

Green Infrastructure and Growth: Forestry Exemplar Study

Communities and Local Government, Forestry Commission, National Forest Company, East Staffordshire Borough Council.



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Introduction

The research

The Forestry Exemplar Study was a joint initiative of Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Forestry Commission (FC), in response to the national growth agenda set out in the Sustainable Communities Plan¹. It focused upon three Growth Point locations where major new development is proposed. In The National Forest this included the Burton upon Trent and East Staffordshire (BES) Growth Point, which will result in around 12,000 new houses being built by 2026. This provides the focus for this review. All three locations were chosen to demonstrate how trees and woodlands can play a central role in planning for green infrastructure, associated with major development growth.

Why do it?

Trees and woodland are key elements of green infrastructure and will make a significant contribution towards delivering sustainable communities. This study helps to raise their profile within the growth agenda. It also demonstrates their role in contributing towards 'place shaping' and the quality of the public realm; connectivity of green spaces and habitats between urban and rural areas; climate change adaptation; landscape enhancement, particularly of degraded land; and environmental protection (eg: buffering of sensitive wildlife habitats). The study also assessed approaches and mechanisms for delivering tree and woodland related green infrastructure, providing experience that can be shared across all of the national Growth Area and Growth Point locations.

Aims & objectives

Aims and objectives at each location were:

- To understand current delivery arrangements relating to trees and woodlands.
- To establish how growth plans and green infrastructure strategies are being tied into the planning process.
- To understand current partnership working arrangements to deliver future development growth.
- To identify how to maximise opportunities to integrate trees and woodlands with development growth.

The Project

Description

The study sets out the national policy links between the growth agenda, green infrastructure and the role of trees and woodlands. It then assesses the local policy context for the BES Growth Point; the scale and location of development proposed; and the role of existing and planned green infrastructure assets (highlighting the strategic importance of The National Forest). The study concludes by assessing partnership working strengths and recommending future delivery requirements to integrate trees and woodlands into future growth proposals.

Approach

The study was undertaken by a Communities and Local Government officer on secondment to the Forestry Commission. It included desk-based research, site assessments, stakeholder interviews and mapping of green infrastructure assets and potential. The project was steered by CLG and FC with support from the National Forest Company and East Staffordshire Borough Council.

Timescales

January 2007 to March 2008.

Budget

In-kind staff time, valued at around £10,000.

Results

Outcomes

The main findings of the study included:

- The National Forest is recognised as the main impetus for delivering trees and woodlands related to the BES Growth Point.
- Robust delivery arrangements already exist in relation to trees and woodlands, but there are questions around partners' ability to respond to the scale of growth planned.
- The level of growth in Burton upon Trent town centre presents a key opportunity to develop high quality green space with good connections to the countryside and particularly The National Forest.
- There is a need to reinforce the relationship between Burton upon Trent and the wider countryside. It is essential that growth on the edge of the town is considered as part of green infrastructure proposals.
- The Local Development Framework will provide a clear direction for growth; a key challenge is to ensure that it is informed by a Green Infrastructure Strategy, the National Forest Strategy and the National Forest Urban Programme.
- A Green Infrastructure Strategy should provide high level, strategic aims for East Staffordshire Borough Council (ESBC) and partner organisations, as a basis for achieving delivery on the ground. (Note: Strategy produced in 2008²).
- The strongest current partnership in relation to green infrastructure is with the National Forest Company. This is one of BES Growth Point's greatest strengths for the future delivery of green infrastructure.
- The National Forest Company (NFC) plays an important facilitation role in developing green infrastructure links across the west and east midlands, encouraging co-operation with neighbouring authorities and the 6Cs Growth Point.
- Delivery of green infrastructure (GI) for the BES Growth Point requires a partnership approach between ESBC, NFC, FC, Natural England, developers and other local organisations. (Note: a Green Infrastructure Steering Group was set up in 2008).



Applications

- The study³ has helped to place trees and woodlands at the heart of green infrastructure policy for the growth agenda.
- The lessons learnt from the study can be applied to other Growth Areas and Growth Points across the UK.
- Locally, the study has proved influential in helping to develop the GI agenda for the BES Growth Point, including its inclusion in local planning policy and in developing programmes for new GI projects.

Further information

Dissemination

- Report disseminated to Government Offices (West Midlands, East of England, South East), Natural England and local partnerships.
- CLG website.
- NFC research review seminar 2010.

Links to published work

¹ *Sustainable Communities Plan* (2003). Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

² *Green Infrastructure Strategy for East Staffordshire* (2008). Faber Maunsell and Lockhart Garrett.

³ *Phase I Status Report* (2007). Communities and Local Government and Forestry Commission.
www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-74XCSY

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