



Culture Nature and Urban Spaces: Sharing Best Practice Grounded in Nature-Based Solutions

UK Urban Ecology Forum UKUEF

Collated by Judy Ling Wong CBE April 2020





Sharing Best Practice

Resize your window to a single page and click on the pages to the left


We have put this e-book together to share a range of Best Practice examples demonstrating an urban ecology approach to nature-based solutions. These were presented at the World Urban Forum WUF10 at Abu Dhabi 2020. Key elements of each example are highlighted, with a weblink for further information. The examples have been proposed by members of the UK Urban Ecology Forum UKUEF.

UKUEF is a member of the UN Habitat Global Stakeholders Forum





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A photograph of a forest path with sunlight filtering through the trees.

UK Urban Ecology Forum

People and Nature Thriving Together

The distinctive contribution of an Urban Ecology approach is **integrated thinking, bringing together social, cultural, environmental and economic dimensions.**

We are a diverse collective of ecologists, artists, managers, planners and researchers. We are a network of networks, bringing together the **full range of stakeholders**, working within an **ecological framework** that creates places **where people and nature can thrive together.**





UK Urban Ecology Forum
People and Nature Thriving Together

An Invitation to Partner with Us

Work with us to promote the understanding and **effective practice of Urban Ecology**
an integrated ecological approach that brings together and puts
equal value on social, cultural, environmental, and economic dimensions

As a member of the **UK Habitat Global Stakeholders Forum**, we will:

- **Promote the Urban Ecology approach, working with the UN on their Best Practice platform**
- **Work in partnership** to stimulate and support the setting up of **national, city-based or local urban ecology forums** in the UK and across the world



World Urban Forum 10 Objectives

Culture as 4th pillar of sustainable development

- **Raising awareness of sustainable urbanisation** among stakeholders and constituencies, including the general public
- Improving collective knowledge on sustainable urban development through open and inclusive debate, **exchange of best practices** and policies and sharing of lessons learnt
- Promote collaboration and **cooperation between different stakeholders** and constituencies engaged in the advancement and implementation of sustainable urbanisation





UK Urban Ecology Forum – Member UN Habitat Global Stakeholders Forum

The New Urban Agenda embodies three guiding principles:

Guiding Principles	Actions
Leave no one behind, ensure urban equity and eradicate poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing equitable access for all, to physical and social infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adequate housing and shelter at the center of the agenda - Public spaces as an enabler of socio-economic function of the city ▪ Recognizing and leveraging culture, diversity and safety in cities ▪ Enabling and strengthening participation and enhancing liveability and quality of life.
Achieve sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhancing agglomeration benefits of urbanization and avoiding land speculation, ▪ Fair and equitable employment creation, productivity, competitiveness, diversification and ▪ Innovation through a sustainable economic development
Foster ecological and resilient cities and human settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Driving sustainable patterns of consumption and production, ▪ Protecting and valuing ecosystems and biodiversity, and ▪ Adapting to and mitigating the impact of climate change while increasing urban systems resilience to physical, economic, and social shocks and stresses



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Best Practice: Social Housing Environment and Local Green Spaces

We need to focus on physical and social infrastructure, targeting those who are left behind, in order to address the impact of climate and biodiversity crises on the most vulnerable. A catchment based ecological approach works with nature to protect people and wildlife.

Examples of nature-based solutions:

Using green space configuration to address flooding and other climate change impacts and using activities in green space to enable and strengthen participation, and organisation:

- Directly transform the housing environment or local green space
- A sense of personal power and the motivation to act.
- A sense of respect, ownership and belonging
- Expression of cultural pride
- Capacity building for employment and business

Working with local residents to:

- Enable them to take control of their lives and their surroundings
- Contribute to the alleviation of the impact of the climate crisis
- Input into policy - today's newcomers are tomorrow's effective representatives



Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) Flood Management Greener Grangetown. Cardiff

<https://www.arup.com/projects/greener-grangetown>

Before: Deprived area, bleak streets and outdoor spaces, ethnically diverse, flood prone, sewage and rainwater pumped for miles.

