Wirral Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

Part Two: Proposals

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Prepared by LUC

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The Green and Blue Infrastructure strategy has been prepared by a team at LUC.
All comments and contributions to the development of the study are gratefully acknowledged.

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Introduction

Chapter 1
Introduction

‘Green and Blue Infrastructure’ (or GBI) is an essential component of healthy, thriving communities and ecosystems.

Working on behalf of Wirral Borough Council, and in consultation with key stakeholders, LUC was commissioned to prepare a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for the Borough. This Strategy identifies opportunities across the Borough to protect and enhance GBI, helping guide the investment and delivery of GBI and its associated benefits. The Strategy also supports and informs the Local Plan which will contain policies to guide and manage development up to 2035, as required by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Report structure

This strategy is structured as follows:

- Part 1 defines the GBI vision for Wirral and presents the existing GBI resource, highlighting key issues emerging from the analysis of baseline data for six themes tailored to the Borough.
- Part 2 sets out a framework of how key issues are taken forward and translated into a series of priorities opportunities.

Why is Green and Blue Infrastructure important for Wirral?

Regeneration and population growth

There are ambitious plans for regeneration and growth within Wirral. For growth to be sustainable, GBI must be considered alongside other forms of infrastructure and built development. In the context of a growing population, existing assets must be protected and enhanced so they are resilient to additional pressures and provide resource for a wide range of users.

The delivery of GBI in the Borough will drive economic growth and regeneration by aiding in the delivery of high-quality environments to increase development value, attracting business and investors, and supporting the visitor economy. GBI will be seen as a driver of economic and commercial value as well as environmental value.

Wirral Council have set out a plan to build 13,600 new homes by the end of the Local Plan period, adopting a ‘brownfield first’ approach. Consequently, this will place greater pressures on the existing GBI network and will require a strategic approach to landscape planning to ensure new GBI is embedded into new development and delivered.

Climate change resilience and mitigation

Development and investment in the Borough will be designed, implemented and managed to provide a range of benefits to society and nature to help manage, and adapt to, the effects of climate change. The effective delivery of GBI will provide a positive response to the Climate Emergency declared by Wirral Borough Council. This will include, but will not be limited to, substantial contributions to carbon sequestration efforts, greenways for active and low carbon travel, flood risk alleviation and reducing the urban heat island effect.

Diffuse Recreational Pressure

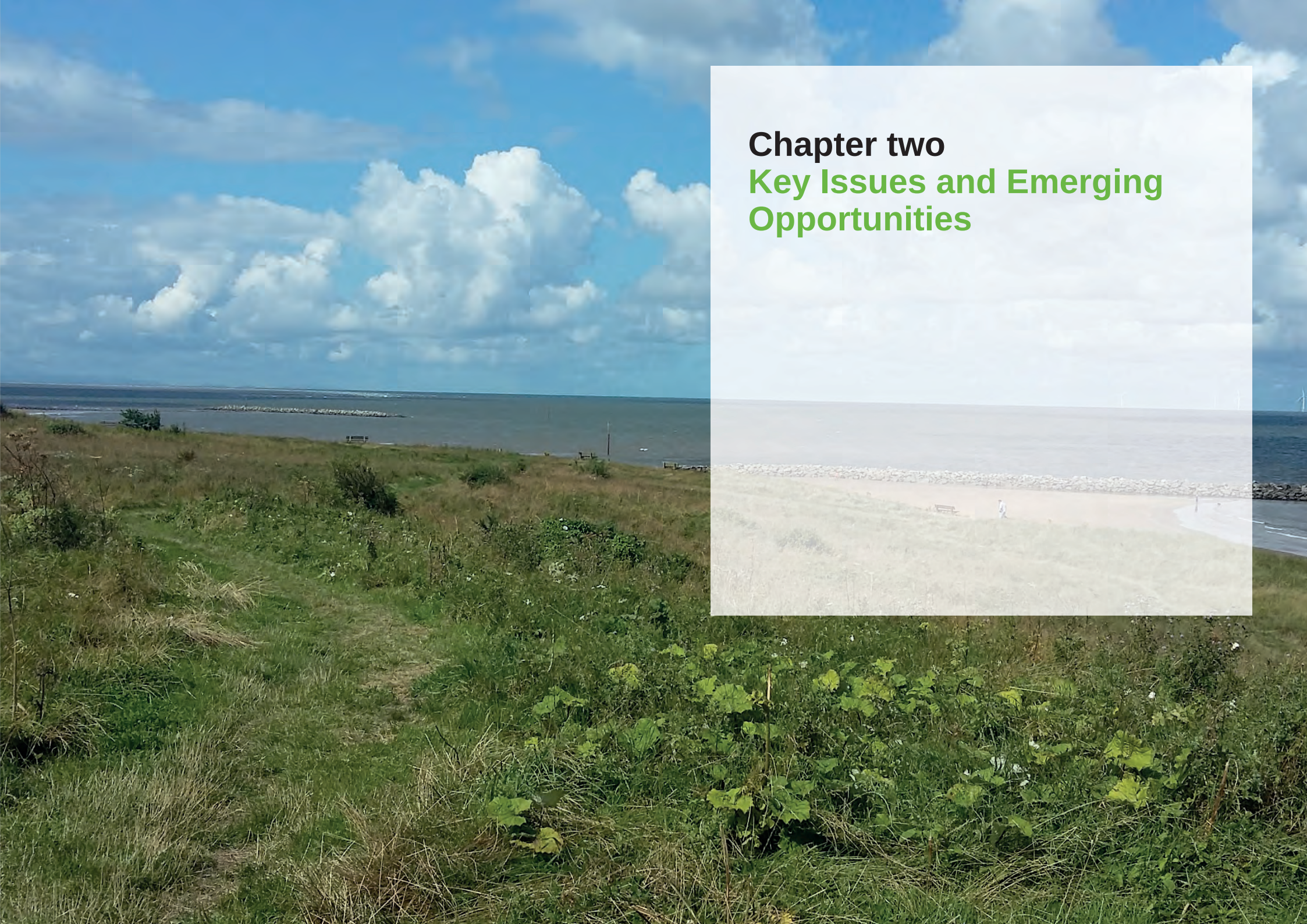
Recreational pressure on Wirral’s biodiversity assets is of most acute concern at the international designations surrounding the coastline and the national designations at Thurstaston and Heswall Dales - in part, drawn by the inherent natural interest of these areas. This Strategy will highlight opportunities to diversify and improve the quality of recreation enjoyed by local residents, the wider Wirral community and visitors to alleviate this pressure.

Implementing Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is “an approach to development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before” with a fundamental aim to minimise loss of biodiversity and help to restore ecological networks.

The forthcoming Environment Bill (in draft form at the time of writing) is set to include a requirement for all development of land to deliver a mandatory 10% BNG. The emphasis is likely to be on retaining and enhancing biodiversity within the boundary of the development site, however, it is likely that off-site contributions will have to be made in some cases, raising the prospect of channelling resources to strategic GBI priorities across the Borough.

Although BNG is not likely to become mandatory until late 2022, this Strategy presents an opportune moment for Wirral to embrace BNG as a delivery mechanism for GBI. This Strategy will form a key document in signposting where the priorities for BNG delivery.



Chapter two
Key Issues and Emerging Opportunities

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Key Issues and Emerging Opportunities

The evidence base presented in Part One of the Strategy is now drawn together to provide an overview of objectives, issues and opportunities across the Borough, considered across a number of GBI themes.

The themes reflect the key environmental and social functions that GBI delivers at a strategic scale and have been developed through a consideration of green infrastructure functions in general, and the specific characteristics and needs of Wirral.

The GBI 'themes' identified for Wirral are:

- Biodiversity
- People and Communities
- Walking and Cycling
- Landscape and Seascape
- Urban Greening, Placemaking and 'Placekeeping'
- Tourism, Heritage and the Rural Economy.

Each theme has a series of objectives that need to be achieved in order to bring forward the vision for the Borough, where we want to get to. The opportunities or interventions are the delivery vehicle to get us there.

Key issues have been identified by theme in Part One and these are now allocated a reference and presented in Tables 2.1 to 2.6. Emerging Opportunities are highlighted in order to help address the key issues.

Moving through Part Two of the Strategy, emerging opportunities are transferred into a long list and then refined into Priority Opportunities.

The Vision for Wirral

The green and blue infrastructure network in Wirral will respect the Borough's unique peninsula landform and the wildlife that it supports. It will be a well-connected and resilient network providing the framework to attract investment and respond to development opportunities in a sustainable way. It will ensure that both urban and rural areas enjoy thriving wildlife, resilience to the impacts of climate change and provide opportunities for play, walking and cycling, and growing your own food.

Woven throughout each of the peninsula's neighbourhoods, the green and blue infrastructure network will be one that all ages and communities can freely access and enjoy. The network will provide many opportunities for people to 'escape' from the daily stresses of life resulting in a positive impact on local health and wellbeing. The network will sit at the heart of regeneration of places and will be a pillar of support for sustainable economic growth.

Biodiversity

Objective 1.1: To safeguard Wirral's existing ecological resource bringing this to favourable condition, prioritising those elements that are locally distinct.

Objective 1.2: To secure a diverse and well-connected ecological network which is resilient to, and serves to mitigate the effects of, climate change.

Objective 1.3: To ensure that future growth – of development, of local communities and of visitor numbers – respect the ecosystems that underpin prosperity and wellbeing in Wirral, and support delivery of locally-appropriate Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

Table 2.1: Biodiversity: Summary of Objectives, Key Issues and Opportunities

Objective	Ref.	Issue	Source	Opportunity
1.1 1.2 1.3	B1	Proactive management of coastal processes to optimise resilience of assets to climate change, recognising the dynamic processes that underpin the habitats and species that can thrive.	Policy Data review Consultation	In accordance with 2016 SMP long-term policies: At the mouth of the Dee Estuary - creation of areas of new habitat by moving coastal defences inland where opportunities exist; At the Mersey (Upper) Estuary - consider opportunities to potentially reduce flood risks upstream and create additional habitat to offset for the potential loss of internationally designated habitat elsewhere, due to the impacts of hold the line policies and predicted sea level rise.
				Management of coastal flood risk with emphasis on natural processes to reinstate and reconnect habitats. Examples include the successful creation of mudflat habitat behind repaired groynes in the Mersey Estuary where wetland birds are observed to feed without significant human disturbance (as a result of the soft substrate).
				Publication of a holistic Coastal Management Plan for the peninsula, taking forward the 2016 SMP to support sustainable human use, whilst protecting the nature conservation commitments of designated sites. Any such Plan will need to be subject to relevant assessment (HRA) but may streamline consent/assent with NE.
1.1 1.2 1.3	B2	Appease the recreational pressure threatening key coastal vulnerable habitats to return qualifying features to favourable condition. Ensure future increase in demand avoids adverse impact.	Policy & legislation Consultation Data analysis and review	Development of favourable management of coastal designations, as part of the holistic Coastal Management Plan, informed by monitoring of on-going measures, and recommendations of NECR201, the 2019 Interim HRA, and RMS (once published).
				Targeted wetland creation landward of Hoylake to capture local land drainage and run-off, post-treatment and prior to discharge, as identified by NE in local coastal management advice[1]. This must be informed by robust baseline data to determine the existing value as potential functionally linked habitat before alternative value as wetland can be assessed.
				Refine mapping of functionally linked habitat, informed by species monitoring data. Land-use decision-making should avoid habitat loss and disturbance during sensitive seasons. Management should accommodate species requirements where practicable, in a way that is coordinated across local land parcels. Functionally linked habitat mapping should inform the identification of land to deliver BNG / SANGS.
				Broadening of destination green space away from the coast will be essential to avoid additional recreational pressure on bird life. Where destination green space lies in close proximity to, or are multifunctional with, habitat creation for specific conservation priorities, sensitive design and management will be required to balance access and screening, interaction and education.
				Support non-vehicular access to the coast including creation of cycle spaces at existing car parking, single carriageway conversion to cycle lanes, provision of traffic calming measures for accesses along and into coastal habitats to stem and slow motorised access. Any new pedestrian / cycle access near the coast must be carefully planned and monitored and buffer widths to set access back from the coast will be appropriate.
				Future SANGS, if required, would need to be provided close to the source of demand whilst achieving greatest distance from the designations each is designed to protect. Potential sites farthest from the Wirral coast include extension of Arrowe Country Park and east of Raby (south of Thornton Common Road, north of Benty

[1] 'Natural England advice to Wirral Council regarding Beach Management' (01 March 2020)

Objective	Ref.	Issue	Source	Opportunity
				Heath Lane), expanding from the watercourse corridors and making use of the higher number of east-west PROW crossings to the M53. Subject to assessment of monitoring data.
1.1 1.2 1.3	B3	Appease recreational pressure on inland SSSI and other associated Wirral priority habitats. Reduce recreation demand of 'middle distance' residents arriving by car, by providing greenspace 'at the backdoor'; applies to both existing and future residents.	Data review Consultation	Creation of strategic areas for wildlife designed to reflect Wirral's conservation priorities, which expand and optimise connectivity between existing habitats. Minimum corridor widths of 100m are recommended in NERR082. - The southern extent of The Dibbinsdale et al NIA and Mersey Estuary NIA, reinforcing the distinction between the settlements of Bromborough and Ellesmere Port - Land between Arrowe and Royden Country Parks - Landward extension of habitats behind the North Wirral Foreshore to connect with open grassland and wetland habitats of the River Birket NIA.
			Data analysis Consultation	Optimise the structural diversity of fringe habitats for wildlife which are inevitably subject to recreational disturbance. This may be complemented by targeted urban greening at the locality. Examples include the M53 corridor between Birkenhead and Woodchurch, extending south to Landican and the Prenton Brook riparian corridor, and to complement the swathe within East Wirral Heathlands NIA.
			Data analysis	Cross-boundary opportunities to optimise the benefit of greenspaces for wildlife include distinction between the settlements of Bromborough and Ellesmere Port, and between Heswall and Neston / Willaston.
1.1 1.2 1.3	B4	Grassland habitats are vulnerable to changes in land use or management, and particularly around urban areas, to new development.	Data review	Increase both the hectarage of permanent grasslands and those in positive conservation management. This applies through coastal, rural and urban areas as well as along transport corridors (target species may need to reflect imported substrates).
				Increase meadow and wildflower coverage, particularly through the B-Line agricultural areas, along transport corridors, in existing and new parks, and via urban greening.
1.1, 1.2 1.3	B5	Relatively low woodland cover in Wirral and lack of positive management.	Data analysis Consultation	Extension of positive woodland management to optimise structural and so to, species richness of these habitats and the resident fauna.
1.1 1.2	B6	Restoration of wetland habitats through reinstatement of support natural process and sustainable land management.	Data review Consultation	A catchment approach to water management to deliver flood alleviation and net zero carbon targets alongside ecological (wetland, watercourse and grassland) enhancement and encourage a return to a seasonally responsive landscape.
				Reconnect severed watercourses through a programme of risk-assessed culvert removal and natural profile reinstatement, prioritising those identified with input from the EA as within strategic opportunity areas. Objectives framed under the overarching goal of 'Good Ecological Status' under WFD across the watercourse network.
1.2, 1.3	B7	Address agricultural intensification and associated degradation of habitats.	Data review	Support for the uptake of agri-environment measures which reduce the intensity of land management and bring greater diversity to the ecological landscape.
1.3	B8	Delivery of locally-appropriate BNG.	Data analysis	Integrate BNG within new development from both private and public sectors at initial Masterplanning to create permeability through the urban realm through retrofit, regeneration and new expansion. Sensitive design principles to inform all subsequent detailed development phases.

People and Communities

Objective 2.1: To build on Wirral's history at the forefront of the public parks movement by ensuring that every resident of Wirral has access to greenspace 'on their doorstep' and can interact with their environment, particularly in the Borough's most deprived wards. This will support the 'Natural Health Service' in underpinning health and wellbeing challenges.

Objective 2.2: To encourage a sense of 'ownership' over the Borough's green assets by a wide range of community, to help to ensure their long-term stewardship.

Table 2.2: People and Communities: Summary of Objectives, Key Issues and Opportunities

Objective	Ref	Issues	Source	Opportunity
2.1	PC1	Addressing the significant under-provision of play space and green space provided for young people across the borough.	Policy Data mapping	Enhancing opportunities for nature-based play within Wirral. New play areas delivered must provide a challenging and stimulating environment which enable self-led play.
2.1	PC2	Addressing the shortfalls in amenity green space, concentrated in Birkenhead, the Heswall urban area and the West Kirby and Hoylake urban area.	Policy Data mapping	There is a need to ensure the inclusivity of green spaces and opportunities to interact with nature across a range of communities, including those in the most socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods.
				In areas where there are shortfalls, a greater weight should be merited upon the integration of 'urban greening'.
2.1	PC3	Addressing significant shortfalls of various types of green space concentrated in the suburbs of Birkenhead and in urban areas of mid-Wirral.	Policy Data mapping	New green spaces and streetscapes are being delivered at Wirral Waters. Wirral's Integrated Regeneration Strategy calls for high quality and distinctive green spaces to be provided as new focal spaces which is expected to be defined further by the Birkenhead Regeneration Framework and Development Action Plans.
				In areas where there are shortfalls, a greater weight should be merited upon the integration of 'urban greening'.
2.1 2.2	PC4	Generalised shortfall in allotment provision, leading to the need for increased provision to meet food growing demand. Current provision is scattered and needs better targeting toward areas of acute need.	Policy Data mapping Consultation	Allocation of under-used land in urban areas for food growing projects, as part of housing delivery. Provision for meanwhile uses. Identify areas of publicly owned green space to allocate for community gardens and growing initiatives.
2.1 2.2	PC5	Areas of acute socio-economic deprivation exist in and around Birkenhead, and significant economic and health disparities are striking between the east and West of the borough.	Policy Data mapping Consultation	Social or 'green' prescribing, centred around food growing opportunities in deprived urban areas, recognising that heath is affected to a whole range of factors and attempting to address needs more broadly instead of relying solely on medicine.
				Building on the 'Eco schools' initiative with a Growing for Health programme, including food growing from an early age. Drawing inspiration from the 'Edible Playgrounds' initiative.
2.1	PC6	An ageing Wirral population will require age-friendly design to be integrated into all green space typologies, to help older people stay active and socially connected into later life and ease pressure on the health service.	Policy	Taking the needs of older people, and those suffering with dementia, into account in the design of existing and new green spaces.
2.1	PC7	Accessibility of PRoW network by wheelchair users is a prevailing issue.	Consultation	Development of 'Access for All' standards across the network

Walking and Cycling

Objective 3.1: To link together the severed connection between inland and the coast around Wirral's coastline and to strengthen the 'green links' between Wirral's east and west coasts.

Objective 3.2: To 'knit together' Wirral's spectacular green assets with pedestrian and cycling routes that provide a vantage point to enjoy the peninsula's natural beauty, with a focus on enhancing east-west movements across the peninsula.

Objective 3.3: To support the Transport Strategy in making walking and cycling the 'mode of choice' across the Borough for shorter journeys, among both residents and visitors, and creating attractive walkable communities.

Table 2.3: Walking and Cycling: Summary of Objectives, Key Issues and Opportunities

Objective	Ref	Issue	Source	Opportunity
3.3	WC1	Levels of walking and cycling are behind national levels, with knock-on implications for health and wellbeing in the Borough, as well as carbon emissions.	Policy Consultation	Greening of the three priority corridors highlighted by the Liverpool City Region Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and ensuring they are fully integrating with local GBI assets and signposted as such.
				Bringing back the disused railway line through Birkenhead, linking Wirral Waters and the town centre.
				Supporting and delivering the City Boulevard project, as set out in the Wirral Waters Vision Statement and supporting 'Landscape and Public Realm Guiding Principles' document (June 2010). This will deliver a new strategic urban greenway and multi-functional GBI asset.
3.2	WC2	Other than the Wirral Circular Trail, the cycling network is limited. The route is more fragmented along the eastern side of the peninsula.	Data mapping Consultation	The phased introduction of priority corridors highlighted by the LCWIP is a welcomed intervention.
3.2	WC3	Active travel links between the Borough's key towns are weak. There is heavy reliance on the private car to reach key GBI assets.	Data mapping Consultation	Prioritising green routes to schools, both by retrofitting existing routes in urban areas and integrating these routes into future development as priorities.
				The River Birket Corridor offers the opportunity to improve connections between Hoylake and Leasowe and Birkenhead Docks.
3.1 3.2	WC4	Limited east-west movements by active travel means, exacerbated by the severance caused by the M53.	Data mapping Active travel Consultation	The creations of a series of greenways through central areas of Wirral, or a super Greenway, which will seek to improve east – west connections.
3.1	WC5	Broken links between inland areas and the waterfront along the Mersey Estuary mean that the Borough is not taking best advantage of its coastal landscape asset.	Data mapping Consultation	Repairing broken links between inland areas and the coast, particularly along the Mersey Estuary.
3.1 3.2 3.3	WC6	The Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network is significantly fragmented in the more urbanised east of the Borough, with opportunity to improve connectivity around the emerging Wirral Waters site.	Data mapping Consultation	Improving the network of PROW along the Mersey Estuary, through the wider Birkenhead area and around the historic village of Thornton Hough and surrounding farmland.
				Strengthening the PROW network by providing stronger east-west routes to link into the 'outer shell' of Wirral Circular Trail. There is a proposal to provide such a route for walkers/cyclists taking in Clatterbridge and Heswall Station

Landscape and Seascape

Objective 4.1: To enhance Wirral's ability to act as a 'carbon sink' in order to combat climate change.

Objective 4.2: Ensuring Wirral's landscape and seascape are both resilient to the impacts of climate change, working with natural processes where possible and to seek solutions with co-benefits for biodiversity and recreation.

Objective 4.3: To enhance the landscape character of the Borough through GBI interventions.

