

2018-19 Portsmouth green infrastructure delivery plan

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1. Introduction

- 1.1.** The Council has a responsibility for balancing the various development needs of the city, whilst also ensuring that it plans in a positive way for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of Portsmouth's green infrastructure. Green infrastructure isn't just aesthetically pleasing in the public realm, but can offer a range of positive functions for making the urban environment a healthier, more pleasant place for people to enjoy. In this way it is just as valuable to the city as other more traditional forms of grey infrastructure such as roads, pavements and sewers.
- 1.2.** There is no single, overarching definition for the term green infrastructure, however the government sets out that green infrastructure is:
- 1.3.** *A network of multifunctional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.*
- 1.4.** *Green infrastructure is not simply an alternative description for conventional open space. As a network it includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, but also street trees, allotments and private gardens. It can also include streams, canals and other water bodies and features such as green roofs and walls.¹*
- 1.5.** The Council is committed to developing and enhancing Portsmouth's green infrastructure network. In the longer term, this will be guided by the policies set out in the emerging Local Plan, a future Green Infrastructure Strategy and supported by other documents such as the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy. The purpose of this shorter term delivery plan is to begin to lay the foundations for this work by setting out how the Council will actively aim to deliver greening more immediately in the city over the next year.

2. Why do we need green infrastructure?

- 2.1.** Portsmouth's green infrastructure network doesn't just have an aesthetic value, but should provide Portsmouth with a host of other functions which have benefits to the city. The 'function' of a piece of green infrastructure is expressed through the natural features of the asset and the particular ecosystem services that asset can perform for an area, such as improving air quality or providing natural drainage.
- 2.2.** Some of the main functions of benefit that can be drawn from a well-developed green infrastructure network which have particular relevance to Portsmouth include:
- Promoting physical and mental health and wellbeing amongst Portsmouth citizens
 - Improving air quality in the city through absorbing harmful pollutants
 - Improving the biodiversity of the city
 - Naturally assisting with water and flood management
 - Building Portsmouth's resilience to climate change
 - Contributing to economic development and boosting investment

¹ National Planning Practice Guidance website

3. Portsmouth's green infrastructure network

3.1. Green infrastructure in the city can be broken down into a variety of typologies, each of which provide a particular set of the functions detailed above. A fundamental aspect of the GI network is that of publically accessible open spaces including parks and gardens, amenity greenspaces, areas of natural and semi-natural green spaces, allotments and cemeteries. A full breakdown of these can be found in the city's Parks and Open Spaces Strategy². Figure 1 below details the protected open space network around the city at present.

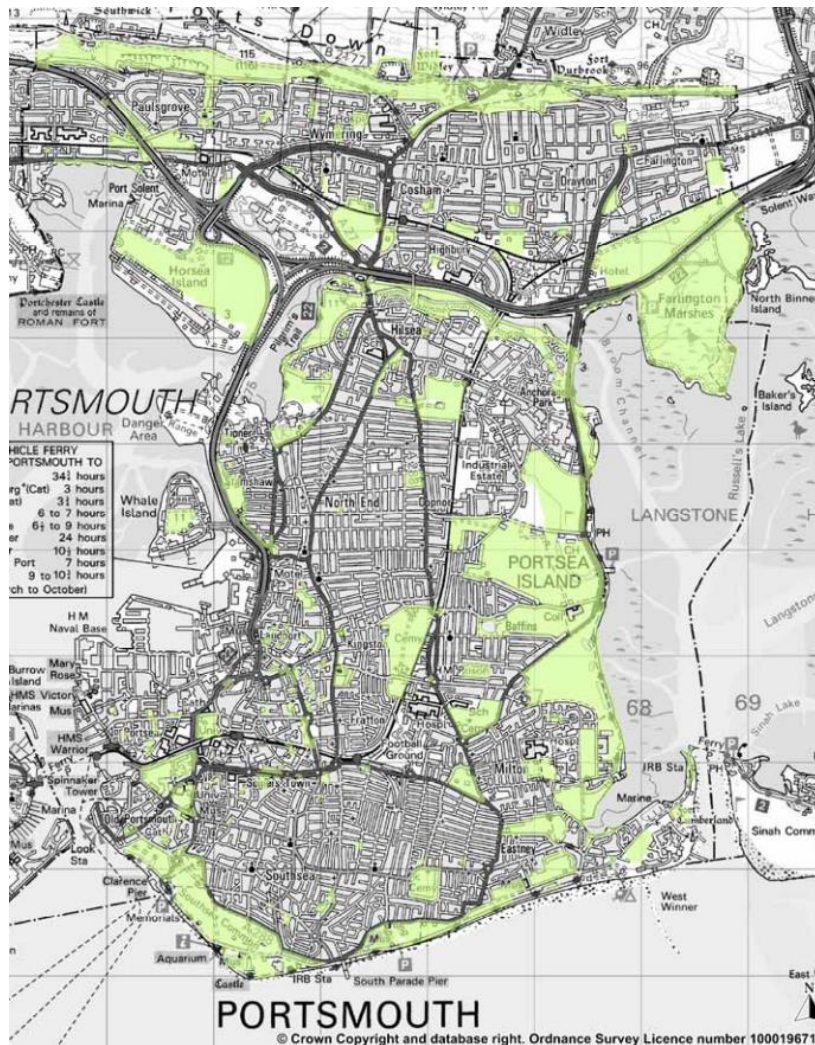


Figure 1: Local Plan policy PCS13 protected open spaces in the city

3.2. Generally due to the densely developed nature of Portsmouth, these spaces tend to be found in larger proportions around the outside of the city, although there are some important spaces found more centrally. Recent assessments of the quantity and accessibility of open space provision in Portsmouth have highlighted that there are deficiencies across most types of open space in relation to the needs of the current population and projected future population.

