



Nature Towns and Cities



**Welcome to
Weaving Nature Through
Towns and Cities**

We'll get started in a minute...



Housekeeping

- Please use the Q&A tab to ask questions or start a discussion topic
- If you need any support throughout the session, please email info@naturetownsandcities.org.uk



1. Welcome
2. Case Studies
 - Really Wild Lockleaze – Alex Dommett, Eric Swithinbank & Eleanor Fairbraida
 - Manchester Medlock Valley – Lucy Stowell Smith
3. Embedding habitat connectivity into urban areas – John Dixon (Natural England)
4. Panel Discussion
5. Closing reflections





83% of the UK population are in towns & cities

Breaking the myth – “wildlife is in the countryside & that is where ‘it’ should stay.”

Only 6% of land is currently managed for nature! *Also debatable!*

Every town and city has its own character, communities & natural assets. By building on these, we can weave nature through our urban areas, creating better connections for wildlife & stronger connections between people.



Elephant hawk-moth



Avon
Wildlife Trust

* NATURE CONNECTION

* HEALTH & WELLBEING

* COMMUNITY COHESION

* ADVOCACY

* CLIMATE RESILIENCE

WEAVING NATURE THROUGH TOWNS & CITIES - WHY?!

Alex Dommett | Urban Nature Recovery Manager
Avon Wildlife Trust | alex.dommett@avonwildlifetrust.org.uk



Urban nature is more than rats, foxes & gulls!

(the above are also fascinating & necessary!) but there is much, much more diversity than we give our urban spaces credit for – are we supporting our towns & cities to achieve their full potential?! Imagination is key!



Awareness of relationships: Goldfinch picking off aphids. Rise of rebel urban botany & glyphosate free streets.



Eels and marvellous migrations!



Some species are now stabilising in urban areas, such as the hedgehog.

**BECAUSE WILDLIFE IS AMAZING!
WE NEED THEM, AND THEY
NEED US! WE HAVE A MORAL,
ETHICAL OBLIGATION & NEED TO
BE PART OF NATURE...**



Team Wilder Ecological Advisory Service - Pilot

Free region-wide ecological advice, site visits & workshops

188 enquiries, majority followed up with a site visit & report

80% of enquiries were from urbanised areas

373 hectares advised on in 2 years

Wide geographic spread – valued service, but limited one-off engagement, more challenging to explore in depth & connectivity opportunities



On site advice – starting with what communities already have. what's strong not what's wrong!



Avon
Wildlife Trust

* **APPROACHABLE**

* **INCLUSIVE**

* **KNOWLEDGABLE**

* **INSPIRING**



HOW!? WHAT IS A COMMUNITY ECOLOGIST?

Who are they? Where have they come from? A very brief history of Community Ecology and community-led nature recovery at Avon Wildlife Trust – 2 ½ minutes to be exact! Let's go!

Community Ecologist in Residence & Nature Together Community Ecologist

Supporting hyper local action

Embedded in or working with local 'anchor organisations'

Building deeper relationships with residents & community practitioners

Working on a neighbourhood scale

Connectivity baby! Builds on LNRS priorities



Going to where people are, rather than expecting them to come to us!



Supporting communities to find, record and champion local species.



Creative community mapping, a session with children in the adventure playground.

“NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH ERIC (COMMUNITY ECOLOGIST)”

— LOCKLEAZE RESIDENT



Made possible with
**Heritage
Fund**



CCNA



**Lockleaze
Neighbourhood
Trust**

Really Wild Lockleaze

Weaving nature through an urban neighbourhood

Lockleaze

14,000 people live here

Fourth most diverse
ward in Bristol according
to Census 21

Challenges around
housing health and
hardship



Where has Really Wild Lockleaze come from?

