Association for Public Service Excellence

The State of UK Public Parks Report 2021

Paul O'Brien,
Chief Executive,
APSE

State of Parks Research 2021

- Follow on from 2013 and 2016 research
- Over 25% of UK's Parks Services responded to this
- Never more popular with public
- Political profile high – 72% see Parks as a priority for their LA
- However, disappointing CSR

Headlines

- A further £190m cut from revenue budgets over past 5 years
- Cuts have not been equitable across the country – average loss £475k
- North West one area most affected by cuts and declining condition
- UK Parks collectively in worst condition since 2013
- Proportion of Parks in good condition lower than those in fair
- Areas showing highest amount of fair and poor Y&H, NE, WM
- Some concern that other areas of the country will level down rather than up as budgets continue to tighten
- ¾ of those reporting decline had seen decrease in revenue budgets

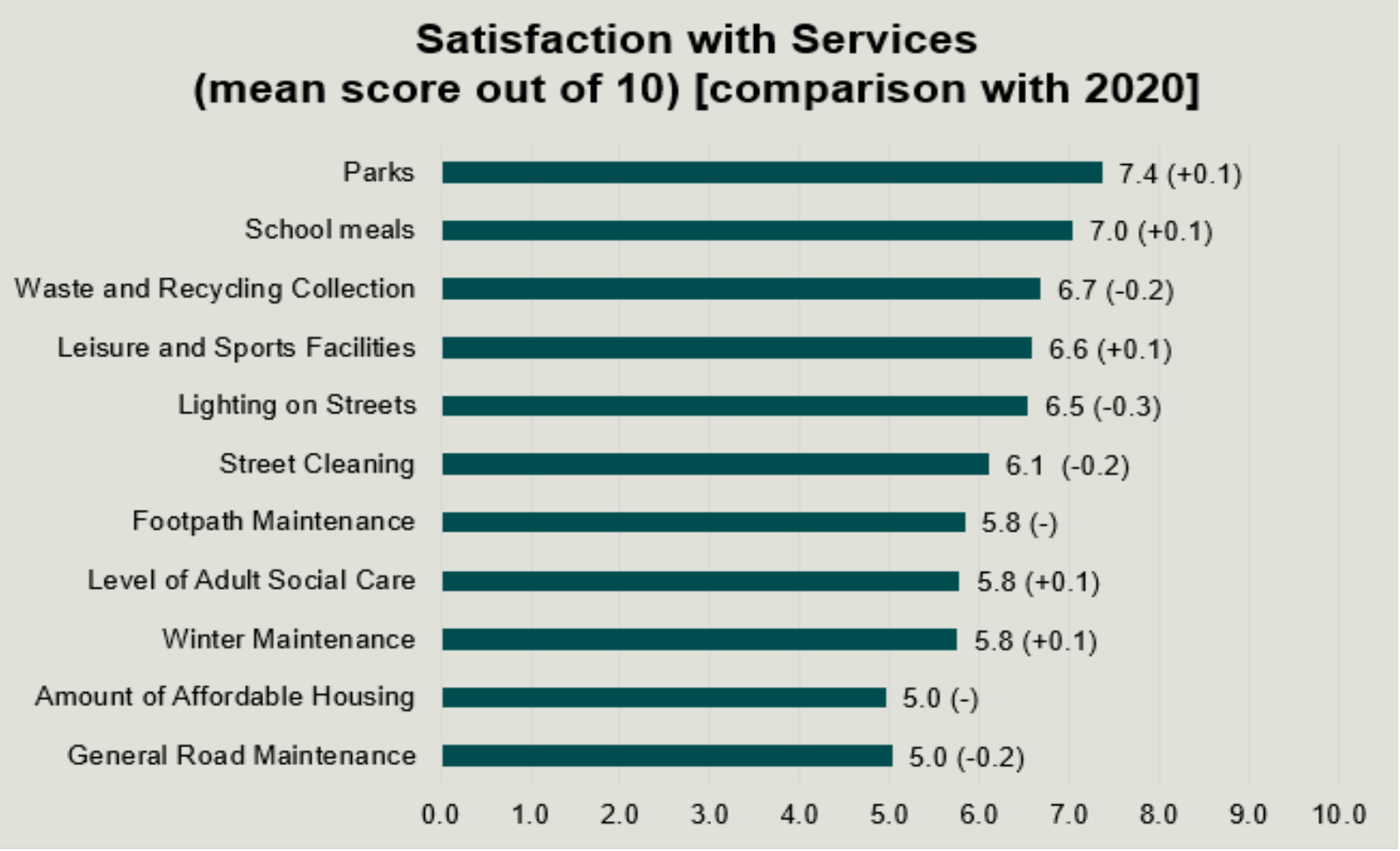
Headlines continued

- Some optimism 40% of LA's hoping condition will improve next 3 years
- However, 60% standing still or declining
- 32% reduction frontline staff, 41% management, 23% development
- Some hoping for increases next 3 years others remain concerned about further cuts to management and frontline staff
- Ageing workforce, Over 50% over 50, male and predominately white
- Need to change workforce profile and create career structure

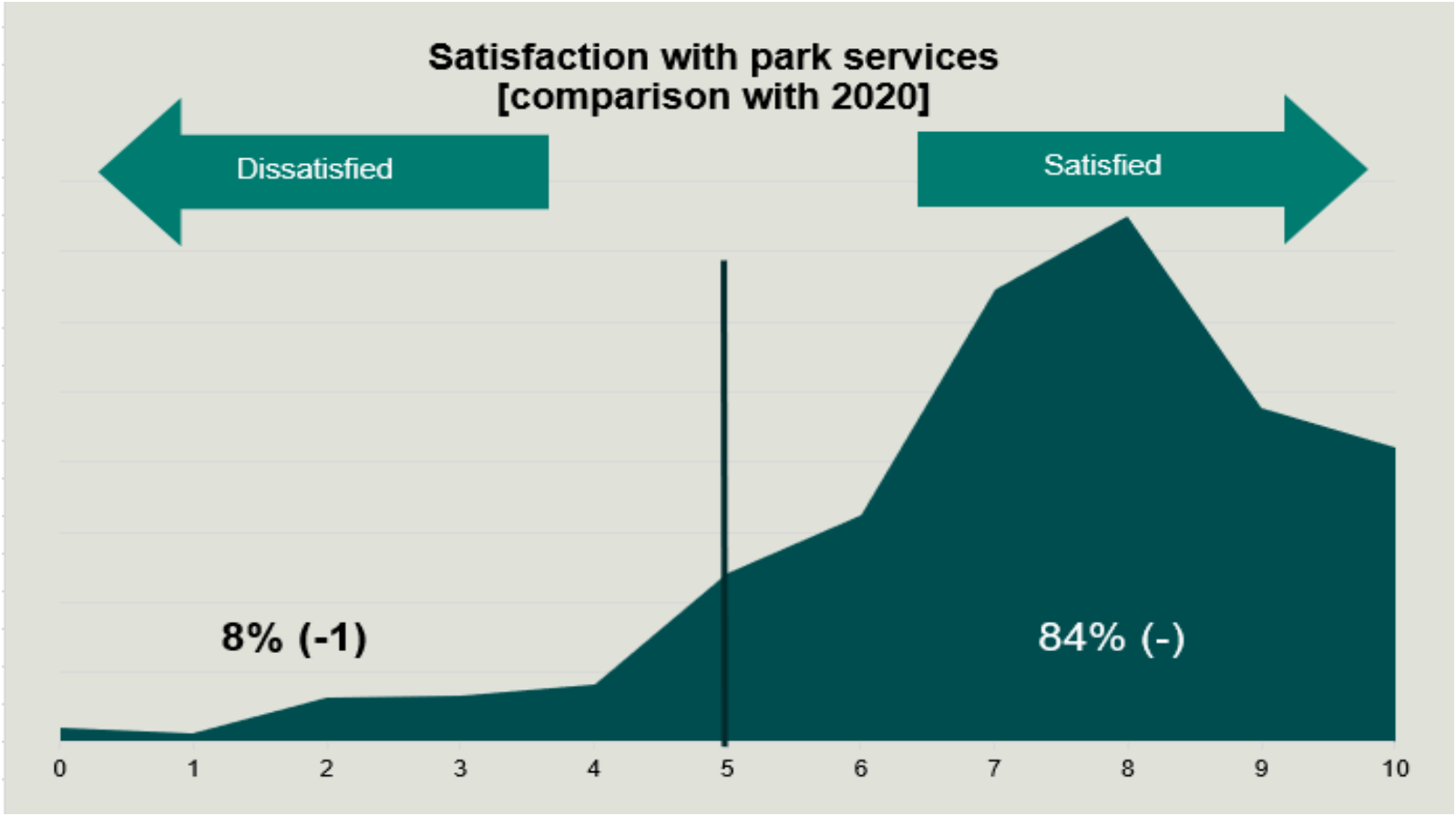
Covid issues

- Workforce isolating, redeployed and overran
- Wear and tear from huge numbers of visitors – 88% seen increases
- Income generation wiped out as restrictions impacted
- Loss of volunteers and friends groups
- 70% seen negative impacts on their parks during pandemic

Satisfaction levels vary between services



7.3 Parks


Satisfaction with park services
[comparison with 2020]
Dissatisfied
Satisfied
8% (-1)
84% (-)
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

Parks and greenspace pointers

- Carbon emissions from property and facilities
- Active lifestyles and travel
- Mental health, social prescribing, outdoor exercise
- EV car clubs based out of leisure centres, car parks there already, Ebike hubs, bike hire, repair and lend
- Recycling green waste and water
- Renewables location
- Reforestation

Opportunities

- Pocket parks?
- Covid reminder
- Public health
- Political support
- Local priority
- Biodiversity net gain
- Climate action

Conclusions

- State of the market not a pretty picture
- Parks have an opportunity to reinvent themselves
- Public support
- Starting from a low point in terms of finance, condition and staff
- Council budgets 22/23
- Part of push to net zero

NEW MUNICIPALISM

Delivering for local people and local economies

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UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology

LANDSCAPE DECISIONS

Creating Tomorrow's Woods:

Place-based approaches for balancing consequences and benefits

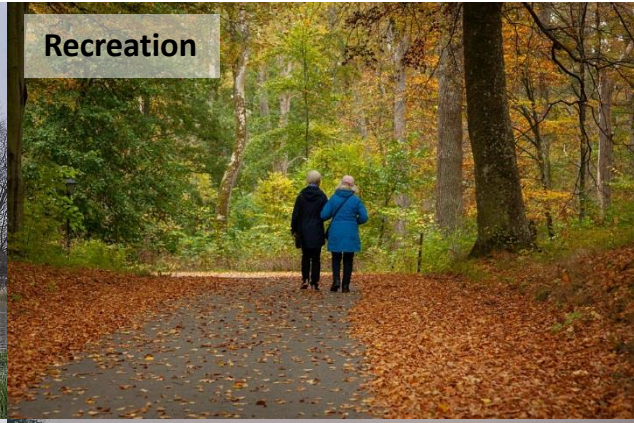
Dr Emma Gardner

Research Fellow, UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology

Collated from an ongoing UKCEH research project working with:

Environment Agency · Natural England · BTO Looking out for birds · ARG UK · Bat Conservation Trust · froglife · Woodland Trust · earth trust · Berks Bucks Oxon Wildlife Trusts · Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre · Natural Capital Solutions

Woodland creation can bring **many benefits**:



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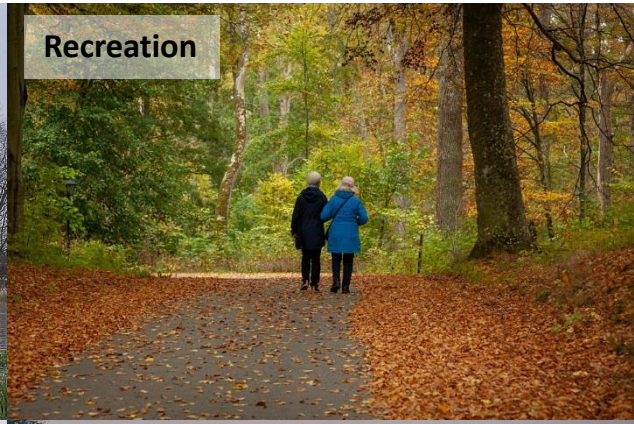