- Natural drainage system for rainwater
- Plans based on science
- Community engagement.
- Plans changed to meet community requests.

Now: Attractive landscape filters water, clean water drains into river, saves money on pumping sewage, reduces floods, new community facilities, award-winning, increased community pride.



Parc Peulwys

[https://chcymru.org.uk/uploads/events_attachments/
PARC_PEULWYS - Management Plan 2015.pdf](https://chcymru.org.uk/uploads/events_attachments/PARC_PEULWYS_-_Management_Plan_2015.pdf)

Before: Poor housing, drugs and crime, no control of green space around social housing

- All residents (especially children) engaged to discover likes and dislikes.
- Expert designer developed plan WITH the residents.
- Residents trained in horticulture and did lots of the work. Graffiti project.

Now: Desirable, low-crime estate. Insulation. Allotments. Nature trails. Landscaping. New business . Biodiversity enhanced. New paths. Traffic management. Green Flag Award.



Before: Neglected historical small park surrounded by poor urban environment on large estates, isolation, food poverty

- Greenhouse supplies 50,000 plug plants to community members to grow food on their allotments, gardens or balconies.
- Local home cooks paid to teach how to cook a meal they know and love using veg grown on site
- 75 nationalities cooking together
- The park is a hub for Vassall and Coldharbour Forum

Food Heroes Project in Local Heritage Park

Myatt's Fields Park

<https://www.myattsfildspark.info/food-project.html>

Now: Created community cohesion, celebrated cultures, built a network of community activists



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Best Practice: Green Infrastructure

The provision of city-wide nature space ameliorates the impact of climate change and biodiversity extinction, improving quality of life. They connect people with nature and gives them the basis and motivation to act for people and for nature. Green spaces are places where people come together, learn, organise, help each other and help nature, in and beyond the green space

Spotting and negotiating nature-based opportunities with social cultural and economic dimensions

The examples demonstrate socio-economic opportunities in urban settings for restoration of extensive natural, cultural or industrial landscapes formerly unavailable to the population.

People Power - Use it, care for it or lose it

People power plays a crucial role in a time of economic pressure, and pressure for land for development:

- Knowledgeable and skilled people engage with policy, in particular planning law, to shape their future
- A strong volunteer base from all social classes, with needs and wishes
- A strong voluntary sector with environmental expertise, and support for actions to halt biodiversity loss
- Recognition of social and cultural history and identity in the landscape.
- Working within an Urban Ecology approach integrating social, cultural, environmental, and economic dimensions.



WALTHAMSTOW
WETLANDS

Europe's largest nature reserve is now open



Restored Walthamstow Wetlands Europe's largest nature reserve

[walthamstowwetlands.com/
projects/ruk/walthamstow-wetlands](http://walthamstowwetlands.com/projects/ruk/walthamstow-wetlands)

Before: 10 reservoirs closed to the public (opened 2017)

- Restored historically deprived and underdeveloped landscape of water, woods and marshland, with industrial elements. 520 acres.
- Opening 10 operational reservoirs for public benefit. Water for 3.5million.
- Conserving heritage and identity of the site, with restoration and conversion of Grade II Listed Engine House and disused mill into a café, new visitor centre, viewing platform
- Internationally and nationally important for birds. Cycle tracks. Reed beds restoration.
- Thames Water, Waltham Forest Council and London Wildlife Trust. Heritage Lottery Fund
- Habitat and access enhancements

Now: Access to natural and industrial architectural heritage. Largest urban wetland nature reserve in Europe with 425,000 visitors in first year of operation (2017-18)



Mersey Basin Conservation Volunteers

Need: 30% - 50% cutbacks in local governmental support threaten the well-being of much needed urban green space affecting people and nature

- Strong voluntary sector
- Volunteer groups formed who provide practical conservation tasks and maintenance
- Local corporate groups support infrastructure improvements
- RSPB and other ecological organizations provide educational input
- Close relationship between the Countryside Warden Service and the local community

Now: Improved ecological well-being and increased usage by all age groups.