Nested in  **with years of experience of working in Lockleaze**



 **Sharing**
in their nature
knowledge
Avon Wildlife Trust
and experience, with
their community
ecologist in residence

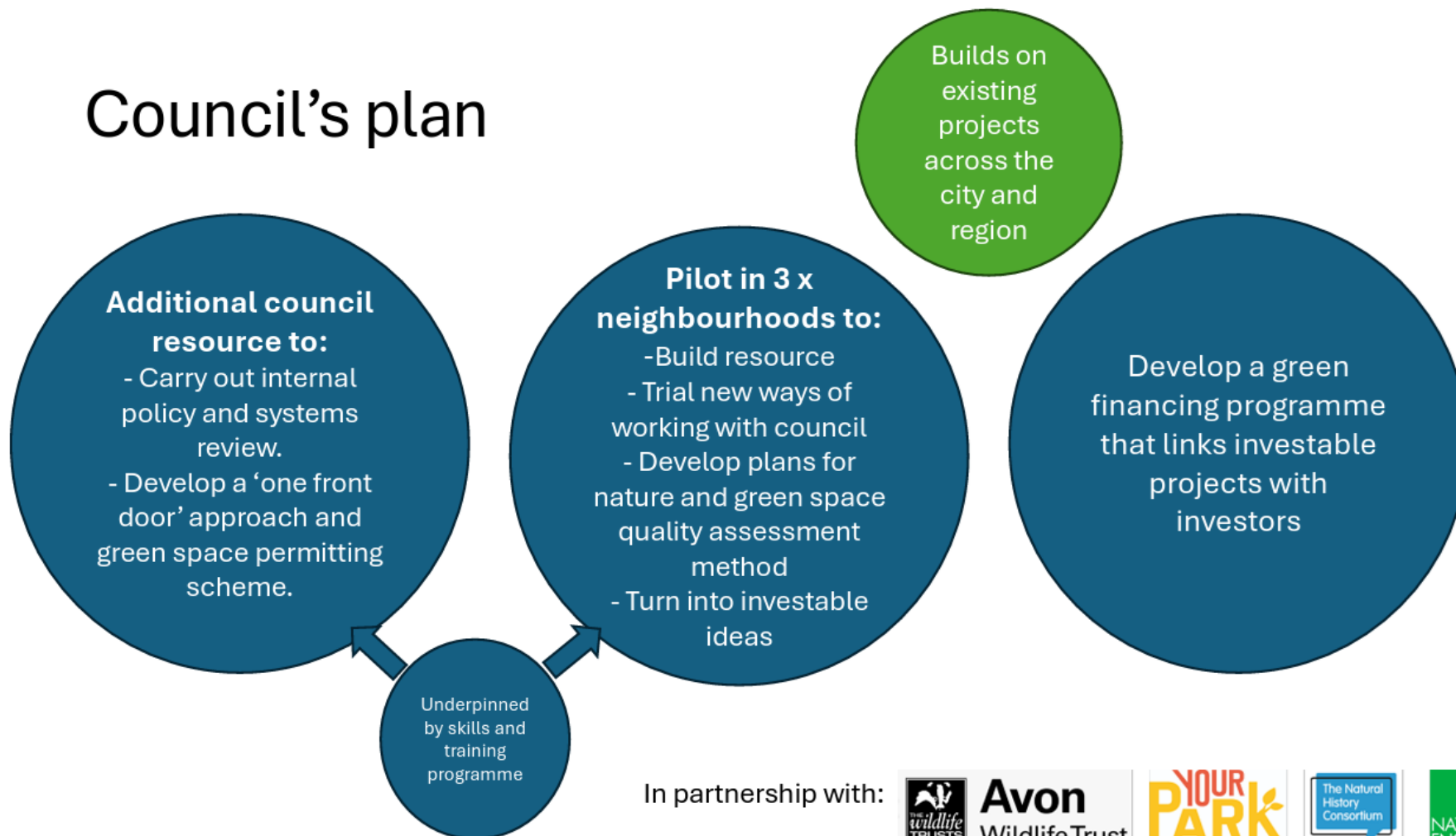


Grounded
in **Lockleaze residents'**
Community Climate Action Plan



Bristol Nature Together Project

Council's plan



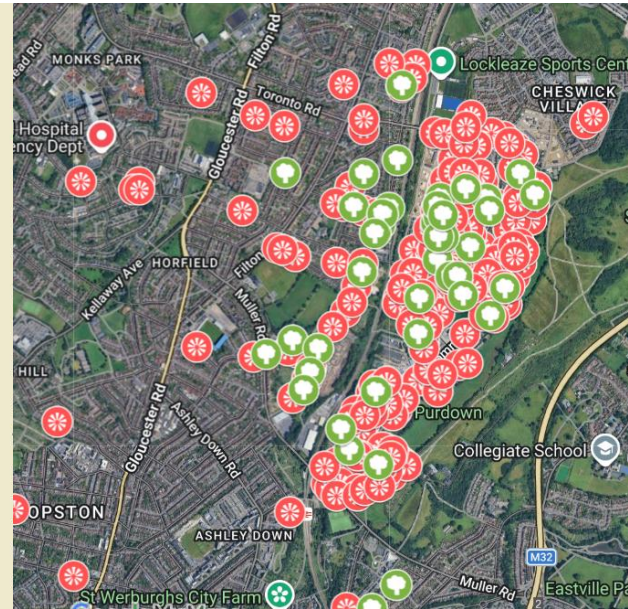
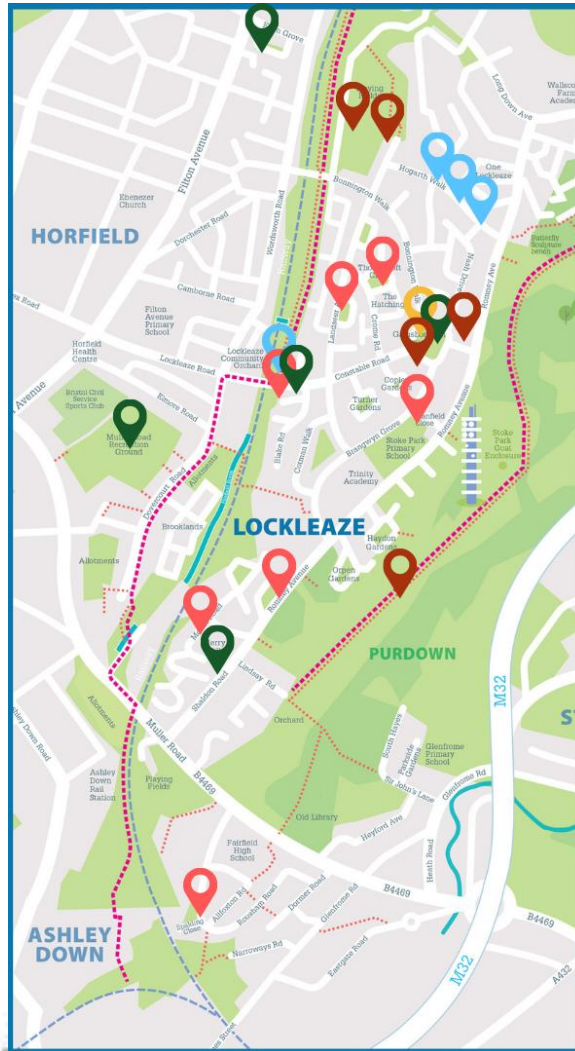
In partnership with:



Avon
Wildlife Trust



Urban Nature Reserve Model



-  Housing greens with community plans
-  Verges adopted by individual residents
-  Land worked on by consultation
-  Marginal land owned by partners
-  Community food-growing project