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determines which **benefits** are realised

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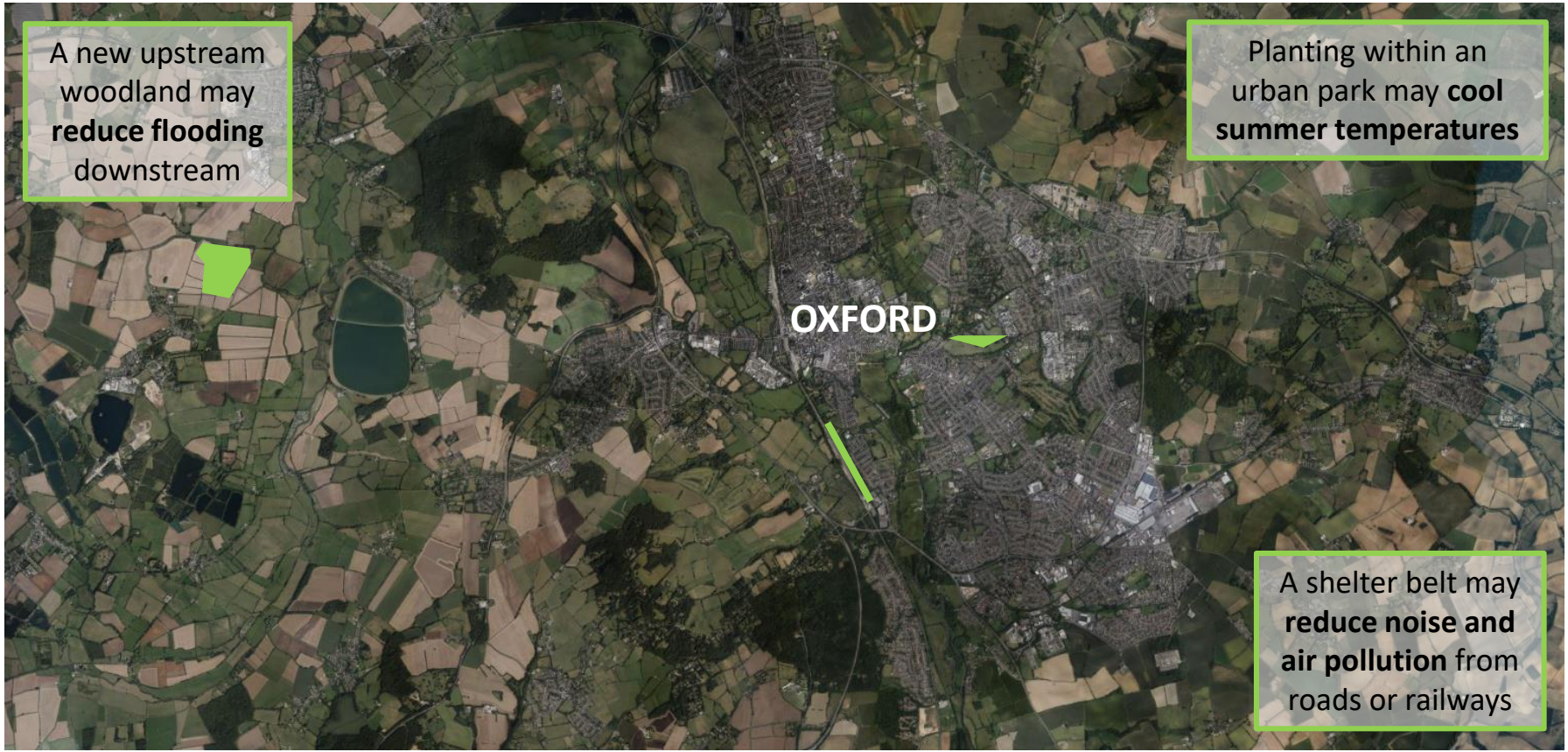

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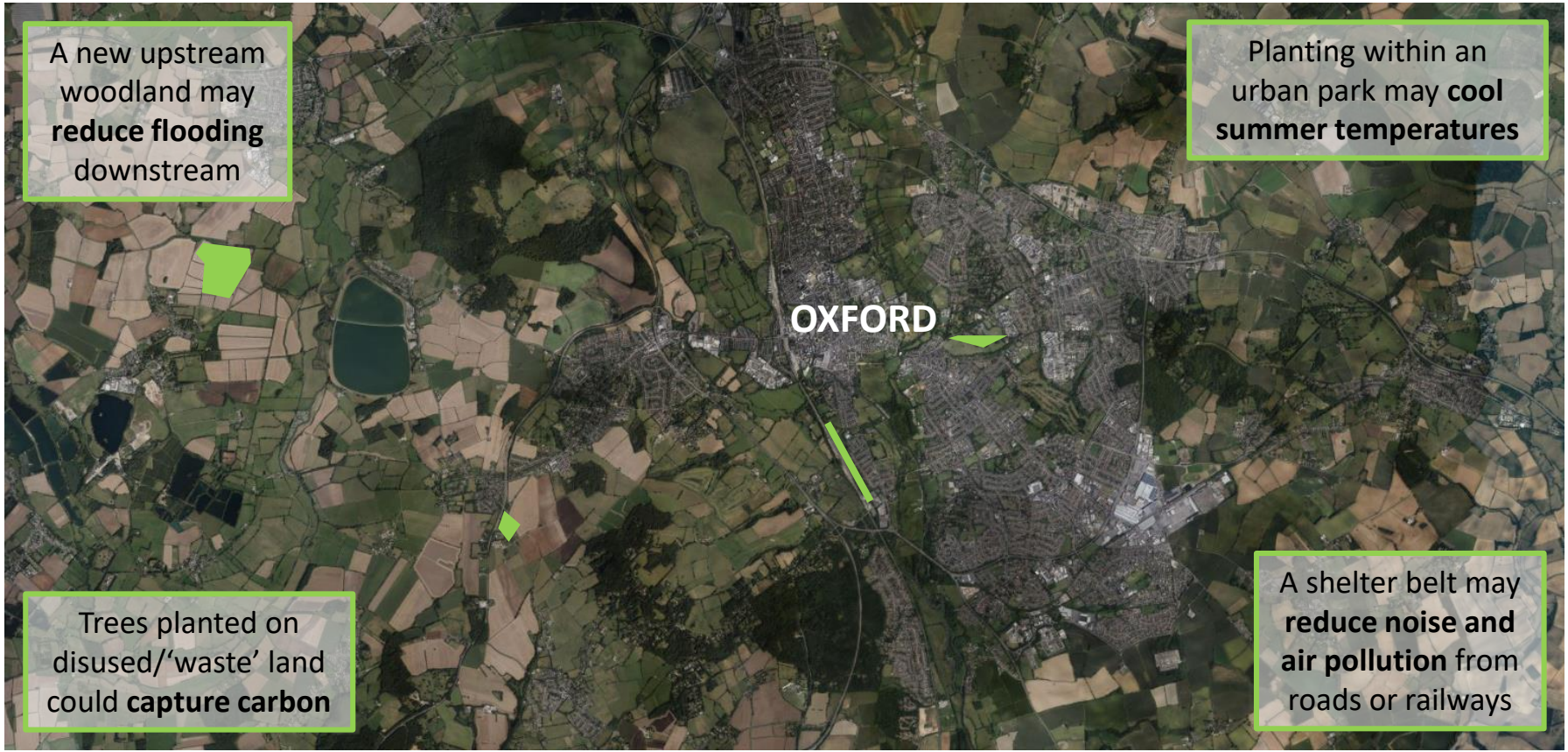

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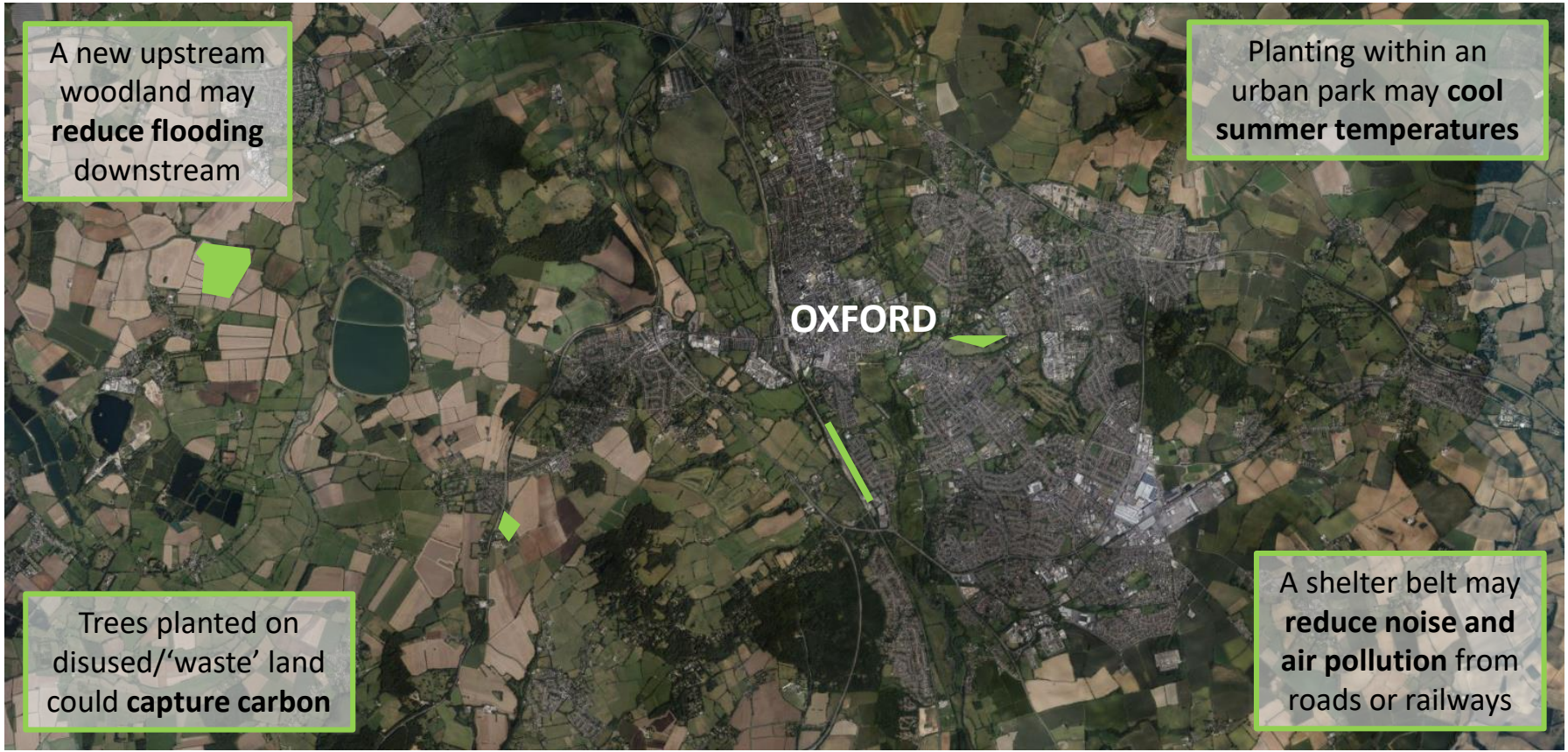

