

Visioning together – a partnership approach



Nature Towns
and Cities



Introduction



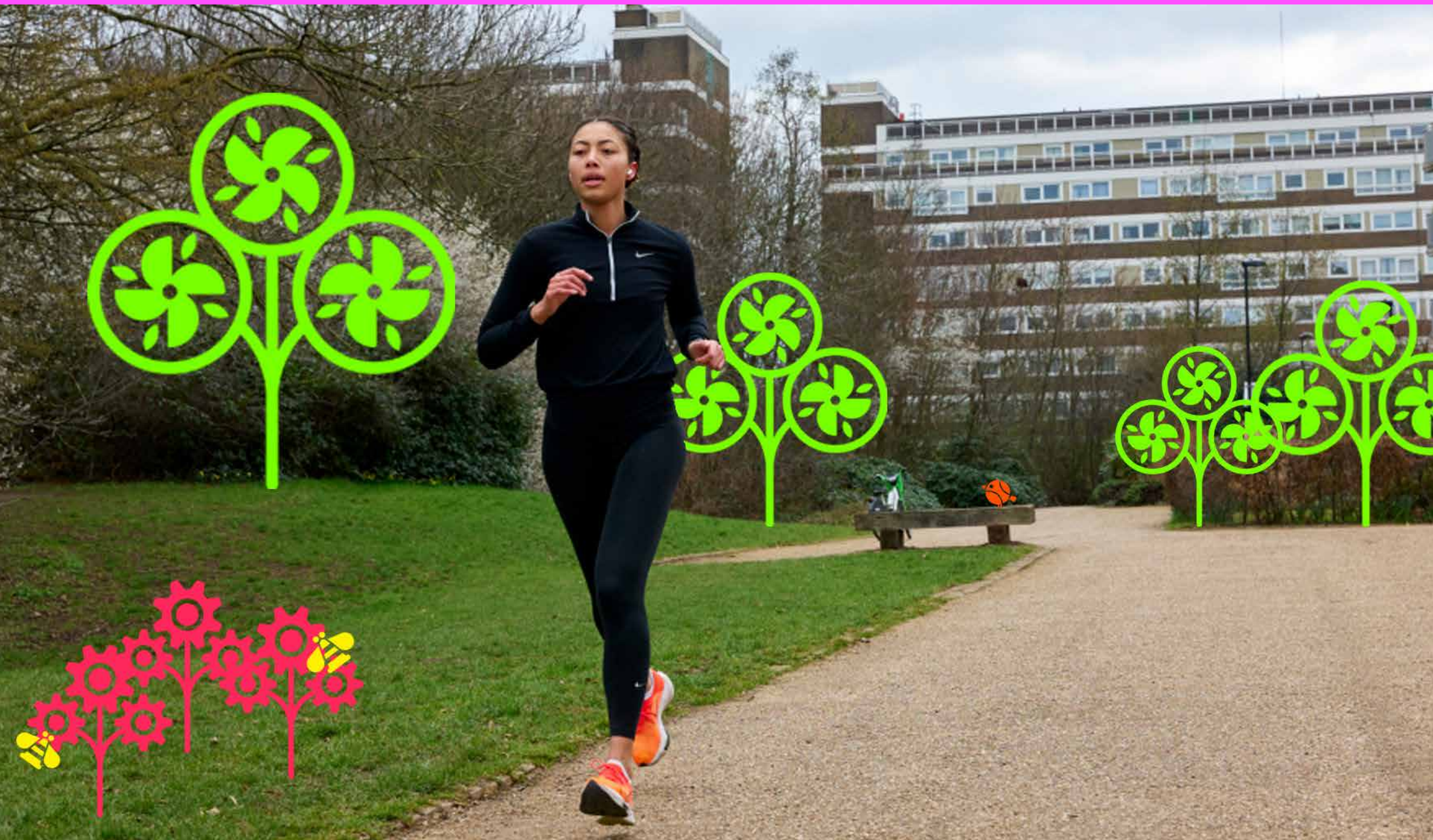
Take a partnership approach to your strategic vision, to tap into good practice and unlock the benefits of nature for all.

This guide is for teams looking to build on their existing approach to community management, setting out a three-part framework to create a shared vision.

Read on for visioning methods that bring teams and communities together in a more collaborative, inclusive way, to shape a better future for their local parks and green space.

Under each stage there are participatory techniques, case studies and tips to help put diversity and equality at the heart of your plans.