The Carbon Landscape Greater Manchester

<https://carbonlandscape.org.uk>

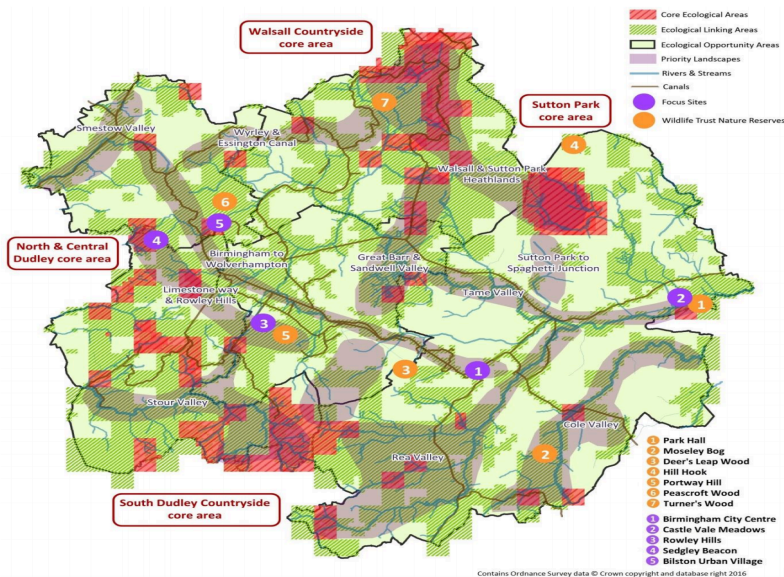
<https://www.thenatureofcities.com/2019/01/03/nature-rebounding-peri-urban-landscapes-industrial-revolution-left-behind-north-west-englands-carbon-landscape/>

Before: This landscape fuelled the industrial revolution and was scarred by extraction

- Manchester area as part of 13 local authorities inking up and restoring and connecting wild sites across 10,000 hectares: increasing climate resilience
- Improved access and interpretation: connecting people to their landscape, heritage and history
- Innovative community engagement: citizen science, health walks, skills training, work with school children

Now: Offers green lungs to a million people. Recognition of socio-cultural history

Birmingham and the Black Country NIA ecological strategy map



Need: landscape scale change to halt biodiversity loss at a time of climate crisis

- UK government policy delivered by regional Wildlife Trust
- **250 sites** improved for nature across conurbation
- **150 community groups** involved and 45,000 volunteer hours given

Birmingham & Black Country Nature Improvement Area

<https://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/NIA%20Ecological%20Strategy%202017-22%20Summary.pdf>

Now: Sites managed locally by site owners, local community groups and wildlife advisers



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Best Practice: The Role of Big Ideas and Ways of Thinking

Big ideas inspire people to re-imagine their experience and can motivate them to act for people and for nature.

Big ideas and ways of thinking motivating different actions

- Bring a phenomenal number of people and organisations together within a shared vision
- Connect formerly disparate actions around similar aims
- The effect is more than the sum of its parts
- Generate dialogue and debate
- Promote a shift of perspective that changes how one thinks, feels and therefore acts
- Stimulate, motivate, support and organise at all levels
- Bring in newcomers to communal actions
- Spawn innovation at scale
- Promote Best Practice and encourage replication at scale
- Attract political and business engagement through presence and scale