Table 2.4: Landscape and Seascape: Summary of Objectives, Key Issues and Opportunities

Objectives	Ref.	Issues	Source	Opportunity
4.1 4.2	LS1	Wirral's central agricultural landscape is at threat from increasing intensification, in line with national trends.	Data mapping Consultation	Support for farming community in adapting to agro-forestry and agro-environment schemes as part of the emerging policy context drive by the Agriculture Bill.
4.1	LS2	There is a need to maximise opportunities for carbon sequestration in the Borough as a contribution to the country's journey to 'net zero'. Woodland expansion is a key vehicle to deliver this.	Policy Data mapping Consultation	A woodland and hedgerow expansion plan creating joined up 'mosaic' of woodlands, closing the gaps between the current 'islands' of woodland, and linking with the adjacent Mersey Forest territory and, more widely, the Northern Forest initiative to allow national scale joining up of woodland resources. Currently Wirral Waters is the only area of Wirral within the Northern Forest and Mersey Forest.
4.2	LS3	Increased threats of pests and diseases, including notably 'ash dieback' pose a threat to woodland cover in Wirral and are likely to be exacerbated by climate change.	Policy Consultation	Align all tree planting and natural regeneration opportunities with the Trees Strategy (2020-30) and produce a Design Guide to accompany the strategy and set out clear parameters for which trees should be planted where and how.
4.1	LS4	There is a need to maximise opportunities for carbon sequestration in the Borough as a contribution to the country's journey to 'net zero' through the creation of grasslands and wetlands and allowing carbon to be 'locked up' in soil.	Policy Data mapping Consultation	Expanding grassland and wetland landscapes to contribute to the Borough's 'carbon sink'. Wetlands have a crucial role to play in carbon sequestration and the design of wetland landscape as part of urban greening should be highly valued.
4.2	LS5	The peninsula is vulnerable to climate-related flooding, both coastal and surface-water. Nature-based solutions, and making the most of the peninsula's tidal marshes and river valleys, will be required in order to boost resilience to flooding and sea level rise.	Policy Data mapping Consultation	Expansion and restoration of wetlands, watercourses and floodplain areas around the River Birkett and Fender as a means of storing water and decreasing the level of flood risk in the local area, with added co-benefits for habitat creation.
			Policy Consultation	Using nature-based solutions to flood risk management and to guard against sea level rise, including 'managed realignment' and expansion of coastal salt marshes.
4.1 4.2	LS6	Promoting positive nature-based management of existing green spaces within the borough	Policy Consultation	The 'Resilient Parks' toolkit should be used as guidance for all newly delivered and re-configured green space in the Borough, and principles should be integrated into site management plans for all of Wirral's green space network.
			Policy Consultation	Engaging with greenkeepers at Wirral's golf courses to encourage progressive thinking on sustainable drainage solutions on courses, and the incorporation of wetlands for water storage and to slow run-off.

Urban Greening, Placemaking and ‘Place-keeping’

Objective 5.1: To ensure that the GBI framework acts as an ‘anchor’ on which to build regeneration initiatives in Wirral’s struggling urban areas following years of post-industrial decline, and to encourage families to remain in the city.

Objective 5.2: To provide an equal focus on ‘placemaking’ and ‘placekeeping’ by integrating GBI assets that will last and thrive in the long term.

Table 2.5: Urban Greening, Placemaking and ‘Place-keeping’: Summary of Objectives, Key Issues and Opportunities

Objective	Ref	Issues	Source	Opportunity
5.1	UG1	Wirral's urban areas suffer from a number of areas of very poor environmental quality.	Policy Data mapping Consultation	A number of 'key green corridors' through urban areas must be maximised and lie at the centre of regeneration initiative as multi-functional GBI assets. These include the three priority LCWIP routes, City Boulevard and River Birkett Parklands (Wirral Waters development).
				Wirral Waters is being delivered as an exemplar sustainable city extension exemplar. There is a need to support GBI measures in the surrounding neighbourhoods including the ‘Green Grid’ and ‘Working Woodlands’.
5.1 5.2	UG2	The in-between 'lost spaces' of road verges and derelict sites are an under-used resource.	Consultation	Maximising 'meanwhile use' opportunities within derelict sites around the former Birkenhead Docks and elsewhere, for woodland planting, food growing, urban meadows and other measures.
5.1	UG3	Air quality is deteriorating in Wirral with a general deficiency in greening measures.	Policy Data mapping Consultation	The creation of active walkable neighbourhoods with walking and cycling as a modal choice.
				Establishing a 'mosaic' of greening options including urban meadows, green walls, rain gardens, bioswales, pollinator friendly bus stops. These are mechanisms to 'climate-proof' by ensuring opportunities for intercepting stormwater and dealing with summer heat stresses.
				Urban areas should boost tree cover. Development of ‘Design guide' to accompany Tree Strategy (2020-30), with an emphasis on investment in upfront design for the long term, delivering maximum canopy cover.
5.1 5.2	UG4	Key 'gateways', including public transport nodes, represent important greening opportunities.	Consultation	Greening of key 'gateways' on the public transport network, including Merseyrail stations, the bus station and ferry terminals, integrated into green routes to access key local destinations and GBI assets
5.2	UG5	The wider Birkenhead area has historically 'turned away' from the waterfront, neglecting an important green-blue asset.	Data mapping Consultation	Wirral Waters is reconnecting people with the water’s edge, and bringing GBI into the waterways of Birkenhead Docks through measures such as Floating Islands for Wildlife (in Morpeth Dock). There are opportunities for improving waterside walks and gateways such as the Seacombe and Woodside Ferry Terminals and dock edge pathways around Birkenhead Docks.
5.2	UG6	'Place-keeping' is a challenge and requires equal attention to the 'placemaking' agenda.	Consultation	Developer contributions must require a clear plan for how GBI assets will be maintained beyond the initial investment.

Tourism, Heritage and the Rural Economy

Objective 6.1: To establish Wirral as a sustainable tourism destination by setting a benchmark in resilient, engaging and biodiverse tourist landscapes.

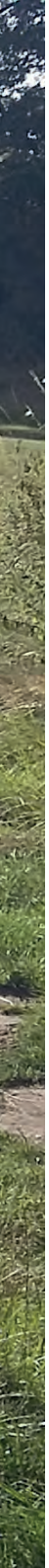
Objective 6.2: To ensure the GBI framework contributes to the Borough's network of heritage assets strengthening Wirral's role as a tourist destination.

Objective 6.3: To create greater harmony between the rural agricultural economy and the wellbeing of the environment through support for agri-environment stewardship schemes.

Table 2.6: Tourism, Heritage and the Rural Economy: Summary of Objectives, Key Issues and Opportunities

Objective	Ref	Issues	Source	Opportunities
6.1	THRE1	The popularity of natural assets as tourist destinations for visitors are putting pressure on the peninsula's most vulnerable habitats, which needs careful management.	Policy Data mapping Consultation	Provision of active transport measures to support non-vehicular access to the coast/green spaces.
6.1	THRE2	Wildlife tourism, particularly along the Dee Estuary and destinations such as the Hilbre Islands, are central to the Borough's visitor economy.	Policy	Promotion of natural tourism opportunities to tourism agencies in Wirral, so that they are considered integral to the area's visitor offer (driven by Liverpool City Region GI Strategy – Action 43).
6.1 6.2	THRE3	The Borough's heritage assets play an important role in the tourism offer. There are ambitions to draw tourists to the urban and industrial heritage assets in the wider Birkenhead area, including the regenerated Wirral Waters site and waterfront offer.	Policy Consultation	The Conservation Area and Heritage Trail requires stronger promotion by the tourism agencies. The route would also benefit from greater greening measures and a dedicated wayfinding strategy and interpretation.
				Greening the Seacombe Ferry Terminal and encouraging green links through to Wirral Waters and Birkenhead Town Centre.
				Upgrading active transport links between key destinations and along green corridors will encourage greater engagement.
6.3	THRE4	The farming community is in a state of flux due to a shifting agricultural policy context with many awaiting the emerging Agriculture Bill. There may be a need for diversification to sustain the industry.	Policy Consultation	Opportunity to weave together the historic villages in central Wirral's agricultural landscape with a 'heritage and wildlife trail', which could also link to key destinations such as Brimstage Maze. In partnership with the Leverhulme Estate.
6.1 6.2	THRE5	Wirral's abundant golf courses contribute to the branding of the Borough as a 'golf coast'. However, there are opportunities to develop its reputation as a sustainable industry.	Consultation	Opportunity to promote environmentally aware golf course management to boost the golf tourism market further and re-brand the Borough's famous 'golf coast'. This would build on the existing brand and draw attention to the Borough as one where prestigious golf courses work with the sensitive natural landscape.
6.1 6.2	THRE6	The wider Birkenhead area has historically 'turned away' from the waterfront, neglecting an important green-blue asset.	Policy Consultation	Wirral Waters is being delivered as a new city waterfront destination - including access to a re-animated water's edge and realising the value of Bidston Dock and Moss as an urban 'lynch pin' in a more diverse tourism offer.
			Consultation	Use the opportunity of Eureka! Mersey (launch 2022) to re-connect walking and cycling routes along the Mersey Estuary waterfront, to enhance the waterfront greenspace and to build in sustainable transport habits.

Chapter three
Identifying Opportunities for Action



Chapter 3
Identifying Opportunities for Action

In this Chapter, the emerging opportunities identified by theme are brought together to understand commonalities, proposing interventions with the capacity to deliver a range of GBI outputs and meet multiple identified objectives.

Table 3.1 identifies GBI opportunities and connects them to corresponding 'themes' reflecting the multifunctionality of GBI interventions and corresponding issues which are numbered against the tables in Chapter 1. Providing a clear link between issue and opportunity provides greater understanding and use of the Strategy going forward.

The table functions as a 'long list' of potential opportunities and serves as the basis for an Action Plan for prioritised delivery and upgrading of the GBI network in Wirral. For each opportunity, an initial review of the potential deliverability was undertaken, and the opportunities categorised in the following way:

- Priority Opportunities: potential interventions which have been selected for prioritisation given how they respond to needs identified in the report, and deliver multiple GBI benefits. They are designed to offer a range of deliverability options.
- Other Opportunities: potential interventions which respond to the needs identified in the report, but which have not been prioritised as those likely to have the greatest impact on the GBI network.

The Priority Opportunities are explored in turn in Chapter 3. For each opportunity, information is provided on:

- The nature of the opportunity
- Its contribution to the range of GBI functions
- Examples from elsewhere that may inform delivery options
- Potential challenges and risks
- Potential delivery partners, mechanisms and stakeholders
- Indicative timescale and potential costs.

All opportunities outlined are indicative – the ability of each opportunity to deliver the number of functions highlighted is dependent on effective planning, siting and design. This chapter is designed to provide support for the prioritisation of projects for delivery as funding becomes available or opportunities arise, or as an initial reference point for further detailed feasibility and master planning work. The lists may also be used in negotiations with developers to help best direct developer contributions coming forward.

Table 3.1: Long list of opportunities

Opp ID	GBI Opportunity	Biodiversity & Geodiversity	People & Communities	Walking & Cycling	Landscape & Seascape	Urban Greening, Placemaking & 'Place-keeping'	Tourism, Heritage & the Rural Economy	Long List Opportunity	Priority Opportunity
1	**GBI standards for new development** A 'toolkit' for GBI interventions to act as an audit or checklist for development coming forward, to encourage better developer standards.	B8 	PC2, PC3 	WC1 	LS2, LS4 	UG1, UG3, UG6 	THRE3 		✓
2	**Rewilding grass verges** Wirral's roadside verges have the potential to act as vital 'biodiversity corridors' for movement and dispersal once restored as wildflower meadows.	B4 		WC1 	LS4 	UG1, UG3 			✓
3	**Woodland and hedgerow expansion programme** The development of the Borough's Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland Strategy to increase provision of woodland and hedgerow in rural, urban and peri-urban areas.	B5 		WC1 	LS2, LS3 	UG1, UG3 			✓
4	**Rewilding golf courses** Opportunities to boost the 'golf coast' through the encouragement of ecologically-friendly management regimes.	B4, B6 			LS4, LS6 		THRE5 		✓
5	**Strengthening the role of private gardens and back alleyways** Proposing measures to protect and enhance the role of private gardens and back alleys as GBI assets in the Borough's urbanised areas.	B4 	PC5 		LS6 	UG1, UG3 			✓

Opp ID	GBI Opportunity	Biodiversity & Geodiversity	People & Communities	Walking & Cycling	Landscape & Seascape	Urban Greening, Placemaking & 'Place-keeping'	Tourism, Heritage & the Rural Economy	Long List Opportunity	Priority Opportunity
6	**Creation of River Birket wetlands** Recommendations for the River Birket Nature Improvement Area (NIA) include the creation of wetland habitats, not only to support existing habitats, but also for sustainable storage of surface water.	B2, B3, B6 	PC2, PC3 	WC3 	LS4, LS5 	UG1 	THRE2 		✓
7	**Developing a 'Super Greenway'** The 'knitting together' of Wirral's spectacular green assets with pedestrian and cycling routes that provide a vantage point to enjoy the peninsula's natural beauty, with a focus on enhancing east-west movements across the peninsula.		PC2, PC3 	WC4 	LS2, LS4 		THRE4 		✓
8	**Greening of key corridors** An ambitious endeavour to improve access to green infrastructure within areas identified as poor environmental quality.	B3, B4, B5 	PC2, PC3 	WC1 	LS2, LS3 	UG1, UG4 	THRE3 		✓
9	**Creating active neighbourhoods** By reducing the dominance of the car and introducing GBI elements into public realm re-design, more people will be encouraged to walk and cycle as part of their daily lives.		PC2, PC3 	WC3 	LS2 	UG3 			✓
10	**Green link between Seacombe 'gateway' and wider area** Greening of key 'gateways' on the public transport network, including Merseyrail stations, the bus station and ferry terminals, integrated into green routes to access key local destinations and GBI assets.	B3, B4, B5 		WC1, WC5 		UG4, UG5 	THRE3, THRE6 		✓

Opp ID	GBI Opportunity	Biodiversity & Geodiversity	People & Communities	Walking & Cycling	Landscape & Seascape	Urban Greening, Placemaking & 'Place-keeping'	Tourism, Heritage & the Rural Economy	Long List Opportunity	Priority Opportunity
11	**Spaces for community growing** Addressing the general shortfall in provision of allotments in the Borough, recognising their role in social or 'green' prescribing.		PC4 		LS6 	UG2 			✓
12	**Support for the uptake of agri-environment measures** Addressing the intensification of farming and associated degradation of habitats.	B4, B7 			LS1, LS4 				✓
13	**Embracing proactive management of coastal processes** Management of coastal processes to optimise resilience of assets to climate change recognising the dynamic processes that underpin the habitats and species that thrive.	B1, B6 			LS5 				✓
14	**Managing Diffuse Recreational Pressure** A multi-faceted approach aligned with support management at coastal hotspots; managing access into functionally linked land; improving the recreational quality of existing and new green space and improving wayfinding.	B2, B3 	PC2, PC3 	WC3, WC4 			THRE3, THRE4 		✓
15	**Embedding Resilient Parks toolkit** Embedding the innovative toolkit into Park Management Plans and the management of smaller green space.	B6 			LS6 			✓	

Opp ID	GBI Opportunity	Biodiversity & Geodiversity	People & Communities	Walking & Cycling	Landscape & Seascape	Urban Greening, Placemaking & 'Place-keeping'	Tourism, Heritage & the Rural Economy	Long List Opportunity	Priority Opportunity
16	**Engagement of children in their natural environment** Building upon Eco Schools initiative in embedding the importance of GBI from an early age.		PC1, PC5 	WC3 				✓	Link to Opp #10
17	**Age friendly design for parks and green spaces** Embedding an inclusive approach to designing green spaces with an ageing Wirral population in mind.		PC6 					✓	
18	**"Access for all" standards across whole PRoW network** Accessibility of routes and how to manage barriers by wheelchair users is a prevailing issue.		PC7 	WC6 				✓	
19	**Better protection for local trees** Protection for existing mature trees have greater benefits for biodiversity, landscape character, carbon sequestration, mitigating air quality.				LS2 	UG3 		✓	Link to Opp #3
20	**Wayfinding Strategy** An opportunity to build upon walking maps already available, establishing consistent wayfinding across Borough, with distances/timing included, particularly to encourage those who would not normally walk.			WC1 			THRE3 	✓	Link to Opp #8

Opp ID	GBI Opportunity	Biodiversity & Geodiversity	People & Communities	Walking & Cycling	Landscape & Seascape	Urban Greening, Placemaking & 'Place-keeping'	Tourism, Heritage & the Rural Economy	Long List Opportunity	Priority Opportunity
21	**Heritage trail through centre of Borough** Linking with the historic villages of central Wirral, aligning with the diversification of agricultural holdings for the purpose of heritage tourism.			WC6 			THRE4 	✓	Link to Opp #7
22	**'Greening the High Street'** A mosaic of urban greening features specifically focussed to support town centre recovery.		PC2, PC3 	WC1 	LS2, LS4 	UG3 		✓	Link to Opps #8 and #10
23	**Greening of brownfield sites for meanwhile use** Maximising meanwhile use of derelict land for the benefit of carbon sequestration and food growing opportunities.	B2, B4 	PC2, PC3, PC4 		LS2, LS4 	UG2 		✓	
24	**Coastal active travel measures** Provision of active transport measures to support non-vehicular access to the coast/green spaces.	B2 		WC3 			THRE1 	✓	

Chapter four
Priority Opportunities

Contribution to GBI themes						

Priority Opportunity #1
GBI standards for new development

The Opportunity

Wirral's urban spaces suffer from a number of areas of very poor environmental quality, with an industrial legacy where the 'grey' overpowers the green. However the Borough's upcoming development agenda presents the opportunity to put GBI back at the heart of Wirral's towns.

The new White Paper; Planning for the Future proposes that all new streets should be tree-lined and "all new homes to be carbon-neutral by 2050, with no new homes delivered under the new system needing to be retrofitted". There are also proposals to develop a national framework of green infrastructure standards. Without this yet in place, there is a need to develop a 'toolkit' for developers, bringing together recognised guidance and best practice principles.

Building with Nature (BwN) may form a key point of reference for the development of Wirral's GBI checklist. BwN is a voluntary approach that enables developers, who want to go beyond the statutory requirements, to create places that really deliver for people and wildlife. It brings together guidance and good practice - for professionals, developers and policy makers - to recognise high quality green infrastructure at all stages of the development process including policy, planning, design, delivery, and long-term management and maintenance.

The framework of standards is divided into four themes (core, wellbeing, water and wildlife), and there are three levels of accreditation:

- Design - high quality green infrastructure demonstrated at the planning and design stage of development;
- Good - high quality green infrastructure, delivering benefits within the boundary of the scheme; and,
- Excellent - exemplary quality green infrastructure, delivering benefits within and beyond the boundary of the scheme.

The Toolkit

The toolkit should act as an 'audit' or 'checklist', ensuring GBI is integrated into development proposals from the very initial stages, and facilitating a co-ordinated and consistent approach to GBI across Wirral. The toolkit should also include guidance for retrofitting GBI, to help address areas of existing poor environmental quality.

The toolkit should include all core GBI principles, and cover a series of standards for each within – non-exclusive examples are listed below:

1. Tree planting

- Selection meets the intended function provides positive diversity within the local tree population, is discussed and agreed with the local authority tree officer and, has engaged the local community;
- A design which reflects the four basic principles of repetition, sequence, balance and scale;
- Placement that takes into account factors such as mature crown spread, highway visibility sight-lines, location of services, and minimum offsets from intrusive elements;
- Below ground infrastructure that includes vandal proof irrigation and aeration tube, and active drainage.

2. Sustainable transport

- Traffic management and calming measures and safe and well-lit pedestrian and cycle crossings and routes;
- Connectivity to existing cycle and walking networks; adequate cycle parking and cycle storage;
- A travel plan promoting sustainable transport;
- A reduction in car parking provision, supported by the controlled parking zones, car free development and car clubs.

3. Community food growing

- A permanent, designated space for a community growing group;
- Start-up funding and a call-out to facilitate a community growing group.

4. Pollinator planting

- A set percentage of native species within the proposed planting mix.

5. Play

- Incorporation of incidental 'playable' spaces.
- Ensuring proposals address the shortfall of play facilities across the Borough, through improving quantity and quality.

6. SuDS

- A collaboration between the drainage engineer and the design team for example, the architect, landscape architect and highway engineer;
- Taking forward and building on Wirral's 'Sustainable Drainage and Surface Water Management' Technical Guide for Developers in order to promote a network of sustainable drainage that provides functionality beyond developer's site boundaries;
- A key aim should be to improve water quality and

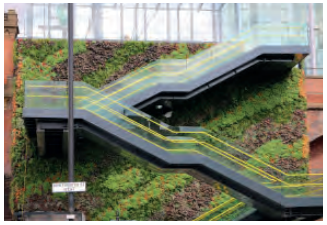
maintain the natural water cycle within the boundary of the policy area;
- SuDS options analysis, reviewing the appropriateness of the different SuDS techniques to ground conditions and the character of the setting;
- Sufficient provision for community engagement and awareness raising;
- Aspects such as point of discharge, interception, peak flow rate control, volumetric control, water quality treatment, constructability, and maintainability.

Promoting sustainable drainage in Wirral

Sustainable drainage has a central role in GBI, generating environmental, ecological, social and cultural benefits. The sustainable management of water, working with the natural water cycle, will go some way to relieving pressure on water drainage systems as population densities increase and development expands.

A network of sustainable drainage in Wirral will provide greater evaporative cooling and help to reduce the urban heat island effect. This network should be based on the processes associated with improving water quality and maintaining the natural water cycle and could include a combination of:

- Green roofs and walls;
- Rain gardens and swales;
- Permeable paving ;
- Detention and retention basins;
- Wetlands;
- Planted streets; and
- Permeable planters and tree drains.



The creation of a network of sustainable drainage across a geographic area is being driven forward by the international concept of 'sponge cities' which are aimed at tackling urban water issues including surface water floods. The concept originated in China and is gaining momentum in the UK, aligned with the Grow Green EU funding programme (due to finish in 2020).

Policy makers should create a framework which promotes developers to consider how their site makes a contribution to the wider network of sustainable water management in Wirral.

It is considered that to achieve the dual goals of sustainable water-use and better flood control, more effective development and implementation of land-use guidance and assessment tools (such as explicit integration of strategic and urban flood risk assessment, land-drainage guidance, climate projection methods and assessment of long term sustainability) are recommended.

7. Local distinctiveness

GBI interventions should be based on the underlying typology of the landscape at each particular location: urban, semi-urban/rural fringe, rural and coastal. Each of these typologies share underlying characteristics, and the incorporation of GBI has the potential to strengthen and enhance place-making.

Rural typology

- The formal tree-lined avenues in proximity to Thornton Hough and Brimstage are distinctive and act as a foil to the surrounding fields.
- Where tree planting in parts of the borough is associated with movement corridors, extending the concept of the avenues would enhance the Wirral sense of place and

The Lever Causeway

consolidate identity.