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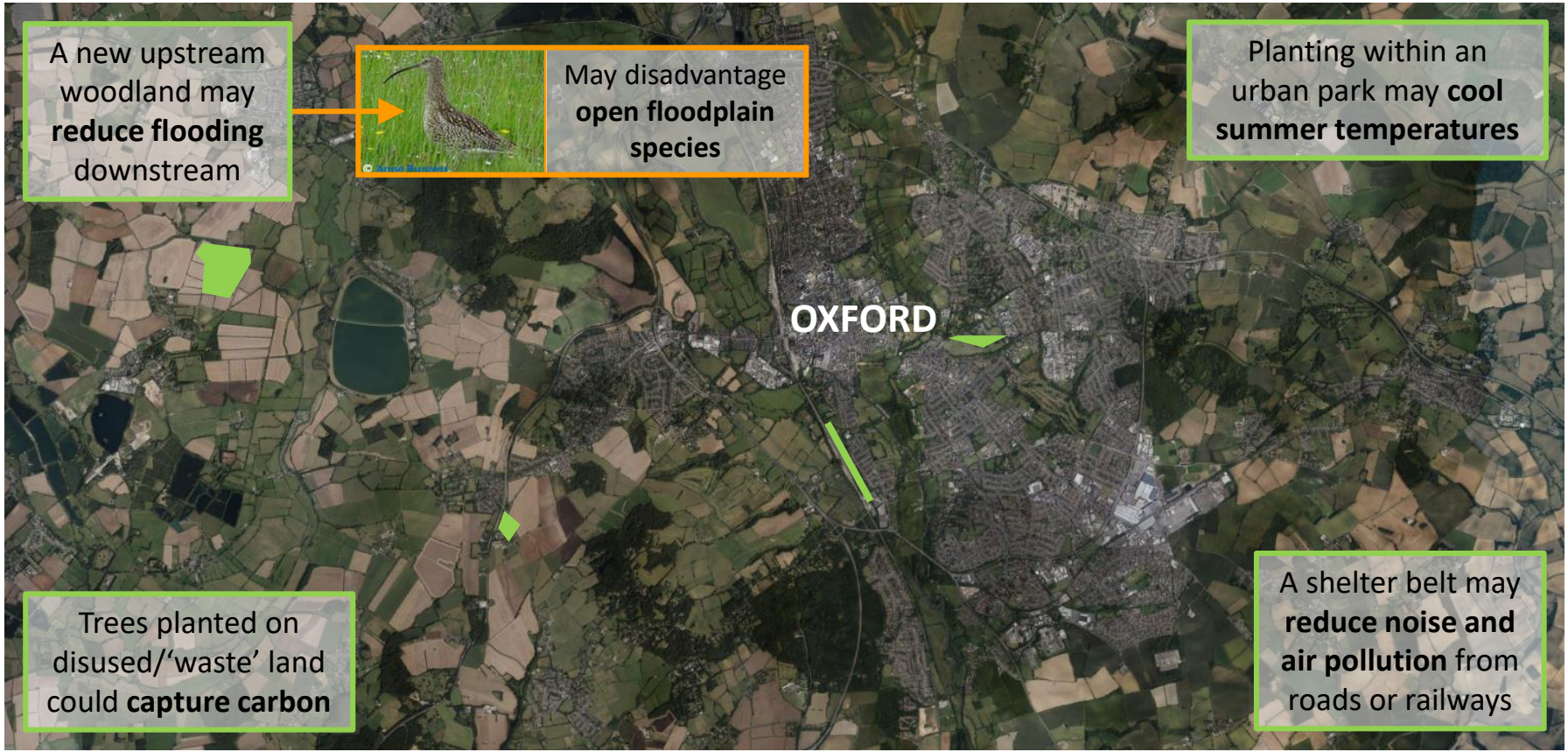

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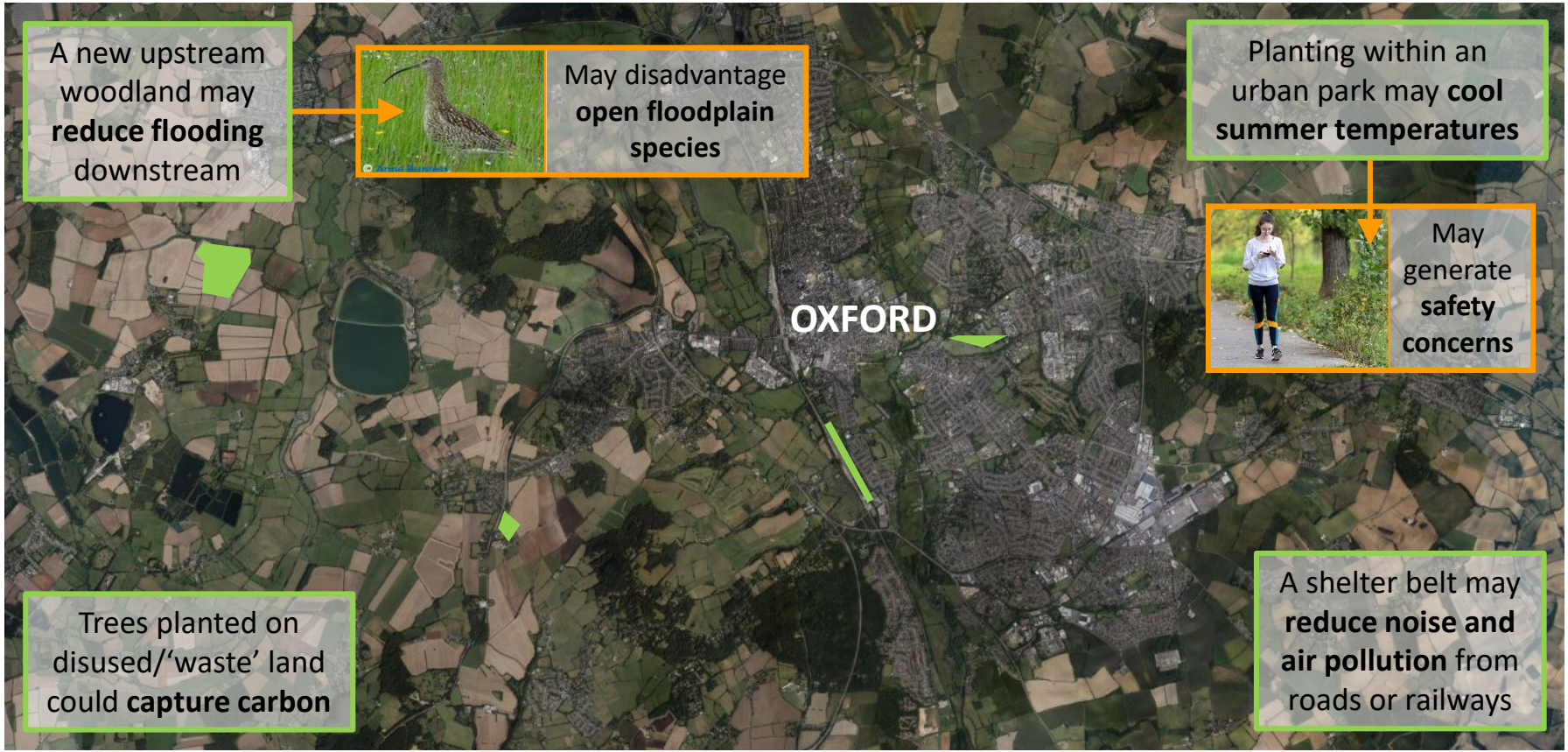

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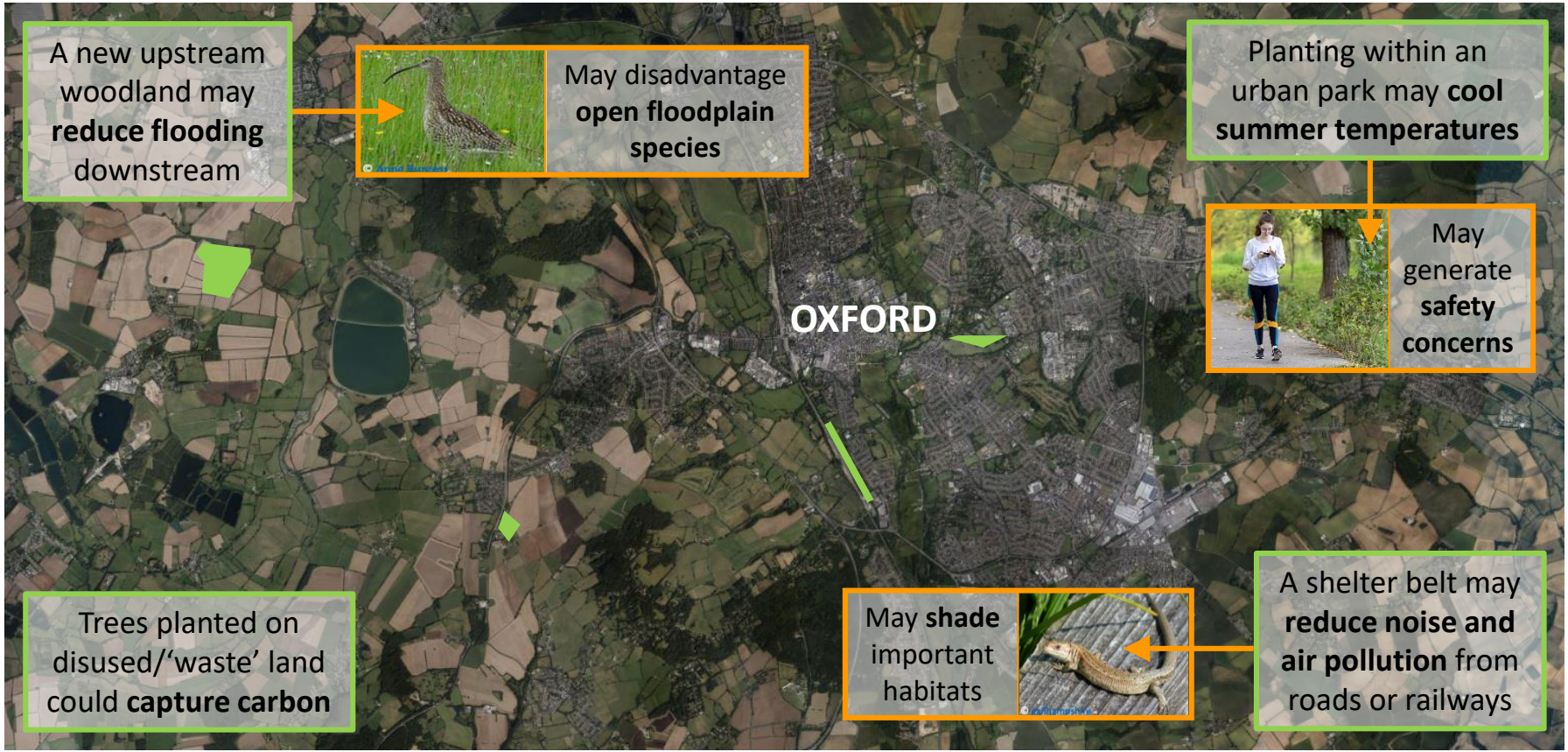

