

Leeds City Region Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

Executive summary

1. Introduction

Our region's green spaces and waterways are among its defining characteristics. This strategy and delivery plan sets out how we will make the most of the region's amazing natural assets to help our economy prosper, enable people to enjoy a great quality of life, and combat the effects of climate change.

As a result of this strategy we will ensure that everyone in Leeds City Region has easy access to a high-quality, safe and well-used network of footpaths, cycleways, green spaces, waterways and wildlife habitats. This "green and blue infrastructure" will contribute towards a strong economy, a sustainable environment and outstanding quality of life.

The actions we and our partners across the region will deliver in response to this strategy will also contribute to our ultimate goal, set out in our Strategic Economic Plan, of making Leeds City Region a zero carbon energy economy underpinned by high quality green and blue infrastructure.

2. Where we are now: our strengths and challenges

From our three national parks, to our world-class cycling infrastructure, to our canals, which have transported goods from the Industrial Revolution to the present day, our region is known nationally and internationally for the quality of its green and blue infrastructure.

Despite these well-known strengths, we also face a number of challenges in ensuring our natural assets play their full part in supporting economic growth that benefits everyone in our region, and in helping us respond to the consequences of rising global temperatures and the impact it brings.

Our strengths:

- Unique in England in having large urban areas in close proximity to a high-quality natural environment.
- Large number of natural designations ranging from the Yorkshire Dales National Park and Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Beauty to Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Wildlife Sites
- Strong green and blue infrastructure sector with interest ranging from large national organisations to small community groups
- Excellent cycling and walking provision, including the country's only segregated cycleway linking two major cities – the 23km Leeds-Bradford cycle superhighway



The challenges we must address:

- Over 63,000 homes and more than 27,000 businesses at some degree of flood risk
- 7,385 homes and 4,698 businesses at a high risk of flooding
- Less than 17 percent of City Region's blanket bog peatlands are in good condition
- Tree cover lower than the national average of 10%
- Areas of deprivation with poor access to green and blue spaces
- Long-term uncertainty over maintenance of, and funding for, green and blue infrastructure
- Poor integration of green and blue infrastructure into new housing and other developments
- Significant issues related to physical and mental health
- Uncertainty over agricultural and environmental policy and support after Brexit and the effect this will have on businesses across the City Region
- Uncertainty around support for peatland restoration after 2020 once EU funding is withdrawn
- Conventional economic appraisals to make the case for investment in new developments do not take into account green and blue infrastructure
- Size of the green and blue infrastructure sector in terms of economic output and people employed is unknown

3. Where we want to be: our vision

Everybody in the City Region is within easy reach of an outstanding and well used network of green and blue infrastructure that reduces flood risks and supports health, the economy, the environment and a superb quality of life.

4. How we will get there: our priorities

To achieve our ambitions we will focus on seven priority action areas:



1. **Effective water management and flood risk reduction** – developing natural flood management programmes and drainage solutions



2. **Build green and blue infrastructure into physical development and housing** – creating vibrant, healthy and inspiring places where people want to live, work and invest



3. **Enhance green and blue corridors and networks** – integrating green and blue infrastructure within the transport routes that link our towns, cities and rural areas



4. **Improve community access to and enjoyment of green and blue infrastructure** – building healthier, more environmentally sustainable communities



5. **Plant and manage more trees and woodlands** – improving air quality, reducing carbon emissions and creating a greener, even more attractive region



6. **Restore the uplands and manage them sustainably** – improving natural flood management, carbon storage and providing an agricultural system that works for the region



7. **Business growth, jobs, skills and education** – demonstrating the economic benefits of investing in green and blue infrastructure and developing skills and job opportunities in green occupations such as land management, agriculture, forestry, parks and gardens

5. Key projects and actions

These are the key projects and actions that will enable us to meet our priorities:

<p>Leeds City Region natural flood management programme</p> 	<p>Inclusive growth integration</p> 	<p>Network of off-road, safe cycling and walking routes</p> 
<p>Identify and deliver a pipeline of natural flood management projects to reduce the risk and impact of flooding in the region</p>	<p>Embed inclusive growth principles – including green and blue infrastructure and health and wellbeing – into the appraisal of capital development projects</p>	<p>Increase the number of off-road and / or largely safe cycling and walking routes in the City Region</p>
<p>Leeds City Region green and blue infrastructure map</p> 	<p>Green and blue infrastructure funding</p> 	<p>White Rose Forest plan</p> 
<p>Understand the full picture of green and blue infrastructure provision across the region by developing a City Region-wide green and blue infrastructure map</p>	<p>Identify funding for the development and maintenance of green and blue infrastructure (this is a major barrier currently)</p>	<p>Set out how the White Rose Forest in Yorkshire will achieve its share of commitments to creating a Northern Forest</p>
<p>Peatland restoration programme</p> 	<p>Post-Brexit agricultural and environmental policy</p> 	<p>Green and blue infrastructure jobs, skills and GVA assessment</p> 
<p>Map, plan and prioritise peatland restoration projects across the City Region and identify funding beyond 2020</p>	<p>Agree policies and other mechanisms to promote environmental and agricultural benefits in Leeds City Region after Brexit, including through devolution</p>	<p>Better understand the evidence relating to jobs, skills and economic output within the green and blue infrastructure sector</p>
<p>Green and blue infrastructure skills programme</p> 	<p>Consistency of green and blue infrastructure planning policy</p> 	<p>Green and blue infrastructure resource targeting</p> 
<p>Create opportunities for people to develop skills relevant to green and blue infrastructure-related jobs</p>	<p>Explore how such policies could be more consistent across the City Region</p>	<p>Develop mechanisms to focus green and blue infrastructure investment in the areas of greatest need</p>

6. How the strategy will make a difference

Benefits of delivering this strategy for people and businesses in the region will include:



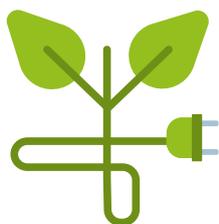
- Increased economic growth and productivity
- Reduced risk and economic impact of flooding across the City Region
- Greener, more attractive places that attract investment and talent
- A healthier, more productive workforce
- Increased property values

Inclusive growth that benefits everyone



- Improved health and wellbeing among residents
- Greener, more attractive places to live in
- Increased physical activity leading to lower obesity levels and fewer serious diseases
- More opportunities to bring communities together

Reduced carbon emissions



- Reduced carbon emissions and improved carbon storage potential
- Improved air and water quality

Find out more

Read our full Energy Strategy and delivery plan here

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