Stage 1: start a conversation

A partnership approach should enable as many people as possible to feed into the strategic vision.

On the next page are some tried-and-tested methods to vision together at city or town scale. They draw out the big and small ways that nature supports healthier, happier lives in your community.

Use this insight to make the vision for green spaces and parks truly meaningful to your local area.

This stage may take up to six months, and end with a finished vision statement.

Top tips:

1. Tap into people's emotions by asking how they might feel more comfortable outdoors or spend more time in nature.
2. At every touchpoint with your audience, show you are listening. Can you show how your vision will build on previous consultations?
3. Use local data to focus your visioning methods. The [ONS demographic tool](#) is a great place to start.
4. Drip feed visioning ideas into your regular communications, such as newsletters, social media and website.



Stage 1: start a conversation *continued*

Ways to vision together:

- **Postcards from the Future:** fast forward to the year 2050. What does the 'ideal day' look like for your local community and stakeholders?
- **Walk & talks:** invite members of the community to join walks through the local area. It's a great way to identify small changes that can lead to bigger things. Discover how the Nature Neighbourhoods project went about it [here](#).
- **Annual programming:** run visits & events that celebrate seasonal moments in local green spaces and parks every year. They are a way to engage positively and consistently with the local community. Examples include conker festivals, acorn trails, and the [National Trust's Festival of Blossom](#).
- **Go beyond consultation:** rework your standard local authority way of running a consultation by adding a twist. Take a look at Camden Borough Council's [Green Space community engagement hub](#) for inspiration.

Participatory visioning in action:

- **Maptionnaire Consultation in Edinburgh:** Edinburgh City Council collected ideas and feedback to shape the future of their parks and green spaces. They used map-based surveys on Maptionnaire's citizen engagement platform.
- **Birmingham's Earth Stories:** Birmingham City Council listened to five hundred people's stories of nature, to inform their 25-year [City of Nature Plan](#). They explored people's childhood connections with nature, and asked what they would like for their children. They sought out marginalised voices through community outreach.





Stage 2: plug the gap

Reach out to new networks in your area as part of the strategic visioning process.

Use data to look at the demographics of your place and map all the stakeholders around existing green space. This could include community builders, sport and health-focused networks.

The purpose is to help you spot gaps as to who is involved and align different strategic objectives.

Green spaces and local parks should be cherished by all who use them. On the next page are some ways to vision together with community partners and networks to make this happen.

Top tips:

1. Use data to show the mutual benefits to your stakeholders of access to quality green space.
2. The [ONS census maps](#) can help to show where the need is greatest.
3. [The People and Nature survey](#) is a useful source of information about people's attitudes towards the natural environment and its impact on wellbeing.



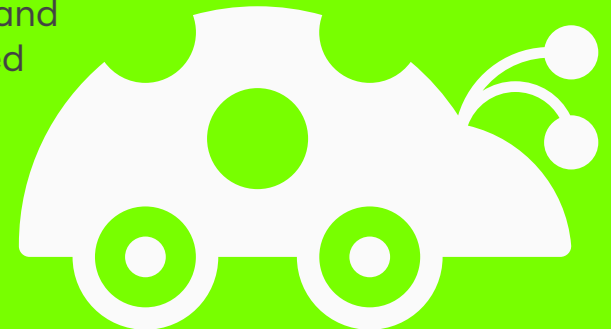
Stage 2: plug the gap *continued*

Ways to vision together:

- **Focus groups:** talk to small groups about a specific topic, product, or concept. This can help you understand the motivations of people who do not currently use your service.
- **Interview target VCSEs:** target your 'visioning together' workshops to VCSEs who can help you understand the current constraints around access to local green spaces. Try the '[Appreciative Inquiry](#)' approach – a way to build change based on the strengths of an existing team or organisation.
- **Map stakeholder insight:** create a vision for green spaces and parks by mapping the desired outcomes of your stakeholders onto a Venn diagram and turning it into a [theory of change](#).
- **See it for real:** [Planning for Real](#) helps communities shape their future neighbourhood by seeing its potential in 3D. Participants comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the place and make suggestions as to how they would like to see their communities develop.

