



GROUNDWORK

MAKING UP GROUND

THE ROLE OF GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE IN URBAN REGENERATION

This report looks at the place of green infrastructure in urban regeneration policy and spending, from the early 1980s to the present day. Analysis of funding allocated through the Levelling Up Fund and the UK Community Renewal Fund finds that these initiatives are being overlooked. We argue that much more emphasis should be placed on natural solutions in the upcoming UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

WHAT IS GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE?

Green infrastructure is a network of multi-functional green space and other green features which can deliver quality of life and environmental benefits for communities. It includes a wide range of spaces and features including parks, nature reserves, playing fields and woodlands as well as street trees, allotments, private gardens, green roofs and walls, sustainable drainage systems and soils. It also includes 'blue spaces' such as rivers, streams, canals and other water bodies.

WHY DOES IT MATTER

UK communities experience stark inequalities in access to nature. Almost three million people in the UK do not live within a 10-minute walk of publicly accessible green space. Groundwork's [Out of Bounds](#) report, published in 2021, found that people on lower incomes, ethnic minorities, disabled people and other minoritized groups experience complex barriers to nature connection. As well as lack of provision, these barriers often relate to accessibility, relevance and feelings of safety.

There is strong evidence that the presence of green infrastructure in a community brings a wide range of benefits, including:

- > **Boosting business and the local economy** including through the creation of green jobs
- > **Improving individuals' health and wellbeing**
- > **Tackling climate change and protecting the environment**
- > **Supporting social connections and cohesion**

Therefore, green infrastructure has the potential to contribute significantly to place-based regeneration, whether through the 'levelling up' agenda or whatever takes its place.

OUR FINDINGS

This research analysed the allocation of funding through the Levelling Up Fund and the UK Community Renewal Fund, billed as the predecessor to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. It found:

- > **Less than 5% of funding has been used to support green infrastructure regeneration projects**
- > **Less than a quarter of funding distributed to local authority areas through the Levelling Up Fund has gone to the half of areas where the average distance to green space is the longest** meaning that it is not reaching places where the investment is most needed

RECOMMENDATIONS

Realising the potential of green infrastructure to contribute to urban regeneration is dependent on action at all levels:

- > **Government** needs to create the vision, framework and incentives – recommitting to existing policy on nature recovery and biodiversity net-gain, embedding a legal right to access to nature in the planning system and building nature-based solutions more fully into social value requirements linked to public procurement.
- > **Local authorities** need to think creatively about ways to embed green infrastructure into programmes of regeneration and development, bringing nature closer to people's daily lives and involving the community in plans to reimagine the way green spaces are designed and managed to ensure that they are accessible, relevant, and safe for everyone.
- > **Combined authorities and elected mayors** should be building the creation and management of green infrastructure into their strategies for transport, housing, business support and skills.
- > **Developers and property managers** can do much more to support accessible green infrastructure by adopting nature-based solutions in the design of new or regenerated residential and commercial spaces.
- > **Infrastructure businesses and public bodies** with large land assets, such as the NHS and Ministry of Defence, should strengthen their commitments to managing and maintaining their estates in a way that promotes community benefit and nature recovery.

FIND OUT MORE

The full report and information on Groundwork's wider policy work and delivery in communities is available on our website: www.groundwork.org.uk/making-up-ground

If you are interested in discussing the findings from this report, please contact Fay Holland, Groundwork Policy & Research Lead: fay.holland@groundwork.org.uk

For media enquiries, please contact Stacey Aplin, Groundwork Public Relations Lead: media@groundwork.org.uk