



EDINBURGH'S THRIVING GREENSPACES 2050

A Vision and Strategy for the
City of Edinburgh Council's
Greenspaces - March 2023

◆ EDINBURGH ◆
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

Draft For Consultation - Version 2



Wildflowers meadows at Cramond

This strategy is concerned with the care, management and improvement of the City of Edinburgh Council's public greenspaces. It should be seen in the context of the Council's City Plan and the Council's Open Space Strategy; these two documents guide the proposals and policies to shape development and plans for the future open space needs in the city and inform planning decisions in the city.

In this document, we refer to space as the outdoor environment in an urban context which is made up of grey, green and blue infrastructure.

GREY infrastructure covers a range of structures such as roads, pathways, buildings, and utilities above and below ground.

GREEN infrastructure refers to vegetated land such as parks, gardens, playing fields, allotments and woodlands.

BLUE infrastructure refers to water bodies such as rivers, lochs, and shorelines.

We use the term GREENSPACE to cover both green and blue infrastructure.

This strategy document has been produced by the Thriving Green Spaces Project team. The Thriving Green Spaces Project has been made possible through the 'Future Parks Accelerator' programme, which is funded and supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the National Trust and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

The project has been delivered through a partnership of the City of Edinburgh Council, the Scottish Wildlife Trust, greenspace scotland, the Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust, the University of Edinburgh and the Edinburgh Green Space Forum, the umbrella organisation for Friends of Edinburgh greenspace groups.

It sets a 2050 Vision for Edinburgh's greenspaces which reflects the ambitions of the Council, project partners and the citizens of Edinburgh which can only be delivered by all parties working together. This document establishes the Council's commitment to what it will do to realise that Vision.





A word from Councillor Val Walker

Culture and Communities Committee Convener



Edinburgh is a wonderful Capital City with unique natural heritage. It is a place where our residents and visitors enjoy and benefit from amazing green and blue spaces. But these spaces are under pressure like never before, faced with the twin challenges of the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis. At the same time the impact of the COVID pandemic has highlighted the importance of having

greenspaces in our neighbourhoods, and the contribution they make to our happiness, health and wellbeing.

Although this Council continues to work successfully with partners to protect and develop our greenspaces, there is continuing pressure on the resources that we allocate to them. That is why we need a long-term strategic plan to look across our whole natural estate, with a view to raising additional funds and resources, improving facilities and habitats, and helping these places fulfil their potential in contributing to our lives and to the natural environment in our city.

Responding to these challenges will require a strategic partnership approach across our city, our localities, and our neighbourhoods, where decisions about how improvements are made can be taken together with our communities and partners.

This 30-year Vision, and the wide range of outcomes and actions underpinning it, will help deliver the required resources and approach necessary to look after and develop these greenspaces so that people can continue to enjoy them, and communities feel involved in how they are looked after.

I am grateful to Councillor Amy McNeese-Mechan in particular for her work in the role of Thriving Greenspaces Champion prior to myself and to all my fellow councillors on the Culture and Communities Committee for their support for the Thriving Green Spaces Project. I would also like to thank the Council's Parks & Greenspace officers, the Future Parks Accelerator Programme, and our partners for their diligent work over the last three challenging years. I look forward to seeing our greenspaces thrive and our communities strengthen with them.

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POSTCARDS FROM 2050

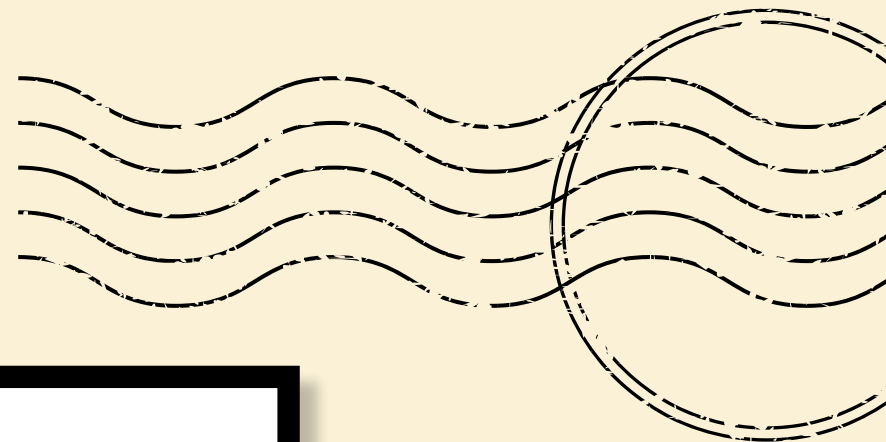
What will our greenspaces look like in 2050?

We all have our own aspirations and we wanted to find out what your visions were for Edinburgh's parks and greenspaces in 2050.

We asked you to...

“Close your eyes and imagine it is 2050. You are on holiday in Edinburgh and are visiting all the parks and greenspaces you remember from 2021. You can't believe what you are seeing, they are everything you always imagined they would be and better. Imagine what they now look like, what facilities they have, what plants and wildlife there is, what people are using them for and what they are enjoying doing there. You dig a little deeper to find out how they are funded, who is looking after them and you are surprised at what you find out. “

Your responses have guided us in the development of the 2050 vision for Edinburgh's greenspaces and we thank you for sharing your postcards with us.



In a nutshell

The executive summary

This Strategy sets out a 2050 Vision for Edinburgh's greenspaces. It reflects the ambitions of the Council, project partners and the citizens of Edinburgh and establishes the Council's commitment to what it will do to realise the Vision. It is an ambitious 30-year Strategy that proposes new ways of working to ensure the on-going enhancement, protection, and care of our greenspaces. Our aim is to establish a sustainable funding model that enables us to resource an outstanding greenspace service which can deliver on many of the capital's aspirations for placemaking, health, sustainability, and biodiversity.

The Strategy is the output of the Thriving Green Spaces project, and was made possible by the 'Future Parks Accelerator' programme which was funded and supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the National Trust and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. This has given

us the capacity to work with partners and a wide range of stakeholders to explore new ways of working together that will allow our greenspaces to grow, thrive and adapt over the next three decades. The project also provided an opportunity to develop solutions unique to Edinburgh and share our learning with a national audience.

Taking a whole-estate, strategic approach was always our ambition. The importance of this became even more evident as we worked on the project. The need for a holistic, informed and evidence-based approach is key to the transformative change we wish to see, enabling us to manage and develop our greenspaces in the most effective and impactful way. We sometimes talk about the competing demands on our greenspaces, and it is true to say that there are significant pressures facing them. However, we wish to put the focus on our greenspaces as major assets, providing multiple benefits for society

and nature, and solutions to many of the challenges facing towns and cities today.

Our greenspaces are multi-functional – havens for wildlife, playgrounds for our children and a resource for all of us to enjoy the many benefits that they provide. If managed and developed in the right way, the services that our greenspaces provide should be complementary. Many of the new approaches and tools that we have developed and tested during the Thriving Green Spaces project will enable us to manage and develop our greenspaces in such a way.