- Elsewhere, the rural area is characterised by hedgerows and stone boundary walls, which make a significant contribution to placemaking, heritage and landscape character. Retention, enhancement (through management) and extension of these features should be promoted.

Urban typology

- In urban areas, the character of GBI should be intrinsically woven together with placemaking, and could be more distinctive in design celebrating the difference between the varied townscapes and the aspirations of regeneration.
- GBI measures associated with greening roofs and walls can form a key landmark within development.
- Urban greening can also bring a restorative action in areas of dereliction.

Coastal typology

- Wirral's coastal landscapes are generally open and exposed. Tree planting is sparse both to maintain open views but also as a consequence of inclement conditions.
- Tree planting may not be considered appropriate, therefore, and analysis will be required to determined the suitability of the species to coastal conditions.
- The rural coastal character is characterised by hedgerows which make a significant contribution to placemaking, heritage and landscape character. Retention, enhancement (through management) and extension of these features should be promoted.

Potential risks and challenges

- Much of Wirral is founded on sandstone which forms a major aquifer. Groundwater sources within the aquifer need to be protected. Care is necessary in those aquifers that are used for public water abstractions and in those that have limited capacity to filter contaminants.
- Perceived additional implementation costs, increased maintenance budgets, and a lack of understanding on the benefits of GBI can cause resistance from developers. Discussions at an early stage will be necessary to ensure a strong understanding of the proposed standards and the overall need for GBI.
- Monitoring of GBI performance, and appropriate implementation, should include site inspections prior to site handover to ensure standards are met, therefore placing additional onus onto the local authority.
- Existing projects are rarely monitored by the local authority following implementation, making it difficult to ensure proposed GBI standards are upheld.
- Good design requires access to expertise.

Case Studies

West Gorton, Manchester

A new park in West Gorton has been designed with 'nature-based solutions' to combat the effects of climate change. Unlike a typical park, the green space in West Gorton has been specifically designed to manage the flow of rainwater into a drainage system to help prevent flooding, utilising a variety of best practice SuDS principles. Paths and hard surfaces in the surrounding area have been replaced with permeable paving to allow rainwater to percolate through the ground; infiltration ponds will soak up water and any remaining will flow into sunken rain gardens; during heavy storms, water that cannot be absorbed by soil and vegetation will be captured through a series of 'v' shaped channels and used to water the trees and plants.

Building with Nature in Earls Green, South Ayrshire

Earls Green is a residential development that has been accredited with the Building with Nature Award to recognise its exemplary approach to delivering high quality green infrastructure as standard, throughout the development.

Tower Road Streetscape, Wirral

Tower Road Streetscape is a successful example of GBI standards being implemented within new developments in the Wirral area. The project began in June 2020 and upon completion, will provide a high quality, safe and attractive green streets that support growth, encourages investment, occupancy, activity and 'dwell time'.

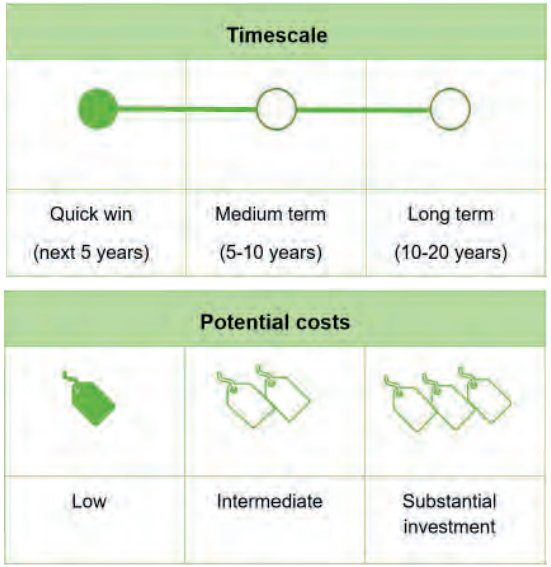
West Gorton Community Park Copyright: BDP

To achieve these aims, the existing carriageway has been narrowed to single lanes to slow the flow of traffic and promote pedestrian and cycle usage. Wider pavements have been introduced that allow more space for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as opportunities for additional street trees and planting. The additional green infrastructure creates sheltered walkways, places to dwell and inclusive street that provides for all ranges of mobility. These enhancements will improve health and wellbeing through increased active travel and create an adaptable and sustainable street that can actively respond to change.

Potential partners	Mechanisms	Wider stakeholders to engage
Local Authority Planning Dept	Policy measures enforced by planning application and conditions	Wirral Parks and Open Spaces team Building with Nature Highways England Schools Local community and volunteer initiatives Local wildlife groups Key regeneration projects and other developers and investors
Central government grants for landowners	Urban Tree Challenge Fund[1] Nature for Climate Fund	
Developer contributions	Building with Nature assessment integration during design phase Section 106 agreements BNG offset	

1 Delivered in partnership with the Forestry Commission.

Tower Road Streetscape Copyright: Peel L&P



Priority Opportunity #2
Re-wilding grass verges

Contribution to GBI themes						
						

The Opportunity

It is estimated that 97% of the UK's meadows have been destroyed since the 1930s, and road verges – which cover around 500,000 km across the UK - would have made up a large part of this provision. Concerns over safety and access, budget constraints and a desire for 'neatness' has minimised the habitat diversity within road verges.

Wirral's roadside verges have the potential to act as vital 'biodiversity corridors' for movement and dispersal once restored as grassland habitat or wildflower meadow. Restoring their wildlife function responds to the decline in biodiversity and habitat fragmentation identified within this Strategy. Grassland habitats are vulnerable to changes in land use or management, and particularly around urban areas, to new development. Therefore, there needs to be an increase in the hectarage of permanent grasslands and grassland in positive conservation management. This applies through coastal, rural and urban areas as well as along transport corridors (where target species may need to reflect imported substrates.)

An increase in meadow and wildflower coverage is advised through agricultural areas, along transport corridors, through existing and newly created parks, and through urban greening. Re-wilding verges along transport corridors will achieve a cumulative visual impact which will be felt across towns. This is reflected spatially in **Figure 4.3.**

In 2019, on the back of the government's National Pollinator Strategy,[1] the organisation Plantlife produced a set of best practice guidelines for managing grassland road verges. This is based on the overall principle of 'cut less, cut later' and removing cuttings to bring nutrient levels down.[2]

Copyright: Pictorial Meadows

Potential risks and challenges

- Wildflower ground preparation - stripping the existing topsoil and sward from the verge and sourcing an alternative location for topsoil - will require a co-ordinated and thorough action plan. Wildflower meadows require nutrient poor soil to thrive.
- Maintenance costs will be lower. The organisation Buglife UK estimates that the wildflower itself seed costs approximately £100 per kilogram.[3] It would require the purchase of wildflower seeds, and the development of an annual maintenance programme to allow the more desirable species to flourish and to reduce the vigour of the more rampant species.
- Careful negotiations are required with the Highways Authority to ensure that safety and access standards are maintained. This can be achieved, for example, by leaving 'visibility splays' at forward bends to roundabouts and at junctions, to ensure that vehicle sight lines are maintained where necessary.
- It is important that British native wildflowers are sown wherever possible rather than cultivated varieties, in order to avoid inadvertent harm.
- Effective and timely communications with local community members will be needed to ensure 'buy-in' to the altered appearance of the roadscape, and to

1 DEFRA, 'The National Pollinator Strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England' [Online] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/794706/national-pollinator-strategy.pdf

2 Bromley, McCarthy and Shellswell (2019), 'Managing Grassland Verges: A best practice guide', Plantlife.[Online] at: https://www.plantlife.org.uk/application/files/3315/7063/5411/Managing_grassland_road_verges_Singles.pdf

3 Buglife UK (n.d.), 'Funding Your Community Meadow' [Online] Available at: https://cdn.buglife.org.uk/2019/07/4.BuglifeCommunityMeadowspackFUNDINGweb.pdf

avoid complaints that verges are not being adequately maintained. Demonstrating impact will be helpful in this effort, as will broader awareness-raising initiatives.

Case Studies

Pictorial Meadows Enterprise Project

Urban meadow specialists Pictorial Meadows and Professor Nigel Dunnett teamed up to transform roundabouts across the UK into sustainable native wildflower meadows. These projects, which occurred on roundabouts in Hull, Birmingham, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield, Swindon and Woking, have rejuvenated the otherwise dull space adjacent to busy carriageways into colourful and vibrant areas of ecological significance.

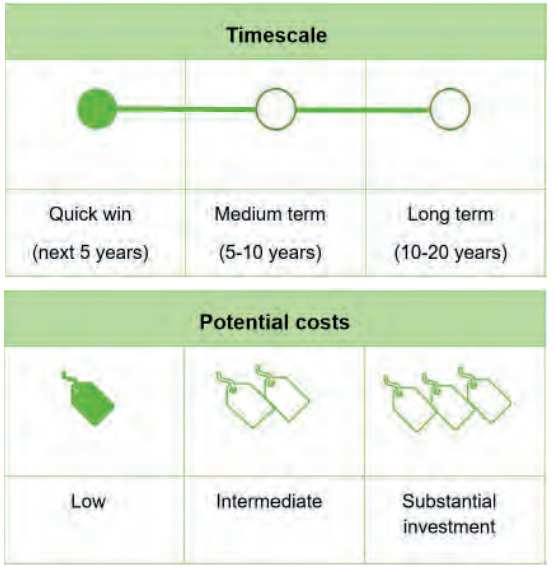
With careful consideration to species choice, these meadows can be easily implemented and once established are extremely easy to manage, only needing to be cut back once or twice a year.

In 2018, Hull City Council began seeding a number of wildflower meadows alongside the city's road infrastructure, including a number of roundabouts. This was undertaken to support the National Pollinator Strategy while adding seasonal colour to the urban landscape. The meadows were also designed to support flood alleviation schemes, and were carried out in partnership with Pictorial Meadows. Projects are now present at Holwell Road, Bude Road, Holderness High Road and Mount Pleasant.

This has delivered savings on maintenance costs by reducing the expense of intensive mowing. In December 2019, the urban wildflower meadow project was awarded as Green Action Bees' Needs Champions in the annual awards run by DEFRA.[4]

Potential partners	Mechanisms	Wider stakeholders to engage
Local businesses	Sponsorship of verges from local businesses as part of CSR initatives, including integration of wildflower planting into existing County-level 'Sponsor a Roundabout' schemes. Enterprise Rent-a-Car created urban meadows across seven sites close to arterial roads in Glasgow, Sheffield, Leeds, Birmingham, Swindon, Liverpool and Woking.	Plantlife UK Highways England Wirral Parks and Open Spaces team Cheshire Wildlife Trust Local voluntary conservation groups Local Councillors Key regeneration projects and other developers and investors
Developer contributions	Potential to consider sums to cover the cost of managing urban/rural verges.	

Copyright: Buglife UK



4 HullCCNews (December 2019), 'Hull's urban wildflower meadows win

Priority Opportunity #3
Woodland and hedgerow expansion programme

Contribution to GBI themes						

The Opportunity

The Committee on Climate Change has outlined that at least 30,000 hectares of land in the UK will need to be planted by 2050, and more woodland brought into sustainable management, in order to meet climate change targets by providing a store of carbon in the landscape and providing harvested wood for an additional stock of carbon[1]. Woodland cover across Wirral is relatively sparse and fragmented. Overall tree canopy coverage currently stands at an estimated 13%, slightly below the national average of 16%. However, the 2020 Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland Strategy cites measure which show that less than 5% of Wirral is woodland[2].

Woodlands provide crucial habitats to enhance biodiversity. They can act as 'stepping stone' habitats and play a role in restoring fragmented habitat networks, increase flood resilience, and help to restore water quality, in agricultural landscapes in particular.[3] Forestry can also create new jobs and sustainable timber, which can 'lock up' carbon in building and other products.

There are two related opportunities in relation to woodland and hedgerow expansion. Joining Mersey Forest is recommended in order to ensure an integrated regional approach to woodland expansion. Secondly, the development of a Design Guide is advised to accompany the 2020 Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland Strategy. The approach to woodland and hedgerow expansion requires in-depth analysis to explore where is most appropriate to increase cover. The Design Guide should:

- emphasise the importance of tree pit design particularly in urban areas, in order to deliver maximum canopy cover in the long term;
- strongly advocate positive woodland management to optimise species richness of habitats and the resident fauna. This includes the creation of glades, rides, thinning as appropriate, and the creation of pockets protected from high levels of disturbance (e.g. scrub or thorn underplanting, use of laid or woven hedgerows, strategic use of deadwood and natural play features).

Figure 4.1 provides an indication of areas most likely to be appropriate for woodland and hedgerow expansion, which should then be reviewed at a local level. This has been developed with an awareness of:

- Landscape Character Assessment, 2019 which makes recommendations for screening urban fringes and transport corridors and softening industrial development through the inclusion of native deciduous woodland
- Nature Improvement Areas which have specific recommendations for habitat creation, and
- Environment Agency Working with Natural Processes project data which identifies 'floodplain reconnectivity potential' and 'floodplain' woodland potential'
- Targeted planting to buffer existing woodlands (particularly ancient woodlands) and to extend canopy cover into agricultural, peri-urban and urban areas.

Woodland expansion requires the availability of land. Several partners are required to come together to identify land for woodland creation, with the Woodland Trust arguing that 'public forest estates and other public land must lead the way'. On a smaller scale, woodland planting by schools - where tree planting can also be used as a valuable educational resource[4]

Overchurch Park Woodlands Copyright: Sue Adair CC BY-SA 4.0

- and utility companies[5] can be explored.

Urban areas have a key role to play in terms of increasing tree numbers and canopy cover. This is referred to in more detail in Opp #8.

Potential risks and challenges

- Woodland creation should be conscious of the impact on landscape character, taking into account the 2019 Wirral Landscape Character Assessment.

1 Committee on Climate Change (2020), Land use: Policies for a Net Zero UK. [Online] Available: https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/land-use-policies-for-a-net-zero-uk/
2 Wirral MBC (2020) Trees, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy, p.10.
3 Woodland Trust (2020) Emergency Tree Plan for the UK.
4 RHS (n.d) 'Information Sheet: Trees in School Grounds' [Online] Available at: https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Info-Sheet/Trees-in-School-Grounds
5 Beament (August 2019), '11 million new trees to be planted in England by water companies', The Independent. [Online] Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/trees-planted-england-water-companies-a9061296.html

- Woodland should also not be integrated into areas of heathland.
- The increasing threat of pests and diseases is a significant threat. Ash dieback is predicted to lead to the loss of around 150 million mature trees and 2 billion saplings and seedlings between 2030-2040[6]. This calls for a diversity of planting when creating new woodland resources, to ensure resilience to such threats.
- Management costs need to be taken into account - The Land Trust are a potential partner.

Case Studies

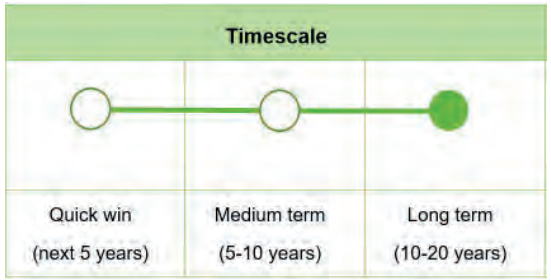
The Heywoods project

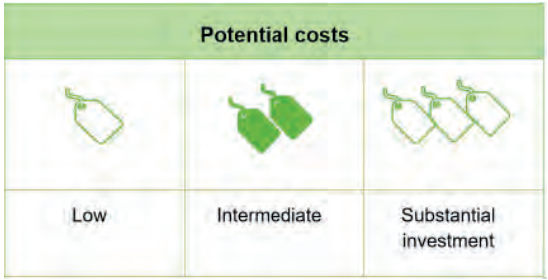
Over five years, the Heywoods project planted 80,000 trees, incorporating a number of community-based planting events, as well as hedgerow reinstatement. The work is delivered in partnership with a group of government agencies, local authorities (Hull City Council and East Riding of Yorkshire Council), environmental charities and key individuals. The partnership coordinates strategic and day-to-day activity and its role includes securing funding and implementing the strategy through agreed action plans. The work is financially supported through a range of sources including core funding, grants, developer contributions and corporate sponsorship (including by East Yorkshire Motor Services).

The Heywoods projects benefits from coming under the umbrella of the broader, more ambitious Northern Forest reforestation initiative, which seeks to create a coast-to-coast belt of 50 million trees between Hull and Liverpool. Within the Northern Forest, DEFRA provide additional funding through the MOREwoods program.

Potential partners	Mechanisms	Wider stakeholders to engage
The Woodland Trust	Subsidised 'tree packs' (30-420 trees), 'trees for your farm' scheme, MOREwoods (500+ trees), MOREhedges(+100m of hedgerow)[1]	Schools Local community and volunteer initiatives Local wildlife groups
The Land Trust	Delivery and management of woodlands	
Agricultural land owners and managers	Countryside Stewardship Woodland Creation Grants (WCG)[2] , ELMA	
Utility companies	CSR initiatives	
Central government grants for landowners	Urban Tree Challenge Fund[3] Nature for Climate Fund	
Developer contributions	Section 106 agreements	

1 https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/large-scale-planting/
2 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/woodland-creation-grant-countryside-stewardship-from-10-september-2018
3 Delivered in partnership with the Forestry Commission.





6 Woodland Trust (2020) Emergency Tree Plan for the UK.

Priority Opportunity #4
Re-wilding golf courses

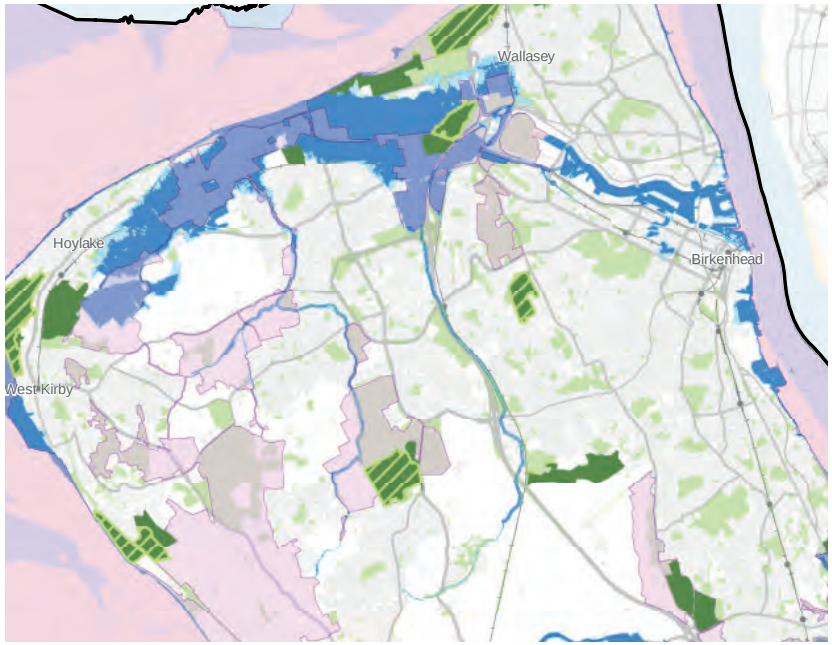
Contribution to GBI themes						

The Opportunity

Wirral has four golf courses and golf heritage runs deep in the Borough, with Wallasey golf course being the birthplace of the 'Stableford scoring system'. The Royal Liverpool course, which hosted the Open Championships in 2014, is a significant destination and has a large impact on the Borough's visitor economy. There is an opportunity to boost the 'golf coast' through the encouragement of ecologically-friendly management regimes.

Opportunity to create significant benefit to biodiversity within golf courses is well recognised, and we are seeing an increasing number of UK local authorities looking to this approach to combat climate change and boost landscape resilience[1]. Furthermore, the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association (BIGGA) is also a keen advocate of the multiple benefits that golf courses can offer. The UK's wildlife trusts look after more than 2,300 nature reserves, covering 98,500 hectares. It's a comparable number to golf courses in the UK, of which there are around 2,600 covering 125,500 hectares.[2]

Opportunities for golf clubs to engage with ecology have been around for a number of years. The non-profit Golf Environment Organisation works in more than 60 countries to protect and foster biodiversity and natural landscapes, encouraging sustainability within the sport. Another scheme, the STRI Group's Golf Environment Awards, are supported by major industry bodies, including BIGGA, and seek to raise awareness and recognise golf clubs who are improving their ecological footprint.



Golf courses that are Local Wildlife Sites
Golf courses
Nature Improvement Areas
Waterway
Flood Zone 3
Flood Zone 2
Existing green infrastructure assets to develop opportunities for sustainable drainage systems

Excerpt from Figure 4.2

A starting point is to engage with golf courses within Wirral, particularly those which are designated as Local Wildlife Sites such as the Royal Liverpool, Caldy, Wallasey and Bromborough Golf Course. Furthermore, Brackenwood Golf Course lies within the East Wirral Heathlands NIA, which recommends restoring and creating new heathland and grassland to better support existing habitat and species diversity.

Golf courses in proximity to the River Birket corridor should be encouraged to think progressively in relation to sustainable drainage solutions, and the incorporation of wetlands for water storage and to slow run-off. All existing and proposed GBI assets should be developing opportunities for sustainable drainage in order to create a network across Wirral.

Figure 4.2 (inset above) shows the spatial locations of golf courses, along all existing GBI assets, and how they align with Local Wildlife Sites and watercourses.

Potential risks and challenges

- A key requirement is securing the support of the greenkeepers at Wirral's golf courses.

1 https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/may/15/country-diary-nature-is-taking-back-control-of-the-golf-course.
2 BIGGA (2019), [Online] Available: Is your golf course a wildlife champion? https://www.bigga.org.uk/news-listing/is-your-golf-course-a-wildlife-champion.html]

- Effective and timely communications with local community members will be needed to ensure 'buy in' to the altered appearance of the golf course, and to avoid complaints that courses are not being adequately maintained. Demonstrating impact will be helpful in this effort, as will broader awareness-raising initiatives.