London National Park City

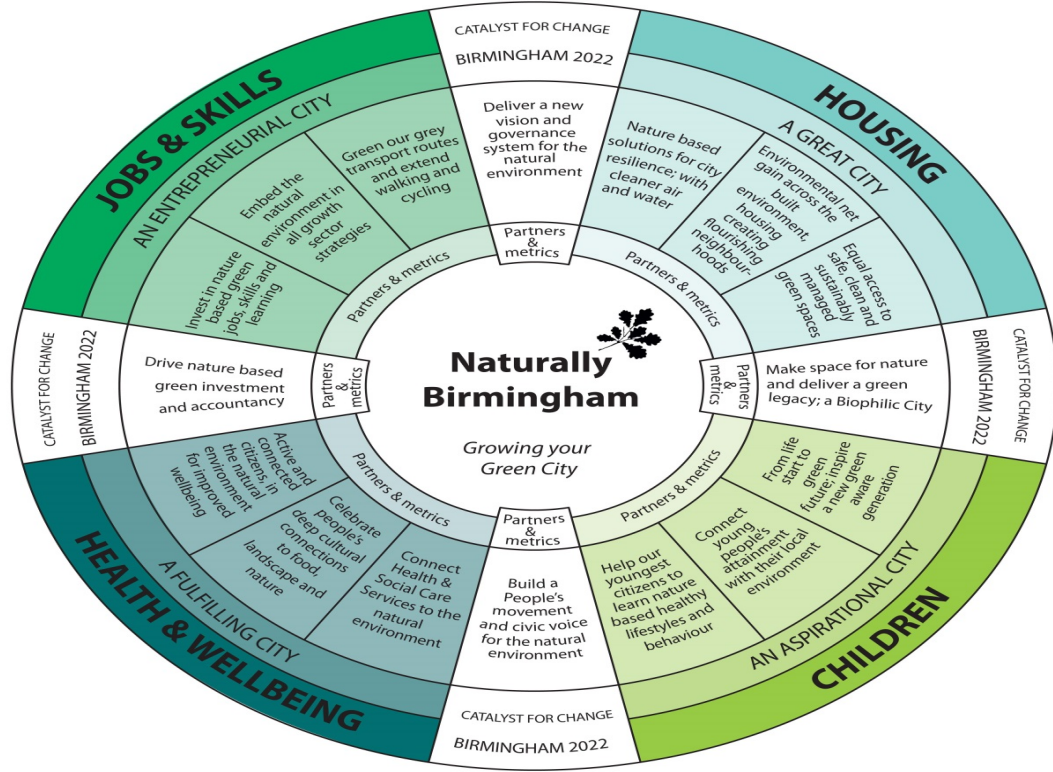
Greener Healthier Wilder

<http://www.nationalparkcity.london/>

Big Idea: Campaigning since 2013 to make London World's first National Park City – Universal Charter as model in an urbanising world – 25 NPCs by 2025

- Pay equal attention to outstanding nature and the potential for wild nature in the built environment
- Enable access by everyone to enjoyment of nature
- Empowered contribution to improvement of local environment
- Campaigned over 6 years resulting in support by Mayor and over 50% of Local Wards, environmental, social, educational, business, leisure and cultural sectors

Now: London declared the World's first National Park City in July 2019. Actions written into London Plan. £12million Mayor's fund for community to green London. Actions to inspire and involve everyone to make London greener, healthier, wilder. Cities across the world are inspired to follow.



Big Idea: Biophilic City

Integrating Nature into Urban Design and Planning

- Birmingham is the UK's first Biophilic City
- This network seeks to ensure each citizen can access 'a daily dose of nature'
- The city has sought a citizens vision for its urban nature
- To deliver this vision means changing the Governance model
- Working through a whole systems and natural capital approach called 'Naturally Birmingham'

NATURALLY BIRMINGHAM

<https://www.biophiliccities.org/>

Now: Working to give all citizens and the city sustainable and accessible urban nature, for good.



Idea: Creative Conservation

Philosophy of planting wild flowers on a grand scale

- Creating new parables of the sower and planter. Art, music, poems..
- Environmental Justice: leave no one behind.
- Stops the waste of derelict land and vacant lots with creative conservation.
- Brings colour, diversity and smiles, turning heads and winning hearts.
- Uses low cost urban substrates for seed sowing & generates income from topsoil sales.
- Health improvements reported in areas of high unemployment.
- Tale of Two Cities - Liverpool twinned with

Now: Transforms plots of all sizes with bold solutions which benefit people and nature.