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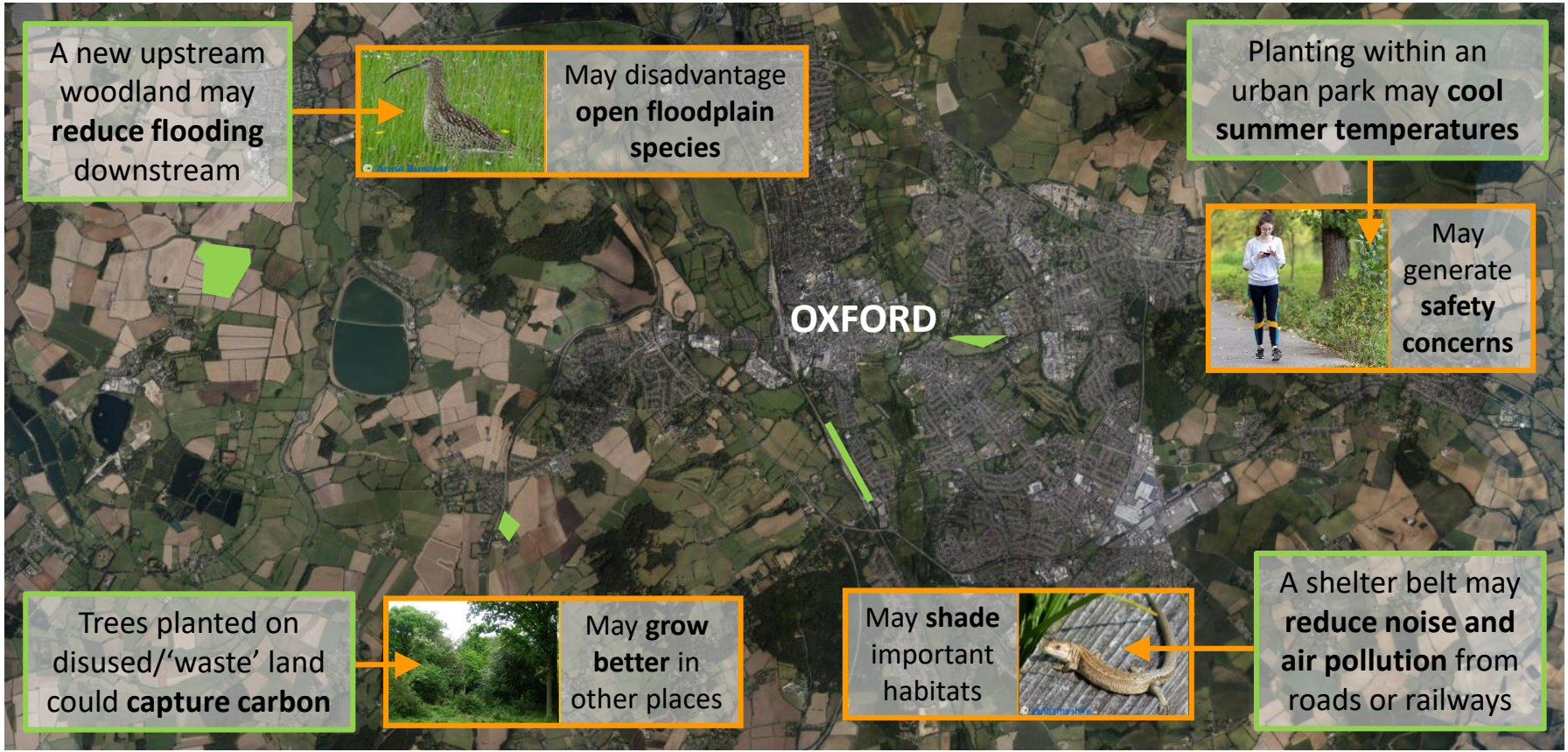
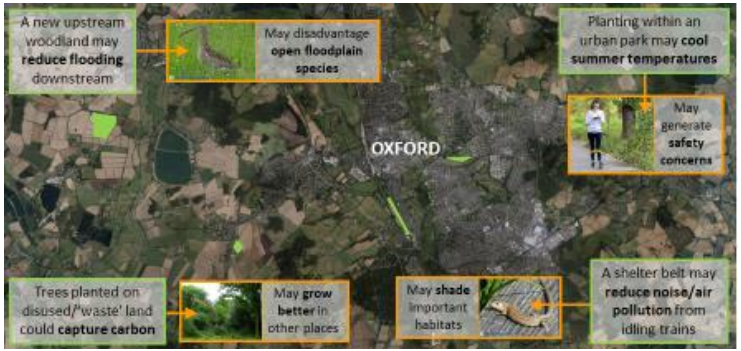


These interactions play a role at all scales:

From deciding where woodland creation might be prioritised or permitted across a **district**, **county** or **unitary authority**…



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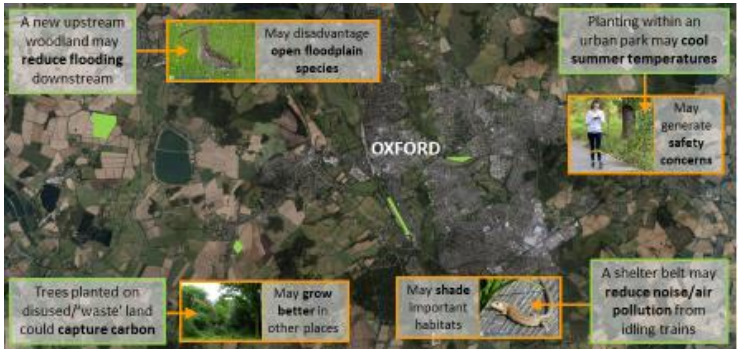

… to deciding where trees might be planted within an **individual public space**.

Image from: https://www.oxford.gov.uk/directory_record/363/cutteslowe_and_sunnymead_park

Taking all this into account: identifying the **‘best’ place**

Step 1: Clarifying priorities

What do **you** want to achieve through woodland creation?

This can help **narrow down** the list of potential locations:

-> then select the location providing **most additional benefits** and **least adverse consequences** on top of your main priority

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<u>Alternatively</u>
If you’ve **already identified a location** based on practical constraints:
-> considering its **potential to provide different benefits** can inform **type of woodland** and **method of creation**

If woodland creation at the site will cause adverse consequences:
-> **other habitat types** can often provide **comparable benefits**

Tools to help estimate benefits, consequences & suitability

Identifying suitable locations

ASSIST E-Planner

- Simple, map-based tool presenting relative suitability of land for different options
- Free, web-based app for mobile or desktop, with GB coverage
- Aims to streamline and support environmental planning

UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology

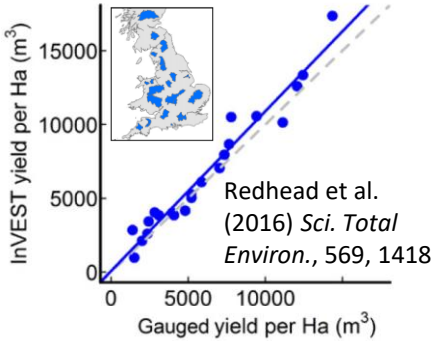
e-planner

assist-e-planner.ceh.ac.uk

Estimating 'ecosystem service' provision

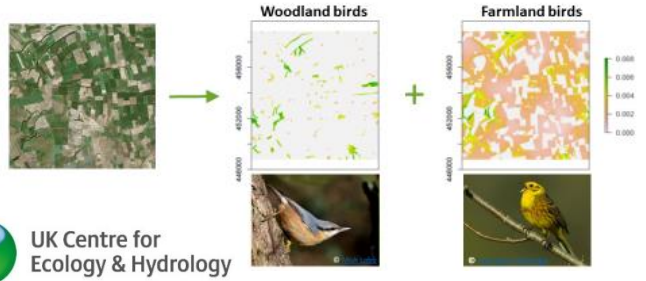
InVEST

integrated valuation of ecosystem services and tradeoffs



Biodiversity consequences

https://landscapedecisions.org/how-many-trees-should-we-plant-and-where/



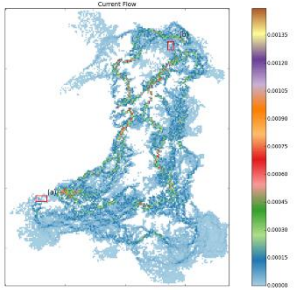
LANDSCAPE DECISIONS

UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology

Large-scale connectivity for single habitat

condatis

http://wordpress.condatis.org.uk/



E-planner: Interactively exploring suitability in your area

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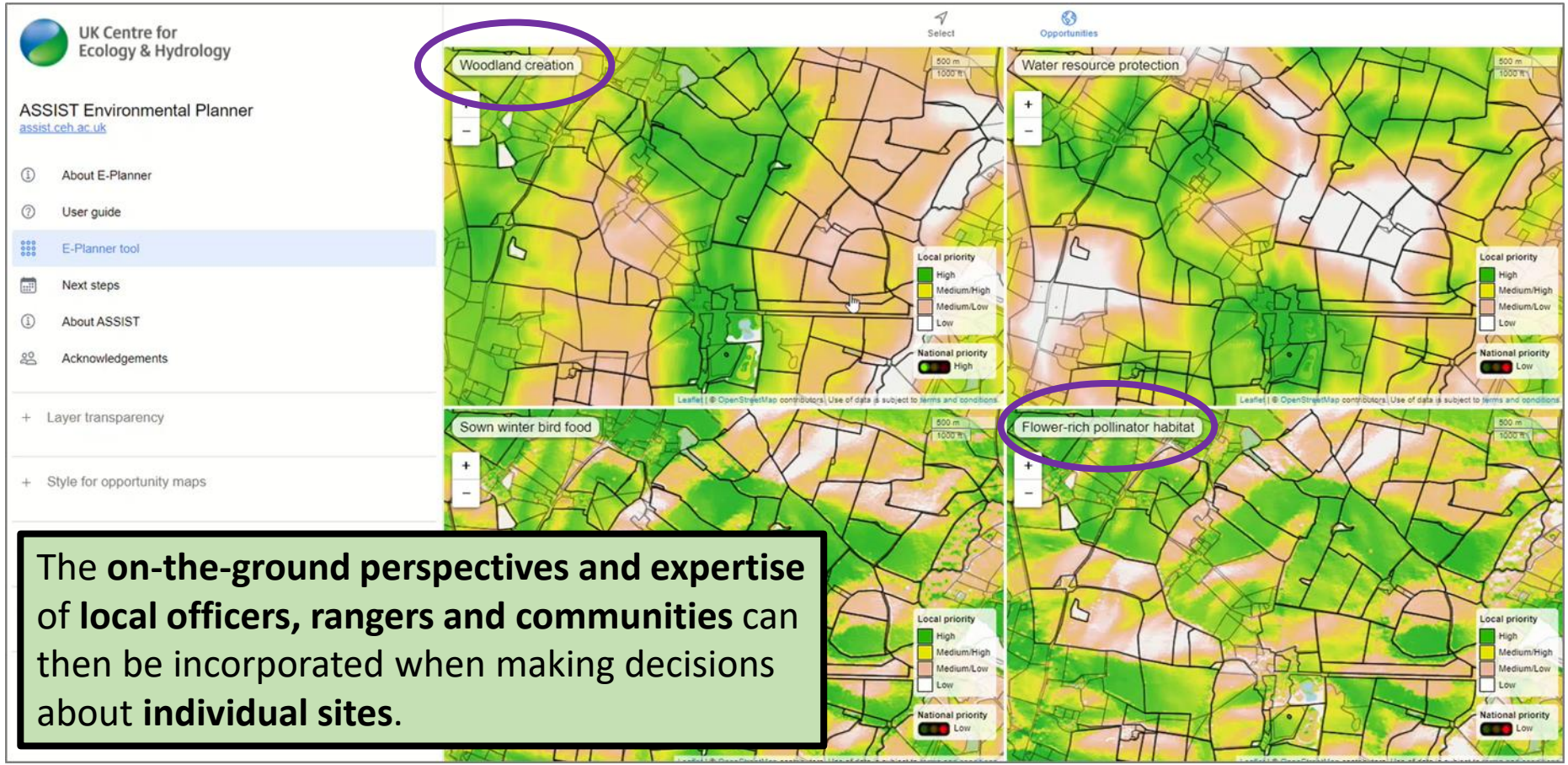

The **on-the-ground perspectives and expertise** of **local officers, rangers and communities** can then be incorporated when making decisions about **individual sites**.