In a nutshell

The executive summary

Our Strategy has been strongly influenced by local, national and international goals. It has been designed to link coherently with other Council policies and strategies and to deliver against the Council Business Plan priorities. As such, it will help Edinburgh become a **fair, welcoming, pioneering, and thriving city**, as expressed by the **2050 Edinburgh City Vision**.

The ambitions we have for our greenspaces cannot be met by the Council on its own. We are committed to working with citizens, volunteers and our public, private, and third sector organisation partners across the city to deliver the outcomes and goals we all share, and which can only be achieved when we work together. While this Strategy

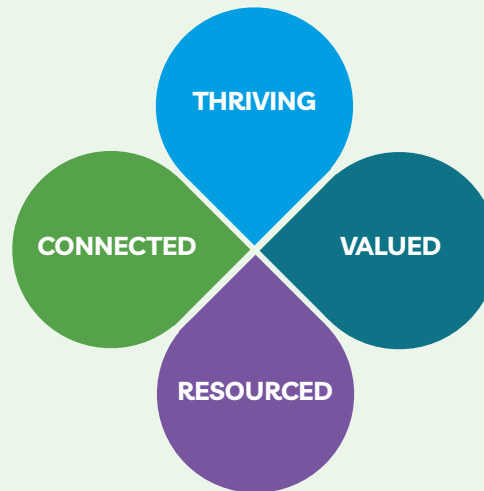
primarily concerns Council assets and services, we are conscious of the need for a citywide approach. We believe that this Strategy will equip our service with the skills and resources to play a leading role in a citywide approach that will enable our green city to really thrive.

In the following pages we summarise the relevant context and challenges. We set out the vision and four themes, with associated ambitions and actions. A separate suite of supporting documents and plans will help to deliver the vision. Critically, this includes a financial plan and a detailed delivery action plan which will set the foundation for continued and accelerated growth as we head towards 2050.

Edinburgh's Thriving Greenspaces 2050 Vision and Themes

Greenspaces that are at the heart of our communities and help make Edinburgh an outstanding city for wellbeing, quality of life and heritage.

Greenspaces that are connected, thriving, valued and resourced.



Strategic context



Close Relationships and Key Influencers

- City Plan (Local Development Plan)
- Open Space 2021 - Edinburgh's Open Space Strategy
- 2030 Climate Strategy
- Edinburgh Adapts climate change action plan
- Vision for Water Management in the City of Edinburgh
- Green Blue Network
- Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan
- Physical Activity & Sports Strategy
- Growing Locally - Edinburgh's Food Growing Strategy
- Cultivating Communities – A growing success: Allotment Strategy
- Edinburgh Living Landscapes Programme
- Edinburgh Million Tree City Project
- Our Future Council, Our Future City: Council Business Plan
- City Mobility Plan
- 20-Minute Neighbourhood Strategy: Living Well Locally
- Locality Improvement Plan
- Edinburgh Economy Strategy - Stronger, Greener, Fairer
- Edinburgh Partnership Community Plan
- Edinburgh Participatory Budgeting Framework
- The City of Edinburgh Council End Poverty Plan
- Equality and Diversity Framework (CEC)
- Edinburgh Tourism Strategy
- Citywide Culture Plan
- Edinburgh World Heritage Management Plan
- THRIVE Edinburgh: A mental health and wellbeing road map for all

POSTCARDS FROM 2050

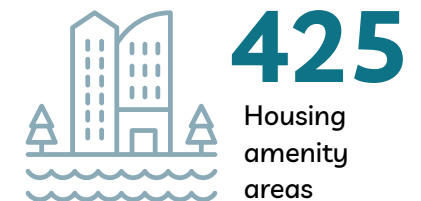
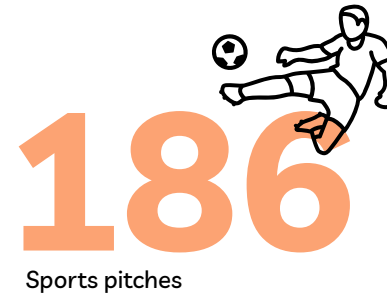
"I couldn't believe how many wild flowers and birds song that could be seen and heard in the park. It was busy with people but there seemed to be quiet places where you could just sit and enjoy nature. I felt restored and ready to take on the historical aspects of the City. Having these spaces so close to the City centre and well connected by cycle routes was a real bonus."

Summer blooms at the Ross Fountain, West Princes Street Gardens



Our amazing greenspaces

The City of Edinburgh Council has a long and proud history of creating and caring for the city's greenspaces. Today, we manage over 11,600 hectares of parks, nature reserves, greenspaces, rivers, lochs, waterways and shorelines for a resident population of 513,200 people, 92,000 daily commuters and 4.26 million annual tourists.



Our amazing greenspaces



Wildlife haven at Figgate Park

An ecological approach to landscape design and management has been introduced across the greenspace estate that has involved planting thousands of trees, creating hundreds of wildflower meadows and rewilding many of our natural spaces. This has been greatly helped by many thousands of park users who have stepped in to raise funds, initiate conservation activities and look after many treasured features that the Council can no longer maintain itself. New income has also been raised from grants, rents, service charges, event fees and plant sales, enabling us to re-invest in those greenspaces that most need it.

Major achievements

148 hectares of the Council's greenspace estate are now managed for nature; 78 friends of park and cemetery groups currently support the Council's own staff on a weekly basis; and over £6m income is generated for the Parks & Greenspace budget to supplement direct Council allocation. These achievements have been recognised by others, helping the Council secure 35 Green Flag Awards in 2021 for our best quality parks; a Gold "Britain in Bloom" medal for Edinburgh, international recognition from an Entente Florale Gold Medal and a Eurocities award; and professional endorsement by being voted COSLA's Best UK Parks, Grounds, and Horticultural Service and Fields in Trusts' Best UK Landowner after protecting 57 green spaces in perpetuity by legal agreement.

Why change?

Edinburgh is very fortunate in its geographic setting, situated amongst seven hills and several river valleys between the Pentland Hills and the Firth of Forth. It is officially the greenest city in the UK with almost half of Edinburgh being classed as greenspace; as the largest landowner in the city, the Council cares for just under half of this greenspace.

This greenspace is central to the capital's environmental heritage, economic vitality, contemporary civic life, and social legacy. However, like many cities in the UK, Edinburgh faces challenges in looking after its greenspaces, places that are so important to the fabric of the urban environment and bring so many benefits to citizens and wildlife.



Water of Leith in the New Town

Why change?

Some facts

Edinburgh is a rapidly growing city, with our population expected to increase by 12% to over 580,000 people by 2043.

Our city's festivals attract audiences of more than 4.5 million people and generate £313 million to the local economy annually.

Edinburgh is an affluent and growing city but is also a city with wide levels of inequality and home to some of the most excluded communities in Scotland.

Achieving net zero emissions and adapting the city to the impacts of climate change represents the greatest challenge of a generation.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the vital importance of greenspaces for health and wellbeing and an essential quality-of-life element in sustainable cities.

These are real pressures and, together with the challenges of a declining workforce and increased workloads, our ability to care for our greenspaces and maintain them to high standards is under threat. The Council's desire to find better options to sustainably resource our greenspaces was a major driver for initiating the Thriving Green Spaces project.