19 Streets

159 trees, creating 1707m² of wildflower meadow



Community
plans for nature



Adopt your
verge model



New housing
developments



Big high
profile spaces



Taking
opportunities



Diversity

**Building
confidence
to take
action**



Visibility

Magic of working on streets

**Increased hope &
wellbeing**



Community Pride



**Nature
Connection**

All available spaces



Butterfly corridor

Lockleaze Sports Centre



Hogarth Walk

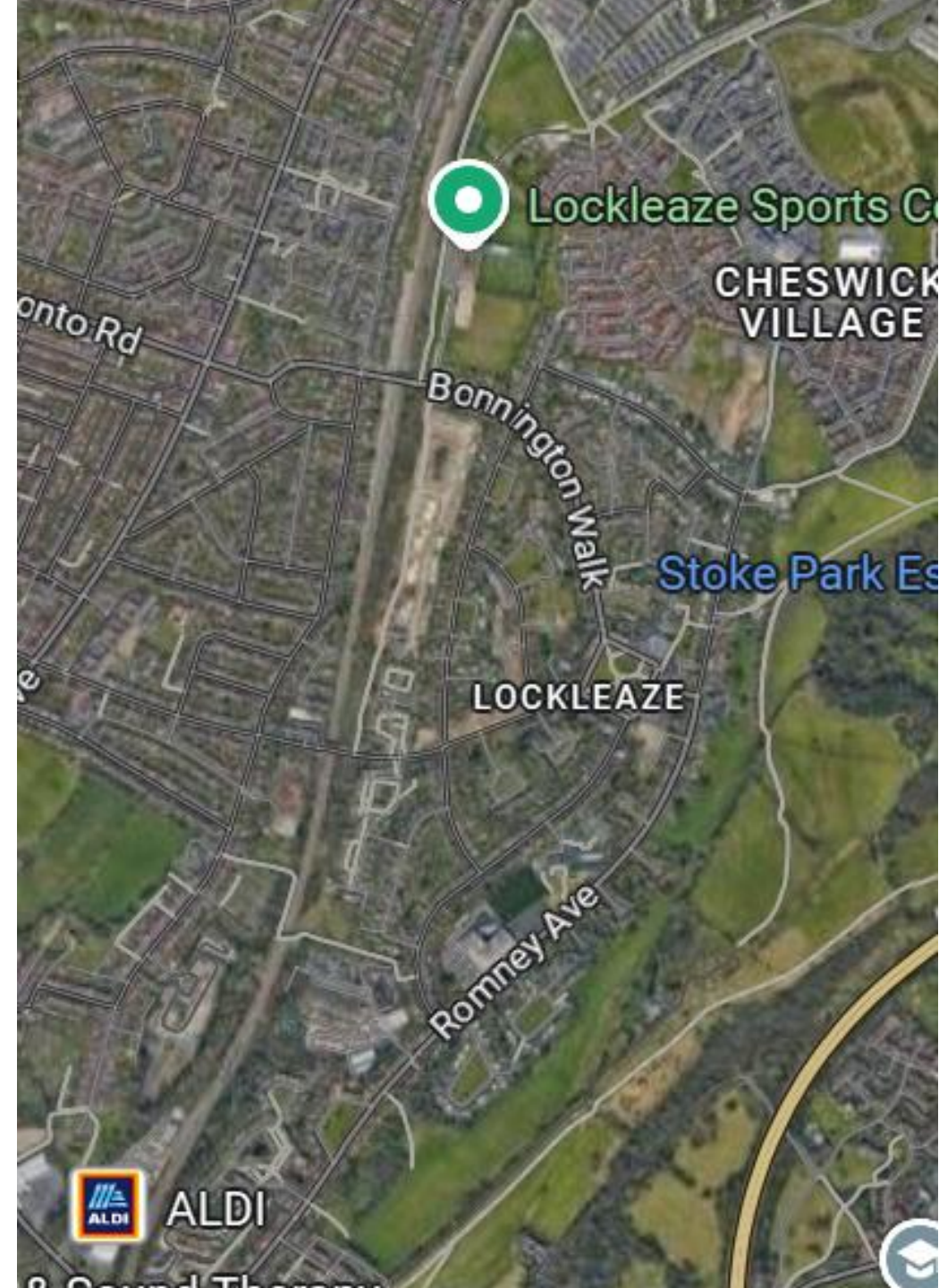
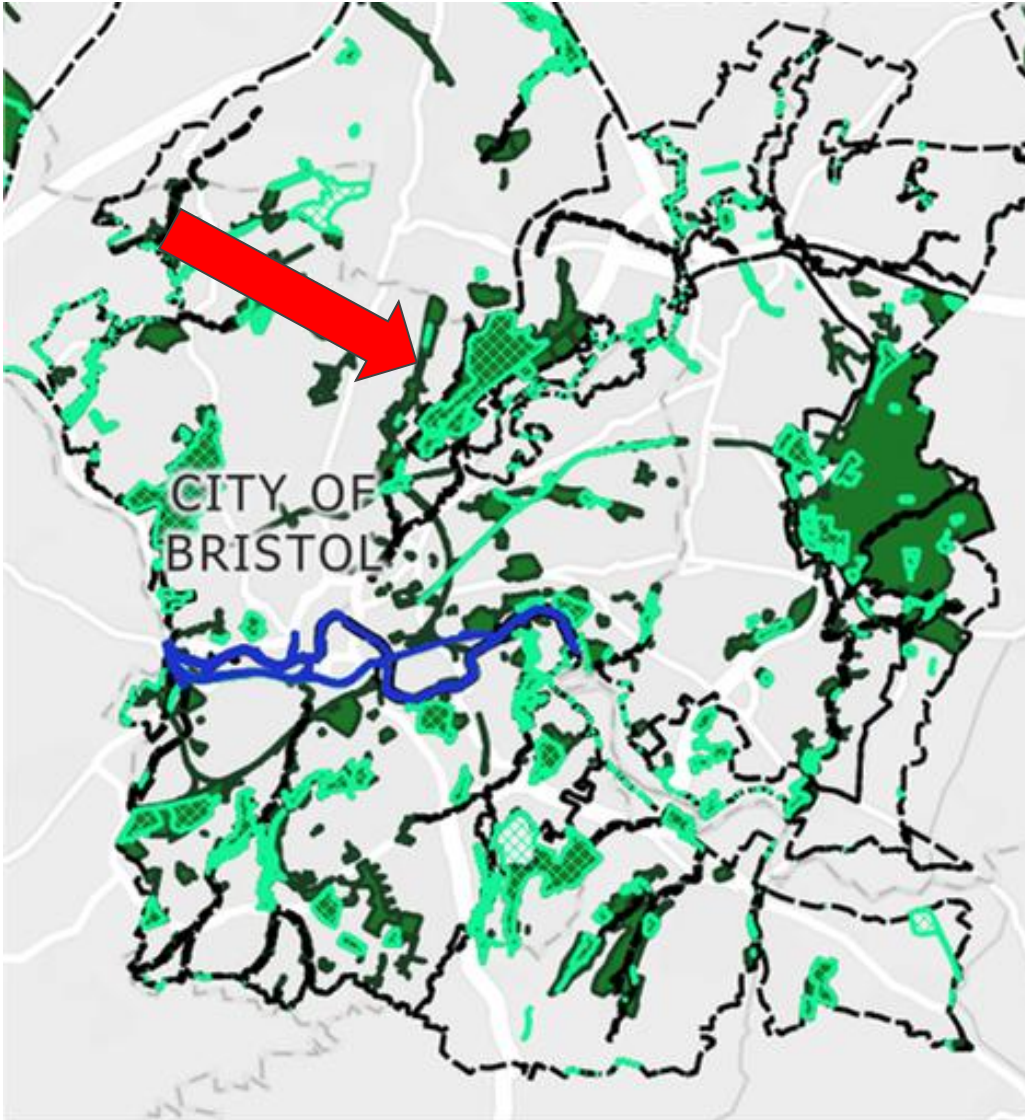