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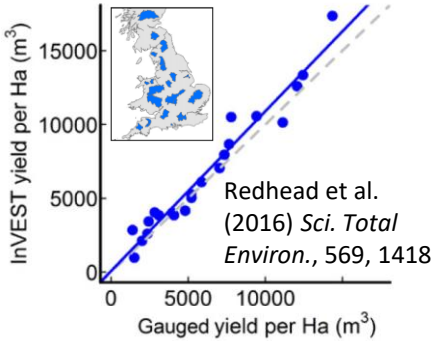

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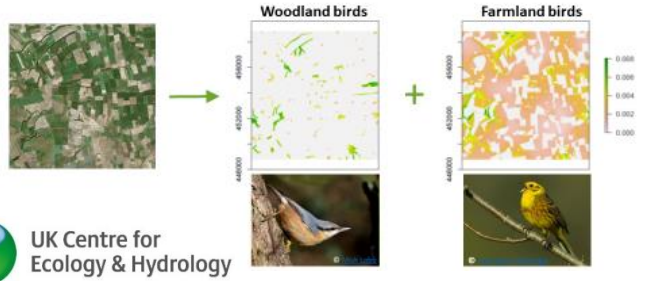

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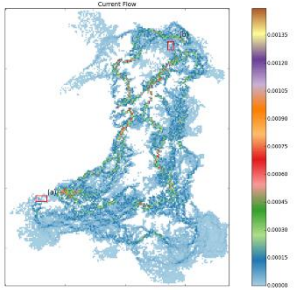
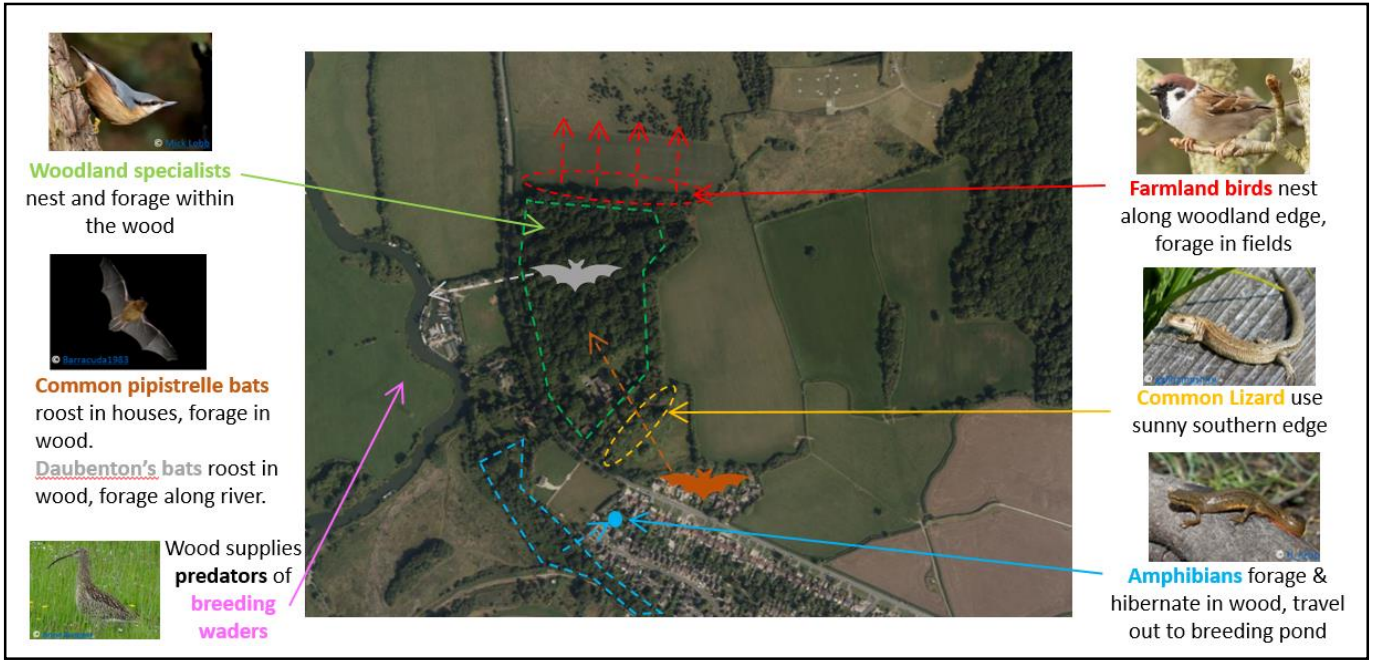


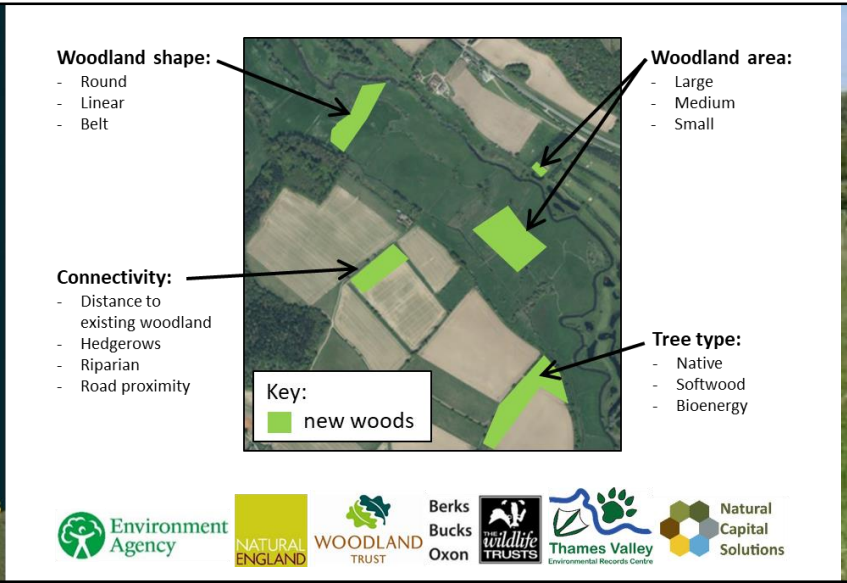
Biodiversity: Multiple roles of woodland habitat

- To understand the **biodiversity consequences of woodland creation**, we need to understand **how different species use landscapes**.
- Building models with conservation NGOs to **better represent species' needs in decision-making**.
- Focusing on **mobile species of conservation concern** (not well represented by current metrics).



Real-world case studies:
Helping decision-makers explore woodland creation possibilities

- Aim: apply models to **help woodland creation initiatives** achieve **simultaneous societal, environmental and biodiversity benefits**.
- Due to **begin trials** in **case study areas** across Great Britain.
- If you have an area of interest and would like to **take part**: please contact emmgar@ceh.ac.uk



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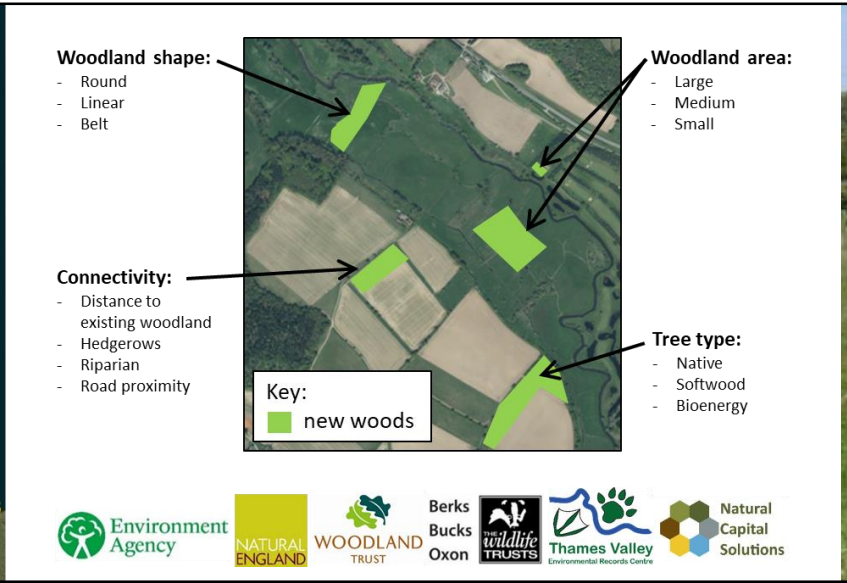

Thinking beyond just trees: Right habitat, right place

- **All healthy functioning ecosystems sequester carbon** e.g. Gregg et al. 2021; Taylor et al. 2019.
  -> the **rate of sequestration** depends on the **habitat type**, where it is **located** and its **management**

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- Some habitats are **geographically/hydrologically constrained** as to where they can occur.

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  e.g. bogs capture carbon better than trees in peaty uplands

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- The **properties of a site** determine **which habitats** it can effectively support.
  -> Tree cover **will not be** the most effective or suitable carbon capture option everywhere.

Carbon capture via trees doesn't mean the trees have to permanently be there

When people imagine carbon capture via trees…

they picture future landscapes full of **mature trees** and **established woodlands**.

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When people imagine carbon capture via trees…

they picture future landscapes full of **mature trees** and **established woodlands**.

But **periodic removal of trees/woody vegetation** to **maintain open habitats**, promotes natural regeneration and the cycle of capture through growth to begin again…

Trees capture carbon in these dynamic systems but they **only appear temporarily, as young trees**.

Benefits of maintaining habitat mosaics

If the removed woody/grassy vegetation is put to a **non-emitting use** (i.e. not burnt), this **habitat mosaic management** can be the **best way to capture carbon** in **contested spaces**.

Maintaining this dynamic between open and woody/scrubby habitats offers:

- resources for both **open and woody habitat specialist species**
- **edge habitats** essential for many species of conservation concern
- supports **species that need access to multiple habitats** (e.g. amphibians)
- **high human wellbeing benefits** due to resulting visual mosaic and extended sightlines

Multi-functional spaces for people and wildlife

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Abbey Fishponds

- leased by **Vale of White Horse District Council**
- managed by **Earth Trust**
- designated as **Local Nature Reserve**

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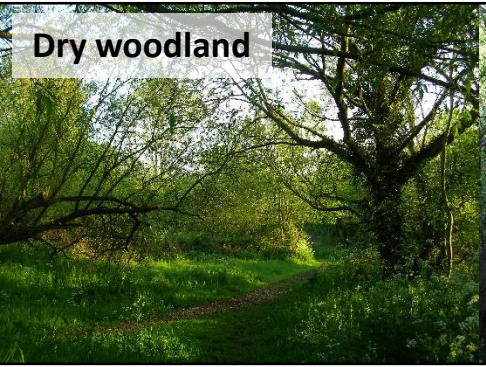
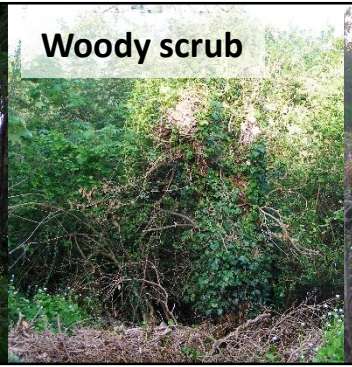
Ock River Path

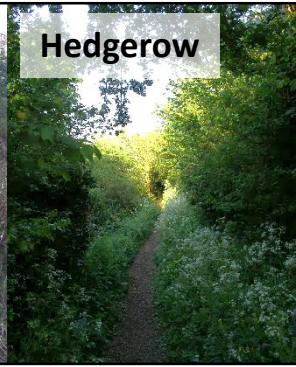
- managed by **Abingdon Town Council** and **Vale of White Horse District Council**
- assisted by **Abingdon Green Gym volunteers**

Abbey Fishponds: woody and open habitat dynamics

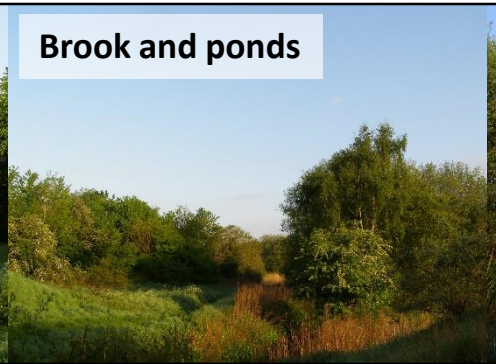
Woody habitats:







Open habitats:



Abbey Fishponds: multiple benefits

Carbon capture:

Variety of habitats means carbon is captured in a variety of ways -> **more resilient**

Biodiversity:

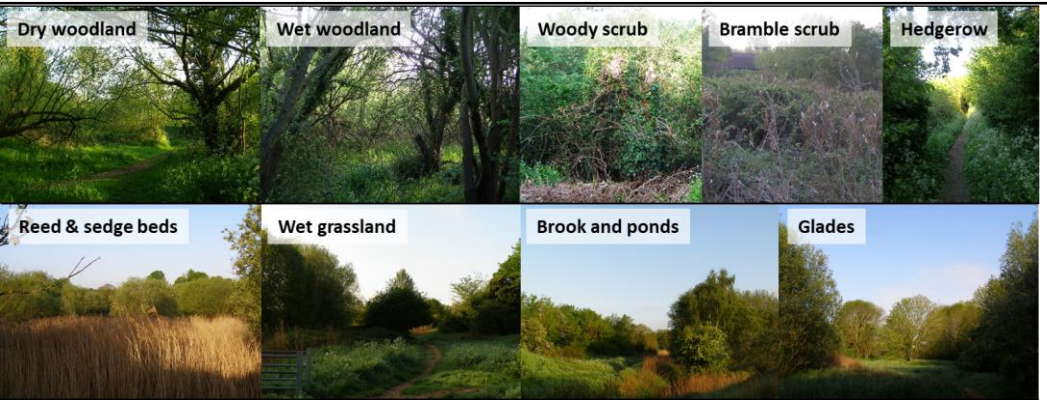
Habitat variety in **medium-sized 'woodland' sites** can increase biodiversity benefits

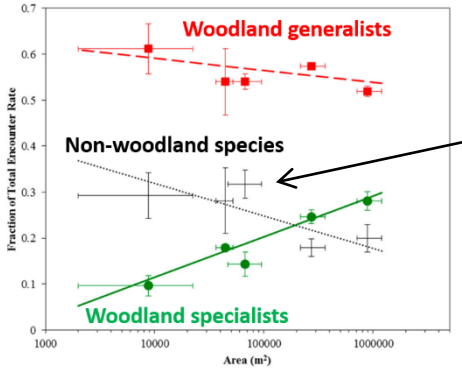
People:

Open habitats along **main public through-routes** -> maintains sightlines to safety

Volunteering to help **maintain** open habitats -> increases **connections** with local spaces/wildlife

Denser habitats act to limit public access -> create **secluded spaces for wildlife**.