The City of Edinburgh Council's Business Plan, issued in 2023, reflects these challenges. It has been developed to cover the period 2023 to 2027 and guides our budget and investment decisions.

The three priorities are:

- Create good places to live and work
- End poverty in Edinburgh
- Become a net zero city by 2030



Why change?

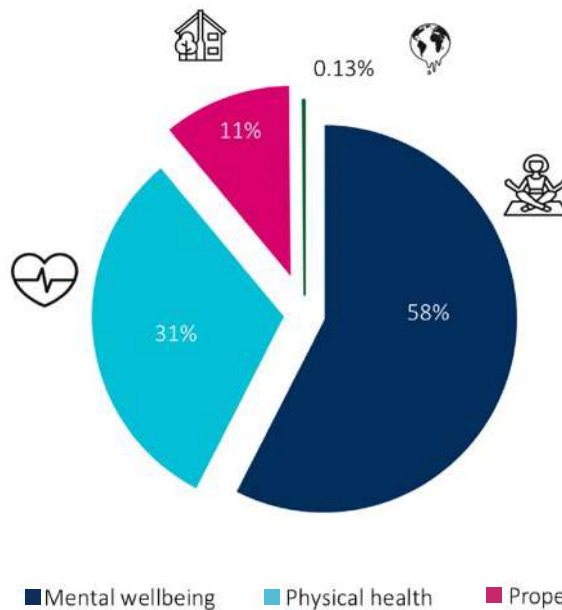
Edinburgh is not alone in facing the challenges of maintaining its greenspaces. The most recent State of UK Public Parks report (2021) concluded that parks are at a tipping point with the loss of funding in further decline from £500 million lost between 2010 and 2016 to a further £190 million in 2021. Funding for parks has declined by a total of £690 million over the past decade. The report goes on to note that reductions in budgets have not been made up for by grants, that in many cases can only be accessed by costly and inefficient bidding systems taking little account of local need. As a consequence, the report concludes, the financing of urban parks continues to be inadequate for local authorities, who manage around 85% of the UK’s urban parks.

During this same period of declining resources, evidence of their importance in terms of the benefits they provide has become overwhelming, including for physical and mental well-being, social interaction and economic growth, as well as creating employment, hosting economic activities and encouraging inward investment. Other studies have sought to quantify the benefits provided. For example, a Fields in Trust study from 2018 estimated that across the UK £34.2 billion worth of wellbeing benefits per year are delivered by frequent use of parks and greenspaces.

At the City of Edinburgh Council, we have been contributing to this evidence base in recent years. In 2015, using a social return on investment model, it was concluded that for every £1 of investment in parks and greenspaces,

approximately £12 of social, economic and environmental benefits are delivered. In 2020, a “Natural Capital Account” by Vivid Economics estimated that Edinburgh’s parks and greenspaces generate benefits of £174m per year.

Edinburgh green spaces provide services valued at £174M per year, 89% of which is attributable to improvements to mental wellbeing and physical health.



Ecosystem service	Estimated benefits
Mental wellbeing benefits	£100m total per year £14 per visit
Physical health benefits	£55m total per year £8 per visit
Amenity value	£19m total per year
Carbon sequestration	£0.2m total per year

Our vision

Greenspaces that are at the heart of our communities and help make Edinburgh an outstanding city for wellbeing, quality of life and heritage.

Greenspaces that are connected, thriving, valued and resourced.

Our vision has been broken down into four priority themes. These themes, covered in more detail on the following pages, will guide the management of the Council's greenspaces and will be used to set the priorities for action over the next 30 years.



Saughton Park in full early summer glory

Connected Greenspaces

Greening the Grey





Greening the Grey

Where is the artwork based?

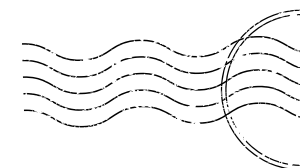
A typical Edinburgh street, full of life and providing connected habitat for many species.

What's happening?

A once grey 'artery' has transformed into a giant, connected green channel. Public and private spaces are bustling, clean, green social areas for humans and wildlife at all times of the day and night. People now have nature on their doorstep, and they can travel along green routes. Species once lost can thrive and feel at home – bats and birds and butterflies are all around and the bus stop is now an important 'buzz stop' for bees and other insects.

This illustration was created by Sarah Hannis and was inspired by the public 'Postcards from the future' vision statements. They are not proposals for a specific space but are just a way to capture a collection of aspirations in one illustration. In most cases, they have been inspired by ideas that have already been implemented in the city and elsewhere.

POSTCARDS FROM 2050



"Edinburgh's green and blue space has expanded since I was last here 20 years ago. There are many green and blue corridors running across the city. Fish can swim end to end from the sea to the top of the Water of Leith. Many rooftops are green, there is green down the side of new office buildings, and there are patches of wildflowers in wee corners between buildings. The gardens where I'm staying have a pond for frogs and a hedgehog corridor, and I'm told this is common. More and more of the tall buildings are swift-friendly. Every bridge is a garden bridge. Edinburgh is known throughout Europe as a wildlife haven, and that's one reason I came back. Surveys of birds, bats, badgers, hedgehogs and otters show thriving sustainable populations. It's amazing. I'm coming back here to live!"

Our ambition for **Connected Greenspaces**

Edinburgh's greenspaces thread their way through the city, creating a well-connected, healthy, and resilient ecological network, which supports people and wildlife.

→ Habitats and ecosystems within our greenspaces are protected, enhanced and restored for people and wildlife to flourish. They contribute to a connected ecological network of wildlife corridors and stepping stone habitats that join up the city and are a fundamental feature of our active travel routes and 20-minute neighbourhoods.

→ Our greenspaces have a high biodiversity value and provide nature-based solutions to achieve the city's sustainability 2030 ambitions and deliver on the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan.

→ Our greenspaces inspire communities to take positive action and contribute to tackling the biodiversity and climate crises.



Grey heron at Inverleith Park

Our ambition for **Connected Greenspaces**

Why it's important

Two of the most urgent global issues we are currently facing are biodiversity loss and climate change. Ecosystems are being degraded, habitat fragmented, and nature is being lost at an increasing rate. These crises are threatening both wildlife and human wellbeing in Edinburgh, the UK and around the world.

By connecting our greenspaces for people and wildlife and using nature-based solutions and green infrastructure to “green the grey”, we can not only reverse the biodiversity decline and mitigate climate change, but we can adapt our city to the changing climate whilst also helping to meet City’s goals of becoming a sustainable, net-zero carbon city by 2030.



Our ambition for Connected Greenspaces



How we will achieve this

🌿 Develop the Edinburgh Nature Network to provide a strategic, holistic approach for prioritising environmental interventions and nature-based solutions to enhance habitats and ecosystem services.

.....

🌿 Use the data provided by the Edinburgh Nature Network and other relevant sources, such as Edinburgh's Water Vision, to prioritise our resources and target areas in most need of enhancement to maximise benefits for both people and wildlife.

.....