One Lockleaze Development



Pylon & railway corridor

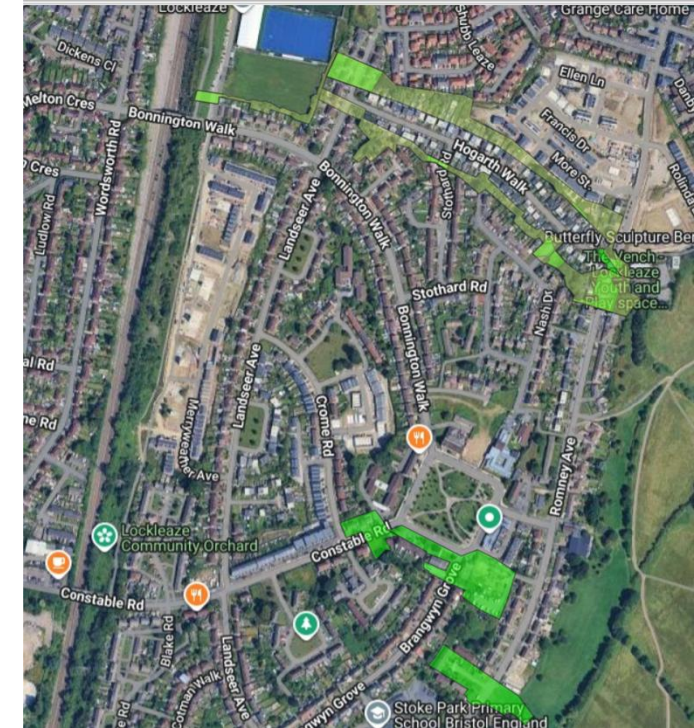
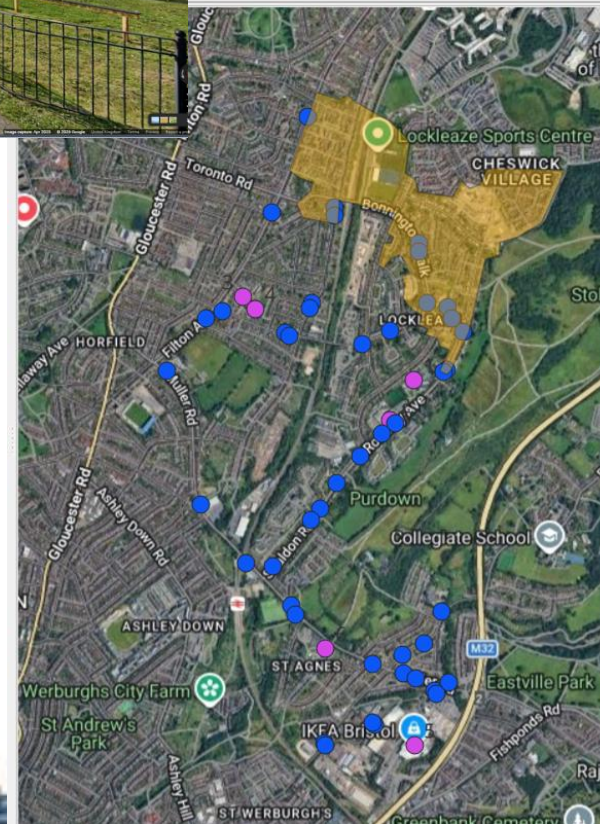
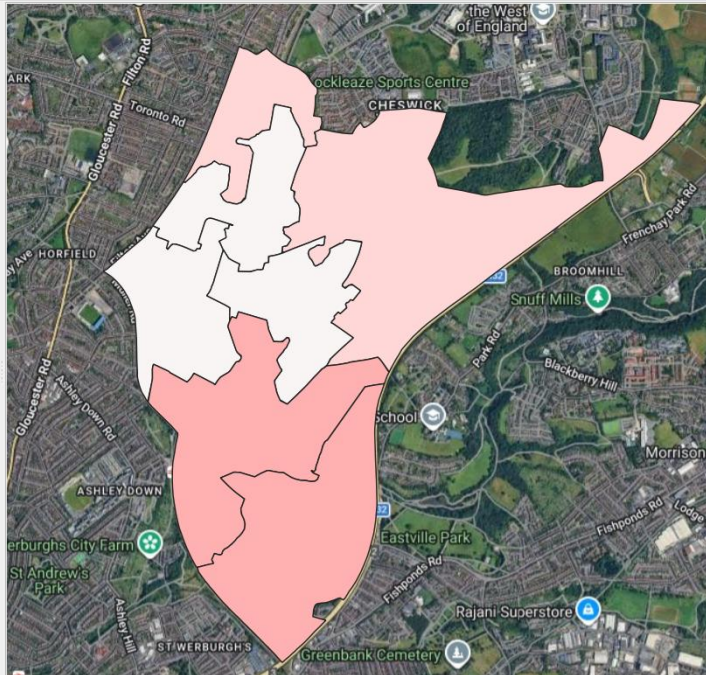
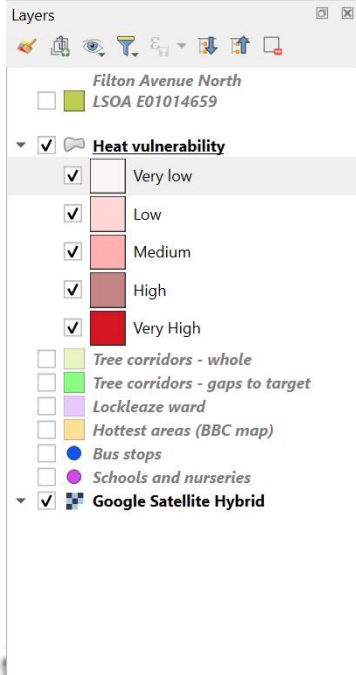
What can an urban community do to help nature recovery in a regionally significant nature corridor?