National Wildflower Centre Eden Project

https://www.edenproject.com/eden-story/our-ethos/national-wildflower-centre?gclid=EAlalQobChMI9cr49_uo6AIVAbTtCh3XrQtbEAAAYASAAEgLBp_D_BwE



Walk On The Wild Side 2003-18

Idea: Focused whole systems Urban Ecology approach

- Climate change adaptation and species migration in urban areas
- Question how we live and discover eco-urban biodiversity aesthetic
- Influence decision makers on spatial planning for life support systems
- Shared experience of urban wildlife across communities, sectors and disciplines
- Continuing process of bringing communities, authorities, environmentalists and artists together

Now: Collaborations with civic authorities, local communities and universities in 8 cities, internationally



Salford,
UK



Asmara,
Eritrea

Domestic Urban Gardens

Idea: Addressing social, cultural, environment and economic needs through attention to the potential of gardens

- Domestic gardens occupy large areas of many urban areas, e.g. London has 3.8million gardens
- Domestic gardens are the place where most people have their daily contact with nature
- Gardens have well-being, biodiversity, and other benefits
- Gardens can be used for food growing and aesthetic values
- Poor diversity in gardens is linked to measures of deprivation

Now: Integration of gardens into biodiversity and quality of life initiatives



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Best Practice: Policy and Influencing Policy

Policy is about people. We live in an age of sound science, where policy is evidence-based. Ideally policy arises out of a love for people, and remain anchored in the needs and the wishes of people. Ordinary people are the experts of their own lives. Their voices are the ultimate guide to policy. Guidance, purposeful engagement and toolkits enable capacity building for effective participation.

Guidance, Citizens' Assemblies and Toolkits – for nature and for people

Access to the enjoyment of nature lays down the emotional basis for the protection of nature and people. Frameworks for effective engagement and input into policy come together to build the foundation stone of environmental activism at all levels:

- The quality of engagement requires nurturing and capacity building, resulting in meaningful consultation and socially and culturally relevant planning infrastructure and policy
- Toolkits that are tried and tested are very helpful
- Bringing people together, for example through citizens' assemblies engage and empower people
- Engagement is a long term endeavour, where, beyond skills, the building of group identity and trust completes the framework for effective participation

Natural England* is working with the **UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs** (Defra) and other stakeholders to deliver a commitment in the UK's 25 Year Environment Plan to develop a:



Framework of Green Infrastructure Standards

to green our towns and cities and deliver multiple benefits for people, places and nature including:

- health and wellbeing
 - thriving nature and biodiversity gains
 - resilience to climate change and meeting zero carbon targets
 - adding value and supporting prosperous communities
- The GI Standards will help ensure that new developments include accessible green infrastructure, and that areas with little or no greenspace can be improved for the community.



*Natural England is a statutory adviser on the natural environment for England

A Framework of Green Infrastructure Standards

The UK Government's 25 Year Environment Plan ([Link](#))

Aims to achieve:

- Clean air
- Clean and plentiful water
- Thriving plants and wildlife
- A reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as flooding and drought
- Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently
- Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