🌿 Move management practices towards a networked whole-estate approach, making connections between existing greenspaces to reduce habitat fragmentation and provide resilience to climate change.

🌿 Assess the biodiversity value of our individual greenspaces and target interventions to improve this by protecting, enhancing and creating new habitat for wildlife.

.....

🌿 Support the Council's 2030 Climate Strategy by championing and showcasing nature-based solutions such as rain gardens, canopy gardens, rewilding 'grey' areas, and the production of renewable energy from ground source heat pumps in parks and greenspaces.

.....

🌿 Work with partners to put the Edinburgh Nature Network at the heart of development in the city, including active travel routes, 20-minute neighbourhoods and other infrastructure.

🌿 Build stronger relationships with Council colleagues and external stakeholders including other landowners to align priorities, advocate, and work collaboratively to delivery joint outcomes for the whole of the city's greenspaces.

.....

🌿 Better connect people to nature through promoting and providing opportunities to engage with the natural environment and wildlife.

.....

🌿 Use our greenspaces to generate conversations about climate change and biodiversity loss, engaging and empowering citizens to respond to these challenges.

Thriving Greenspaces

Wild swimmers meet wildlife





Wild swimmers meet wildlife

Where is the artwork based?

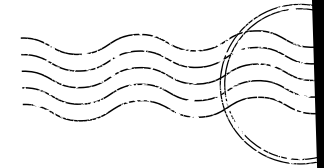
At a bay along Edinburgh's 27km of coastline which is a thriving haven for seabirds and other coastal species and where communities come together to enjoy the outdoors.

What's happening?

An important Edinburgh seafront is a diverse and animated green and blue space. There is an abundance of wildlife - seals and dolphins can be spotted, seabirds are nesting, and, in the distance, new high-rise housing boasts green walls and roofs. People come year-round to socialise, exercise, play and relax making them healthier and happier.

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POSTCARDS FROM 2050



"You'll never believe the thriving parks and green spaces in Edinburgh these days. I'm so grateful for the accessible and well maintained paths and seating maintained through a combination of private sponsorship and public funding. There are active friends groups and environmental education activities for youngsters. The wildflower meadows are beautiful, and control of gorse has seen many native species thrive. There are lots of mature trees and reintroduction of pine martins has enabled the red squirrel population to thrive. I like the wee cafes and toilet facilities in the more remote parks, which all run on renewable energy and give all profits to the maintenance of the park spaces. I love the wee hides and feeding stations too! Skylarks have returned to the Braid Hills too! What a joy to hear their soaring song. I wish you were here to enjoy it too. Maybe one day soon."

Our ambition for **Thriving Greenspaces**

Edinburgh's greenspaces are thriving, encourage the health and wellbeing of citizens, and reflect the diversity, values and interests of local communities.

- A diverse range of greenspaces which people can easily access within 20 minutes and which provide natural health solutions for the city's health and wellbeing ambitions.
- Thriving greenspaces which provide the backdrop to people's lives, where they come together for sport, play and culture, to volunteer, to grow food, to connect with nature, to enjoy gardens, plants and landscapes, or simply to find peace and quiet.
- Inclusive and accessible greenspaces where everyone feels welcome and included.



Helping to keep our parks clean

Our ambition for Thriving Greenspaces

Why it's important

We know that good quality greenspaces are vital to what makes a thriving community. For many of us these are spaces where key parts of our lives take place – taking our daily walk; having a coffee with friends; enjoying a picnic; taking children to a playground; looking at spring bulbs or the autumn colour of trees; playing or watching sport. These are also spaces where communities come together to grow food, volunteer and take part in cultural events.

Above and beyond this, the benefits of connecting with nature for people's mental health and wellbeing are widely understood and underpinned by an ever-growing body of evidence. People feel happier, less anxious, more creative and calmer when in natural environments.



Access to greenspace is also known to have very tangible and measurable physical health benefits: lower heart rate, lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol, and reduced incidence of stroke, asthma, diabetes and coronary heart disease.



Our ambition for Thriving Greenspaces



How we will achieve this

Work with Edinburgh's Health and Social Care Partnership, the NHS, and relevant third sector organisations to take a more joined-up approach in developing our greenspaces as community hubs and a natural health service.

Explore the concept of a 'Green Heart Park' which encompasses activities, design and facilities that enhance health and wellbeing, and the standards they need to achieve to be recognised as important hubs for these benefits.

Introduce ways of assessing our greenspaces to enable us to focus investment on improving the provision of health and wellbeing benefits.

Work with communities and partners to identify and implement initiatives across our greenspace estate that make the most deprived areas a priority for improvement.

Develop our estate to ensure everyone has access to high quality greenspaces which offer a range of experiences, from tranquil reflective spaces to connect with nature, to social spaces with sports and play opportunities.

Improve our greenspaces as settings for play and recreation for children and young people, making them more inclusive and creating more playable spaces outside of traditional playground facilities.

Continue to work with partners in local communities to develop more opportunities and initiatives for growing food in our greenspaces, and work with partners and our café leaseholders to promote local food growing and healthy eating.

Make our greenspaces inclusive and welcoming venues for citizens and groups to bring their own ideas and activities into the spaces, targeting those who are not using greenspaces, for whatever reason.

Create dementia friendly and inclusive environments through the introduction of inclusive design principals into everything we do, to ensure everyone can enjoy and benefit from our greenspaces.

Valued Greenspaces

Where the past meets the present





Where the past meets the present

Where is the artwork based?

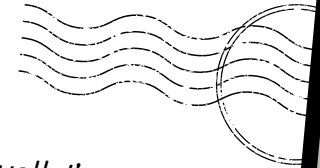
A historic part of our city has found a new purpose as a place where wildlife habitats have been created and people value what is special and unique about this space.

What's happening?

This typical inner-city historic space has been transformed to provide new habitats for some of our most loved wildlife - otters, herons and kingfishers can be spotted in this area. Volunteers look after floating community allotments, monitor wildlife and run tours for visitors. People walk along the canal enjoying the historic sights while children have fun crawling through tunnels and over net bridges.

This illustration was created by Sarah Hannis and was inspired by the public 'Postcards from the future' vision statements. They are not proposals for a specific space but are just a way to capture a collection of aspirations in one illustration. In most cases, they have been inspired by ideas that have already been implemented in the city and elsewhere.

POSTCARDS FROM 2050



"As someone who doesn't know the city well, I'm impressed by how easy it is to find and navigate my way around the beautiful parks and green spaces here. They're many and varied, and I've come across plants I've never seen before! Everything is clean and the park rangers and volunteers I've come across are very friendly, helpful and clearly love what they do. There are some great little cafes where you can sit and watch the world go by, some of them even using produce grown within the park itself. There's a real sense of pride and ownership from the local community who play a really active role in deciding how the spaces are managed and looked after."

Our ambition for **Valued Greenspaces**

Edinburgh's greenspaces are valued and celebrated for their natural and cultural heritage.

- High quality, well managed and loved greenspaces which are valued for what's special and unique about them.
.....
- Greenspace where staff, volunteers and communities are empowered and supported to work together to look after and make decisions about the spaces they value and love.
.....
- Greenspaces which are developed sensitively and in keeping with their natural and built heritage and which collectively deliver the optimum outcomes for people and nature.
.....
- Greenspaces whose natural, historical and cultural heritage is interpreted, understood and celebrated.
.....