Horfield Brook corridor



Plans for the Forest of Lockleaze



www.lockleazent.co.uk/project/really-wild-lockleaze



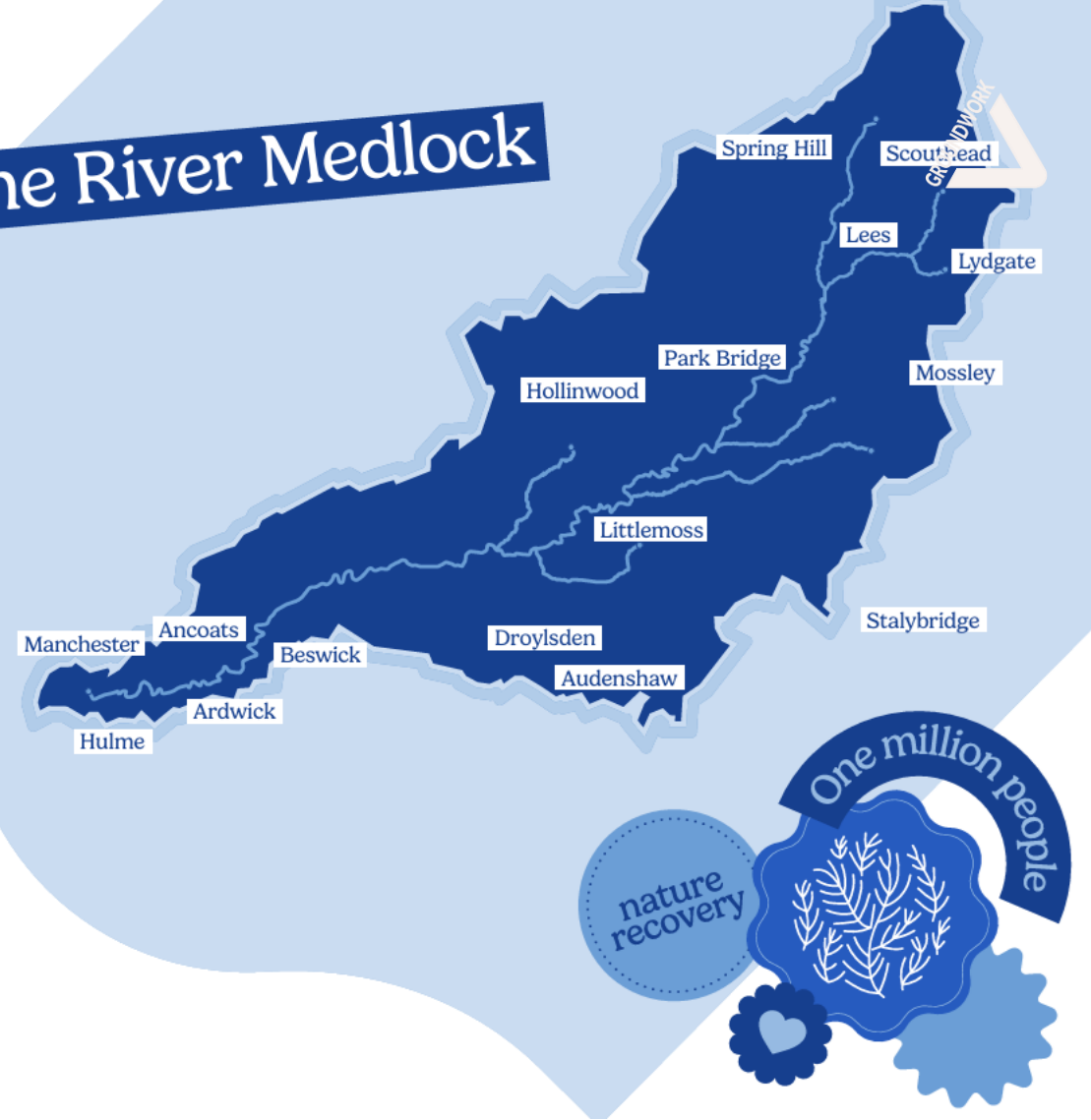
Why here? Why now?

One million people live in the Medlock Valley's three local authorities. Many nearby communities rank in the most deprived 10% nationally, with poor access to green space, high health inequalities and limited economic opportunity.

The Medlock flows through exactly where investment is needed most, reaching the people who will benefit most – families, young people (Oldham has the highest proportion of 0-15 year olds in Greater Manchester), ethnically diverse communities, those currently excluded from conservation, volunteering and green skills opportunities. Investment here doesn't just transform a landscape – it addresses inequality at scale.

The Medlock Valley represents one of Greater Manchester's most ambitious opportunities for nature recovery at scale; climate resilience; social justice through access to green space; walking, wheeling and cycling; and a long-term boost to the local economy.

The River Medlock



River Medlock – it's industrial past



Medlock Valley - it's industrial past



The Red River



Philips Park 1846

An early adopter of JKW & HB

Nature restoration since 1980's



1980's revival @ Clayton Vale - trees



Bank Bridge Meadow today - 2026



2013-14 Clayton Vale Restoration



River restoration



SPECIES SURVIVAL FUND

Funded by UK Government Heritage Fund



Medlock Valley Habitat restoration project:

- HABITAT : Conservation and restoration
- PEOPLE: Connecting people with nature
- JOBS AND SKILLS: Providing employment and training

21 months. £1.1 million.
Transformational impact.

Habitat – conservation and restoration:

- 33.3ha habitat restored
- 6,000 trees planted
- 3.3ha new wetland created
- 5.7ha grassland improved
- 4km landscape improved
- 2.9km new or restored footpaths
- 1.4km riverbank protection

People – connecting people with nature:

- 3,937 people engaged including:
- 1,717 young people
- 468 members of ethnic minority communities
- 513 unemployed people
- 188 people living with long-term health conditions or disabilities
- 275 activities

Jobs and skills – providing employment and training:

- 329 people trained in green skills
- 12 jobs created or retained
- 57 active volunteers
- 7,115 volunteer hours (£142,000 value)
- 13,500 engagement hours – including people attending led walks, talks, and nature festivals

If £1.1 million can deliver this much in 21 months, just imagine what £10 million could deliver across the entire valley...