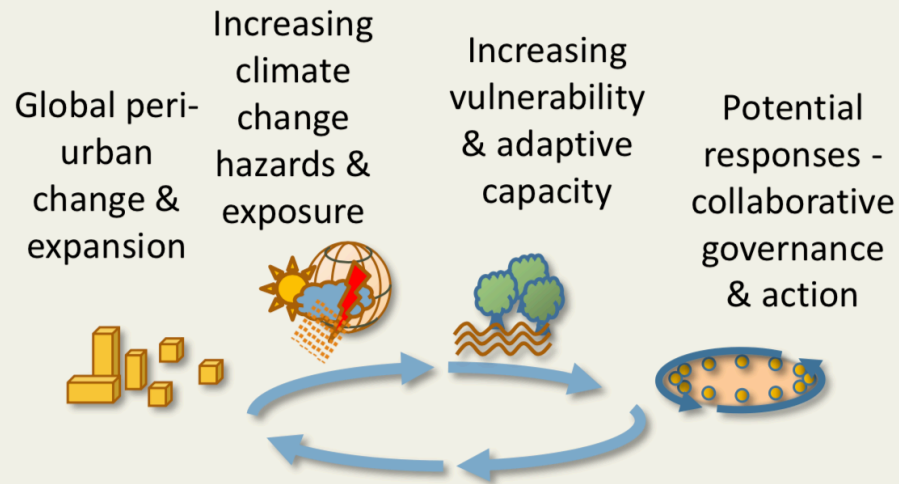


And aims to manage pressures on the environment by:

- Mitigating and adapting to climate change
- Minimising waste
- Managing exposure to chemicals
- Enhancing biosecurity



THE PERI-URBAN CLIMATE CHALLENGE



With a global trajectory for 2 degrees of climate change, & with current rates of peri-urbanization, by 2050:

- *1.2 billion livelihoods, and \$14tn of urban assets & infrastructures could be at risk*

So the potential rewards of coordination & integration are huge.

(sources: NCE 2018; MGI 2019; Revi et al 2014)

Building Strategic policy intelligence

- Pilot paving the way for more detailed follow up
- First ever comprehensive assessment of global peri-urbanisation : Urban-rural planning, finance & real estate, Social & community enterprise, resource management % infrastructure
- Policy Lab: 21 partners with UN % ICLEI
- In-depth case studies India & UK
- Spatial Analysis tool for global data
- Pathways tool for creative dialogue

The Peri-Cene Project

www.peri-cene.net



Ketso: a hands-on approach to community & stakeholder engagement

<https://www.seed.manchester.ac.uk/planning/research/impact/ketso/>

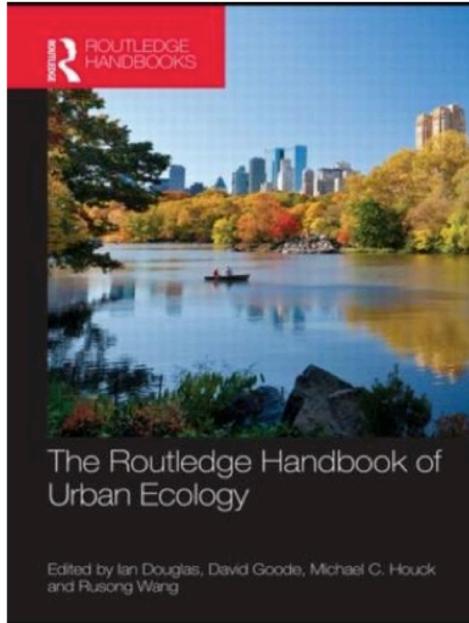
Ketso Toolkit

- Hands-on toolkit ensures that everyone's voice is heard
- We need to engage with local communities and across sectors to achieve synergistic benefits (health & wellbeing, climate change resilience) from green spaces
- Used from local to national level in range of contexts: neighbourhood planning, green space management, climate change adaptation strategies
- Used in 68 countries and proven to be more effective than meetings based on discussion alone



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**SECOND
EDITION
DUE OUT
Mid-2020**

A publication of the UK URBAN ECOLOGY FORUM

Routledge Handbook of Urban Ecology

EXCERPT FROM THE PROLOGUE TO THE SECOND EDITION

At the end of the second decade of the 21st century, much, much more is being done to improve the ecology, living conditions and attractiveness of cities. However, while demonstrable progress is being made, the growth of cities and the enormous increase in the world's urban population means that every day there is yet more to be done. This urgency is expressed in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, not only by Goal 11's target to *"By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities"*, but by broader goals to end poverty; end hunger; improve health; ensure inclusive and equitable quality education; achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; and Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.



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