Floral clock in Princes Street Gardens

Our ambition for Valued Greenspaces

Why it's important

Edinburgh's greenspaces are valued and well-loved assets of our city. The Natural Capital Account for Edinburgh found that the amenity value of our parks is approximately £19 million annually and our annual surveys show that people in Edinburgh really value their greenspaces and the benefits they provide to people at all stages in life. As a Festival City with 11 international festivals held each year, our greenspaces have significant value as key outdoor venues as well as hosting more than 370 community events every year.



Our volunteers make a significant contribution in enhancing that value by the work that they do. Through volunteering they give their time to work with us in looking after, animating and protecting our wonderful greenspaces.

Unfortunately, over the past decade, Edinburgh's greenspaces have faced

increasing pressures from the acceleration of urban developments, tourism and population numbers, and climate change events.

These factors, together with declining budgets and resources, threaten our ability to maintain greenspaces to a high standard and we have already seen a marked decline in some of our greenspace infrastructure, such as park buildings, paths and walls, as well as increased maintenance issues such as littering, erosion and anti-social behaviour. There is a real risk that our greenspaces will continue to decline and deteriorate in quality, which will impact on the citizens of Edinburgh and its visitors.

Our ambition for Valued Greenspaces



How we will achieve this

• Work with communities to identify what is special and unique about greenspaces and adopt a master planning approach guided by design principles and the visitor experience to ensure a consistent approach.

• Introduce robust and comprehensive data collection and associated management protocols to ensure that we have an accurate and up-to-date understanding of our greenspaces and what people need from them to enable us to meet changing requirements.

• Develop an Asset Management Strategy to set priorities and principles to maintain and develop our assets and ensure we have a funded and resourced maintenance and development programme in place.

• Collaborate with partners to develop a Sustainable Venues Protocol and explore the use of Greener Festival Certification, which will help ensure that the Council delivers its 2030 Climate aspiration and events are appropriate to the landscape's heritage and community needs.

• Introduce new participation and community empowerment principles which promote stronger collaboration and citizenship and ensure that communities have a voice to influence how our greenspaces are managed and developed.

• Develop a Volunteer Strategy and Programme to attract a more diverse range of park and greenspace volunteers and groups, and empower them by providing resources to support positive volunteer experiences.

• Develop our parks as a 'cause', telling people more about what the Parks and Greenspace service delivers, what it costs, the need for more funding, and a call to action.

• Develop and deliver a Communication and Marketing Plan which has a recognisable brand and communications which are inclusive.

• Develop and implement an Interpretation Strategy which goes beyond fixed interpretation and uses art, culture, activities and other media so that the cultural and natural heritage of our greenspaces are understood.

Resourced Greenspaces

Look after your park and it will look after you





Look after your park and it will look after you

Where is the artwork based?

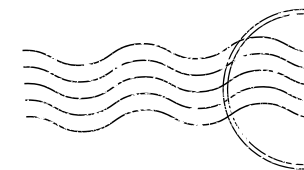
One of Edinburgh's heritage parks has been restored in a way which respects its cultural importance while embracing new technologies and creating an animated space for both wildlife and humans.

What's happening?

One of our parks has been transformed into an amazing asset for the local community providing environmentally sustainable solutions while also providing valuable habitats for our wildlife. From renewable heat to locally grown food to a sustainable venue for a host of activities, this well-managed park is much more than might first meet the eye – ground source heat pumps heat the buildings, robotic mowers keep the lawns looking good and swift boxes provide valuable homes for the swift population.

This illustration was created by Sarah Hannis and was inspired by the public 'Postcards from the future' vision statements. They are not proposals for a specific space but are just a way to capture a collection of aspirations in one illustration. In most cases, they have been inspired by ideas that have already been implemented in the city and elsewhere.

POSTCARDS FROM 2050



"To me when I still had hair! The spaces in Edinburgh are now much more beautiful, natural places with greater levels of tree canopy coverage and biodiverse habitats with a greater level and range of wildlife. These spaces are really designed around moving and standing watercourses that are providing habitats themselves but also give a focal point to the enjoyment of the place for visitors. The spaces are well funded with amenities like benches, toilets as well as informal and conventional play areas alongside occasional cafes providing indoor and outdoor dining areas. These facilities are run by the Council and provide income that in turn helps maintain a vibrant and beautiful open space."

Our ambition for **Resourced Greenspaces**

Edinburgh's greenspaces are sustainably resourced, with a committed and resilient workforce working in partnership with residents, organisations and businesses to deliver high quality greenspaces.

- An agile, skilled and resilient greenspace workforce that works together to improve the quality of life for all citizens.
- A sustainable and flexible funding model in place to deliver the ambitions of Edinburgh's Thriving Green Spaces 2050 Vision.
- Greenspaces which are managed, maintained and developed to a high standard through strong and collaborative partnership working with other Council services, external organisations and citizens.
- A culture of learning, sharing and working with others to explore and develop better solutions for our greenspace management and development.



Meadows at Parkside Park

Our ambition for Resourced Greenspaces



Why it's important

Like nature itself, our greenspaces are resilient, but without care and attention these places will slowly decline under the pressures of a rapidly growing city coupled with ever more extreme weather. If the quality of our spaces decline so too will the multitude of benefits they provide for us, particularly if their ecosystem services are gradually undermined. To deliver on our vision and ambition for connected, thriving and valued greenspaces we need a Parks and Greenspace service equipped with the necessary skills and resources to help make it happen. To that end we need to develop new and innovative ways of managing, funding and resourcing our greenspace estate.



Our ambition for Resourced Greenspaces

How we will achieve this

Ensure that all greenspace team has the right skills such as business planning, bid writing, data management, community development, communications and marketing, ecology and design, who work in close collaboration with the grounds maintenance, horticulture and arboriculture teams.

Develop a robust, deliverable and flexible financial model which diversifies our approach to securing funding, and which leads to increased revenue and capital funding required for investment in both our people and our greenspace estate.

Build in capacity for partnership building and collaboration with partnership agreements to establish expectations, roles and responsibilities.

Build stronger links and connect greenspace ambition with the Council's Learning and Housing green estates and Edinburgh Leisure's green estate as well as Planning and Sustainable Development programmes.

Build stronger advocacy for the investment, protection and enhancement of our greenspaces, working with partners to have a collective voice which is influential and respected across the city and in government in order to educate, build broader support, unlock investment and create a collaborative culture to achieve more.

Grow a culture of learning and sharing which helps to unlock the power of the collective and support creativity in partnership working.

Introduce a monitoring and evaluation framework to assess progress and ensure we are meeting outcomes.



Bedding in

This strategy has set out a clear ambition and approach for how the Council will deliver greenspaces that are at the heart of our city and help create an Edinburgh that is outstanding for wellbeing, quality of life, heritage and quality of natural spaces. Greenspaces that are connected, thriving, valued and resourced.