329
people trained
in green skills

33.3ha
habitat restored

6,000
trees planted

3.3ha
new wetland
created

4km landscape improved

513
unemployed
people

468
members of
ethnic minority
communities

1,717
young people

7,115
volunteer hours
(£142,000 value)

21





https://youtu.be/L85f0RCGenA?si=a_wWOP_TkhDghDZn



Challenges

- Always read the small print – mobilising partners
- Meadow management – where to put all the grass!
- Green Social Prescribing referrals from GP practices
- Data – Keeping track of regular vols between partners
- EA – Flood Risk Activity Permit approval timescales
- Shouting about impact in the right way to the right people – 7,115 vol hours or £142k contribution!!



Success

People and communities

OUTREACH

859%



Young People
1717

627%



People with Long Term
Health Conditions
188

360%



People of Ethnic
Minority
468

428%



People experiencing
unemployment
513

915%



People looking to improve
their health and wellbeing
915

218%



Total Outreach
3937

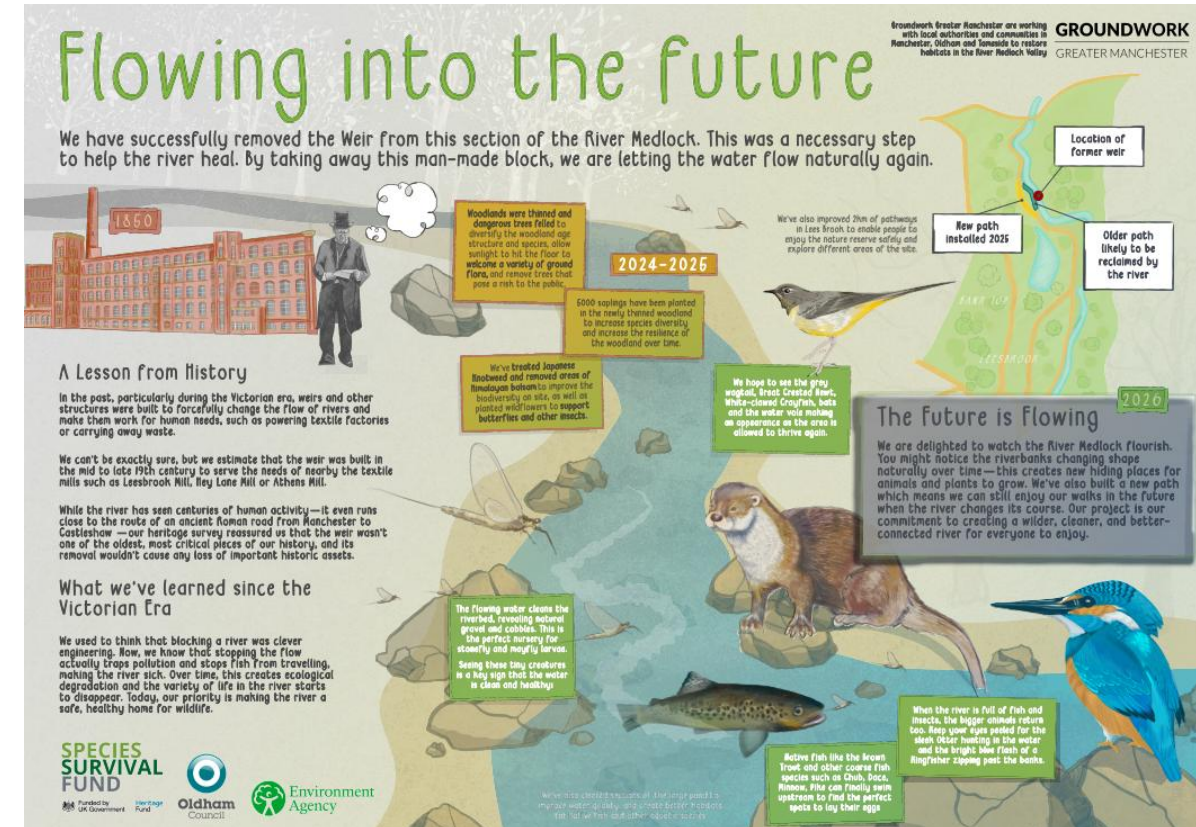


Success



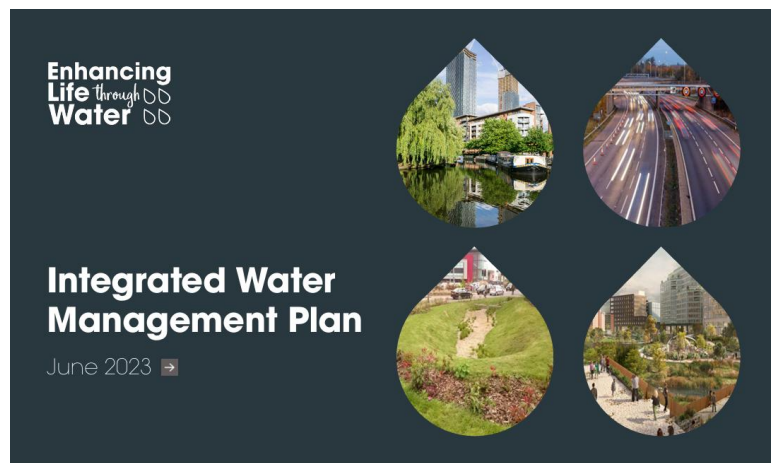
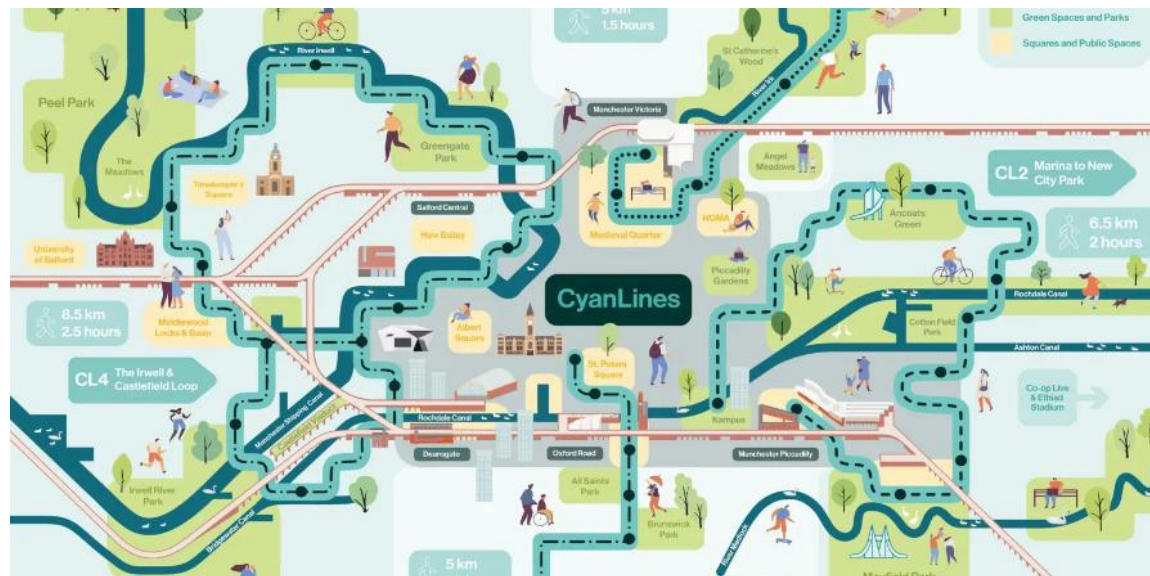
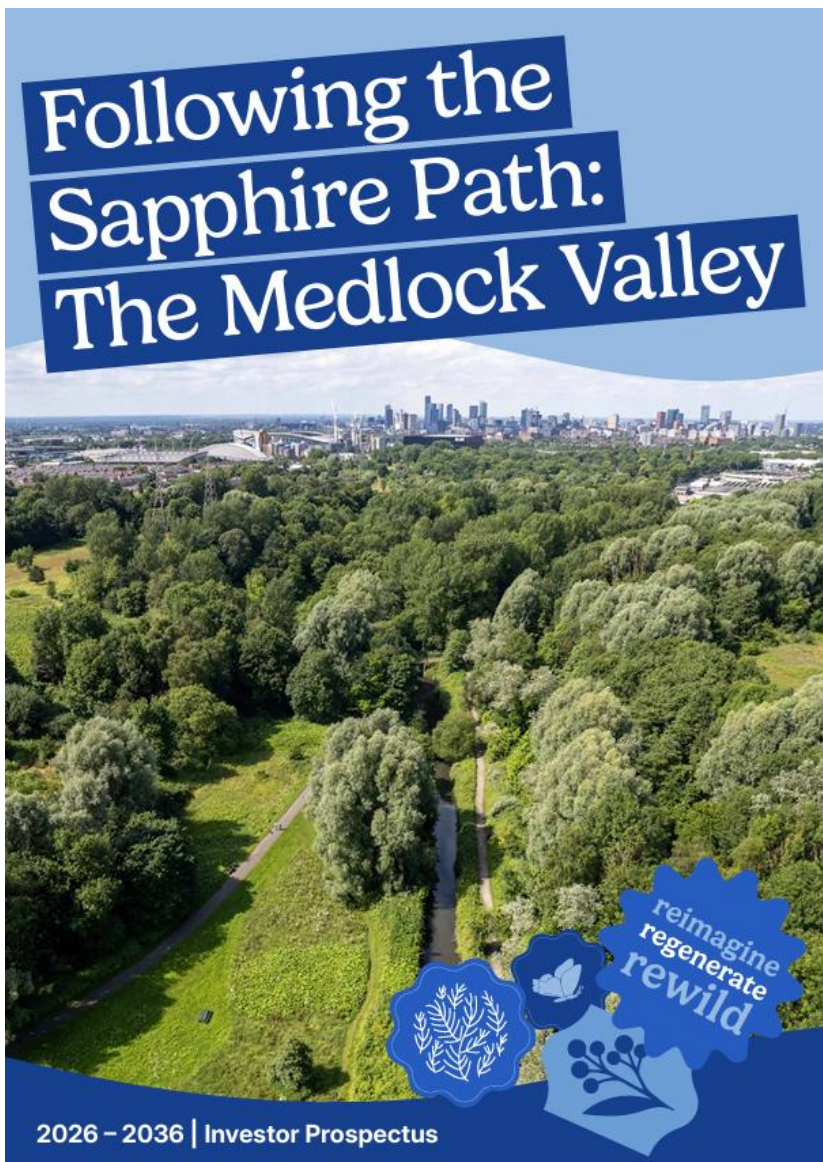
Places:
City of Trees veteranisation

Success



Places:
Weir removal @
Lees Brook Nature Park Oldham

Legacy / Next steps



Medlock Valley
Investor Prospectus

Cyan Lines

GMCA IWMP





Creating nature-rich New Towns

John Dixon, Principal Officer for New Towns
John.Dixon@naturalengland.org.uk

www.gov.uk/natural-england

The story starts here....

www.gov.uk/natural-england



**Shoppers in the pedestrianised Stevenage town centre,
c1959** *Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies*

A New, New Towns Programme

www.gov.uk/natural-england

New Towns Taskforce

Report to Government



Recommended New Town Locations



Reasonable Alternative Locations



Work so far



Natural England's Objectives



New Towns
as
exemplars of
sustainable
development
and nature
recovery at
scale.

Secure high
nature-
supporting
standards
and targets

Take an
integrated
approach to
the
environment
at each
location

Provide a
consistent
offer to New
Towns
across the
country

Explore
innovative
approaches:
E.g
Nature Town
and Cities

The challenge



**Essential
Infrastructure**

**The
Planning
System**

Regulation

**Environmental Capacity
and Impacts**

**30+
years**

Viability

**Climate
resilient**

**Local
needs**

Affordability

Stewardship

**Health
goals**

Nature is essential infrastructure



Resilience

Manage heat, flooding, drought and water pressures.

