

Wynyard Woodland Park

Green Infrastructure Case Study

Managing future development by investing in green infrastructure

NATURAL
ENGLAND

Wynyard Woodland Park shows how green infrastructure can be used to effectively manage increased demand for green space in urban areas. It is an innovative example of how to turn the journey to the park itself into part of the outdoor recreation experience, while not only protecting but enhancing biodiversity through habitat creation for Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species.

Snapshot

- Number of visitors to the park has increased by 100,000 since 2010/11
- More than 50 percent of visitors to the park say that they go there to exercise
- At Pickard's Meadow, 10 ha of lowland meadow has been created contributing 100 percent to the local BAP target for lowland meadow creation and 20 percent of the regional target
- Revenue taken at the park's visitor shop has increased from £11,800 in 2009/10 to £22,600 in 2010/11



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A cyclist benefiting from the park's enhanced cycleways

Key facts:

- Size of green infrastructure created or enhanced: 180 ha (445 acres)
- Size of BAP habitat created: 10 ha (25 acres)
- Length of improved access routes: 2.75km
- Total cost of project: £176,888
- Key partners for Wynyard Woodland Park include Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, Forestry Commission, Durham Tees Valley Probation Trust, SITA Environment Trust, Natural England, Wildflower Ark, Wynyard Environmental Trust, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, Sustrans and National Grid

Key environmental functions:

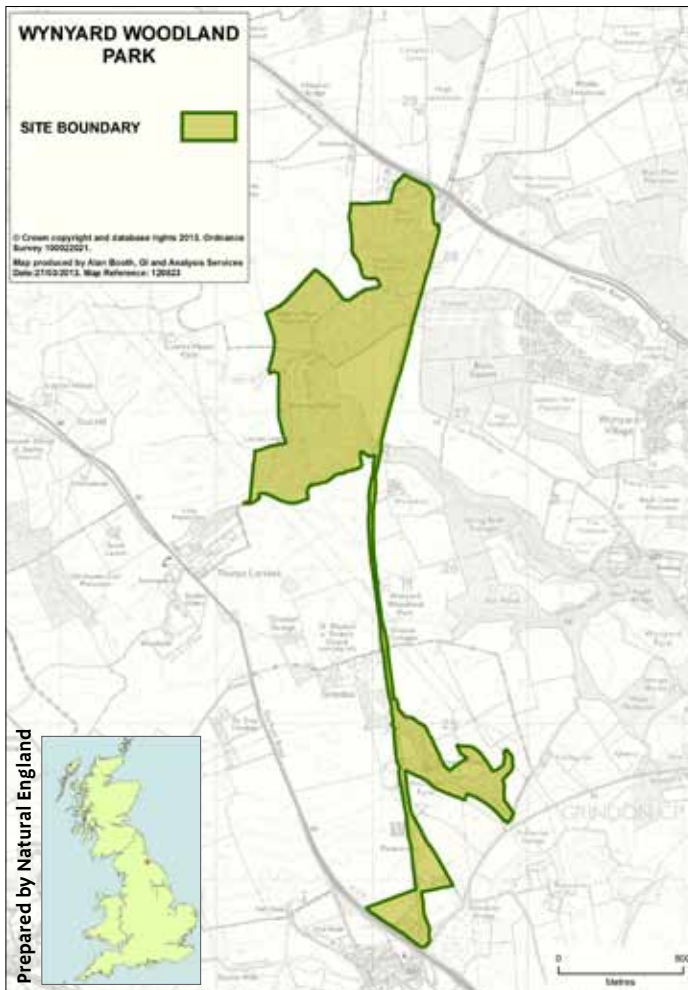
- Improving connectivity to other green spaces
- Providing opportunities for recreation
- Promoting sustainable transport
- Improving conservation and biodiversity