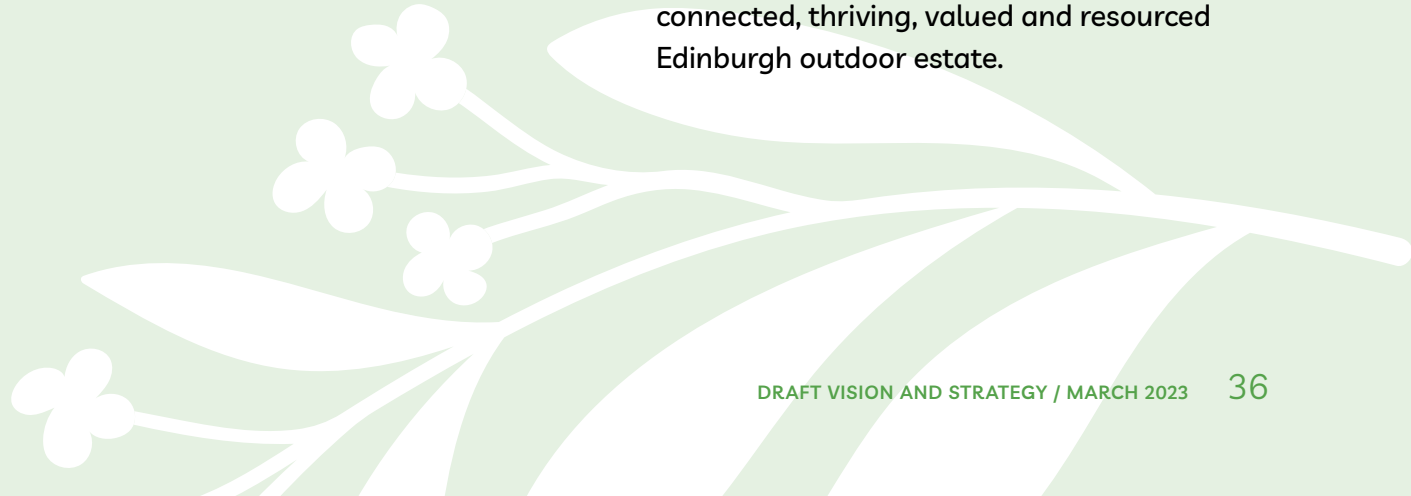
A 10-year implementation plan is being developed to accompany this strategy, which will set the foundation for continued and accelerated growth as we move towards 2050. The main focus of the action plan in the first three to five years is to lay the foundations for change so that we can deliver the long-term outcomes we seek to achieve. Some foundations are already in place as a result of the Thriving Green Spaces Project, including the piloting of new ways of engaging with staff and communities, introducing new income opportunities, and developing concept masterplans for some of our major public parks.

There is no doubt that the commitment and determination that exists in our workforce, volunteers and partners will be instrumental in achieving the aims we have set ourselves. But if we are to deliver the aspirations this city has for its greenspaces, we do need to invest more.

There is a need to invest in our people so that we can bring in new skills, increase income generation, increase capacity of our existing workforce, empower our volunteers and build stronger and more effective partnerships. We also need to invest in our greenspaces so that we can bring all of them up to a high standard to benefit both people and wildlife.

Nature does not recognise boundaries and it is clear that to achieve the city's ambitions for a high quality and connected natural estate, we need to work at a citywide scale and work in close collaboration with citizens, volunteers and many other organisations across Edinburgh who own, manage, maintain, run activities and are reliant on outcomes delivered by these spaces.

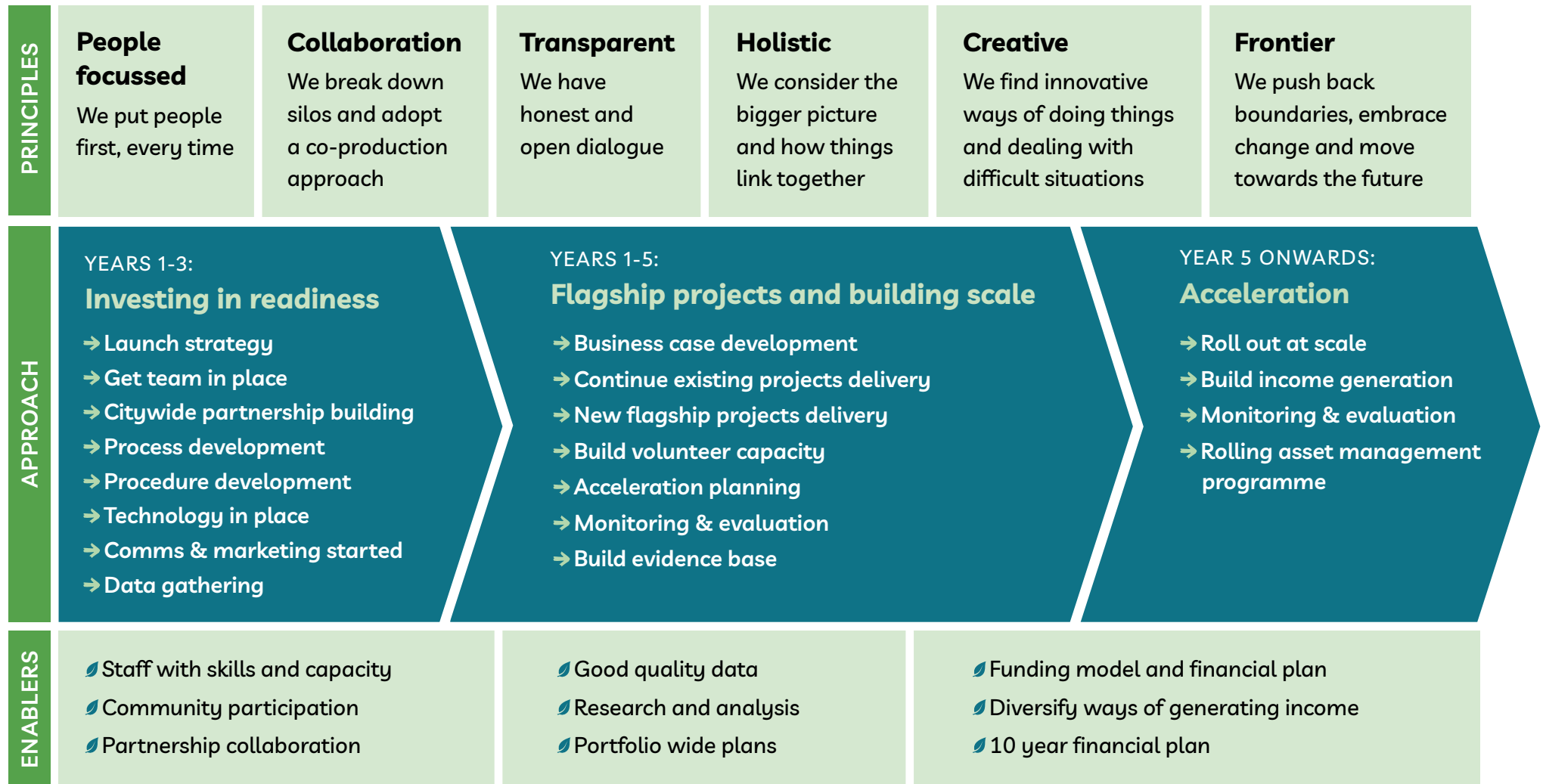
Through this strategy, we make a commitment to work with partners to develop guiding principles and a delivery framework which is owned by the city and which will drive forward the projects and initiatives that are needed to achieve a connected, thriving, valued and resourced Edinburgh outdoor estate.



STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

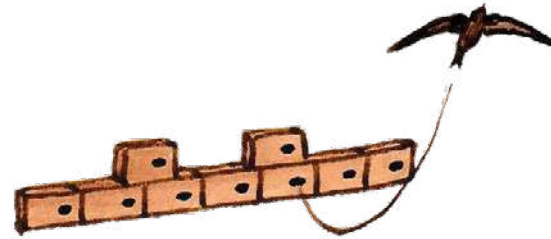
Phased Approach

Build capacity internally and develop flagship projects before we can accelerate



What does success look like?

Connected outcomes



→ Habitats are better connected, enabling wildlife to be more resilient to climate change.

→ More of our greenspaces are providing multiple benefits for the city, such as reducing air pollution, mitigating flooding, increasing pollination and improving health and wellbeing.

→ Citizens are more connected to nature and are inspired to take action to improve their homes, gardens and greenspaces with positive outcomes for the environment.

→ The benefits from access to quality greenspace become available to all, by prioritising areas of the city in most need of environmental enhancements.

→ Our greenspaces have a higher biodiversity value through targeted, evidence-based interventions.

→ More of our walking, running and cycling routes weave through greenspaces, making it a safer and more enjoyable way to travel. More of our roadways are lined with trees, biodiverse hedgerows and other nature-based solutions, helping to reduce pollution and providing green corridors for active travel routes.

What does success look like?

Thriving outcomes

- People have easier access to a greater variety of greenspaces which are appropriate to their wellbeing needs.
.....
- More people and a greater diversity of people use greenspaces to improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing.
.....
- There is more equitable access to high quality greenspaces throughout the city. For those who would benefit most, there is an increase in usage and length of time they spend in greenspace for health, recreation, social and cultural activities.
.....
- More people and a greater diversity of people are spending longer in their greenspaces to relax, exercise, socialise, take part in and run activities and events.
.....



- More people are able to grow their own food in Edinburgh and an increasing amount of fresh produce is grown within the city
.....
- More children and young people enjoy high quality play opportunities, particularly outdoor free play in stimulating inclusive spaces with access to nature on a daily basis.
.....

What does success look like?



Valued outcomes

- More people and a greater diversity of people are attracted to volunteering in their greenspaces.
- More people and a greater diversity of people are actively involved in strategic planning, management and delivery of activities for greenspaces.
- More of Edinburgh's public greenspaces are protected and enhanced to a consistently high standard, which benefits the local environment and communities.
- There are more opportunities around the city to host festivals and events in our greenspaces on an environmentally sustainable basis with activities appropriate to the landscape's design and community needs.



- Citizens have a greater awareness, understanding of, and appreciation for their greenspace. They have an increased sense of ownership of their greenspace.
- Our greenspace assets are better maintained and enhanced, with a robust evidence base helping to target resources.

What does success look like?

Resourced outcomes

- Continued investment in our staff, equipment and estate to protect and enhance high quality greenspaces.
.....
- A workforce with the capability and capacity necessary for achieving the Council's ambitions for high quality, well-maintained and thriving greenspaces.
.....
- There are higher levels of staff satisfaction and more development opportunities for staff.
.....
- Improved information about how our service is performing and how we allocate resources, so that we are better equipped to adapt our action plan to meet changing priorities.
.....



- Better and more consistent sharing of information leading to more creative solutions and best practice for managing our greenspaces.
.....
- Increased and more effective collaboration with other Council services and external stakeholders through partnership working to efficiently deliver shared priorities.
.....



The roots for growth

As part of the Thriving Green Spaces project, we have started to develop the building blocks needed to deliver the strategic outcomes. This includes the following plans, strategies and tools:

Connected

<p>Edinburgh Nature Network</p>	<p>Edinburgh's Nature Network (formerly called the Ecological Coherence Plan) is a powerful tool that provides a strategic approach to prioritise environmental interventions and nature-based solutions to tackle the threats of climate change and biodiversity loss in the city. The Programme for Government has confirmed that every Local Authority will be required to have a Nature Network by 2026, and ours is the first Nature Network in Scotland. This action is linked to the Council's Business Plan objective 3b</p>
<p>Natural Capital Account</p>	<p>This "Natural Capital Account", developed by Vivid Economics, seeks to put a monetary value on some of the benefits provided by our greenspaces. Just four of the "ecosystem services" that our greenspaces provide were assessed and it was found that Edinburgh's greenspaces generate benefits of £174m per year.</p>
<p>ParkPower and Green Heat in Green Spaces</p>	<p>Project partners greenspace scotland worked with a range of partners across Scotland to explore the contribution that urban green and blue spaces can make to decarbonising the energy system. This "opportunity mapping" has given the Council comprehensive data on the potential of our greenspaces to provide low carbon heat.</p>

Thriving

<p>Health Park Audits and Analysis</p>	<p>Parks and Greenspace staff have surveyed over 150 parks and greenspaces for their potential health and wellbeing benefits using a pioneering audit tool developed by Tisdall Associates. Analysis of the survey data will be completed during spring 2022. This analysis will feed into our Capital Investment Programme.</p>
<p>Green Infrastructure (GI) mapping tool</p>	<p>Project partners the University of Edinburgh led a pilot of a GI mapping tool. The tool records greenspace features, giving them a score for ecological value based on scoring developed by another of our project partners, the Scottish Wildlife Trust. The tool was trialled in a number of parks with the help of volunteers. The tool could be used to help manage greenspaces by providing information about landscapes and habitats to staff and to citizens and further pilots are being undertaken.</p>

Valued

<p>Built Infrastructure Condition Survey</p>	<p>Built infrastructure condition surveys are being carried out across the whole of our greenspace estate. The data is helping to inform our priority capital investment programme and the next step is to use this data to establish a regular maintenance programme and enable more accurate forward planning.</p>
<p>Asset Management Strategy</p>	<p>To guide and inform our priorities for managing our greenspace assets, an Asset Management Strategy has been drafted. It sets out policies and principles for how we will prioritise new projects and roll out maintenance standards to ensure that the social, natural and economic benefits delivered by sites do not degrade.</p>
<p>Capital Investment Programme</p>	<p>We have drafted a capital investment programme, which uses robust and diverse data sets to identify needs and opportunities along different outcome areas to prioritise where we should focus resources. This programme will support us in delivering against the Council's Business Plan objective 3b.</p>
<p>Spirit of Place</p>	<p>In exploring approaches to placemaking we piloted the use of the National Trust's 'Spirit of Place' process. This process uses a collaborative approach to capture what is special and unique about a place. This engagement can inspire community stakeholders to explore the potential of their greenspace and can help inform Management Plans and future developments.</p>
<p>Volunteer Strategy and Action Plan</p>	<p>As part of our aim to offer high quality, impactful and memorable volunteering experiences, we have been collaborating with staff, partners and the Edinburgh Green Space Forum to draft a Volunteer Strategy with an action plan which will set out guiding principles along with key priorities. It is highlighted as an action in the Council's Business Plan objective 3b.</p>
<p>Marketing and Communications Strategy</p>	<p>A Marketing and Communications Strategy has been drafted with the aim of creating a coherent identity across parks and greenspaces. It identifies key objectives and key messages, along with target audiences and channel recommendations.</p>