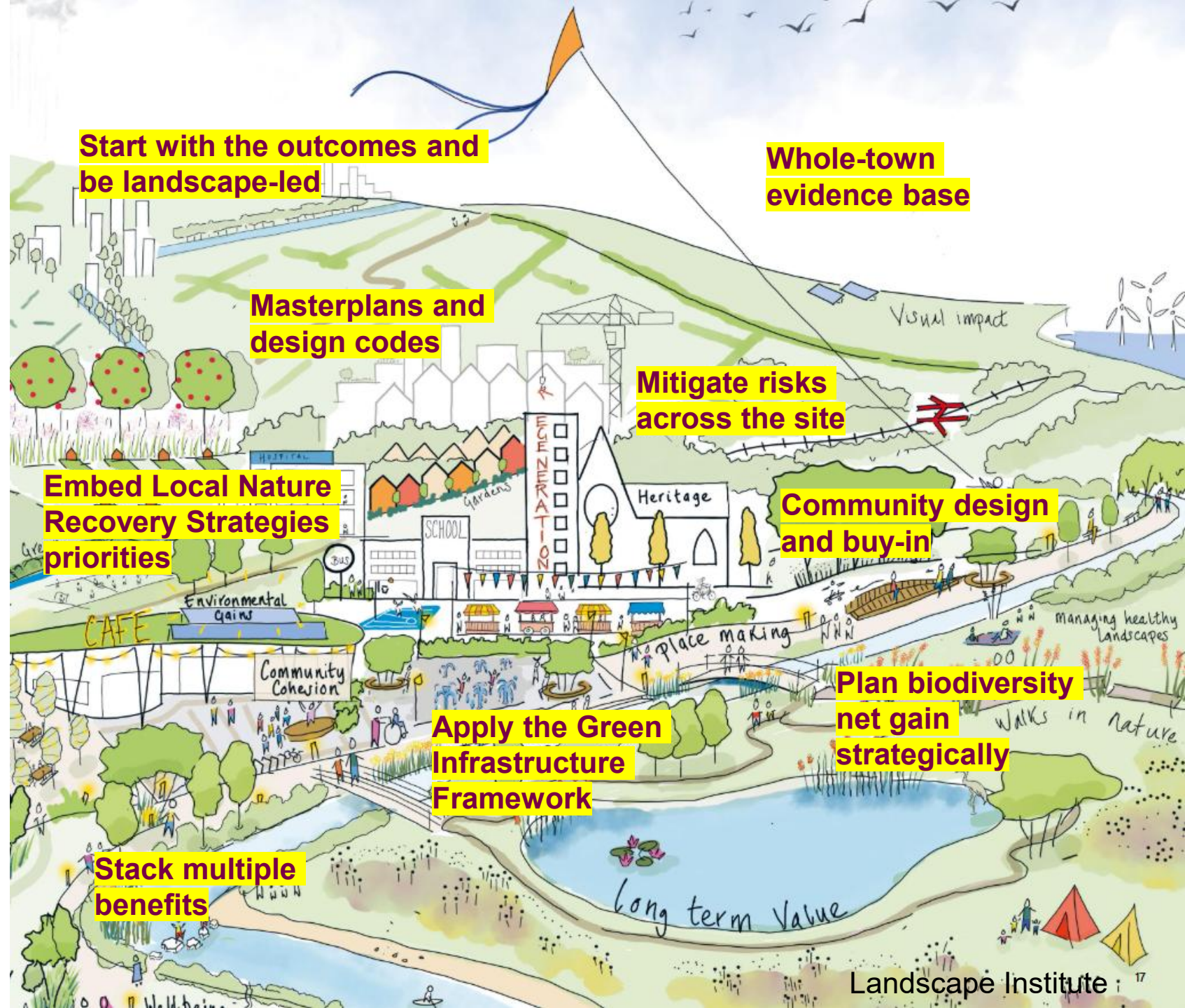
Value

Creates more desirable homes with greater certainty through planning.

Quality of life

Support healthier communities, cleaner air and water, and better green space.

Taking a strategic approach



Pressure points can unlock bigger opportunities



Air quality

Cleaner travel,
vegetation
& farming measures

**Greener corridors
& nature parks**



Protected species

Surveys, licensing
and dark corridors

**Connected habitats
& landscape
recovery**



Water quality & quantity

Nutrient reduction,
water efficiency
and treatment

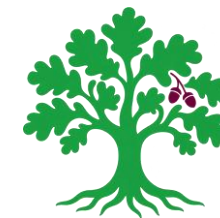
**Wetlands, restored
catchments &
floodable
landscapes**



Recreation pressure

Green infrastructure,
recreation space
and monitoring

**Accessible parks
& green space**



Linked land & ancient woodland

Joined-up species,
recreation and LNRS
measures

**Connected rivers
& green-blue
networks**

Natural England's offer



- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|---|
| 01 | Convening and coordinating | Working with Government and local delivery partners to lower risks, create consistency and confidence |
| 02 | Evidence | Informing early evidence gathering, identification of constraints and opportunities |
| 03 | Finding solutions | Supporting the design of strategic mitigation and enhancement measures. Integrating licensing, habitat regulations, biodiversity net gain and green infrastructure. |
| 04 | Ambition and investment | Set high environmental ambition standards, outcomes and policy. Support New Towns to become accredited Nature Towns and Cities that attract wider investment. |



September 2025

New Towns Taskforce

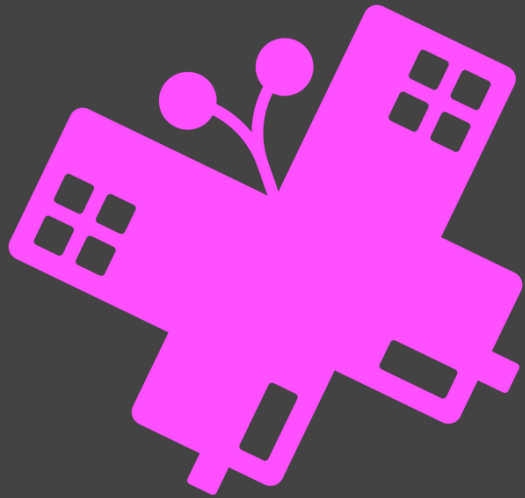
Report to Government



Panel discussion

Please use the Q&A tab to ask a question





thank you