Participatory visioning in action:

- **[Edinburgh's Young Placechangers Toolkit:](#)** Edinburgh City Council worked with Greenspace Scotland to inspire young people to make changes in their local community.
- **[Islington's Citizens Climate Panel:](#)** Islington Borough Council worked with a panel of 35 residents to imagine what a climate-resilient Islington could look like and how to get there. A team of experts were on hand throughout the six-month process, but the proposals and principles were led by the community.
- **[Birmingham's City of Nature Alliance:](#)** Birmingham City Council launched the City of Nature Alliance to create a shared vision for green infrastructure across the city. All the members were already working in the sector, but the alliance created a shared vision, and ways of working. The Alliance is now helping to achieve the aims of the 25-year City of Nature Plan.
- **[Young Voices for Nature:](#)** RSPB, WWF and the National Trust brought 300 people aged 13 to 25 together, to tell their stories about supporting nature. There were skills workshops on storytelling, filmmaking and advocacy. The film produced about their vision was screened in cinemas.





Stage 3: the big launch

A public launch or event can grow awareness and encourage more people to help make your vision a reality. On the next page are some ways to approach it.

For it to resonate with a broad range of people, the vision should be easy to engage with. Try online polls and build a public mandate through established groups and elected members.

Be really clear on the purpose of people's contributions to help manage expectations. If you're asking for their thoughts, you're 'gathering information'. If you're allowing people to bring forward their ideas on an equal platform, then you're 'deciding together'.

Top tips:

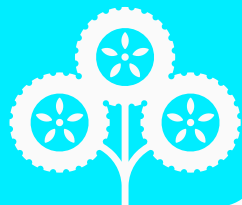
1. Put your vision online to increase visibility.
2. Reflect multiple voices in the narrative.
3. Consider non-traditional venues for in-person events e.g. recreational venues like an ice-rink or even a yurt!



Stage 3: the big launch *continued*

Ways to vision together:

- **Launch videos:** take a look at Birmingham City Council's City of Nature [YouTube video](#).
- **Collaborative workspaces:** web platforms such as Mural or Padlet help facilitate theory of change workshops online. [Here are some more tips for running sessions online](#).
- **Participatory budgeting:** enable people to make direct decisions about how budgets are spent. This works for greening projects as well as day to day issues with competing priorities.
- **Public reimagining:** create models that show the vision for your green spaces or parks. You could make a CAD drawing or even build them in 'real life' with Lego or IKEA furniture.



Participatory visioning in action:

- **People's Plan for Nature:** WWF, the RSPB and the National Trust crowdsourced opinions from 30,000 people on the best ways to make change.
- **Groundwork Northern Network programme:** Groundwork supports community groups to co-create Green Community Hubs, building community leadership at neighbourhood level and creating a network of peer-to-peer support.
- **Open Space Standards Toolkit:** Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Future Parks Project, in partnership with Fenland District Council, set out recommended steps for local authorities to develop open space standards. The toolkit includes learnings around public engagement.





Appendix



Top tips before getting started

Define your problem statement

A great strategic vision grows from a well-defined problem statement. Start by pinpointing the opportunities and challenges for your green spaces and set the direction to overcome them.

This direction, often referred to as the 'North Star' will provide the foundations for your strategic vision.

For more help writing your problem statement visit [BetterUp](#).

Define your audience

From clean air to birdsong, woodland to trees – in countless ways, nature in our towns and cities underpins healthier and happier lives.

To help realise these benefits, ask yourself at each stage of this framework:

- Who do you want to talk to?
- What do you want to discuss with them?
- What's the best way to get the message to them?

Appendix

Weigh up effort vs. impact

There are many ways to engage stakeholders, community networks and the wider public with your strategic vision.

When planning the right techniques for your area, it might be helpful to think about the effort they will require vs. the impact they might have.

For more ideas and inspiration about participatory methods, visit [involve](#).



Appendix

Ladder of engagement

An engagement ladder is a tool for clarifying the purpose of engagement with a group of people – from telling, to devolving decision making (with lots of steps in between).

It might be helpful to plot the methods you choose on the ladder, to manage expectations of both your stakeholders and the target audience.

This example was created by the National Trust. Take a look at [The Citizen's Handbook](#) for more information about using a ladder to map your approach to participatory visioning.

1. Giving information

2. Gathering information

3. Inviting action

4. Consulting to be influenced

5. Deciding together

6. Acting together

7. Supporting others



If you require an alternative format, or if you have questions for the team behind this guide, please email us on info@naturetownsandcities.org.uk



Image credits: ©National Trust Images/James Dobson, Paul Harris, Arnhel De Serra, John Millar, Megan Taylor, Trevor Ray Hart