Resourced

Financial Model	In order to facilitate the range of actions identified as required to deliver the strategic aims, there is a need for a revised approach to how the Council's Parks and Greenspace service is funded. The financial model proposes a combination of existing and new income streams, a range of innovative capital funding mechanisms and grant funding linked to national or international public policy priorities and estimates the financial impact to our service.
Income Generation Strategy Proposals	An Income Generation Strategy proposal has been completed. This has identified opportunities for increased income generation, calculated potential income and expenditure over 10 years and includes recommendations for staffing structures and other changes that need to be in place in order to generate the income. These proposals are subject to further analysis and development before it can be implemented.
Ground Maintenance Service Review	This review is being undertaken by the Association for Public Service Excellence. The review will ascertain the staff, fleet and machinery resource needed to deliver ground maintenance service to high standards, to be resilient to change, and to respond to the strategic vision and aspirations set out in the Thriving Greenspaces Strategy. The output of this review will inform the proposed operational structure for our greenspace maintenance and development.
Operational Structure	We need to ensure that we have the appropriate organisational structure and workforce in order to deliver the strategy
Appreciative Inquiry	Appreciative Inquiry is a way of looking at organisational change which focuses on identifying and doing more of what is already working, rather than looking for problems and trying to fix them. We have conducted conversations with staff to test out this approach, and so far, the conversations have been very enlightening and will help us to make our service even better.

The roots for growth

The Thriving Green Spaces Project undertook a number of pilot projects to try out different approaches, concepts and tools.

Masterplan Projects

During the past year we and one of our bid partners, Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust, have been developing concept masterplans for four sites around the city – Inch Park, Inverleith Park, Leith Links and West Pilton Park.

Conceptual masterplans seek to guide development of these sites and to ensure a coherent and inclusive vision for each. Placemaking and engagement approaches, such as the National Trust's Spirit of Place tool, have been used and have helped to capture what is unique and important about each site.



*Image of what Inverleith Biodiversity Area could look like.
(Inverleith Park Concept Masterplan Report produced by rankinfraser, 2022)*

The roots for growth



A week long programme of activities for well-being in Saughton Park

Green Heart Parks

It's a lot lot more than a walk in the park!

AUGUST 2021

THURSDAY 26TH AUGUST	2pm to 3.30pm	Writing workshop with Wana Udobang - Nigerian writer, poet, journalist, film maker and TV personality
MONDAY 30TH AUGUST	12pm to 1pm	Ecotherapy by Stephen from Health All Round
TUESDAY 31ST AUGUST	11am to 12pm	Meditation in the park with Edinburgh Community Yoga
	2.30pm to 3.30pm	Community orchard tour with Shona and Sarah from The Friends of Saughton Park
	2pm to 3.30pm	Writing workshop with Victoria McNulty - Poet and spoken word artist focusing on the lives of young women in urban communities
WEDNESDAY 1ST SEPTEMBER	11am-12.30pm	Photography workshop with Jassy Earl
THURSDAY 2ND SEPTEMBER	10am to 11am	Tour of physic garden with the Friends of Saughton Park
	11am to 12pm	Low level health walk through Saughton park by Edinburgh Leisure.
	2pm to 3pm	Weed and tidy session of the seating areas around the park perimeter with a Park Ranger (either Scott or Andy) Meet at the entrance to the Courtyard.
FRIDAY 3RD SEPTEMBER	11am to 12pm	Ecotherapy by Stephen from Health All Round
	1pm to 1.30pm	Storytelling in the park by Stephen from Health All Round
SATURDAY 4TH SEPTEMBER	10.30am to 12.30pm	Art in the Park - outdoor canvas painting with Yvonne from Gorgie Collective (beginners welcome, materials will be supplied).

All Events FREE

EDINBURGH'S THRIVING GREEN SPACES 2050

GORGIE Collective

Green Heart Park Pilot

In considering how we can ensure our greenspaces are delivering the best they can for health outcomes, we have developed the idea of recognising high performing greenspaces with a 'Green Heart' award. We also envisage that Green Heart Parks could become a standard or indicator of a space with suitable facilities for health and wellbeing activities and provide a celebratory focus around the value of greenspaces in the post-Covid period. To explore this further, we worked with Health All Round to run a 'Green Heart Park' week in August 2021 – a week of free wellbeing activity at Saughton Park, testing what attracted and engaged people.

This was a first step in piloting and developing further activities with health practitioners and communities, under a 'Green Heart Park' banner. This will help guide and assess how we develop our greenspaces in the future, how we work with health practitioners to support green health prescriptions and how we develop park activity programmes to animate and activate parks to benefit everyone.

Taking forward these initiatives means we are in a strong position to play a key role in preventative health measures, including helping to facilitate the increase in green health prescribing in Edinburgh.

The roots for growth

Edinburgh Nature Network Pilots

We have already piloted the Edinburgh Nature Network tool to direct and maximise improvements to Edinburgh’s biodiversity. For example, bid partners Scottish Wildlife Trust have been working with Lloyds Banking Group Edinburgh to create a stepping stone habitat for the northern brown argus butterfly at their office at the Mound. In Edinburgh, the northern brown argus is only found in Holyrood Park. By creating small areas of habitat, such as at the bank’s office at the Mound, it will allow the butterfly to move around the city and perhaps find significant areas of suitable habitat such as at Calton Hill.

We have also used the Edinburgh Nature Network to inform the Lauriston Farm Agroecology project, Pentlands to Portobello Green-corridor project and the Wee Forests project as well the four Thriving Green Spaces masterplan projects.



Calton Hill

Fast Followers Pilot

In 2021, Scotland’s Park Managers Forum became a “Fast Follower” network for the Future Parks programme, and specifically the Edinburgh Thriving Green Spaces project, to share information and emerging learning with colleagues across all Scottish local authorities.



Northern brown argus butterfly (photo by John Bridges)

This pilot programme was led by bid partner greenspace scotland and during the programme they ran monthly workshops on themes as diverse as income generation, ash dieback, participatory budgeting, using data and nature-based solutions.

Thank you

The Thriving Green Spaces project team would like to thank the Parks and Greenspaces staff, City of Edinburgh Council colleagues, elected members, our bid partners and all the organisations and citizens of Edinburgh who have joined the conversation, shared their vision and contributed to the project.

The Thriving Green Spaces project was made possible by the funding from the 'Future Parks Accelerator' programme and we thank the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the National Trust and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for supporting our project.



Walking under the autumn canopy at Inverleith Park

For further information contact:

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HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

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