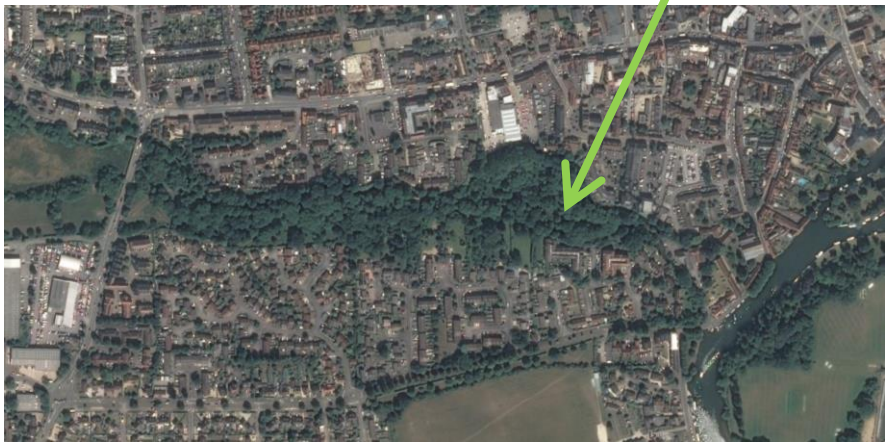
Boost in bird diversity due to habitat variety in this group of sites (Gardner et al. 2019)

Ock River Path: People and wildlife

Highest density of song thrush in our 2019 study

Was red list, now amber.

Key habitat combination: **thick vegetation + mown paths**



Ock River Path: People and wildlife

Open areas support finches
Greenfinch now red list.

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- **Robustness to changing conservation priorities**
- Habitats **manage the flow of people**/pets
- **Natural regeneration** rather than costly planting

Summary

- **Woodland creation** can have **many benefits**… but also **negative consequences**.
- **Woodland location** determines which benefits/consequences are realised.
- **Tools are available** to help explore suitability, societal, environmental and biodiversity consequences.
- We have **active research projects** currently trialling ways to **help woodland creation initiatives achieve their goals** and **minimise unintended consequences**.

  For more information, or to take part as a case study area, contact: emmgar@ceh.ac.uk
- Thinking beyond just trees – woodlands in combination with other habitats (**right habitat, right place**):

  Habitat mosaics can offer a **resilient way to capture carbon**, **resolve conflicts** and maintain **multi-functional spaces**.
- **Place-based thinking** is key:

  What is the potential of my site to support different habitats?
  What role does it fill within the wider landscape?
  Who might depend on it now and in the future?

Parks for the 21st century

Stuart McLeod - Director, London & South
National Lottery Heritage Fund

Overview

1. Who we are and what we do

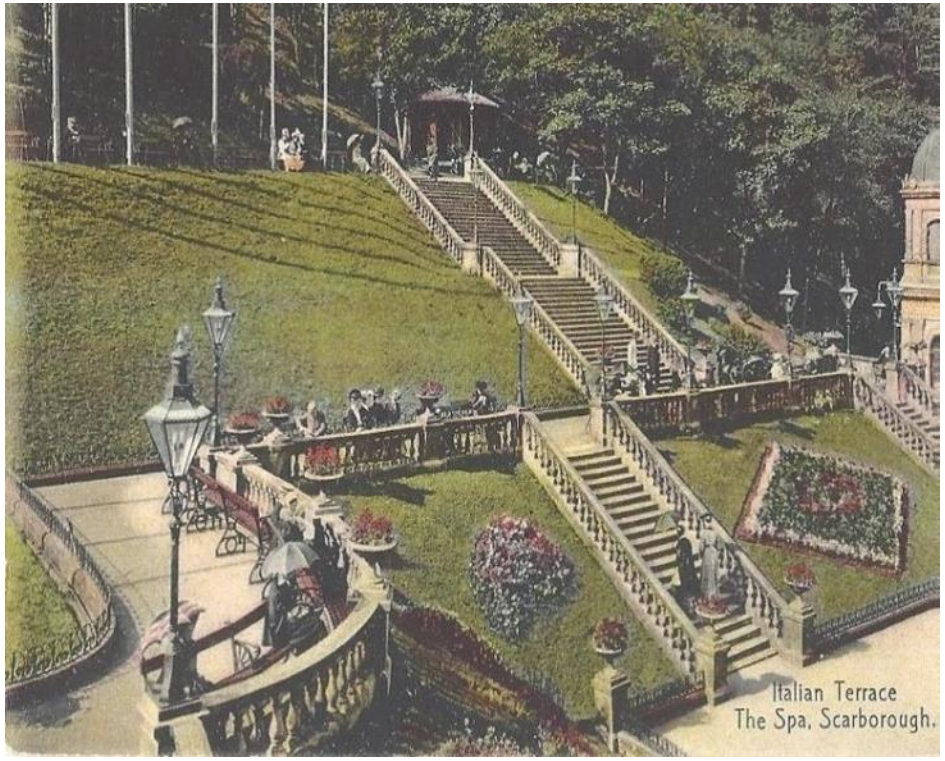
2. Our advocacy and leadership role

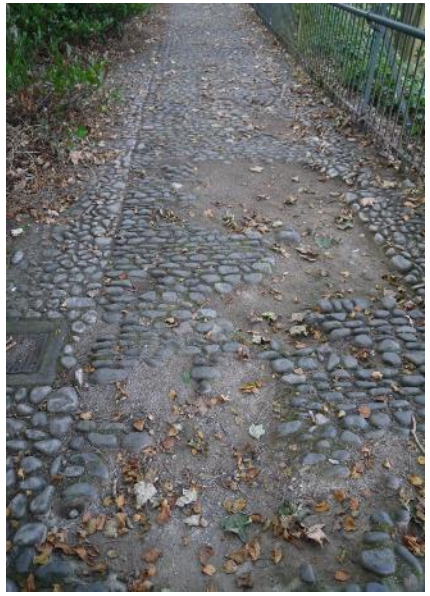
3. Our current opportunities for funding of parks and greenspaces