Case Studies

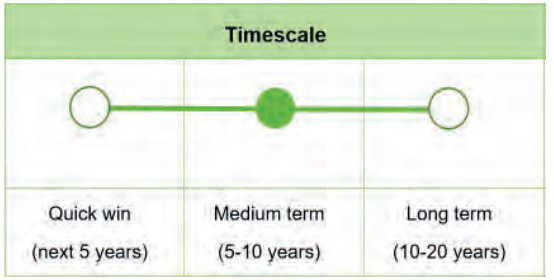
Coventry Golf Club

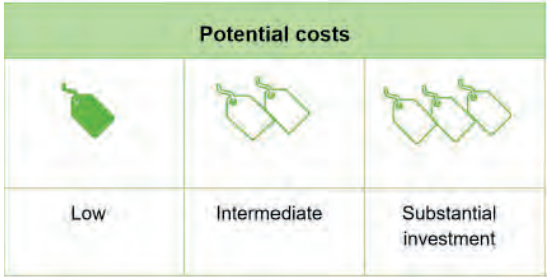
Coventry Golf Club is continually striving to improve and enhance its standards for sustainable management. The course has set aside several acres for wildflower habitat, as part of the Syngenta Operation Pollinator biodiversity programme; selected a turfgrass species which minimises demand on water and fertilisers; invested in the on-going use of grey water from Severn Trent; and put new initiatives put in place with the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (WKWT) to enhance the habitat for both flora and fauna. Wildlife boxes and log piles have been created along with a new wildflower area providing good opportunities for a range of pollinators, birds and small mammals. The creation of an artificial otter holt in a disused irrigation pump house on the golf clubs grounds. The club is also involved in the WKWT's Princethorpe Woodland project and the Trust runs a range of other community conservation activities within the course throughout the year.

The club has also implemented a range of measures to reduce energy consumption in course maintenance including installing on-site solar panels, a new fleet of fuel efficient green keeping equipment and electric buggies. A cycle to work scheme has also been set up for staff, along with the addition of on site shower for greenkeepers.

Potential partners	Mechanism	Wider stakeholders to engage
Golf Courses	Changing management regimes	Golf course managers Cheshire Wildlife Trust Local community
Central Government grants for landowners	Emerging funding schemes for biodiversity	
Developer Contributions	BNG offset	

Coventry Golf Course Copyright: E.Gammie CC BY-SA 4.0





Priority Opportunity #5
Strengthening the role of private gardens and back alleyways

Contribution to GBI themes						

The Opportunity

Private gardens are becoming increasingly recognised as valuable multi-functional GBI assets in themselves. Cumulatively, they can serve as a 'sponge' for stormwater. capture and contain carbon within soils, improve mindfulness and serve as crucial 'stepping stone' habitats for local wildlife. This is particularly important in urban areas, where they join up to form wildlife corridors, with particular impacts on species such as hedgehogs which require greater permeability to move and access food. However, various reports have raised concerns over the increase in impermeable paving within private gardens - particularly front gardens - across the UK's urban landscape, linked in large part to a steady rise over time in car ownership. The growing popularity of low-maintenance artificial lawn in the UK is a further threat to wildlife.[1]

There is a need to propose measures to protect and enhance the role of private gardens as GBI assets in the Borough's urbanised areas, through a combination of 'hard' policy measures and 'softer' awareness-raising initiatives alongside key partners:

- Policy measures – the role of private gardens should be explicitly referenced in the Borough's Local Plan; the planning authority can explore using legal precedent to refuse applications to pave over front gardens.
- Awareness-raising campaigns - by distributing materials already developed by the RHS, among others, as well as introducing workshops for schools on 'hedgehog highways' and other wildlife-friendly initiatives. This approach is particularly important to address biodiversity concerns, which are currently less well supported by the legal and policy framework.
- Working with housing developers - to encourage biodiversity and flood resilience to be integrated into the delivery of new homes at an early stage. Government guidance on Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) outlines that 'relatively small features can often achieve important benefits for wildlife, such as incorporating 'swift bricks' and bat boxes in developments and providing safe routes for hedgehogs'.[2] There is precedent for large house builders taking these steps, including the support of Bovis Homes for 'hedgehog highways'[3] and a joint venture between Barratt Homes and the RSPB to install bat and swift boxes at developments in Aylesbury.[4] These relatively accessible and affordable steps can be included as planning conditions, particularly at large development sites.

Potential risks and challenges

- Legislation and policy has a limited impact on restoring biodiversity in private gardens, leaving a reliance on 'softer' measures such as awareness-raising campaigns.
- In the longer term, the increasing take-up of electric car

1 Laville, Sandra (July 2016), 'Growth in artificial lawns poses threat to British wildlife, conservationists warn', Guardian [Online] Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jul/04/growth-in-artificial-lawns-poses-threat-to-british-wildlife-conservationists-warn

2 Government Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). Paragraph: 023 Reference ID: 8-023-20190721.

3 https://www.bovishomes.co.uk/news/housebuilder-launches-industry-first-hedgehog-campaign-to-protect-creatures-under-threat/

4 https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/projects/kingsbrook-housing/

charging infrastructure (given evolving national targets) is likely to intensify the problems caused by paving over of existing gardens, given the need to install charging points and the inherent limitations of providing these 'on street'. This is likely to require a greater reliance on the promotion of design interventions whereby parked cars can co-exist alongside extensive permeable surfaces.[5]

Case Studies

Community regeneration projects, Wirral

There have been an increasing number of rear alleyway revivals during the Covid-19 pandemic in Wirral's urban wards. Neighbours have come together, volunteering their time to rejuvenate their communal rear alleyways creating areas of planting and spaces to come together in a safe, car-free environment. These are grass roots projects, with like-minded people coming together, working hard and raising funds as needed.

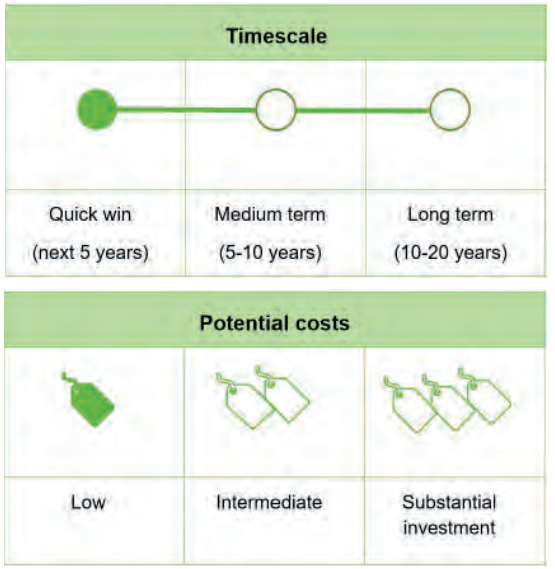
The Front Gardens Project

In 2005, Ealing revealed that one-quarter of the borough's 74,300 front gardens was completely hard surfaced, and a further fifth were nearly all hard surfaced.

The Front Gardens Project, aside from research and data gathering activities, has also carried out demonstration projects to illustrate how gardens can be transformed to fulfil more environmental functions, while still providing parking. This was carried out in collaboration with the RHS and local designers and landscapers.

Potential partners	Mechanisms	Wider stakeholders to engage
Local authority planning dept	Policy measures enforced by planning application	Cheshire Wildlife Trust Local schools Local wildlife groups Local community Hedgehog Preservation Society RSPB
Housing developers	Via planning conditions	
Education authorities	Integration of 'wildlife gardening' into school curriculum	
Local community groups	Fundraising, organising clean-up days, raising awareness	

Copyright: Emma Dolan



5 See RHS Guidance on 'Front Gardens: Designing). Available at: https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=738.

Contribution to GBI themes						

Priority Opportunity #6
Creation of River Birket wetlands

The Opportunity

Opportunities should be explored for wetland creation in areas adjacent to existing watercourses and at risk from flooding, as part of a wider network of sustainable drainage. Wetlands provide many benefits to society, helping us to be more resilient to the effects of our changing climate. They provide multiple benefits such as slowing the flow of water, reducing flood risk, filtering water and capturing carbon. Wetland creation also presents opportunities for encouraging recreation - including walking and cycling - and providing access to natural and diverse landscapes and waterscapes.

There are multiple factors which presents the River Birket corridor as an ideal location for wetland creation. The distribution of flood risk highlights that major areas of risk are centred around the River Birket and River Fender in the north of the peninsula. The naturalisation of river corridors is a nature-led solution to managing flooding. Recommendations for the River Birket Nature Improvement Area (NIA) include the creation of wetland habitats, not only to support existing habitats but also for sustainable storage of surface water.

The route offered by the River Birket, which currently connects Moreton and Leasowe with Bidston Moss, has the potential to be a key GBI corridor, linking up active travel routes, biodiversity corridors and 'blue links' between the urban area in Birkenhead's former docklands and the river's origins in Hoylake.

However, the opportunities for improving connections between communities will also need to be tempered as the River Birket corridor provides ecologically important grasslands and wetland habitats with great value for overwintering, passage and breeding birds. Opportunities to enhance this asset for biodiversity should be prioritised in order to prevent the risk of adding to diffuse recreational pressure in the Borough. Wildlife only areas will need to be designed in to the development of any wetlands proposals.

Bidston Moss

Bidston Moss is a natural gateway to the River Birket wetlands in the east of the borough. Through consultation, Bidston Moss has been advocated by the local community as an important green space for recreation and habitat for wildlife. Part of the site is a Local Nature Reserve, which is located on a triangular piece of land sandwiched between the River Birket, the M53 and the A554, and the larger part of green space is located on the site of a former waste disposal site accessed from Wallasey Bridge Road. It is served by Bidston Train Station.

Better access will be required to Bidston Moss as the key gateway to and from the Wirral Waters development. Access is currently fragmented, unclear and is not future-proofed for the increasing number of residents who will want to access the park (and wetlands beyond). Regenerating Bidston Dock as a leisure-led destination with Bidston will 'unlock' access to Bidston Moss and the wider recreational corridors. A landscape-led masterplan for the Birket wetlands is advised, incorporating improved gateways, an improved footpath network for both walking and cycling, hydrological modifications to naturalise the corridor, the creation of terrestrial and intertidal habitat areas for biodiversity enhancement, zones for educational interactions by local schools and a wayfinding and interpretation strategy.

Kersal wetlands, Salford

Potential risks and challenges

- Developing a co-ordinated approach across a wide area requires investment in a landscape-led masterplan.
- An increased maintenance budget will be required but this should be viewed as a distribution of funds from flood risk management.
- Effective communications with local community members and wildlife groups will be needed to ensure inclusivity and enable all parties to become activitated in the design process.

Case Studies

Kersal Wetlands, Salford

Completed in 2018, the creation of Kersal wetlands is a £10.3m Environment Agency project on the site of Kersal Dale which is situated in a meander loop of the River Irwell. The flat topographical range of the Dale has been altered to create an undulating landscape which is allowed to flood seasonally. The project has created urban wetland habitats, and 2.5km of new footpaths for walking and recreation by the East Salford community. The flood embankments have been planted with 10ha of wildflower habitat and the site's ponds are used as an educational resource and managed by local primary schools. The Salford Ranger Team host Wild Walks through the wetlands. Within the basin area, a number of multi-use sports pitches have been given improved playing surfaces and better drainage systems, making them more resilient to flooding than the pitches that were in place before the scheme. Furthermore, ninety hectares of development land has been protected through the scheme as the site is able to divert and hold 650 million litres of water.

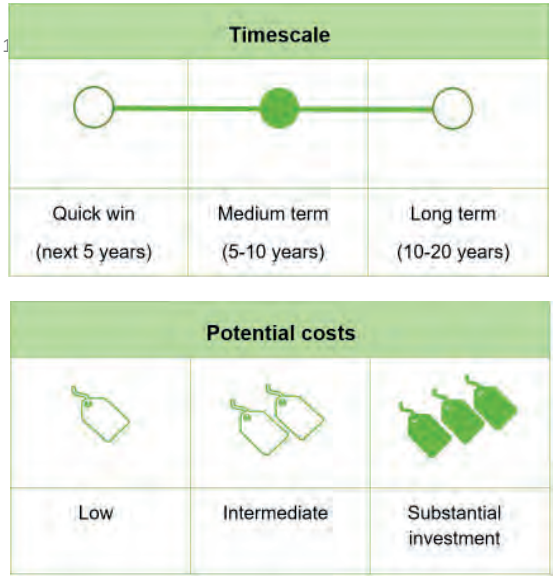
Bristol Harbourside

Bristol Harbourside is a successful example of urban wetland creation with planting being introduced for habitat creation and sustainable drainage opportunities. Prefabricated floating reed beds were introduced within the wider regeneration of the Harbourside development and were designed to reflect the sites original ecosystem. The floating reed beds increase local flora and fauna biodiversity, treat water runoff from the development in the planting and improve overall water quality within the root system. The floating reed bed planting also creates an attractive green edge to the waterside development.

Potential partners	Mechanisms	Wider stakeholders to engage
Central government	Nature for Climate Fund, Cycling and Walking fund[1] , Transforming Cities fund, Clean Air fund, Countryside Stewardship grants	Cheshire Wildlife Trust RSPB Local wildlife groups Local community Wirral Council teams: parks and open space, flood risk Key regeneration projects including Wirral Waters
RSPB	The Birdfair/RSPB Research Fund for Endangered Birds	
Landfill Tax	Landfill Communities Fund	
Orsted	Burbo Bank Extension Community Fund	

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2-billion-package-to-create-new-era-for-cycling-and-walking

Bristol Harbourside Copyright: Grant Associates



Priority Opportunity #7
Developing a ‘Super Greenway’ network

Contribution to GBI themes						

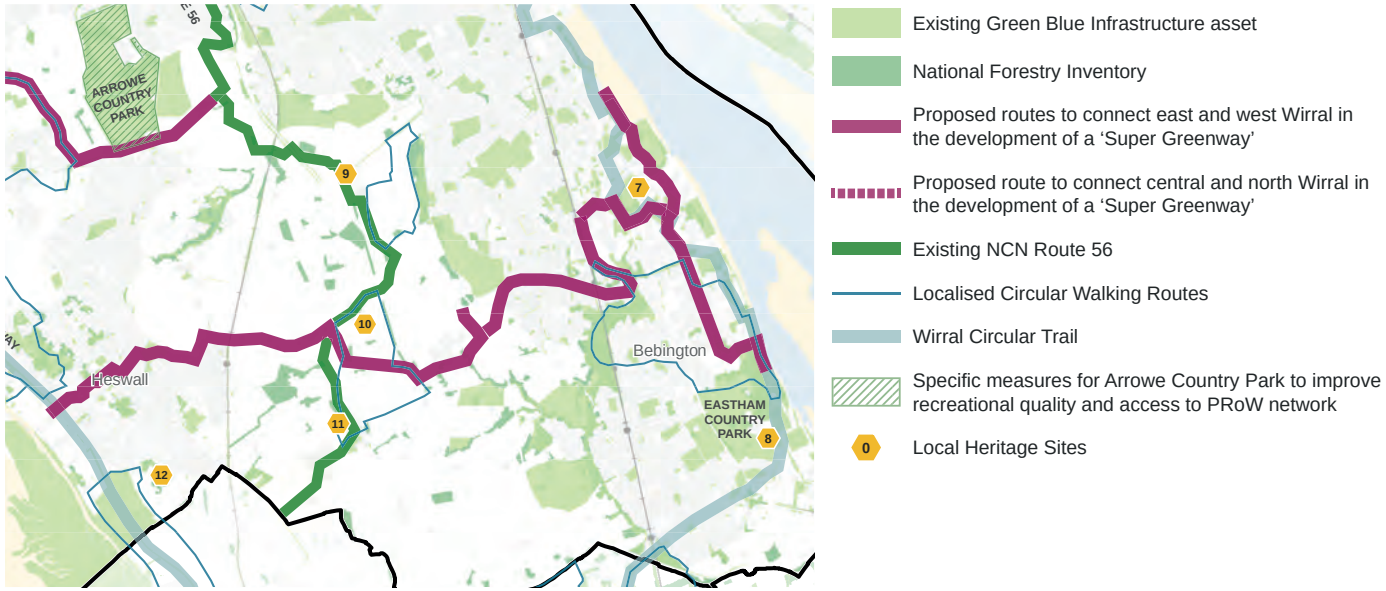
The Opportunity

Wirral’s Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network provides a significant heritage feature as well as a major recreational resource, helping people get out into the countryside from urbanised areas. There is scope to strengthen the network further, developing access within the areas where there is a much lower density of path, including the Mersey Estuary, through the wider Birkenhead area and central area of farmland. This will provide a stronger east-west route to bridge the M53 barrier, but fundamentally will create an improved network of recreational routes which will alleviate diffuse recreational pressure at Wirral’s internationally designated ecological sites.

This opportunity outlines the broad alignment of a greenway that seeks to ‘knit together’ some of Wirral’s spectacular green assets, such as Arrowe Country Park, Eastham Country Park, Port Sunlight River Park and Thornton Hough. Indicative spatial analysis is provided in Figure 4.5 (also shown in inset) and it is recommended that feasibility work is undertaken on the ground to reach a preferred route. Feasibility studies should look at integrating the Lever Causeway and formal green avenues that connect to Thornton Hough.

The proposal will not only enhance the east-west alignment of PRoW for walkers and cyclists, but also strengthen the central spine of routes through the heart of Wirral, connecting with the NCN Route 56.

A greenway is a traffic-free route that is attractive, generally well separated from traffic and continuous over obstacles and through road junctions. The greenway should look to utilise existing permissive routes and, for maximum connectivity and permeability, links with the existing cycle network, including the Wirral Circular Trail.



Excerpt from Figure 4.5

The proposal for a greenway within the central agricultural area, alongside the activation of opportunities in this area relating to rewilding verges and increasing support for agri-environment schemes and farm diversification, will also provide cross-boundary opportunities to optimise green spaces for the benefit of wildlife.

Consultation with major Wirral landowners highlighted ambition from Leverhulme Estates to develop a Green Infrastructure network within the centre of the Borough.

Potential risks and challenges

- A key requirement is securing the ‘buy in’ from the landowners and ensuring availability of land across the across proposed route.
- The interface between the greenway and existing land-uses, including agricultural, watercourses, woodland, heritage sites, and conservation areas, will need to be sensitivity and appropriately designed.
- Locations where existing vehicle access needs to be retained will need to be incorporated into the scheme design.
- Engineering applications such as lighting, fencing and landscaping are important considerations when designing a traffic-free route, but will also increase the overall maintenance budget within an already strapped public purse.

- The application of lighting to a traffic-free cycle route would improve user ability to navigate the route and discourage anti-social behaviour and crime, but can also cause light pollution and overspill of lighting to nearby residential dwellings, and have an adverse impact on wildlife.

Case Studies

Liverpool Loopline

Classified as a 'greener greenway' by Sustrans, this popular traffic-free route runs from Halewood to Aintree and on to Southport.

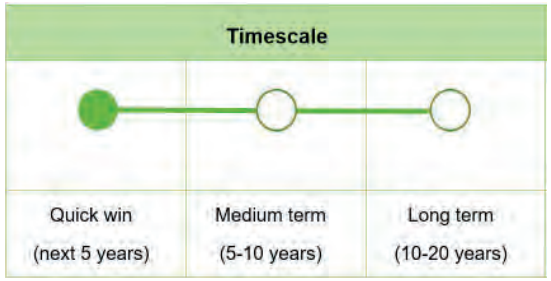
The Loop Line was abandoned in 1964 by British Rail and became quite derelict until 1986 when plans were drawn up for its conversion to a walking and cycling route. Construction began in 1988, and the final section to Aintree opened in 2000. The railway path provides a flat, well surfaced green corridor through the urban environment of east Liverpool, and forms part of the Trans Pennine Trail. The route is managed like a linear woodland park, with volunteers currently actively enhancing the 40+ access points along the route by planting wildflowers and improving habitats.

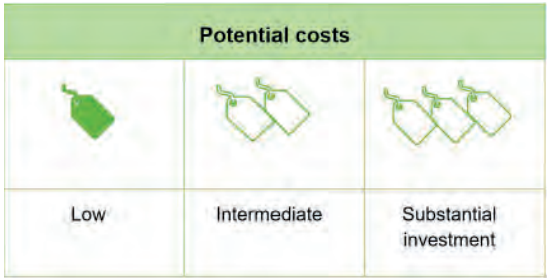
Fallowfield Loopline, Manchester

The Fallowfield Loop is an attractive, largely traffic-free walking and cycling route which follows a former railway line. This greener greenway forms a green corridor running about four kilometres south of the city centre, linking parks and open spaces between Chorlton-cum-Hardy and Fairfield station. It includes a number of community spaces and south facing banks that support interesting and varied wildflowers, invertebrates and small birds.

Potential partners	Mechanisms	Wider stakeholders to engage
Central government (Department for Transport)	Cycling and Walking fund[1] Transforming Cities fund Clean Air fund	Wirral Transport Planning team Wirral's Parks and Open Spaces Team Landowners, including Leverhulme Local community Sustrans National Trust
Developer contributions	Section 106 BNG offset	
National Trust	Contribute with direct funding or with labour towards the implementation (corporate social responsibility).	
National Lottery Heritage Fund	National Lottery Grants for Heritage	

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2-billion-package-to-create-new-era-for-cycling-and-walking 1





Priority Opportunity #8
Greening of key corridors

Contribution to GBI themes

The Opportunity

Birkenhead is a focus area for transformative change propelled by the waterfront development of Wirral Waters and the proposed regeneration of Birkenhead town centre. Wirral Waters is delivering exciting neighbourhoods with distinctive identities and streetscapes that promote legible routes, walking and cycling and urban greening.

This ambition should be matched by an endeavour to improve access to GBI within the neighbouring area, particularly those identified as having poor environmental and air quality. It is vital that projects promoting multi-functional GBI measures in the surrounding neighbourhoods are supported, such as the 'Green Grid' and 'Working Woodlands' Wirral Waters projects. 'Greening the grid' that connects Wirral Waters to green space and heritage assets in the wider area - such as Birkenhead Park, Central Park, Hamilton Square, Birkenhead Priory - is strongly recommended to ensure connectivity between communities, and that economic benefits are filtered through to deliver beneficial change for all.