Introduction

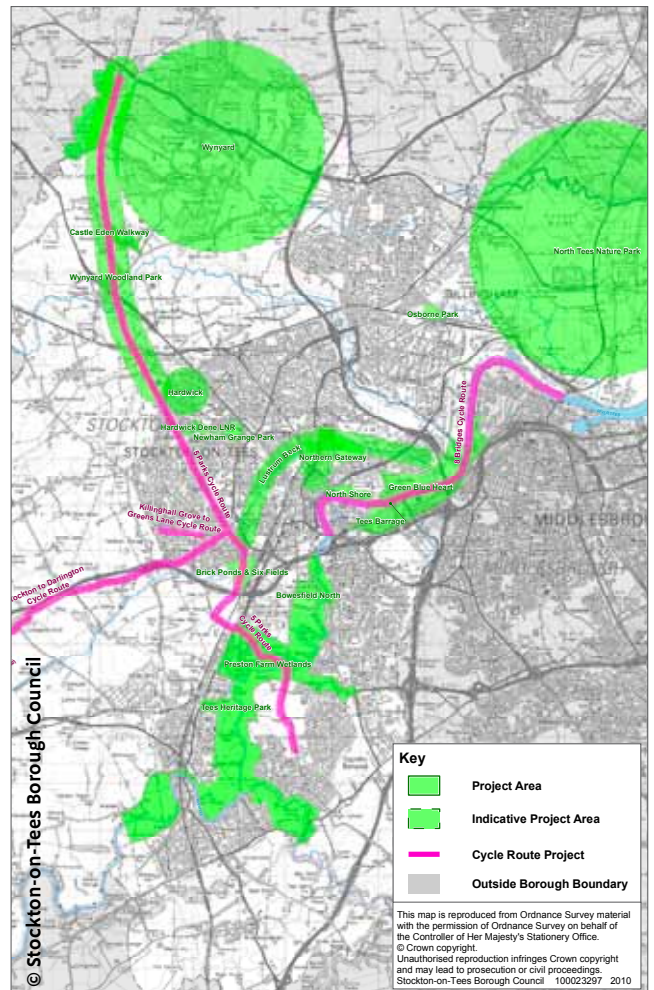
Wynyard Woodland Park is a prime countryside gateway site in the north of Stockton, providing links to Sedgefield, Hartlepool and beyond. There are an estimated 35,000 households within a 5km radius of the park and in 2009/10, it received more than 175,000 visitors. This figure rose following proposed developments to the park’s planetarium, visitor centre and recently constructed flagship play area. The site was identified in the Tees Valley Green Infrastructure Strategy as facing considerable change.

Already managed for conservation, recreation and education, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council recognised that access to the park could also be managed sustainably over time through new and improved green infrastructure. The aim was to enhance the park’s connectivity to its surrounding catchments. Principal among these connections would be a cycle and footpath network at the south of the site to provide an uninterrupted link with the residential areas of Stockton. This would help achieve a strategic goal of establishing a continuous green corridor through the borough all the way to Preston Park and Ingleby Barwick by summer 2013 with the completion of the South Stockton Greenway.

The project was delivered by a partnership of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, Forestry Commission, Durham Tees Valley Probation Trust, SITA Environment Trust, Natural England, Wildflower Ark, Wynyard Environmental Trust, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, Sustrans and the National Grid. It is a key strategic priority in both the Tees Valley and Stockton-On-Tees Green Infrastructure Strategies, and complements the borough’s Green Infrastructure Action Plan.



Map showing the location and boundary of Wynyard Woodland Park (Indicative Only)



Green Infrastructure Strategy Action Plan Priorities 2010–2013 shows how Wynyard Woodland Park will be connected to a wider network of green infrastructure (Indicative Only)

Wynyard Woodland Park is a country park, with parts of the site also designated as a Local Nature Reserve, Local Wildlife Site and Ancient Semi-natural Woodland (ASNW). The site has 180 ha of various types of green space, including mixed woodland, lowland meadow, wetland, a disused railway line, play area and visitor centre. It is home to Tees Valley BAP priority species such as great crested newt, bats, harvest mouse, and globeflower.

Although the site is accessed primarily by car, National Cycle Route (NCR) 1 forms the spine of the park. Prior to the project, the site already had an existing 15km of footpaths, rights of way and bridleways, plus 12 official access points. Enhancements to the park's green infrastructure was intended to reduce the need for people to arrive by car by making it highly accessible on foot or by bike, but also highly 'natural'. The connectivity of the site would facilitate the movement of wildlife as well as people. These goals are among those set out in the Tees Valley Green Infrastructure Strategy, which, by 2021, aims to "develop a network of green corridors and green spaces that enhance the quality of place for existing and future communities and investors" and "create and extend opportunities for access, regeneration and enhancements of biodiversity" across the Tees Valley.

Creating a resilient landscape for people and wildlife



Improved opportunities for walking and cycling in Wynyard Woodland Park

As NCR 1 forms a significant part of Wynyard Woodland Park, the main thrust of this project has been to provide cyclists with an alternative NCR route to and from the park, by improving connectivity with other principal green infrastructure sites in Stockton, the neighbouring village of Thorpe Thewles and the large residential areas of Hardwick, Grangefield, Fairfield and Hartburn. To date, improvements have delivered 2.75km of enhanced footpath, including 250m of linear new, and 600m of enhanced, dual footpath and cycleway. The new alternative route on the south side of the park now offers cyclists a safer journey as they are not required to cycle along Blakeston Lane, which is a narrow, single-lane road. These improvements contribute to the Local Transport Plan, the associated Cycling Strategy 2006–11 and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2008–18.