4. What we are looking for in parks projects

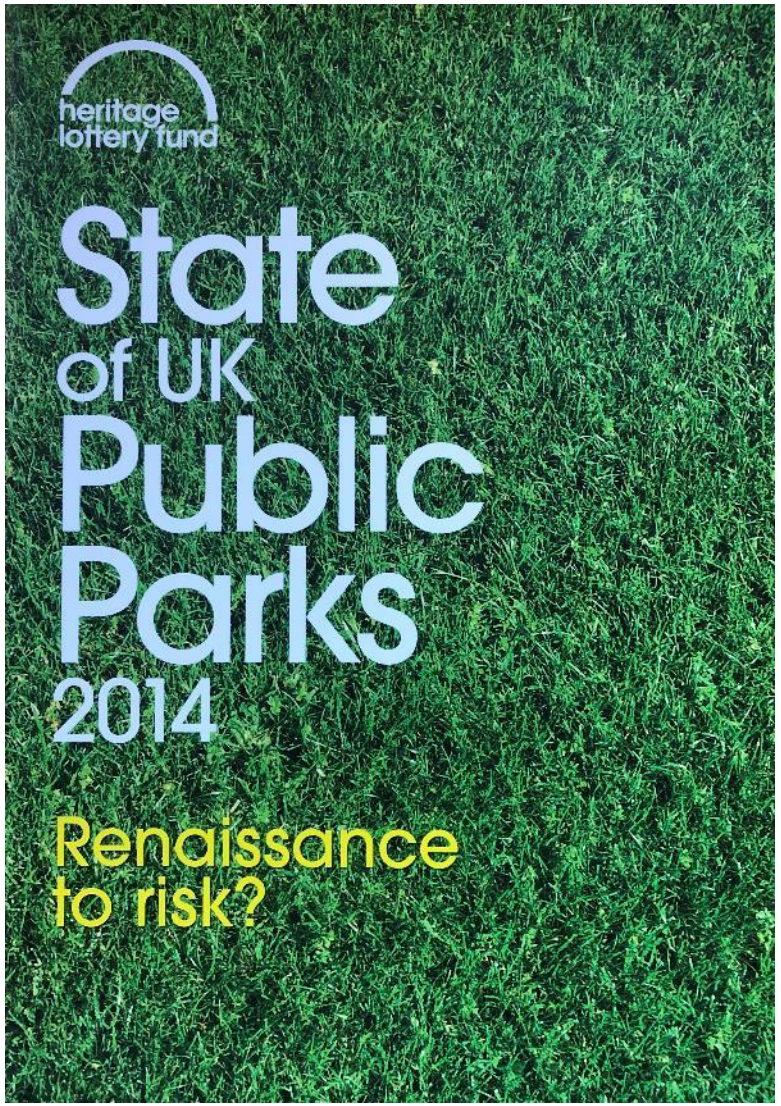
Lordship Recreation Ground, Haringey

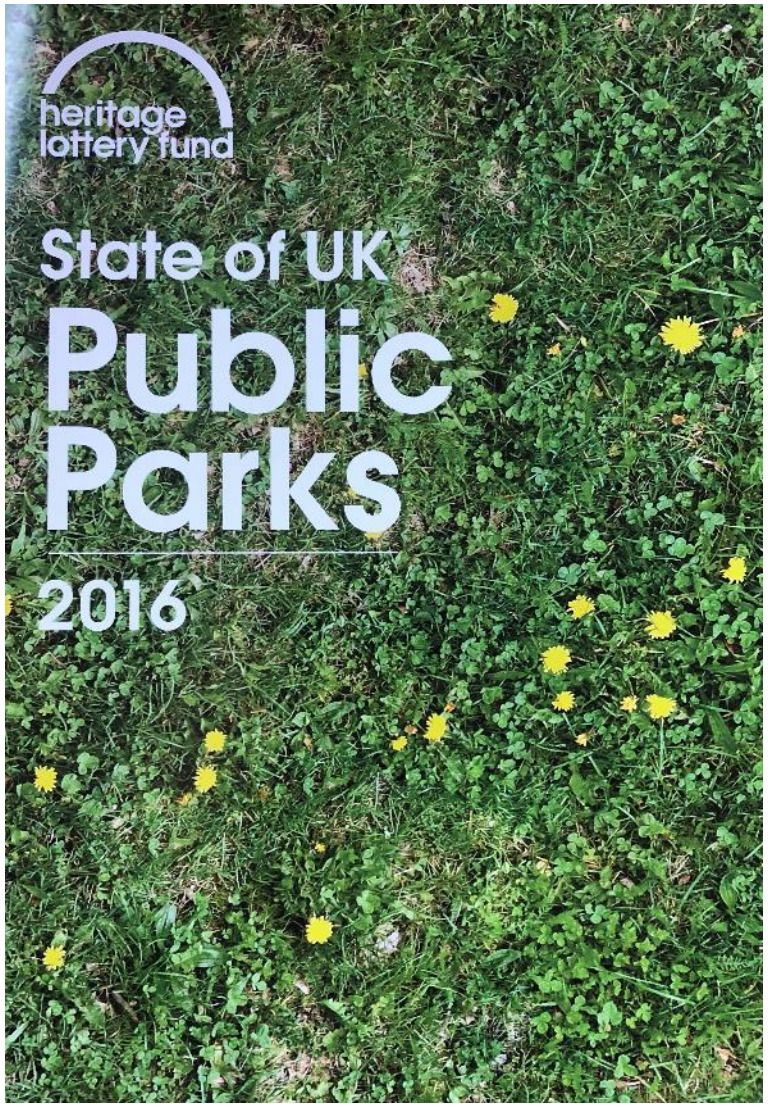
Cassiobury Park, Watford

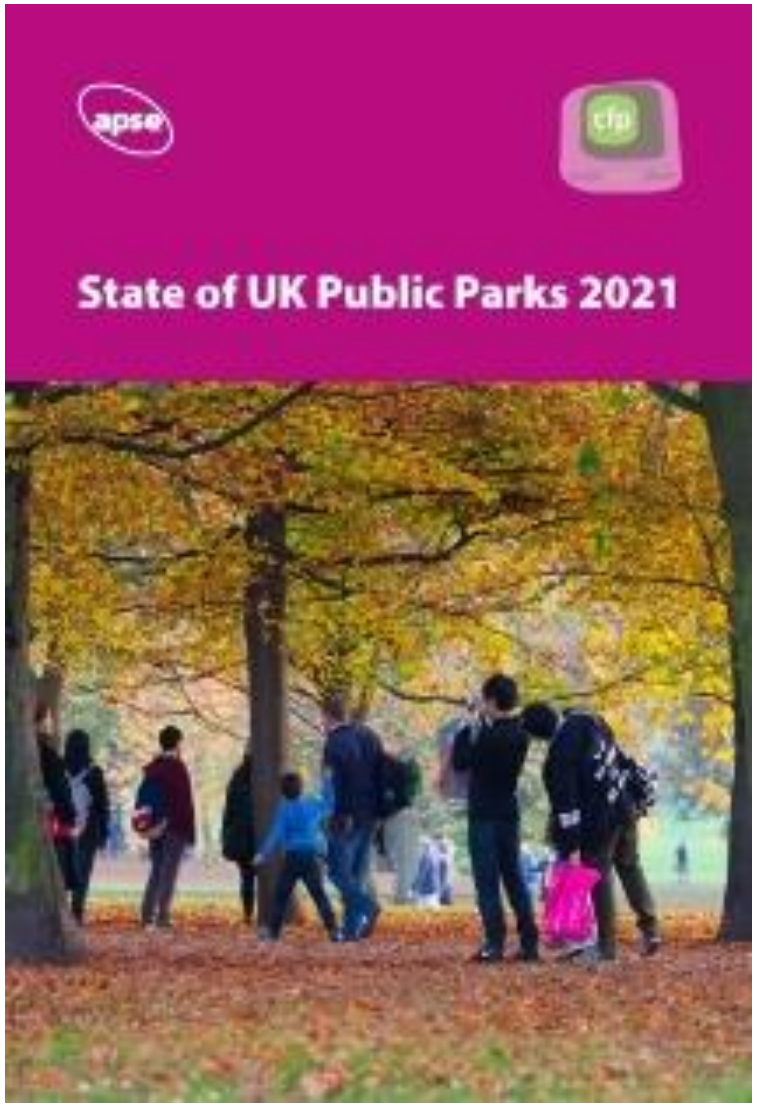

Italian Terrace
The Spa, Scarborough.



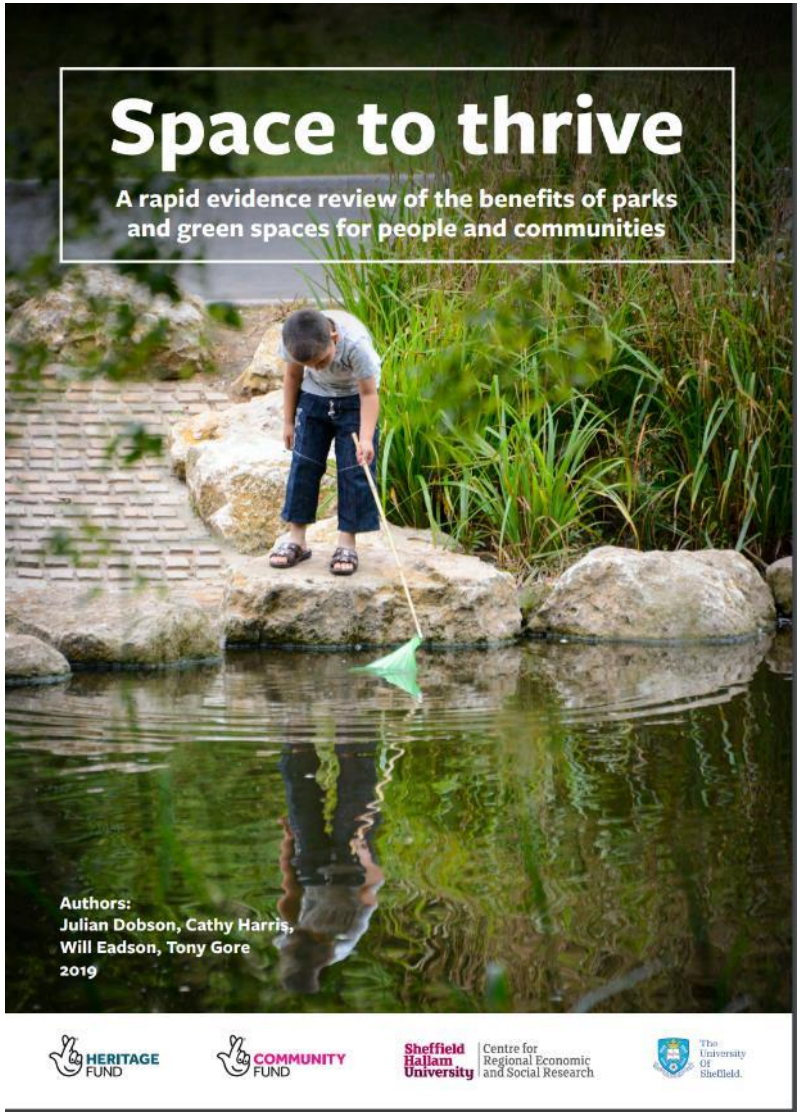
Heritage Fund







Heritage Fund



Harnessing renewable energy in parks

Greenspace Scotland – ParkPower – via Rethinking Parks

https://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/pages/category/energy

Guide on renewables in parks:

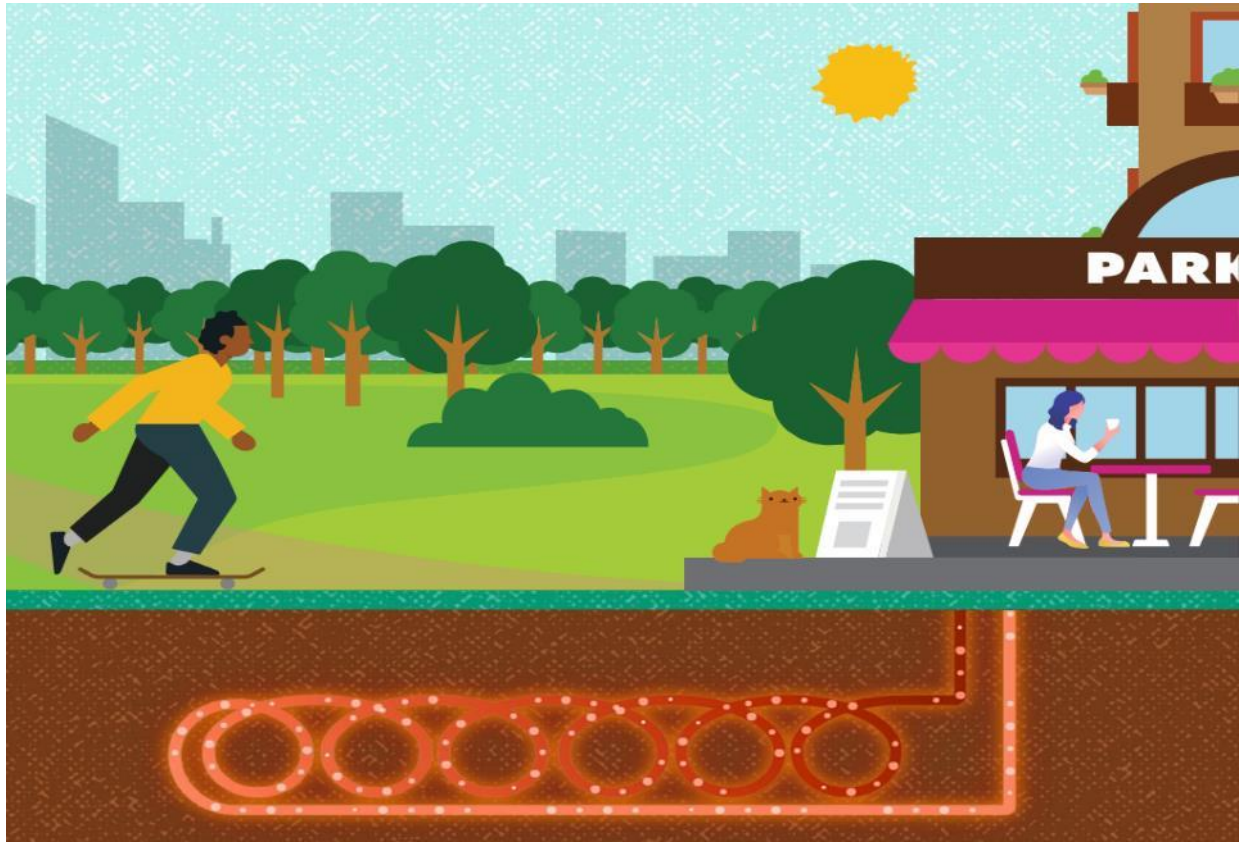
https://www.nesta.org.uk/project-updates/harnessing-renewable-energy-parks/