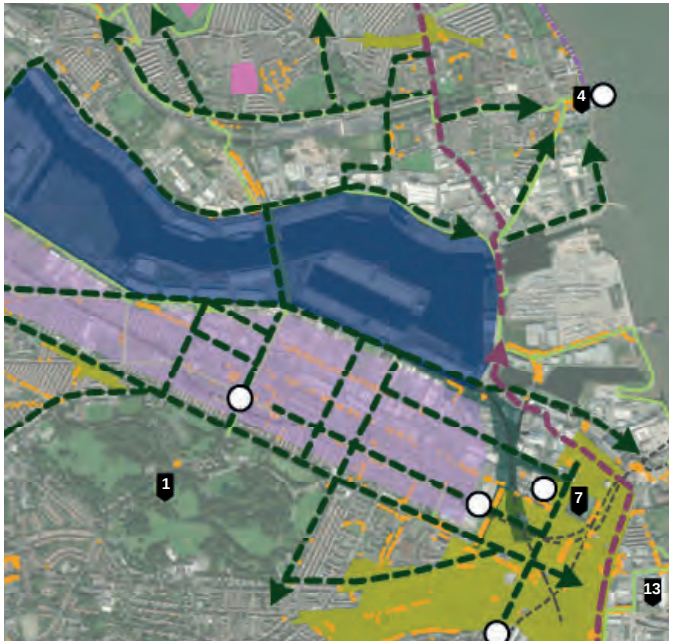
The LCR LCWIP highlights three priority corridors for walking and cycling in Wirral which have the potential to act as a further catalyst towards the 'greening of the grid.' These are:

- Phase 1: Leasowe – Seacombe Ferry Terminal
- Phase 2: New Brighton – Birkenhead
- Phase 3: Birkenhead to Eastham

When road layouts are reconfigured to accommodate walking and cycling, this presents a valuable opportunity to accommodate multi-functional GBI assets. An ambitious mosaic of trees and shrubs, hedges, wildflower verges and sustainable drainage solutions (rain gardens, swales, living walls and permeable paving) should be fully integrated into these routes. Routes should also feature signposting to key green spaces, heritage assets, train stations and other active travel gateways.

The planting of street trees alone is considered a minimum requirement. In order to improve current environmental quality and air quality levels, and accommodate for future growth, it is recommended that project proposals should pass a 'GBI audit' to ensure that green and blue opportunities are fully integrated, in order to deliver the type of streetscape and landscape that encourages active travel and forms part of a wider network of climate-resilient sustainable drainage (see Opportunity #1).

Figure 4.4 presents indicative recommendations for urban greening in the vicinity of Birkenhead (also shown in inset right.) The greening of these corridors offers multiple benefits. Research has suggested that enhancing the green elements in streetscapes is a promising mechanism to support urban cycling.[1] Offering green routes connecting destinations and train stations creates legibility within our environment and minimises barriers to using public transport.



Excerpt of Figure 4.4

Potential risks and challenges

- Developing a co-ordinated approach across a wide area of existing and proposed roads requires investment in a landscape-led masterplan.
- Existing streets will need to be surveyed for underground utilities in order to better understand viability for street trees and improved drainage systems.
- An increased maintenance budget within an already strapped public purse will be required. Commuted sums should be built in to projects to cover additional expenditure.
- Effective and timely communications with local community members will be needed due to disruption to the road network and local streets.

1 Nawrath, Kowarik and Fischer (2019), 'The influence of green streets on cycling behavior in European cities', Landscape and Urban Planning 190. Available online: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0169204618313732

Case Studies

Oxford Road, Manchester

One of Manchester's busiest roads has undergone transformation into a 'green corridor' prioritising active travel and urban greening measures. The Corridor Partnership Board overseeing the change comprises of public, private and third sector organisations including Manchester City Council and the University of Manchester. General traffic is prohibited from travelling through new 'bus gates' which restrict access to sections of the corridor at certain times of the day. New cycle lanes have been introduced adjacent to existing footpaths. Street trees and SuDs have been designed in to the new layout, with the ultimate aim of increasing the proportion of the ground with a capacity to evapotranspire, cooling the heat-island effect.

Greener Grangetown, Cardiff

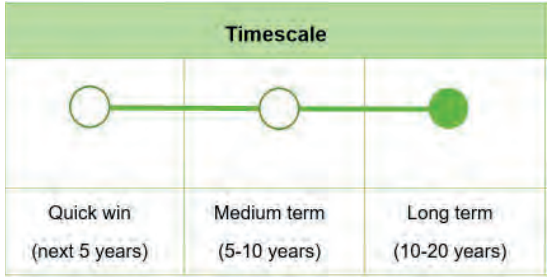
Greener Grangetown redevelopment greened key corridors along 12 residential streets, with the primary aim of reducing the amount of water that was being directed into Cardiff's sewage system. Sewage was being pumped 8 miles away from the existing site, then treated and discharged into the Severn Estuary.

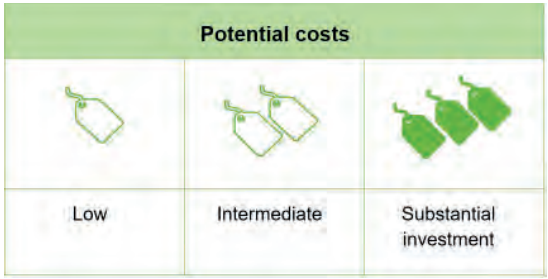
To improve drainage in the area green infrastructure was introduced, which provides a sustainable approach to drainage and also a visual amenity for the local area. The Green infrastructure introduced reduces the level of rainwater being managed by the local sewer system by over 40,000m³ per year. The use of SuDS drainage throughout the project resulted in a large network of green infrastructure network being created, climate resilience was increased, high quality public realms were provided for residents and cycle routes were improved to allow greater numbers of users.

Potential partners	Mechanisms	Wider stakeholders to engage
Central government (Department for Transport)	Cycling and Walking fund[1] Transforming Cities fund Clean Air fund	Wirral Transport Planning team Wirral's Parks and Open Spaces Team Local community Sustrans Key regeneration projects including Wirral Waters
Developer contributions	Section 106 BNG offset	

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2-billion-package-to-create-new-era-for-cycling-and-walking 1

Greener Grangetown, Cardiff Copyright: GreenBlue





Priority Opportunity #9
Creating active neighbourhoods

Contribution to GBI themes							

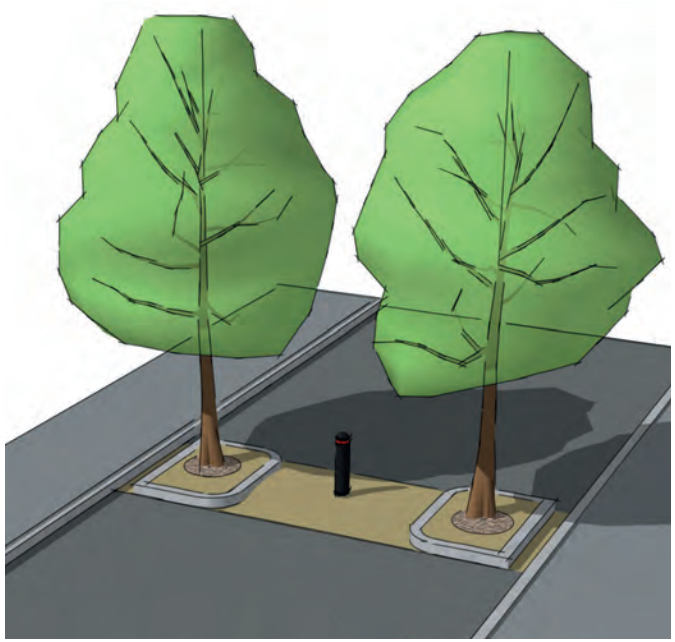
The Opportunity

In June 2020, the Government announced a 'new era for cycling and walking'[1] with a key aim to double cycling and increase walking by 2025. Measures include higher standards for permanent infrastructure, embracing prescribing of cycling and exercise and creating a long-term budget for cycling and walking. Councils are being advised that 'side streets could be closed to through traffic, to create low-traffic neighbourhoods and reduce rat-running while maintaining access for vehicles.'

Opportunities for creating active, low traffic neighbourhoods in areas of poor environmental and air quality should be prioritised in Wirral. By reducing the dominance of the car and introducing GBI elements into public realm re-design, more people will be encouraged to walk and cycle as part of their daily lives. Active, filtered or walk-able neighbourhoods may also contribute to the greening of the school run.

Features like 'modal filters' - where modes of transport are filtered at junctions creating no-through routes for cars - provide a good spatial opportunity to integrate urban greening measures. Examples of GBI enhancements range from street trees to rain gardens, to community growing spaces and parklets. This requires input from the local community through engagement to understand their requirements. The benefit that this opportunity affords for biodiversity is centred on the idea that through providing a network of green infrastructure aligned with green space 'at the back door,' the recreational pressure on the coast, and the impact of car travel on habitats, will be to some extent dispersed.

GBI proposals must be integrated fully into a 'Healthy Streets' agenda which puts human health and experience at the heart



of planning, based on London's experience with its 'mini-Holland' and 'liveable neighbourhoods' programs. These initiatives have extended into larger UK cities including Birmingham, Manchester and Bristol. Communities in Greater Manchester are encouraged within the Greater Manchester Bee Network initiative to be proactive in putting forward proposals to create active neighbourhoods. Some groups have managed to secure additional community grant funding.

Potential risks and challenges

- Broad community engagement is fundamental to allay concerns in relation to closing roads to traffic and understanding the potential impact on streets within the wider area. Residents will also be concerned regarding car parking.
- Existing streets will need to be surveyed for underground utilities in order to better undertstand viability for changes below street level, if required.
- There is a varying scale of ambition and GBI intervention seen across the case studies. This will be directly relatable to the level of funding available and the appetite for change. Small changes should be valued for their contribution to the broader picture.

1 https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2-billion-package-to-create-new-era-for-cycling-and-walking.

Case Studies

‘Mini-Holland’ schemes, London

The Mini-Holland scheme is part of the London Mayor’s Healthy Streets Approach and is aimed specifically at outer London boroughs where residents are more car-dependent. Mini-Hollands aim to make cycling more pleasant, safer and more convenient. The infrastructure changes include; segregated cycle lanes; measures to calm motor traffic; redesigned town centres; cycle hubs and a range of behaviour change measures including community bike rides. The schemes also include measures to improve the walking environment such as new pedestrian crossings at key locations, and the introduction of GBI assets.

Greater Manchester Bee Network initiative

The Chorlton Climate Action Partnership: A group of Chorlton residents have teamed up to win just over £200,000 from The National Lottery Community Fund’s brand-new Climate Action Fund to get their local area ‘back on its feet’ after COVID-19 through people-powered transport. One project will aim to bring more shoppers to a local high street, one will work with families to debut a safer, greener school run and one will be designed for environmental improvements to a residential street.

Northbank Dock Road Cycleway, Wirral

Northbank Dock Road Cycleway creates an active neighbourhood through pedestrian, cycleway and public transport improvements. These improvements better connect East Float Quay to Seacombe Ferry and Tower Road and the existing pedestrian and cycle network. The project includes a 3.5m wide pavement for active travel, additional public transport stops and additional green infrastructure.

Potential partners	Mechanisms	Wider stakeholders to engage
Central government	Emerging national funding opportunities aligned to new Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (expected 2020)	Wirral Transport Planning team Wirral’s Parks and Open Spaces Team Landowners Local community and councillors Sustrans
Community grants	National Lottery Community Fund’s Climate Action Fund	
Developer contributions	Section 106 agreement BNG offset	

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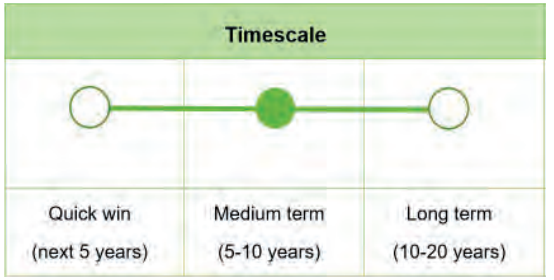
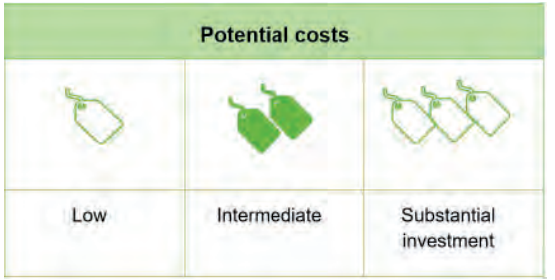




Priority Opportunity #10
Green links between Seacombe 'gateway' and wider area

Contribution to GBI themes

The Opportunity

The Left Bank Growth Point is a partnership project between Wirral Council, Peel L&P, Wirral Growth Company, Hind Street and other partners. The project is delivering ambitious regeneration proposals along the 'Left Bank' of the River Mersey, across the water from Liverpool City Waterfront. Urban greening and development of a network of sustainable drainage should play a crucial role in the framework in order to improve the existing poor environmental quality and access to green space[1], to ameliorate air quality levels, to address health deprivation[2] through an uptake in walking and cycling and to encourage climate change resilience.

The waterfront is a key but underused 'placemaking' asset but this is perception is evolving with the development of Wirral Waters. Wirral Waters is envisaged as a key 'node' in the Borough's tourist trail of the future, and benefits to the visitor economy are well noted, given the plans for an attractive waterfront environment with green spaces linked by green routes.

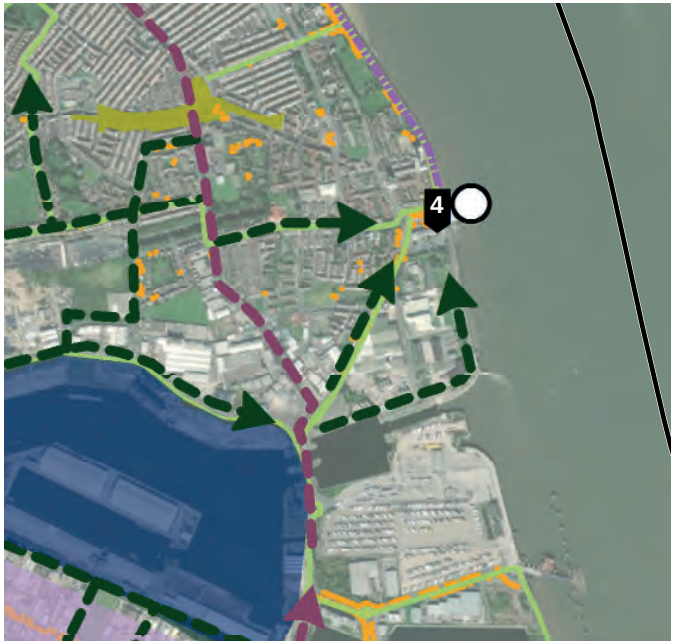
The development of existing coastal assets should be maximised in order to help deliver the ambition within the regeneration framework. The Seacombe Ferry Terminal is one such asset; a key gateway into Wirral from Liverpool set within a complex currently undergoing transformation as Eureka! Mersey, a new visitor attraction for Wirral. There is a real opportunity at Seacombe to create a step change in the quality of the Birkenhead conurbation's urban environment which will have a positive impact on tourist footfall and perception of Birkenhead within the region.

Eureka! Mersey will form a key destination which will draw tourists across the Mersey from Liverpool. In order to retain visitors, it will be important to connect the Ferry Terminal with Birkenhead's cultural heritage assets, the town centre and Wirral Waters. If Birkenhead is to become 'firmly established on the tourist trail' as advocated by the Integrated Regeneration Strategy, connections between these assets will be key in enabling this tourism potential to be rediscovered.

Public realm improvements to the Wirral Circular Trail will reconnect walking and cycling routes along the Mersey Estuary waterfront providing a legible progression towards Wirral Waters. Green infrastructure should form a central role within these improvements.

Potential risks and challenges

- Developing a co-ordinated approach across a wide area of existing and proposed roads requires investment in a landscape-led masterplan.
- Existing streets will need to be surveyed for underground utilities in order to better undertstand viability for street trees and improved drainage systems.
- An increased maintenance budget within an already strapped public purse will be required. Commuted sums should be built in to projects to cover additional expenditure.
- Effective and timely communications with local community members will be needed due to disruption to the road network and local streets.



Excerpt of Figure 4.4

Case Studies

Heart of the City project, Sheffield

The Heart of the City is a £130 million major redevelopment in Sheffield, running from 2004 - 2016. Heart of the City forms one of the city centre's quarters and was largely developed by Sheffield One, an Urban Regeneration Company set up to facilitate the redevelopment. The scheme has created new public spaces and development including Sheaf Square which has streamlined the road network to create a primarily pedestrianised space which now forms a city gateway for

1 According to the Wirral Open Space Strategy, urban areas of Birkenhead do not have sufficient access to natural and semi-natural green space, amenity green space, play provision and allotments..

2 Childhood obesity is a strong indicator of health deprivation, and data from Wirral Intelligence Service (WIS) notes that at age 4 to 5, one in ten Wirral children are obese, with problems concentrated, in particular, in Birkenhead South..

those visiting by train.

A wide pedestrianised tree lined boulevard (Howard Street) connects Sheaf Square to Sheffield Hallam University and on to the Winter Gardens and Millennium Square, the Peace Gardens and Fountain Square. There has been a focus on creating high quality public realm spaces where green and blue infrastructure play a central role in placemaking. From 2011, efforts were focused to the regeneration of The Moor, a retail area of Sheffield that has seen continuous decline over several years.

Hull 2017 and City of Culture Programme

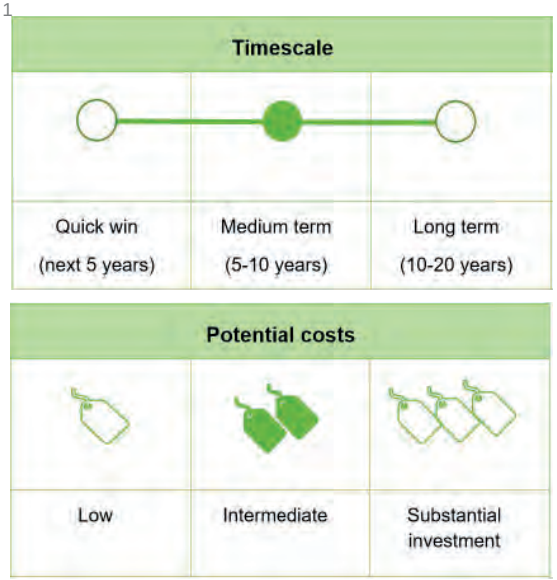
Hull has suffered from industrial decline and subsequent economic hardships in recent years. The Hull 2017 developments were initiated following a successful bid in 2013 to become the UK City of Culture 2017, aiming to position Hull as a visitor destination and gateway to the local area. A programme of over 2,800 events, exhibitions, installations and cultural activities were not confined to galleries and theatres, but also spread across the city utilising new and existing public realm and historic settings such as the waterfront firework display and sounds and light display at Victoria Square.

Hull's regeneration focused on revitalising the public realm through improved connectivity, de-cluttering the streets, green infrastructure, and delivering high quality pavements, street furniture and lighting. This approach was carried out across 14 streets and four new public squares. These spaces became the platform for the 2017 City of Culture events and have subsequently changed perceptions of Hull, providing a city that residents are proud of and visitor destination reflecting the cities maritime history. Victoria Square has now become the city's main civic space with public realms unifying the city and forming a gateway to the wider area.

Potential partners	Mechanisms	Wider stakeholders to engage
Central government (Department for Transport)	Cycling and Walking fund[1] Transforming Cities fund Future High Streets Fund	Wirral PRoW team Eureka! Mersey Wirral Growth Company (Muse) Local community and councillors Sustrans Key regeneration projects including Wirral Waters
National Lottery Heritage Fund	National Lottery Grants for Heritage	
Developer contributions	Section 106 agreements	

1 https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2-billion-package-to-create-new-era-for-cycling-and-walking

Victoria Square, Hull Copyright: Re-Form Landscape



Priority Opportunity #11
Spaces for community growing

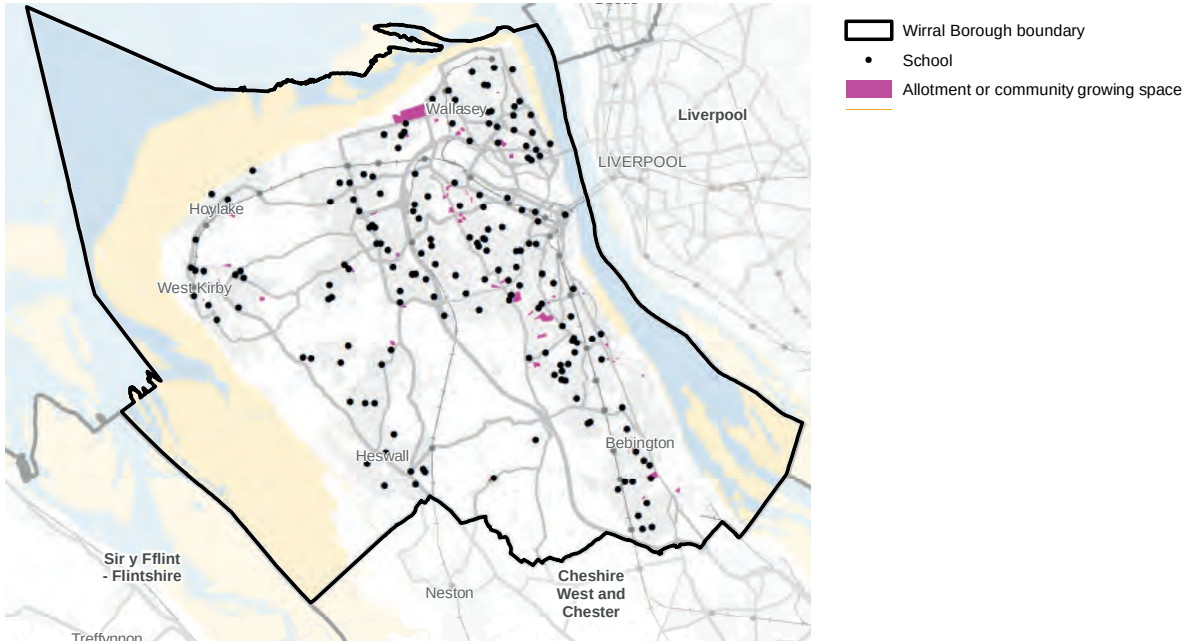
Contribution to GBI themes						

The Opportunity

Community growing schemes can enable social cohesion and encourage neighbourhood interactions, improving people's mental health and their sense of belonging. Growing food can also encourage healthy, sustainable eating practices whilst also generating civic pride in an area and engagement with the natural environment. Furthermore, social prescribing or 'green prescribing', centred around food growing, is being routinely used by the health and social care services as a way of promoting health and wellbeing.