At Pickard's Meadow, 10 ha of lowland meadow has been created contributing 100 percent to the local BAP target for lowland meadow creation. Three new ponds have also been created, as well as a nesting box for barn owls. At Thorpe Pond, 0.15 ha of pondscape has been maintained, contributing to BAP targets for great crested newt. Work has commenced on the management of 76 ha of ASNW at Thorpe Wood, helping to meet BAP targets for harvest mouse, barn owl and semi-natural broadleaf woodland. Future maintenance of the enhanced green infrastructure will be carried out by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's in-house maintenance teams or, in the case of Pickard's Meadow, by grazing agreements with local farmers.

The project, which was completed in Autumn 2011 at a total cost of £176,888, has benefited from effective partnership working. Considerable value for money has been achieved as a result of cooperation. Many of the green infrastructure outcomes have been delivered at a relatively low cost. Contributions from partners such as Durham Tees Valley Probation Trust, which contributed 800 hours of unskilled labour and 150 hours of supervisor time, represent valuable examples of how non-environmental organisations appreciate that green infrastructure projects can help achieve their own objectives. Furthermore, the lessons learnt from the project have been shared with the local and wider community, and have ensured strong commitment from all project partners.

Extending the benefits of a thriving country park to a wider audience



Children enjoying the park's new play area

Wynyard Woodland Park contributes to a number of the strategic themes set out within the Tees Valley and Stockton-on-Tees' green infrastructure strategies. These include improving quality of place; promoting tourism; promoting outdoor recreation; promoting active and sustainable travel; making places safe, welcoming and accessible; enhancing biodiversity and conserving natural resources; and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

By completion of the project, visitor numbers to the park for 2010/11 had risen to 280,000 – an increase of more than 100,000 visitors on the previous year. This increase was driven largely by the completion of the park's new play area in July 2010 and an example of the growth that new green infrastructure will help to manage sustainably over time. A survey in 2009/10, found that 81 percent of visitors spent less than 15 minutes travelling to the site, but by 2010/11 that figure had dropped to 67 percent. This indicates that a significant number of people are now taking longer to travel to Wynyard Woodland Park either by bike or from further afield, thanks in part to improved connectivity for cyclists.



The park's visitor centre is a popular attraction

The same survey also discovered that the average duration of a visit to the park is an impressive 1.5 hours. Most people visit the park for exercise, with 50 percent saying that they went to the park to walk and 14 percent for a bike ride. The increased number of visitors to the site by foot and bicycle not only has positive implications for the health and wellbeing of Stockton's population, but has the potential to reduce the carbon footprint of visitors to the site. It has helped to boost the park's own economy, with £22,600 taken at the visitor shop in 2010/11 compared to £11,800 in 2009/10.

Lessons learnt from planning for maintenance from the start

Weather conditions, issues regarding weed control and the presence of ground-nesting birds all had an impact on the delivery of Pickard's Meadow at the northern end of the park, which highlighted the need for flexibility when planning such projects in the future. However, development of suitable infrastructure at an early stage of the Pickard's Meadow project will enable the site to be managed sustainably for the foreseeable future. This forward-planning approach is particularly important with local authorities facing severe cutbacks in revenue and maintenance budgets.

A key part of managing and developing the site is done via the Wynyard Woodland Park Environmental Trust – a body of volunteers and representatives from neighbouring parish council, residents associations, charities and other trusts. The park also has a group of 12 volunteers that attend once a week, and further collaboration with the Durham Tees Valley Probation Trust is giving offenders the opportunity to develop new skills and training that could lead to an National Vocational Qualification.

The cycle route is expected to be extended in June 2013 three miles to the south of Wynyard Woodland Park with the creation of the South Stockton Greenway, creating a continuous cycle route running north to south through the heart of the borough. Not only will this make it easier for the residents of Stockton and Ingleby Barwick to access Wynyard Woodland Park, it will also provide a direct link to the borough's other major urban parks – Preston Park and Ropner Park. To the north of Wynyard Woodland Park, the National Cycle Network also extends into County Durham and beyond. Now that these improved links are in place, the council and its partners, including Sustrans, are considering the potential for cycle hire centres in both the north and south of the borough, with one of the hubs proposed at Wynyard Woodland Park.

For further information

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