



Locally accessible green spaces: Briefing note

Ahead of Lord's Oral Questions on 1.2.2024

This briefing is on behalf of Wildlife and Countryside Link ([Link](#)).

Earl Russell has secured an oral question in the House of Lords on 1 February 2024 on whether the Government has plans to increase the number of locally available and easily accessible green spaces. Ahead of the oral question, Wildlife and Countryside Link highlights the gaps in Government action on access to nature and the policy solutions needed to ensure local access to nature for all.

The Government's access to nature pledge is welcome, but further action is needed

The Government's commitment in the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) to provide all people with access to a green or blue space within a 15 minute walk of home is welcome.¹ Significant and ambitious action will be needed to meet this target. Recent Government figures show that 38% of people do not have access to local green space within a 15 minute walk of home.² These nature-deprived communities, which are frequently also the most economically marginalized, are missing out on the substantial health and wellbeing benefits that access to nature provides.³

Currently, it is not clear if and how existing Government initiatives will add up to ensuring all people have access to a green or blue space within a 15 minute walk of home. The EIP contains no published detail on how Government plans to meet this commitment, what policies and delivery actions are needed, who is responsible for delivering them, and what funding and support is required. This criticism has also been made by the Office for Environmental Protection, in their January 2024 report on EIP implementation.⁴

Without a strategic framework which evaluates existing local provision and circumstances, and then directs and coordinates local authority, other public body, and private sector funding and action towards the areas that need it the most, it will be challenging to meet the national target in all local areas across the country, let alone in a cost-effective and equitable way.

In our view, the Government's existing approach and policies will not deliver the step-change in urban green space policy needed to drive significant and long-term investment and action in creating and improving local green spaces.

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1168372/environmental-improvement-plan-2023.pdf

²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1168372/environmental-improvement-plan-2023.pdf

³ <https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Improving%20public%20access%20to%20nature%20-%20Link%20briefing%20-%2002.05.2023.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.theoep.org.uk/report/government-remains-largely-track-meet-its-environmental-ambitions-finds-oep-annual-progress> p141 & 142



Policy solutions

The Government must take a strategic, local-led, and cross-sector approach in order to deliver more, high-quality and easily accessible local green spaces in the right places for people to access and enjoy. To meet the 15 minute target, the Government should:

1. Require and fund each local planning authority to produce, implement, and report on a local Green Infrastructure Strategy, according to the existing Green Infrastructure Standards.⁵

These local GI Strategies should assess existing local provision of green and blue spaces, set local targets for delivery, provide a framework for local authority, developer, and other public body action towards rectifying inequalities in access to nature, target action towards the most nature-deprived areas, and monitor progress against local targets. This local prioritization, implementation and coordination tool would ensure that access to nature is improved in an efficient and equitable way in every local area across the country. Local authorities should be funded to meet these new duties, and to increase their resources to deliver new green spaces. These resources have been strained in recent years.⁶ Existing funding is also often one-off and short-term, and investment rounds are not coordinated, leading to low take-up or smaller projects. A new and significant funding pot, to enable the implementation of local GI Strategies, would make a significant and long-term impact to increasing the availability and accessibility of local green spaces.

2. Mandate that all public bodies contribute to the delivery of the local GI Strategy and all new development should meet the standards set out local GI Strategy.

This will ensure key stakeholders and landowners, such as other Government departments, water companies and the Highways Agency, pull together with local authorities to increase access to nature. It would also set minimum legal requirements on developers to deliver urban green spaces. Existing voluntary green infrastructure standards⁷ are not sufficient to galvanise action from developers: recently developed neighbourhoods have up to 40% less green space provision than neighbourhoods dominated by late 19th- and early 20th-century housing.⁸ A statutory requirement on developers would ensure that all new development contributes to providing the new or improved local green spaces identified as essential in the local GI Strategy.

Wildlife and Countryside Link ([Link](#)) is the largest nature coalition in England, bringing together 82 organisations to use their joint voice for the protection of the natural world and animals.

For questions or further information please contact:

Emma Clarke, Wildlife and Countryside Link

E: emma.clarke@wcl.org.uk

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⁵ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/Home.aspx>

⁶ <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/our-cause/communities/new-research-reveals-need-for-urban-green-space>

⁷ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/downloads/Green%20Infrastructure%20Standards%20for%20England%20Summary%20v1.1.pdf>

⁸ <https://neweconomics.org/2022/05/exposed-the-collapse-of-green-space-provision-in-england-and-wales>