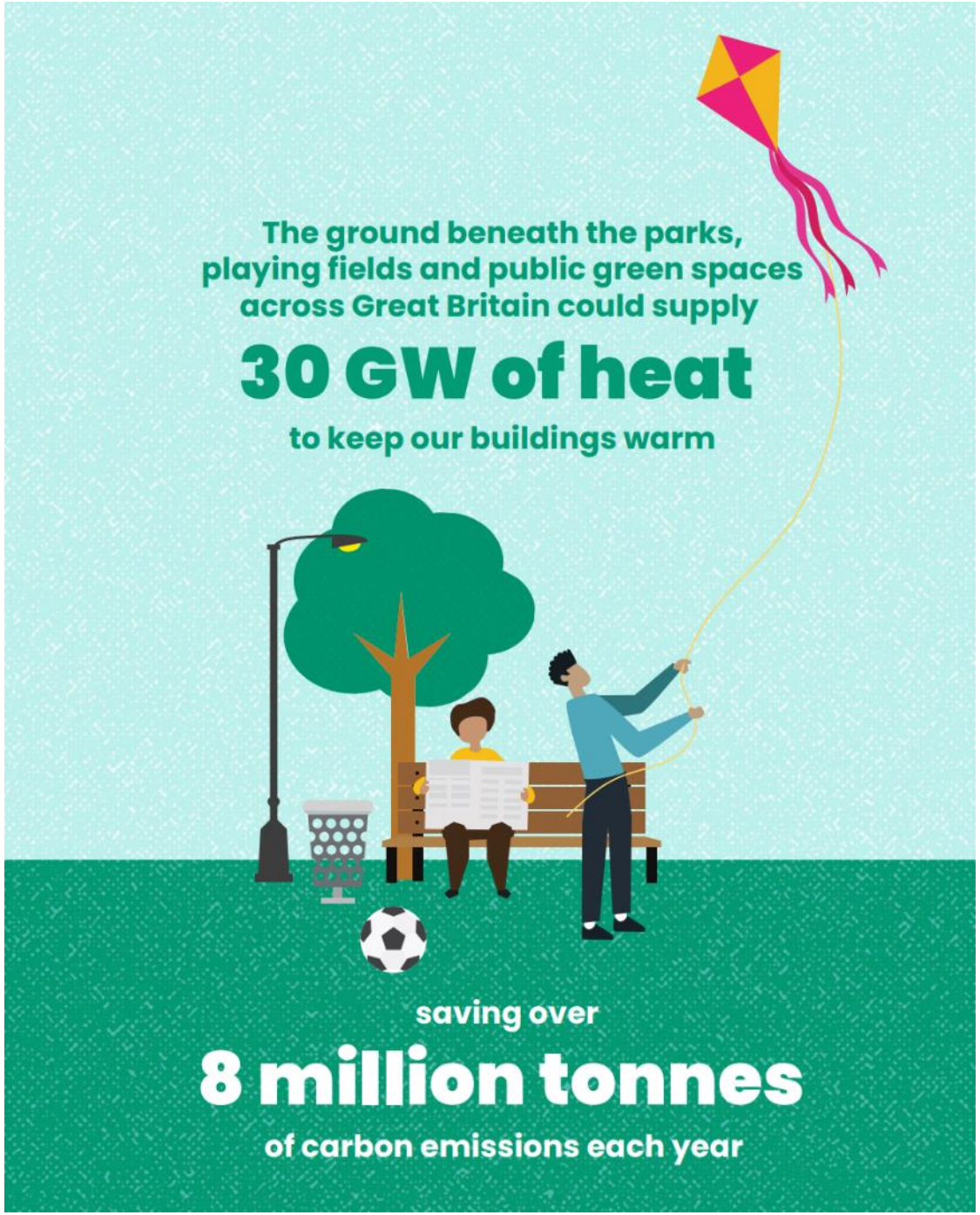
Rethinking Parks

COMMUNITY FUND HERITAGE FUND nesta

Possible – Powering Parks – via Rethinking Parks

https://www.wearepossible.org/latest-news/powering-parks





Heritage Fund

Love Leeds Parks

https://loveleedsparks.org.uk/

THE PARKS FOUNDATION

https://parksfoundation.org.uk/

Bristol & Bath Parks Foundation

https://www.bristolbathparksfoundation.org.uk/

Guide to setting up a Parks Foundation:

https://www.nesta.org.uk/toolkit/how-set-parks-foundation/

How to set up a Parks Foundation

Heritage Fund

Rewilding of Horsham Park a ‘mad idea’ amid fears long grass could house ‘lots of insects’

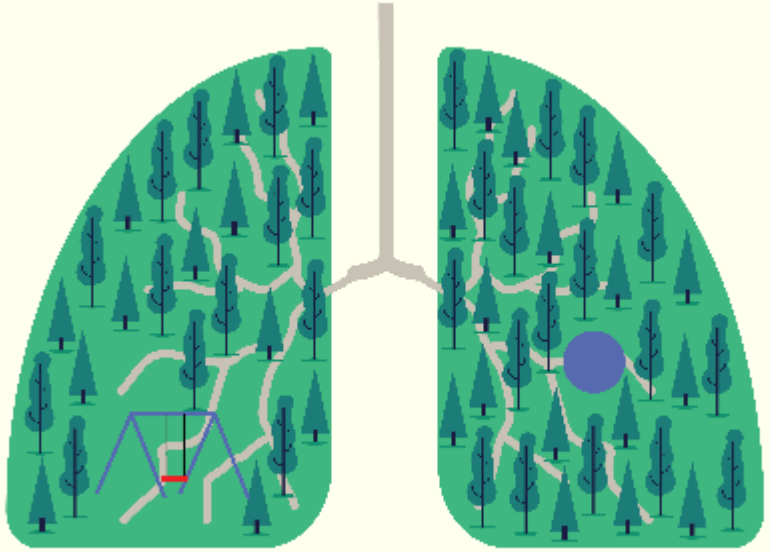
A dog walker has raised fears the rewilding of Horsham Park could lead to increased vet bills for pet owners.

By Sam Dixon-French
Friday, 30th July 2021, 2:56 pm

Heritage Fund


Tudor Tools
Tudor Tools

Future Parks
Accelerator



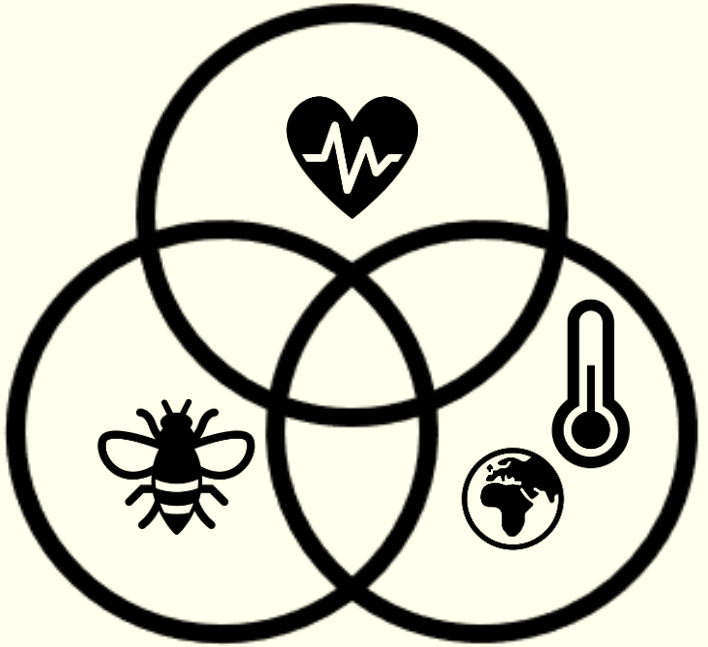
Heritage Fund

National Trust

Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

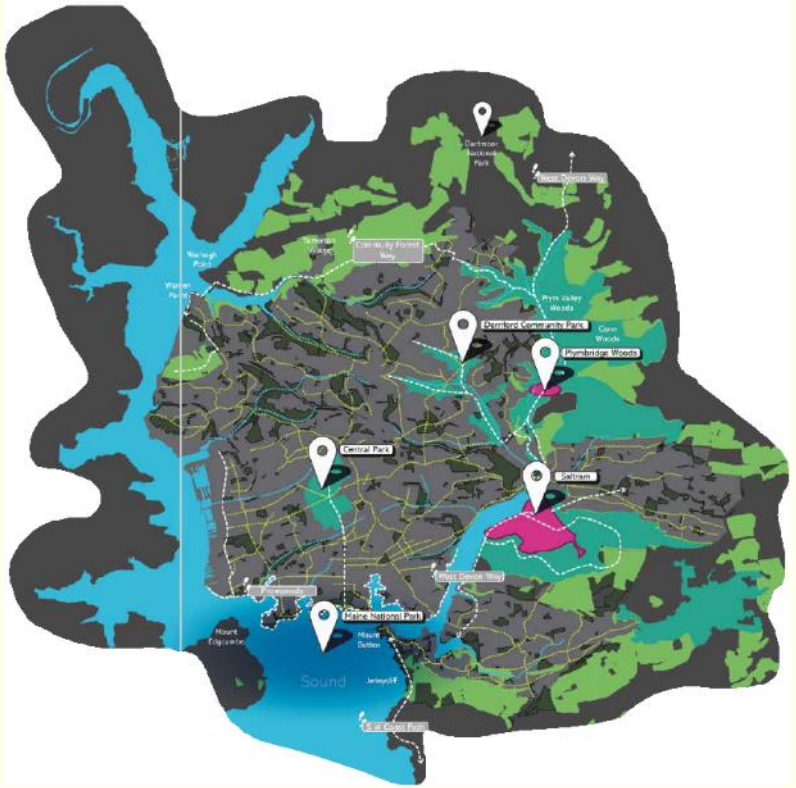
About Future Parks

- Joint initiative – NT & NLHF with some support from government.
- Support to develop new business, operational & investment models.
- Strategic response to funding crisis - access to quality green space and nature at risk for millions of urban dwellers.
- Covid highlighted inequality of access, also areas worst affected by Covid-19
- Repurposing parks for the 21st Century and addressing health, climate and biodiversity emergencies.



The Accelerator Model

- Borrowed approach from tech start ups & venture capital
- ‘High support and high challenge’ model
- Account manager and access to specialist consultancy support
- Flexible milestones for iterative approach
- Cohort – shared endeavour and peer network
- Rapid learning – shared and packaged for others



Just because something did not work does not mean we have failed. This has led to bold, ambitious thinking and a willingness to 'try things out' before committing to significant investment. This approach is counter-intuitive in political environments.

Source: City of Edinburgh Council Mid-Point Review

Catalysing long term change

Four long term aims – but FPA lays foundations:

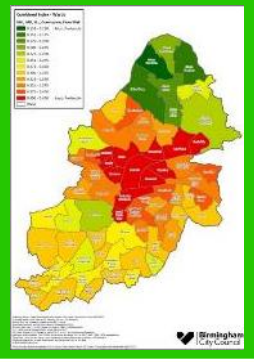
1. Promote a step-change in how people engage with and use their green spaces
2. Enable new cross-sector partnerships to bring in knowledge, expertise and leadership
3. Catalyse and blend new sources of funding and finance
4. Ultimately, we want everyone to have access to high quality, free green spaces, close to where they live

Improving access to urban greenspace

New partnerships for parks

Strategic, health-based investment

Environmental Justice – addressing inequality

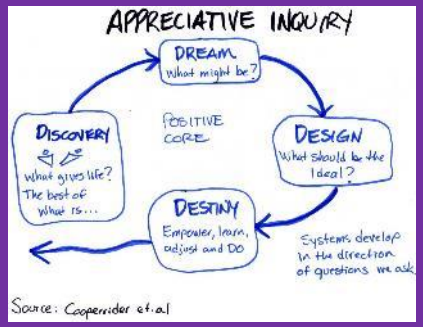


New finance & funding

Nature recovery networks for people and wildlife

New accessible green landscapes

Workforce development



Funding for parks projects

National Lottery Grants for Heritage

- £3,000 – £10,000 (single stage)
- £10,000 – £250,000 (single stage)
- £250,000 – £5m (two-stage)

The Level, Brighton

Funding priorities 2022-23

Poole Park, Dorset

- **A wider range of people will be involved in heritage (mandatory)**
  Every project must meet this outcome
- **The funded organisation will be more resilient**
- **People will have greater wellbeing**
- **People will have developed skills**
- **The local area will be a better place to live, work or visit**
- **The local economy will be boosted**

Key messages

- **We are open for parks and urban green space projects** despite not having a targeted programme.

- We'd like to see green space **projects focused on places and not just destination parks** – we can fund a single park, but keen to see how it fits within a wider Local Nature Recovery Strategy – e.g. expanding green spaces beyond the park gates, improving their biodiversity and creating corridors for nature.

- Also wish to see **projects that focus on all the benefits green spaces can deliver: social** (isolation, inclusion, volunteering); **economic** (role of green spaces in creating thriving places, appropriate commercial opportunities, not reliant on dwindling revenue budgets); **environmental** (climate/nature) - need for the sector to up its game in relation to environmental sustainability (e.g. emissions from machinery, peat, use of chemicals etc).

- We welcome **projects that take existing innovation and learning forward** – e.g. new funding models like foundations, exploring opportunities around green finance, creating environmental justice (communities deprived of green space tend to be the poorest, unhealthiest and most ethnically diverse), the role of parks in addressing climate change.


Any questions?