In a review of projects engaging communities in urban green spaces, it was urban farming and food which stood out as a key method of engagement. The Borough already has a network of allotment spaces but typically these are concentrated in the built-up area in the east of the peninsula. Consultation with key stakeholders highlighted 'rocketing demand' for growing space, particularly during 2020's Covid-19 crisis, leading to a long waiting list. 'Incredible Edible' initiatives, such as in Hoylake, already do important work, but there is scope to make such food growing initiatives more inclusive so that their reach is expanded to neighbourhoods facing greater health challenges.

Community growing schemes are spatially flexible and can take many forms. Vegetables, fruiting trees, and pollinator-friendly herbs can all be grown - in pots, raised wooden planters, or directly into the earth. Temporary, or meanwhile, planters within a residential neighbourhood are a good way to begin a community growing initiative, if a permanent space is not immediately available. This is also a good way to help connect with other people in the area, by establishing a doorstep opportunity for residents. Disused strips of land at the edges of public parks, school playing fields, or rail lines, and run-down or underused spaces are other commonly utilised, more permanent locations.



Consultation highlighted that Wirral Council have recently advocated an existing area of green space in Birkenhead to the local community for food growing purposes, which was achieved via an application to the planning department.

Potential risks and challenges

- Successful long-term management requires a lead person, group or organisation to oversee the longevity of the project. There is particular potential in areas where a community group is already present, meaning implementation and management would more likely be a success.
- The location of community growing areas is integral to their success as they need to be in a safe and overlooked place, which is also publicly accessible. Permission will be required from the relevant landowner and, as with any public location, vandalism and theft are key risks. Growing areas near roads and rail-lines will face pollution, which may affect produce quality.
- Access to water during times of drought, and the warmer days during the growing season. Rainwater capture using, for example, water butts presents an additional challenge in terms of costs and vandalism. Planting new trees is also something that needs serious contemplation when it comes to water.

- All grown food is free to the community, with picking encouraged. This concept will need to be balanced with a perceived 'fair' distribution of the produce within the participating community.
- While small amounts of funding may arise locally, and community growing groups can sell excess plants to people in their area, capital – especially when starting-up – is a challenge. The responsibility of writing funding bids will also rest with the community group itself.
- Community growing areas can look bare and 'untidy' during the winter months if there is a focus on annual crops and herbaceous plants. Broad community engagement is fundamental to understanding, and should focus on the positive messages and stories that community growing represents.
- The sharing of tools, gloves and other equipment, typically used in community growing areas, can cause the transmission of Covid-19.

Case Study

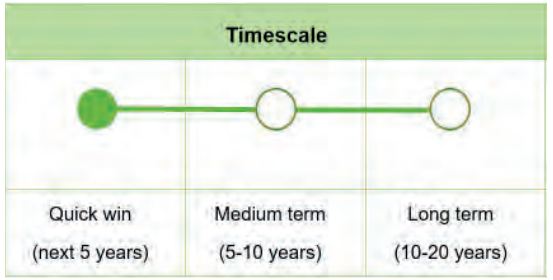
The Edward Kemp Community Garden, Birkenhead

The area was formerly a school playing field which had been disused for over 30 years. In 2011, the site was converted into growing areas for local community groups such as charities, residents associations, youth groups, schools, colleges, and the NHS. The Garden brings together people from a wide variety of backgrounds to enjoy gardening and grow their own fruit and vegetables, and is designed to be inclusive space for people with a range of health and mobility issues. The member of one gardening group said that having an Edward Kemp plot, "had enabled group members to regain confidence and self-worth."

Potential partners	Mechanisms	Wider stakeholders to engage
Local community groups	Fundraising, raising awareness, implementation and management	Local schools Local community Local businesses NHS Wirral Council teams: parks and open space
Developer contributions	Potential to consider sums to cover the cost of managing urban/rural verges.	
Education authorities	Integration of 'community growing' into school curriculum	

Woodbank Community Food Hub, Stockport

Formerly a commercial plant nursery, the Woodbank Community Food Hub is an urban garden that joins up inclusive community gardening with commercial organic food production. A collection of organisations are working together on the site to turn it into a thriving hub for local food, including health and wellbeing programme 'Grow, Cook & Eat.' Combining access to local organic food, with cookery, socialising and physical activity, the Grow, Cook & Eat programme takes referrals from both the NHS and VCSE as a form of 'social prescribing' - recognising that medical intervention is not always the most effective, or long-lasting way of improving health and wellbeing.



Priority Opportunity #12
Support for the uptake of agri-environment measures

Contribution to GBI themes						

The Opportunity

Altogether, just over one-quarter of land in Wirral is used for agricultural purposes, and is predominantly dairy.

Reflecting the national trend, farm amalgamation and intensification practices in Wirral have resulted is issues such as the widespread use of pesticides, the degradation of the habitat mosaic, and the removal and poor management of hedgerows - contributing to the ongoing national and global biodiversity crisis. To illustrate, in the UK, the Farmland Bird Index shows a decline of 48% between 1970 to 2007. Research undertaken in 2019 highlighted that agricultural field interiors in locations such as the Borough's central area perform very poorly for pollinators, making road verge habitats all the more important as 'refuges from cultivation[1].'

Agri-environment schemes have been running in England for many years and have developed from simple schemes to support a particular habitat into more comprehensive actions to address agricultural intensification and associated degradation of the habitat mosaic, through habitat creation and sensitive management.

The Farmer Clusters agri-environment approach was first piloted in 2012 and encourages farmers and land managers to work together to collectively deliver greater benefits for soil, water and wildlife at a landscape scale, rather than single farms working in isolation. Opportunities to expand and support this opportunity further beyond Wirral, around the Dee and Mersey estuaries and across the borough border into Cheshire, also exist. A starting point is to engage with farmers and land managers, and communicate the benefits of working collectively. Figure 4.3 maps LCAs where improving agricultural field margins was recommended. In addition, Figure 4.1 highlights LCAs where increasing hedgerow was recommended.

Several Farmer Cluster projects have been set up with private sources of funding whereas the majority have applied for the Natural England's Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund (CSFF), which opened in 2015. The funding pays for a facilitator who provides support and training, and also incentivises uptake of Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreements that fund improvements on group members land. This allows groups of farmers and land managers to develop a shared ambition, informed by evidence-based priorities, increasing their skill and knowledge to farm for the benefit of people and wildlife, that go beyond what could be delivered by individual holdings acting in isolation. Examples of land management CS agreement options include woodland creation, the protection of in-field trees on intensive grasslands, hedgerow laying and planting, and introducing wildflower-rich margins and plots.

There is considerable uncertainty over the post-Brexit policy context for agriculture in the UK, including the future of farm subsidies. The emerging Agriculture Bill will see a transition from Countryside Stewardship agreements to the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme, although there will be a transition period from 2021 to 2027 enabling farmers 7 years to adjust to the new system.

Potential risks and challenges

- Consultation with the National Farmers Union has affirmed the need for engagement with the farming community in order to build respect and understanding regarding the need to balance making a living against environmental benefits.
- Any action to address this challenge in Wirral will have to take account of a shifting agricultural policy context.
- When starting a farming cluster, a lead farmer is required as the steering member. Ideally they need to be well-connected, with good 'green' credentials, and have time to devote to the farmer cluster.
- Funding award is a competitive process, and unsuccessful groups will need to seek independent funding
- There are concerns that applying to CS now, could prevent access to the proposed new ELM scheme,

Copyright: Farmers Weekly

1 (Phillips, Gaston, Bullock and Osborne (2019), 'Road verges support pollinators in agricultural landscapes, but are diminished by heavy traffic and summer cutting', Journal of Applied Ecology, 56(10) pp 2316-2327.)

when it's rolled out from 2024 to replace CS. Defra has committed to ensuring anyone in existing schemes isn't "unfairly disadvantaged" when new schemes are introduced, although this still may prevent update.

Case Studies

The Lower Dane Farmers, Cheshire

The Lower Dane Farmers group of 22 landowners was formed thanks to a successful application to Natural England's Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund. The cluster plans to identify opportunities for improving water quality and, where appropriate, slowing the flow of floodwaters. This will be achieved through the installation of features such as leaky dams and wetlands that hold water in the landscape during storm events. The group will also use land management to reduce the risk of soil and nutrient losses, for example planting trees to reduce soil erosion and overland flow.

The group will be facilitated by a partnership between The Mersey Forest and Reaseheath College. Members own land within the catchments of the Lower Dane including Fowle Brook, Wheelock Brook and the main stem of the Dane between Middlewich and Northwich. The Dane corridor is prone in flooding in places and therefore poses some significant challenges for farmers along the main watercourse. The group are interested in working together to tackle flood risk, manage soils in the floodplain, and create opportunities for new and restored wildlife habitats.

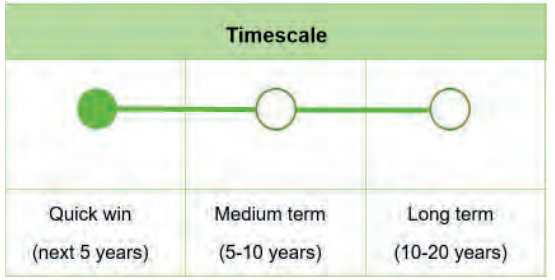
Hope Farm, Cambridgeshire

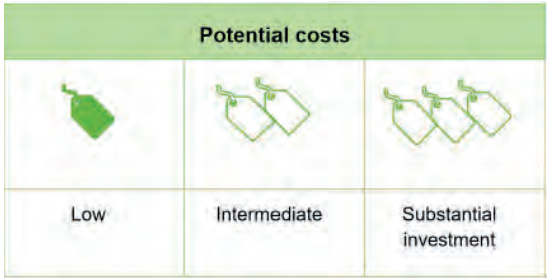
There are far fewer grey partridges, skylarks, yellowhammers and corn buntings now than 30 years ago, largely because of changes in farming practices. In 1999 the RSPB purchased Hope Farm, a two-square kilometre conventional arable farm, in order to develop and trial farming techniques which can produce food cost-effectively and benefit wildlife.

One key outcome is an increase in biodiversity on the site, through the creation of key habitats, wild bird cover, nectar flower mixtures and floristic grass margins, has seen Hope Farm's Farmland Bird Index increase by 200 per cent. This rise has been driven by helping species which have declined nationally, such as grey partridge, skylark, linnet and yellowhammer.

The results from this project have helped develop RSPB's advice to farmers, government and the general public, demonstrating that increasing biodiversity can be integrated into the management of a conventional arable farm without effecting the profitability of the site.

Potential partners	Mechanisms	Wider stakeholders to engage
Countryside Stewardship	Facilitation through Natural England's Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund (CSFF)	Agricultural landowners Local community and councillors Cheshire Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group RSPB Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (developed the Farmer Clusters concept) Natural England
Environmental Land Management	Future programme under the Agriculture Bill	
RSPB	The Birdfair/RSPB Research Fund for Endangered Birds	





Priority Opportunity #13
Embracing proactive management of coastal processes

Contribution to GBI themes						

The Opportunity

In recent guidance to Wirral Council, Natural England states that “coastal conservation is often about understanding the way in which the physical system underpins the presence of individual habitats or species. Management for habitat and species features must take account of coastal dynamics… As the coast changes so the mosaic of habitats and species as well as the landscape and its ‘local distinctiveness’ will change and evolve. Understanding the reasons for change must be factored into management decisions to ensure the best possible outcomes for the natural environment”. [1]

Coastal management around the peninsula is currently guided by the 2016 Shoreline Management Plan (SMP). SMP policies also inform conservation and green space planning inland where ‘upstream’ measures are required to adapt to changes in sea level rise and flood risk. Proactive management of coastal processes is required to optimise resilience of assets to climate change, recognising the dynamic processes that underpin the habitats and species that can thrive.

Potential opportunities for managed realignment and the creation of areas of new habitat have been identified along the mouth of the Dee Estuary and the Upper Mersey Estuary, specifically:

- At the mouth of the Dee Estuary, creation of areas of new habitat by moving coastal defences inland where opportunities exist. The emerging Environment Agency’s Tidal Dee Flood Risk Management Strategy should form the delivery plan for managed realignment here.
- In the Upper Mersey Estuary, managed realignment has been assessed in the SMP as an alternative long-term policy to offset for the potential loss of internationally designated habitat elsewhere, due to the impacts of hold the line policies and predicted sea level rise. A number of areas have been identified to create additional habitat and minimise flood risk.

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It is recommended that a holistic Coastal Management Plan for the peninsula is prioritised, taking forward the 2016 SMP to support sustainable human use (for recreation, shellfish industries, etc), whilst protecting the nature conservation commitments of designated sites. This Plan will need to be subject to relevant assessment (Habitat Regulations Assessment) and also seek approval from Natural England.

Development of favourable management of coastal designations, as part of the holistic Coastal Management Plan, informed by monitoring of on-going measures, and recommendations of NECR201, the 2019 Interim HRA, and RMS (once published). Measures may include access control (delineated cycleways, screened and/or elevated accesses, dynamic management of boardwalks, etc), education and engagement and consent enforcement.

Potential risks and challenges

- Potential loss of land with high property value. However, this value needs to be offset against reduced annual

1 Natural England advice to Wirral Council regarding Beach Management’ (01 March 2020)

flood defence costs.

- The coastal landscape and seascape has a fundamental role in the local distinctiveness of Wirral, and it is cherished by its people. Early and on-going community engagement regarding changes to coastal management is fundamental in enabling the Borough to move forwards in an efficient and unified way. Use of steering groups with active community members is advised.
- Opportunities for controlled engagement with the realigned coastline and the habitats it supports should be optimised in order to provide an educational resource and potential tourism asset.

Case Studies

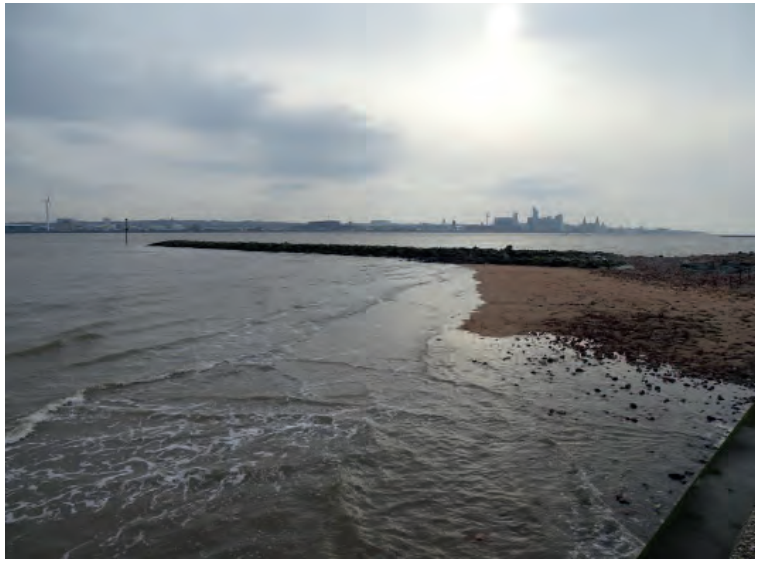
Alkborough Flats, Humber Estuary

The Alkborough Flats managed realignment scheme was developed via a partnership approach involving the Environment Agency, Natural England, Associated British Ports and Lincolnshire County Council. Completed in 2006, the scheme covers 440ha and cost £10.2m to deliver. It is situated at the confluence of the River Trent and River Ouse. It features a newly created wildlife habitat and has been engineered to act as a storage site for floodwater.

The estuary has a highly dynamic tidal range, and much of the land sits below the high tide level. Major industries, power stations, farmland, the country's biggest port complex and the homes of 400,000 people are all based in the floodplain. Overall, the scheme is estimated to have delivered a financial benefit of £400,000 per year.

From the outset, the development team engaged with a wide group of stakeholder parties including landowners, farmers, ramblers, parish councils and local residents. Working groups were set up to consider specialist areas such as conservation and farmland management.

Potential partners	Mechanisms	Wider stakeholders to engage
DEFRA / EA	Flood and coastal defence funding	Local community and councillors Cheshire Wildlife Trust RSPB Agricultural landowners Wirral Council teams: parks and open space, flood risk
Central government	Countryside Stewardship grants	
World Wildlife Fund for Nature (UK)	Evidence of supporting managed realignment at Abbotts Hall, Essex	
RSPB	The Birdfair/RSPB Research Fund for Endangered Birds	



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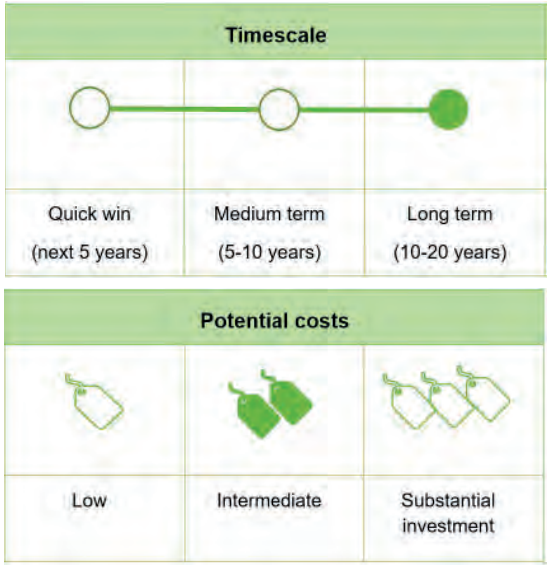


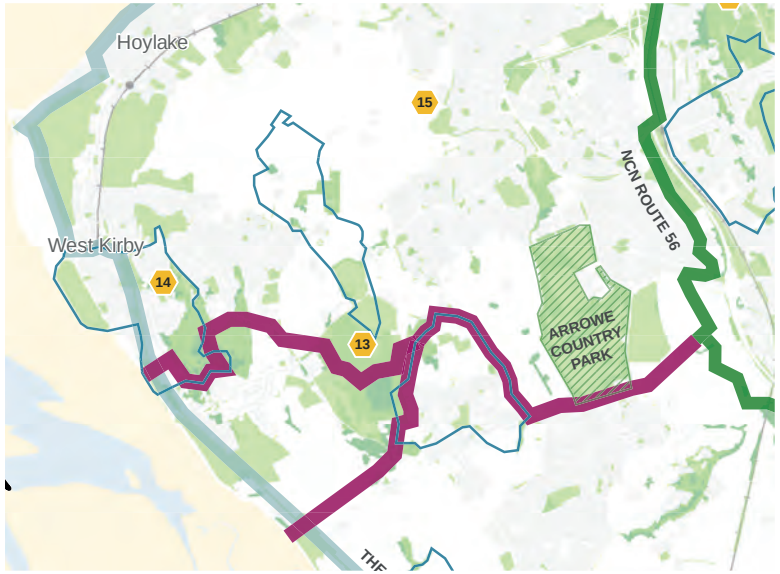
Priority Opportunity #14

Managing Diffuse Recreational Pressure

The Opportunity

Objective 1.1 of the GBI Strategy is “To safeguard Wirral’s existing ecological resource, bringing this to favourable condition, prioritising those elements that are locally distinct”. Recreational pressure on the designations of Wirral is of most acute concern at the international designations surrounding the Wirral coast and the national designations at Thurstaston and Heswall Dales. A strategic approach for the GBI Strategy to address the recreation enjoyed by local residents, the wider Wirral community and visitors, is summarised below in targeted sub-objectives.

Contribution to GBI themes						



Excerpt from Figure 4.5

Objective 1.1.1: Support the management of visitor numbers and activities, particularly at coastal sites, to be achieved through an extension of the existing programme of visitor engagement, site monitoring and management of visitor numbers via access points and access routes. This includes cycleways and boardwalks which may be seasonally open or re-routed to avoid cumulative pressure over time.

Objective 1.1.2: Protect functionally linked land behind the coast, potentially in the form of a Local Wildlife Site designation. Support for appropriate environmental stewardship, conservation covenant or other management agreement, where practicable. Provide habitat management and enhancement to reflect the target species of each land parcel as part of the wider or neighbouring NIA. Provide an appropriate level of recreational access, which is balanced against the key aim of improving the condition of the existing ecological resource.

Objective 1.1.3: Provide natural greenspaces inland, within and around urban and peri-urban areas, to accommodate recreational need ‘on the doorstep’ of existing and new residential development. Existing strategically located greenspace, such as Arrowe Country Park, should be subject to specific measures focused on improving recreational quality (providing circular walking routes).

Objective 1.1.4: Provide clearly signposted walking and cycling routes across and around the peninsula, connecting to new and extended greenspaces, to offer recreational

interest away from the coast. Detailed siting and design of greenspace destinations within the rural heartland of Wirral should be informed by the location of functionally linked land and of areas known to support farmland bird assemblages of importance. This also applies to the detailed routing and design of associated access routes. Interpretation may also prove a useful tool at coastal areas, raising awareness of the qualifying features of the biodiversity assets and why it is important to maintain them.

Potential risks and challenges

- The coastal landscape and seascape has a fundamental role in the local distinctiveness of Wirral, and it is cherished by its people. On-going community engagement regarding the need to alleviate diffuse recreational pressure is fundamental. Use of steering groups with active community members is advised.
- Biodiversity Net Gain off-set will form an important delivery mechanism for the delivery of projects associated with this Priority Opportunity. The Council will need to adopt a clear schedule of works for priority of BNG offset contributions.

Case Studies

Fixing the Fells, Lake District

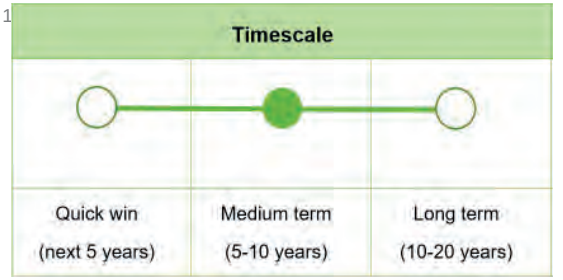
The Lake District is a UNESCO World Heritage site and popular tourist destination. Erosion from people, coupled with severe weather events and climate change, is causing ugly scars and environmental damage in the fragile mountains. Fix the Fells tackles this erosion problem by repairing and maintaining 330 upland paths, helping to keep the Lake District a special place for future generations.

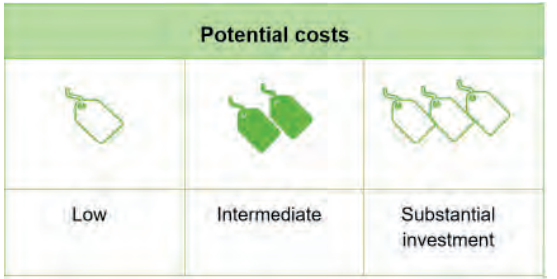
Fix the Fells has repaired more than 200 paths already and there are now 351 paths totalling over 640 km or 400 miles identified for repair work, maintenance or monitoring. The number and priorities change over time as some paths erode more quickly and new ones are identified. Each year a combination of National Trust and Lake District National Park rangers schedule work from these 351 paths.

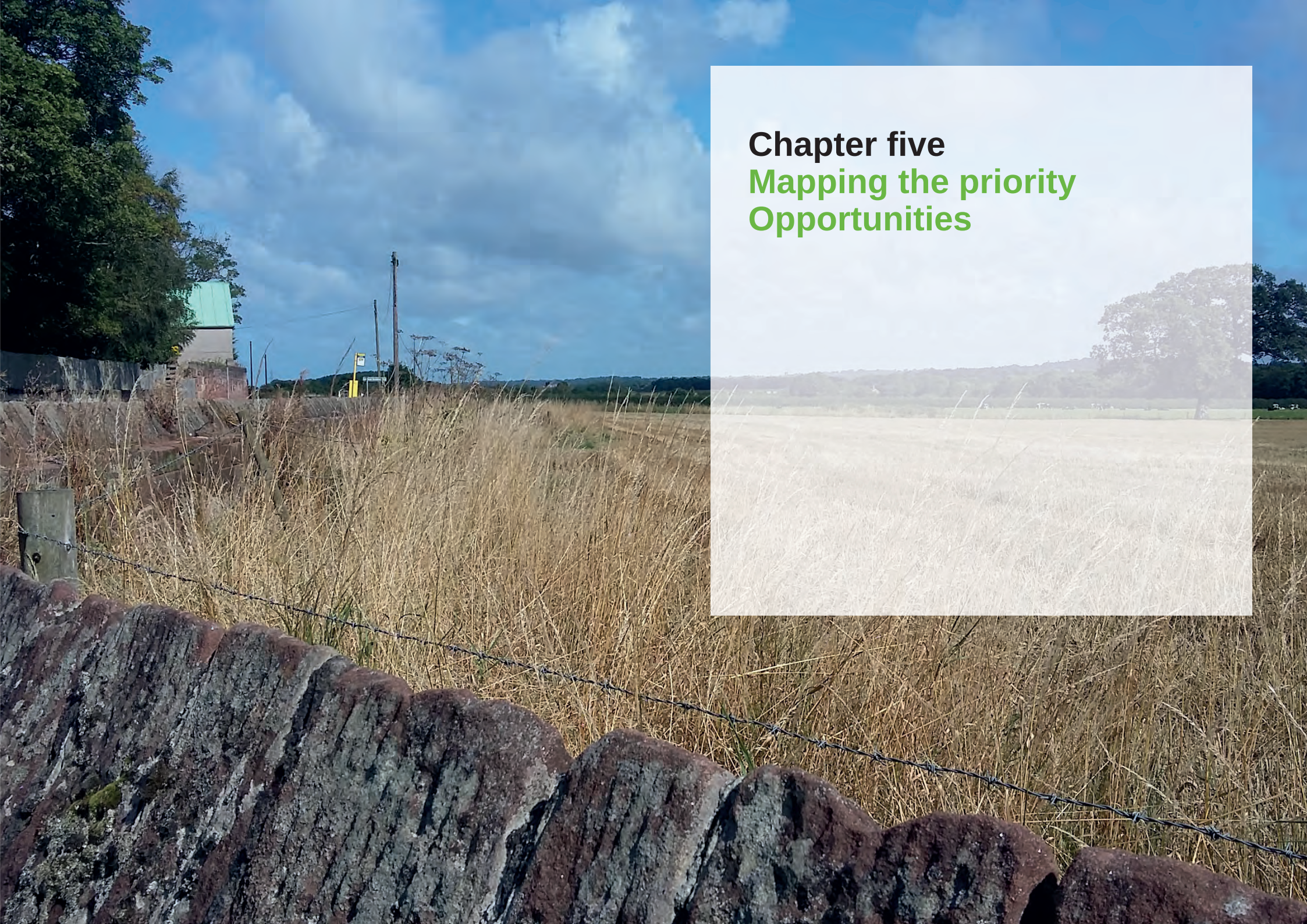
Fix the Fells relies on grants and donations to undertake this work and is part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund during the years 2019, 2020 and 2021. They also receive funding from the National Trust, Lake District National Park, Friends of the Lake District and a range of local businesses.

Potential partners	Mechanisms	Wider stakeholders to engage
Developer contributions	BNG offset Section 106 contributions	Merseyside Environmental Advisory Unit Cheshire Wildlife Trust Rangers Wirral Council teams: parks and open space, PRoW Key regeneration projects
Central Government (DfT)	Cycling and Walking fund[1]	
National Lottery Heritage Fund	National Lottery Grant for Hertiage	
RSPB	The Birdfair/RSPB Research Fund for Endangered Birds	

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2-billion-package-to-create-new-era-for-cycling-and-walking





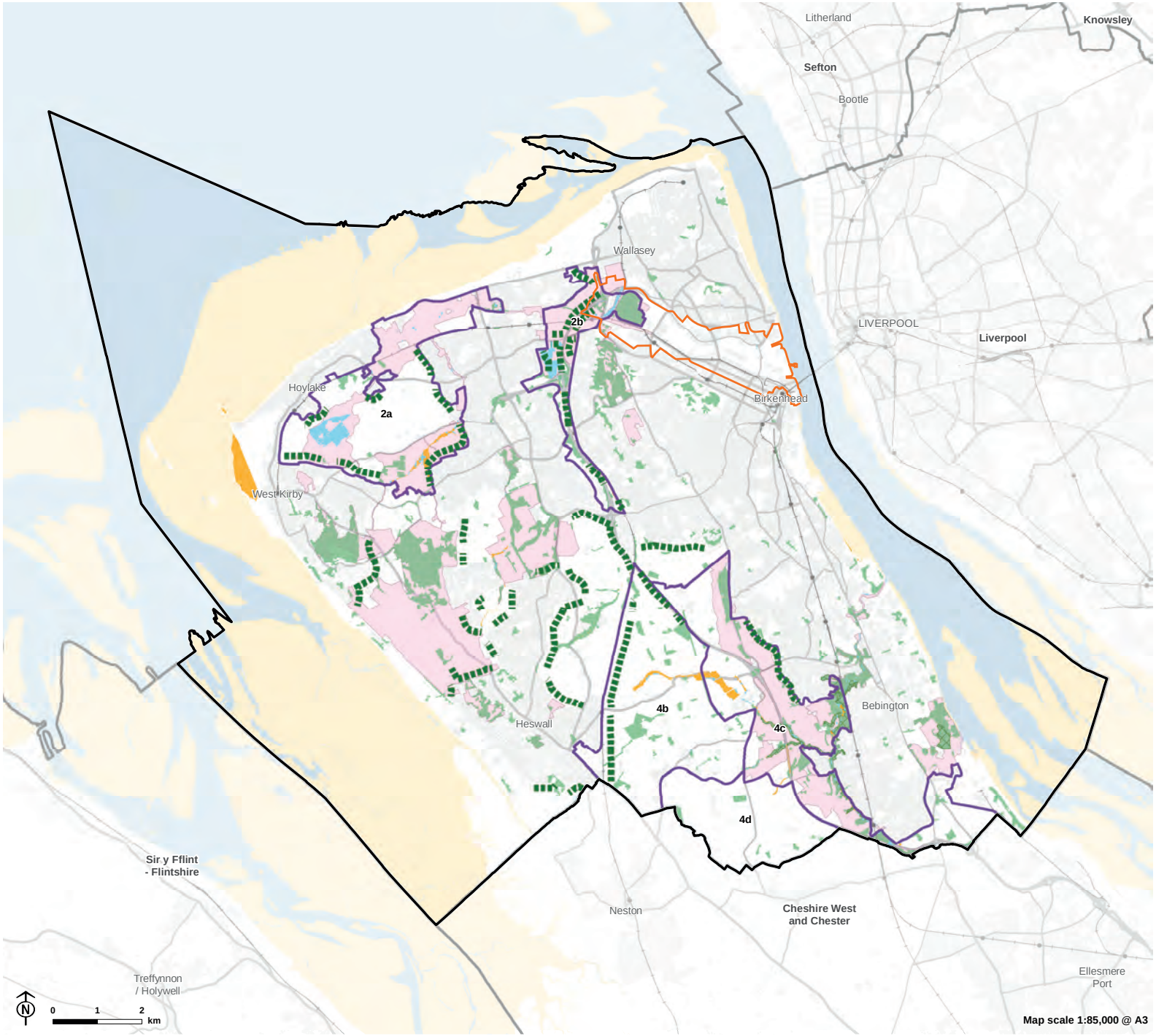


Chapter five
Mapping the priority Opportunities

Wirral Green Infrastructure Strategy
Wirral Borough Council

LUC

Figure 4.1 Opportunities for woodland and hedgerow expansion



Wirral Borough boundary

Indicative areas of woodland reflecting recommendations from LCA

Identified LCAs with recommendations for augmentation of hedgerow field boundaries

WWNP Floodplain reconnection potential (EA)

WWNP Floodplain woodland potential (EA)

Ancient woodland

National Forest Inventory

NIAs with specific recommendations for habitat creation

Wirral Waters SRF - Opportunity for urban woodlands within Wirral Waters

NOTES

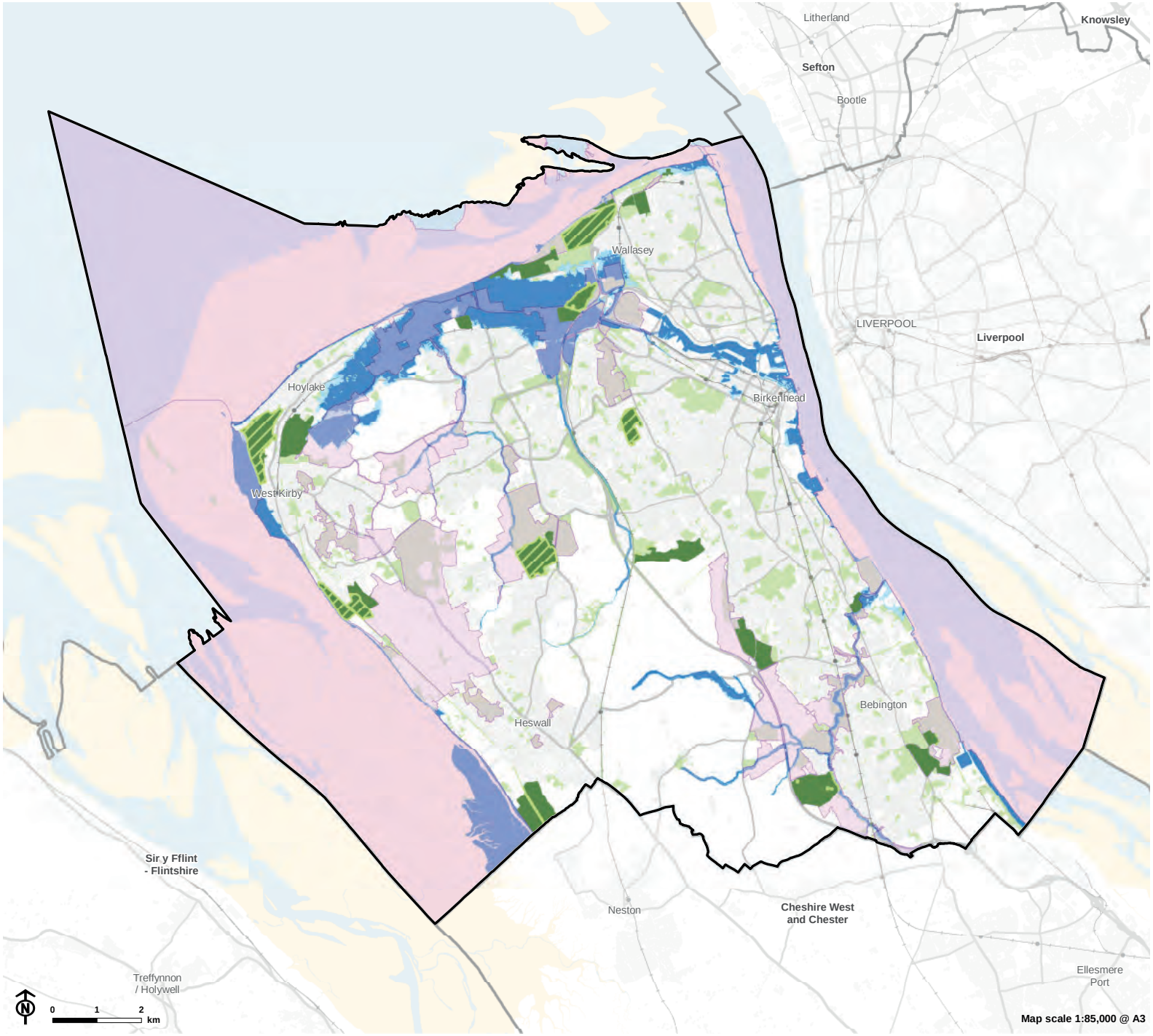
All areas woodland illustrated on the plan are indicative only. It is proposed as part of Opp #13 Woodland and hedgerow expansion programme that the Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy is accompanied by a Design Guide which should provide a detailed evaluation of the best locations for woodland and hedgerow planting.

CB:KC EB:Chamberlain_K LUC 11010_001_r0_OPP_Fig_4_1 10/09/2020
Source: WBC, OS

Wirral Green Infrastructure Strategy
Wirral Borough Council

LUC

Figure 4.2 Opportunities for improved management of golf courses



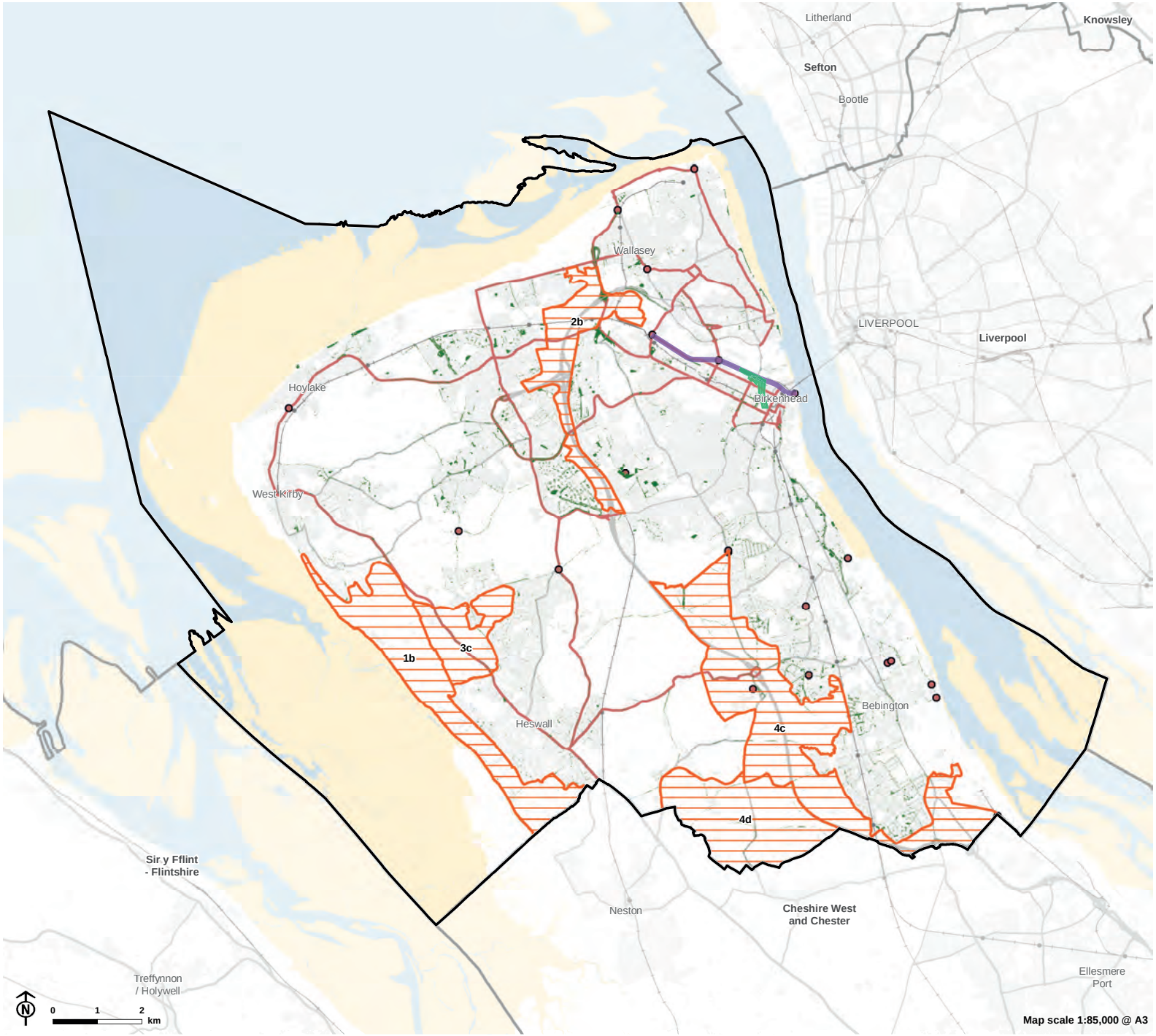
Wirral Borough boundary
Golf courses that are Local Wildlife Sites
Golf courses
Nature Improvement Areas
Waterway
Flood Zone 3
Flood Zone 2
Existing green infrastructure assets to develop opportunities for sustainable drainage systems

CB:KC EB:Chamberlain_K LUC 11010_001_r0_OPP_Fig_4_2 30/11/2020
Source: WBC, OS

Wirral Green Infrastructure Strategy
Wirral Borough Council

LUC

Figure 4.3 Opportunity areas for rewilding grass verges and improving agricultural field margins

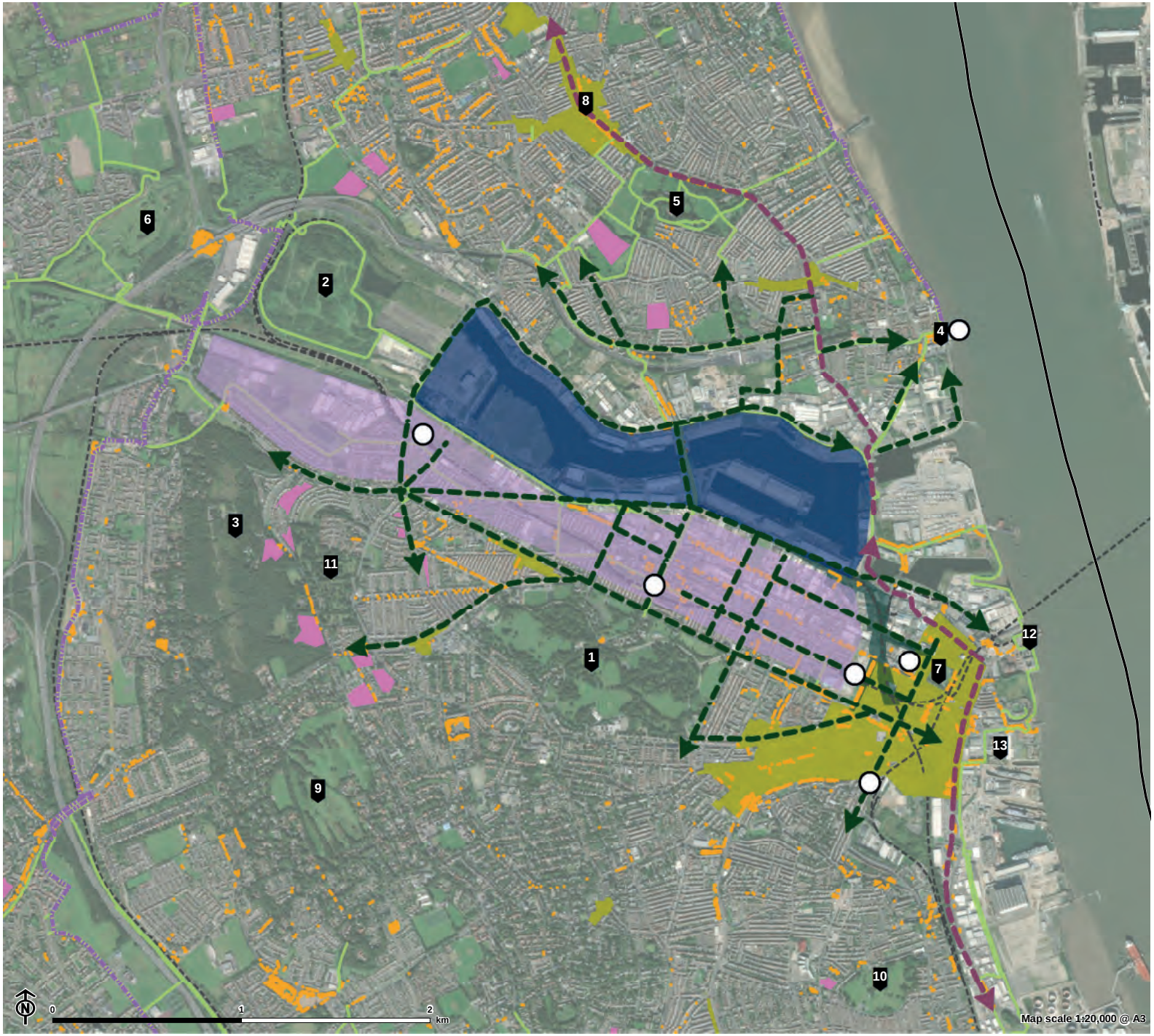


- Wirral Borough boundary
- Roundabout
- A road
- Road verge
- Identified LCAs with recommendations for wildlife friendly agricultural field boundaries
- Proposed Green Link
- Proposed City Boulevard

CB:KC EB:Chamberlain_K LUC 11010_001_r0_OPP_Fig_4_3 10/09/2020
Source: WBC, OS

LUC

Figure 4.4 Opportunities for urban greening and active neighbourhoods in Birkenhead



- Wirral Borough boundary
- Wirral Waters site
- Green corridor proposal
- Street tree
- Railway track
- Local cycle route
- National Cycle Network
- Retail centre
- Allotment
- Gateways for priority greening (train stations, ferry terminals)
- Streets for priority for urban greening (street trees, rain gardens, green walls, uran meadows)
- Urban greening measures on priority corridors from LCR Walking and Cycling Strategic corridors
- Potential priority area for active neighbourhoods
- Parks and key destinations

1. Birkenhead Park
2. Bidston Moss
3. Bidston Hill
4. Seacombe Ferry Terminal
5. Central Park
6. Bidston Golf Club
7. Hamilton Square
8. Liscard town centre
9. Wirral Golf Course
10. Mersey Park
11. Flaybrick Memorial Gardens
12. Woodside Ferry Village
13. Birkenhead Priory

Note: Community growing areas should be focussed around areas without reasonable access.

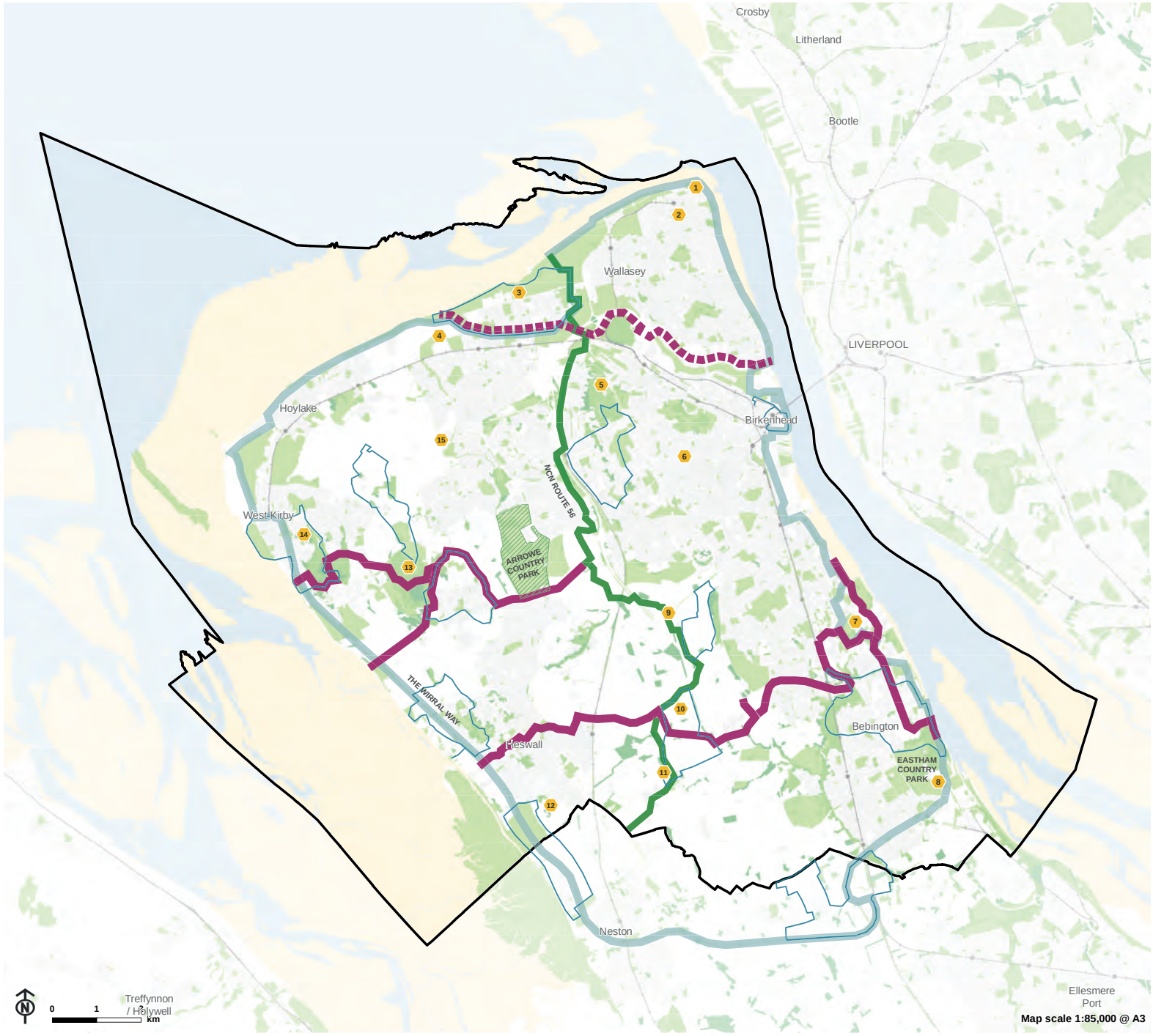
Source: Esri, Maxar, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

CB:KC EB:Chamberlain_K LUC 11010_001_r0_OPP_Fig_4_4 10/09/2020
Source: OS, WBC, LUC

Wirral Green Infrastructure Strategy
Wirral Borough Council

LUC

Figure 4.5 Opportunities for the creation of a Super Greenway and relieving Diffuse Recreational Pressure



- Wirral Borough Boundary
- Existing Green Blue Infrastructure asset
- National Forestry Inventory
- Proposed routes to connect east and west Wirral in the development of a 'Super Greenway'
- Proposed route to connect central and north Wirral in the development of a 'Super Greenway'
- Existing NCN Route 56
- Localised Circular Walking Routes
- Wirral Circular Trail
- Specific measures for Arrowe Country Park to improve recreational quality and access to PRoW network
- 0 Local Heritage Sites
  - 1 - Lighthouse and Fort Perch Rock
  - 2 - Dome of Home, New Brighton
  - 3 - Leasowe Castle
  - 4 - Leasowe Castle
  - 5 - Bidston Lighthouse, Observatory & Windmill
  - 6 - Williamson Art Gallery & Museum
  - 7 - Port Sunlight
  - 8 - Eastham Country Park and Ferry
  - 9 - Storeton Village
  - 10 - Brimstage Hall & Tower
  - 11 - Thornton Manor & Gate House
  - 12 - Gayton Mill
  - 13 - Royden Park
  - 14 - West Kirby War Memorial and Mariners Beacon
  - 15 - Saughall Massie Bridge

NOTES:

The physical location of proposed routes should be determined on the ground following feasibility work. Feasibility work should also include a review of wayfinding and orientation associated with the improved PRoW network.

Map scale 1:85,000 @ A3

CB:KC EB:llott_J LUC 11010_000_r0_Settlement_Areas 09/10/2020
Source: WBC, OS

Chapter six
Embedding GBI into Local Plan policy

Chapter 6
Embedding GBI into Local Plan policy

The NPPF (2019) and legislative context provides strong support for enhancing Green and Blue Infrastructure because of the wide range of benefits it affords.

Local Plan Development plans should give further expression to this by setting an overarching vision of GBI delivery during the Plan period. This section sets out a series of recommendations on how to 'embed' GBI in Local Plan policies and how to support their delivery via the planning process.

Recommendations on Future Policy Development

Planning policy can play a critical role in the delivery of GBI, by setting clear expectations for it as part of long-term development plans. Wirral Borough Council has a duty to act on climate change, generate employment, maintain healthy functioning ecosystems, maximise physical and mental well-being, and protect and promote cultural and heritage assets. The GBI opportunities identified in this Strategy will help achieve these aims.

GBI will form part of the overall mitigation for planned site allocations and other future development that comes forward for determination. However, despite the recognised multiple benefits of GBI, it can often be difficult to deliver policy expectations due to competing policy priorities. As such, GBI is often treated as a lower tier requirement at the application stage, particularly in Section 106 negotiations.

There is potential to strengthen the Council's GBI policy approach in the emerging Local Plan that will allocate sites for housing and employment uses, designate sites for environmental protection and contain policies to guide and manage development up to 2035.

When designing a set of replacement policies, it is important to ensure that green infrastructure is fully embedded within the Local Plan rather than dealt with through an isolated policy alone. An updated dedicated GBI policy should be accompanied by a Local Plan structure which 'mainstreams' GBI by weaving references throughout various policy areas. This will allow it to move outside any policy 'siloes' and support (and be supported by) other agendas, including health, economic and social policy areas. It is recommended that policies are tested through the 'Mainstreaming GBI' toolkit developed by the Nature Environment Research Council (NERC), an assessment process based on a content analysis of Plan wording[1].

In accordance with the tool, two principles should guide replacement policies, focussing on providing both breadth and depth of policy coverage:

- Functional coverage ie. the extent to which GBI is covered across all other chapters, including the introduction and vision for the Plan; and,
- Strength of policy wording ie. the phrasing used to articulate the treatment of GBI.

The toolkit also includes a set of 'exemplar GBI policies' which can guide those developed for Wirral, both for a 'primary GBI policy' and for supporting policies and stewardship requirements. There is strong emphasis within the toolkit on more explicit recognition of the value of 'place-making' as a uniting concept for GBI.

The team which developed the tool recommend that scoring is undertaken independently by two assessors and then compared, and that both forward planning and development management staff are involved.

It is recommended that the Council considers supporting these policies by preparing a Supplementary Planning Document to provide guidance on addressing GBI needs and what will be expected to be delivered through development. In addition to setting out and providing detail on the expectations for the Borough, the SPD would also provide the opportunity

1 See Scott and Hislop (2019), 'What does good GBI policy look like? Town and Country Planning, 88(5) [Online] Available at: https://www.tcpa.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=a70fd808-eee1-4b50-bb9d-805e5c017d26

to summarise design considerations and standards for GBI (including open spaces and play space), providing examples and precedents where appropriate.

Mechanisms for Securing Funding through Development

There are two major existing mechanisms by which financial contributions to GBI can be secured from new proposed development through the planning process: S106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Section 106 (of the Town and Country Planning Act) is used when it can be reasonably demonstrated that a development directly affects a community or GBI feature, therefore investment in GBI is needed as part of the mitigation package. The Community Infrastructure Levy was introduced through the Planning Act (2008) as a levy payable by developers towards the cost of local and sub-regional infrastructure to support development. This can apply to strategic Borough-wide projects and does not need to be directly related to the proposed development.

In addition, the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) through the emerging Environment Bill will provide an additional mechanism which is likely to become a powerful tool for securing GBI features, both on-site and off-site, through new development.

Infrastructure Levy (IL)

The Planning White Paper (PWP) published in August 2020, entitled *Planning for the Future*, proposes scrapping Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in favour of a nationally set value-based charge for developers. This Infrastructure Levy system for securing social benefits from development will bring numerous benefits, including providing greater clarity for communities and developers about the level of developer contributions expected and being more effective at capturing land value uplift.

The PWP particularly focusses on the role of S106 in the delivery of housing and the payment of financial contributions but the reality is that S106 performs a much wider function than delivery of these benefits alone. It remains to be seen precisely how the proposed IL will substantively replace all the functions of the current S106 regime.

Further details are yet to be published, and it is unknown when Section 106 Agreements and CIL will be phased out.

Section 106 Agreements

Developer contributions under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 should provide a mechanism for securing funding for the Council's GBI priorities. Section 106 agreements are a tool which makes a development proposal acceptable in planning terms, which would not otherwise be acceptable. There are three legal tests which must be met, in order for a Section 106 agreement to be appropriate:

- Must be necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
- Must be directly related to the development; and,
- Must be reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

The limitation of Section 106 in the past had been that contributions could not be pooled (beyond 5 developments) to invest in a strategic site. However, the Government lifted this restriction in 2019. This means that S106 can now be used to enhance or promote the wider GBI network, and could fund Borough-wide opportunities and GBI priority projects.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The implementation of CIL is seen as a vital component in the funding of essential infrastructure projects across the Borough, including the Priority Opportunities outlined in this Strategy. The Council will need to ensure that they set their charging schedule at a suitable level and ensure that key GBI priority projects are included within an Infrastructure Funding Statement.

Regular updating of this Statement will be key as GBI projects and other infrastructure projects get completed, so as to ensure that completed projects are taken off the list and new key projects are added. This will allow for continued delivery and monitoring of priority projects throughout the Plan period.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Objective 1.3 of the GBI Strategy is "To ensure that future growth – of development, of local communities and of visitor numbers – respect the ecosystems that underpin prosperity and wellbeing in Wirral, and to support the delivery of locally-appropriate BNG".

BNG will be an important tool for structuring developer response to GBI requirements, and should also be used to direct interventions toward the Priority Opportunities outlined in this Strategy. It is "an approach to development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before."[2] The aim is to minimise losses of biodiversity and help to restore ecological networks. BNG is already part of the NPPF (Paragraphs 170,174 and 175), however, there is no specific percentage gain required.

The draft Environment Bill currently targets BNG at 10% with a 30 year management legacy, which is anticipated to become mandatory in late 2022 (assuming Royal Assent of the Bill in late 2020, with a two year transition period). Any requirement for delivery of BNG within Wirral should be reflected in local planning policy to ensure this is implemented during the interim period prior to becoming mandatory.

The draft Environment Bill leaves much detail to secondary legislation i.e. subsequent regulations and planning policy will need to be sufficiently flexible to respond to this. Flexibility will also be required to respond to the future 'biodiversity credit' and 'environmental credit' markets as these are brought forward, and to the social component (also referred to as the 'people's principles') of BNG. Draft British Standard BS:8683 Process for Designing & Implementing BNG – Specification' (section 5.2.1.1) provides initial guidance on the social component of BNG, which takes an approach not dissimilar to the GBI strategy in recognising the wider benefits of greenspace to local and future residents.

Further detail is provided below to ensure Objective 3.1 can be implemented:

Objective 1.3.1: Recognise that the provision of 'locally-appropriate' BNG refers not only to the habitat type to be provided but, where adjoining land is recognised to be of high value, refers also to the need to optimise opportunity to buffer or extend the high value feature(s). In this regard, BNG which aims to accommodate recreational use must avoid creating disturbance of adjacent land (if sensitive) and should seek to alleviate existing recreational pressure (if present).

Objective 1.3.2: To secure delivery, the requirement for BNG, should be prescribed in planning policy, at a basic target of 10%, supported by minimum 30 year legacy, habitat management plan and land owner agreement, which can be enforced through s106, conservation covenant or equivalent mechanism. It may be appropriate for policy to require management 'in perpetuity' where BNG is considered to be an essential long-term requirement, e.g. in areas of ecological paucity or pressure, or where additional environmental benefits are achieved (e.g. flood alleviation or carbon sequestration).

Objective 1.3.3: Maintain a BNG register to enable monitoring of the BNG proposed, delivered and maintained. To assess the cumulative effect of biodiversity and wider environmental services provided through BNG to the Wirral, and identify issues and opportunities to optimise its delivery proactively across the peninsula.

Recommendations for Securing On-site Green and Blue Infrastructure

The Local Plan should provide guidance on the GBI features that are expected to be incorporated within a new development, where viable. These will vary depending on the nature and type of development, however, the opportunities highlighted within this report provide guidance on what could be expected and where, according to identified priorities. Priority Opportunity #1, the development of a GBI checklist to enable project auditing, will embed the expectations required of developers from the outset.

In this way, expectations will be clear, and GBI features can be 'designed in' at an early stage rather than retrofitted later. This also provides valuable certainty to the developer. GBI within development must be designed, multi-functional and managed, rather than mono-functional landscaping.

Some Local Authorities (mainly London Boroughs) have sought to achieve this by introducing an 'urban greening factor' (UGF), however, the suitability and viability of this approach would need to be examined locally. Priority Opportunity #1 recommends that the Building With Nature standard[3] could be used in early discussions with Development Management teams. The Standard seeks to raise the standard of GBI over time and improve the quality of GBI coming through the development pipeline via a series of themes. It should form the basis of the design of proposed development, as well as its assessment by Planning Officers.

When articulating expectations of development, it is important not to be overly prescriptive as this may leave insufficient

2 https://cieem.net/i-am/current-projects/biodiversity-net-gain/

3 Building with Nature is owned by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and "is a voluntary approach that enables developers who want to go beyond the statutory requirements to create places that really deliver for people and wildlife." www.buildingwithnature.org.uk.

flexibility to account for local circumstances and lead to poor design choices. However, proposals for on-site GBI provision should take account of the following Priority Opportunities as set out in this Strategy, alongside the principles contained within the Building with Nature standard:

- Opportunity #6: Creation of River Birket wetlands (ensuring development in Wirral Waters ensures better access into area)
- Opportunity #8: Greening of key corridors
- Opportunitiy #10: Green link between Seacombe "gateway" and wider area (ensuring development of Eureka! Mersey takes forward opportunities for greening and links up with prioritised routes).

For all development proposals which include new residential units, it is recommended that an assessment is undertaken to determine whether they are within an area of open space deficiency (including quantity, quality/value and accessibility) as set out in this study. Such assessments should determine which open spaces / play spaces comply with local accessibility standards in order to ensure that existing high quality open space and play provision is safeguarded, or that new open space is provided.

Where sites have been allocated, it will be beneficial to develop development briefs or policies that specify what the requirements will be in terms of GBI provision at each site. This may include both on-site provision or enhancements to existing GBI assets.

In determining planning applications, sufficient weight should be given to design considerations in order to ensure that GBI achieves the standards set out in recognised good practice guidance. In particular, given concerns raised during consultation for this Strategy, it is important that GBI assets provided are 'future proofed' i.e. that adequate provision is made for their management and maintenance, including the responsibility for these activities and their funding.

A key issue for Wirral will be the implementation and affordability of these measures and the extent to which it affects the viability of developments being proposed. This can only be determined on a case by case basis. However, it is essential, recognising the multi-functional benefits GBI can deliver, that it is not treated as a 'nice to have but not essential' feature in the list of requirements for new developments. It should also be recognised that some features – such as the integration of routes for hedgehogs, bat boxes and 'swift bricks' discussed under Priority Opportunity #5 – do not imply significant cost, but rather require consistent up-front design expectations of developers.

Recommendations for Securing Off-site Green and Blue Infrastructure

Depending on the location of new development, it may be appropriate for development to contribute to off-site GBI enhancements in strategic areas or along strategic routes, in order to strengthen the overall integrity of the network.

Strategic routes are signposted within the following Priority Opportunities:

- Opportunity #2: Rewiliding grass verges
- Opportunity #6: Creation of River Birket wetlands
- Opportunity #7: Creation of a centralised 'Super Greenway'
- Opportunity #8: Greening of key corridors

Biodiversity Net Gain Off-site contributions

The introduction of BNG, and the opportunity it offers for off-site contributions, will also form an important mechanism for channelling funds toward improvements in strategically important areas.

Priority areas for the delivery of BNG offset should be afforded to those projects where improving the condition of existing biodiversity assets and relieving diffuse recreational pressure on those assets is a defined project outcome. Priority should also be afforded to habitat management within Nature Improvement Areas in line with individual area action plans.

Priority Opportunities in the GBI Strategy where BNG offset could be delivered, include the following:

- Opportunity #3: Woodland and hedgerow expansion programme
- Opportunity #4: Rewilding golf courses
- Opportunity #6: Creation of River Birket wetlands
- Opportunity #7: Creation of a centralised 'Super Greenway'
- Opportunity #8: Greening of key corridors
- Opportunity #9: Creating active neighbourhoods
- Opportunity #14: Managing Diffuse Recreational Pressure.

The Local Plan should include some spatial expression of the Priority Opportunities outlined in this Strategy, which can then be used by Development Management officers in their early discussions with developers and ultimately in the determination of applications. As such, these considerations would be treated as a material consideration in planning decisions, adding weight to the GBI opportunities and increasing the potential for their delivery.

Wider Funding

Beyond funding from developer contributions, GBI opportunities could be delivered from a diverse range of funding mechanisms. Funding will be dependent on the type of scheme, its origins and functions. Some proposals will need capital funding to establish a GBI asset and subsequently revenue funding to secure its long term management. A new SuDS installation, for example, will require capital investment to initially create the scheme as part of development proposals, as well as revenue funding for its long-term maintenance and management to secure its functionality.

Potential sources of funding for different forms of GBI could include:

- agri-environment schemes;
- woodland grant schemes;
- endowments and community management trusts; and
- the local authority.

A range of potential funding opportunities are identified for each Priority Opportunity identified in this Strategy.

The capital and revenue costs of GBI will be determined by the requirements of any individual scheme. GBI can be a cheaper and a more viable alternative to investment in more traditional grey infrastructure. Any assessment will also need to take into account the multi-functional characteristics of green infrastructure, to ensure that functions are not costed twice.

Chapter seven
Monitoring and implementation

Chapter 7
Implementation and Monitoring

Crucially, it should be recognised that a wide number of partners are required for successful GBI delivery. Local authorities and their partners can facilitate delivery of the Strategy by reflecting GBI opportunities and priorities in their own plan and strategies, and those of partner organisations.

Implementation

The opportunities in Chapter 4 show the many opportunities for GBI to transform the quality of the urban, peri-urban, coastal and rural areas of Wirral. The proposed comprehensive and connected networks of GBI will deliver many benefits to residents, employees, investors and visitors to the Borough. Some actions will be led by the Council, some by the community, some by the third sector, some by developers, some by health and regeneration specialists and all will need partnership working.

This GBI Strategy represents a key step in Wirral Borough Council's delivery of GBI in the Borough. The following next steps are recommended in order to secure effective, high quality and timely delivery of the Piority Opportunities identified in this report:

- A series of feasibility studies / implementation plans for the Priority Opportunities - further detail is provided in Chapter 4.
- Training on the GBI Strategy for Council Members, Officers and Development Control in order to raise awareness and embed the Strategy vision.
- Engage relevant internal and external partners to further scope and progress the Priority Opportunities.
- Ensure the GBI network and Priority Opportunities are embedded within the Local Plan.
- Consideration of the adoption of CIL/IL and incorporate GBI within the Infrastructure Delivery Schedule, including approximate costs and funding gap.
- Further development of the Council's approach to delivering Biodiversity Net Gain and the prioritisation of projects for delivery off-site BNG.

Monitoring

The Strategy is a live document and should be updated at intervals throughout the 15 year Local Plan period in order to ensure it is being implemented and to maintain its effectiveness as a key resource in developing an improved network of green and blue infrastructure across the Borough.

The long list of opportunities presented in Chapter 3 should be reviewed regularly in order to understand whether opportunities not currently given 'priority opportunity' status become more viable over time, in terms of resource, ambition and funding opportunities.