² <https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/leisure/parks/parks-and-open-spaces-strategy>

- 3.3.** Beyond the city's open spaces, the GI network includes other more individual assets including trees, hedgerows, shrubs and green roofs. The city has a known stock of more than 30,000 trees including 25,000 Council owned trees; 8,000 which are managed by the city's highways contractor and a further 3,000 protected through tree preservation orders (TPOs). A number of recent developments have included green roofs, with more planned. Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre recently recorded 66km of hedgerow, these are a priority habitat for the whole Hampshire region³.
- 3.4.** At the street level, there can be immense variation over just a few streets in the provision of green infrastructure across Portsmouth. For example in Southsea, a highly urbanised part of the city, streets such as Frensham Road are planted with numerous large, mature trees and other forms of planting which help break up the urban fabric. Neighbouring roads can be completely devoid of greenery however and lacking in any form of natural features which has the effect of exacerbating the urban, artificial feel of the area. Space in many of Portsmouth's streets particularly in central areas such as Southsea, Fratton and North End is highly limited and is under pressure from a range of sources such as needs for pedestrian access as well as access for vehicles and parking. However, there are numerous examples where trees and other natural features were once present in such locations, but for various reasons have since been removed from the environment without a replacement. It is also evident that there are untapped spaces within many streets where new planting could take place which have yet to be fully identified and mapped.

4. The Council's planned green infrastructure measures

- 4.1.** Several immediate measures have been identified which the Council will work to progress to deliver new green infrastructure across the city over the coming months. These measures will be made up of two parts, additional tree planting across Portsmouth, as well as enhancements to existing green spaces to improve their quality and functionality. Each measure will be discussed in greater detail below along with some particular means by which their success (and therefore the overall success of this delivery plan) could be monitored and quantified going forwards.

Additional tree planting across the city

- 4.2.** Trees are valuable assets within the public realm not only for the visual amenity that they provide, but also because they help to intercept and slow down rainwater; shade and cool the surrounding area; aid in removal of pollutants from the air and provide space for nature. Portsmouth's tree canopy cover has been conservatively estimated at around 14% of the city, which is similar to London⁴, it is evident however that more can be done to help expand the city's tree network.
- 4.3.** As part of its day-to-day work, and in partnership with its highways contractor, the Council works to manage and maintain its stock of trees including new planting and

³ Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) 2016-17 Annual Monitoring Report

⁴ <http://www.treeconomics.co.uk/london-itree>

replacement planting. In recognition of the value that trees can bring to the streetscape, however the Council will actively work to plant more specimens across Portsmouth. This additional planting could be targeted at existing vacant tree pits as well as identifying new sites for planting. A number of locations will be identified around the city for this additional tree planting and the Council will be targeting these areas over the coming year(s) in addition to its usual programme of tree works.

- 4.4. A further piece of analysis will be conducted at a street by street scale in areas of the city which have particularly low tree coverage (council owned) within the public realm. This would identify a number of roads which are completely absent of trees, as well as a number which have low coverage and could help with targeted improvements. In the longer term, this analysis could be extended across the wider city to inform future rounds of tree planting.
- 4.5. Success for this first measure of the delivery plan will be quantified by the numbers of additional trees planted across the city. Success could be further measured by attempting to quantify particular ecosystem services (benefits to people such as air quality regulation, reduced carbon emissions etc.) that the additional trees planted will contribute to the city.

Enhancements to existing greenspaces (e.g. additional planting of trees, shrubs, wildflowers; landscaping and improved access)

- 4.6. Alongside targeted tree planting across the city, the second measure the Council intends to pursue is that of making enhancements to existing greenspaces in the city. As touched upon earlier, Portsmouth has a variety of typologies of open space, ranging from cemeteries and allotments, to parks and gardens, amenity greenspace and formal/informal playing pitches. Whilst many of these typologies have a particular primary role to play in the city such as a place for burials (cemeteries) or a place for sport (playing pitches); parks and gardens and amenity greenspaces perform a broader set of functions and have value for the health and wellbeing of a wide proportion of the city's inhabitants who live around them for that reason.
- 4.7. Parks and gardens in the city tend to be characterised by a range of features including facilities for children and young people, outdoor sports and landscaping and horticultural features that help them to play a multi-functional role in the city. Several such spaces have been awarded nationally recognised Green Flag awards for their quality in recent years for that reason, they may not be the spaces where significant short term improvements can be easily obtained. In contrast, amenity greenspaces tend to be smaller (though not always) and far less equipped in terms of such features, usually given over to grass, shrubs and trees. Yet these spaces are often still used by people for a range of informal recreational activities.
- 4.8. When considering how to target green infrastructure enhancements in the city to improve quality and multi-functionality, the generally lower quality provision in terms of the functions that amenity greenspaces provide make them an obvious target for focus.

Within the constraints of available funding, it is considered that as an initial step, these greenspaces could more obviously benefit in the short term from targeted improvements than more well-equipped parks and gardens to help boost their multi-functionality as green infrastructure assets. Therefore amenity green spaces in the city will be the primary focus for an initial round of improvements in the first instance.

- 4.9.** The Council has recently undertaken an assessment of its open spaces which included an evaluation of the quality of amenity greenspaces to support the work of Culture and City Development. General issues noted with regard to quality of the city's amenity spaces included that many lacked significant tree or other informal planting which would assist in enhancing biodiversity value and interests, also that few had attractive and informative signage, even where there was an obvious presence of interesting heritage or history and that a number lacked seating or litter bins.
- 4.10.** The city is also faced with other challenges which enhancements to green infrastructure could help to address and that this piece of work would make a contribution toward. There are several important routes running north-south that bring people into the city centre, or out of the city centre back onto the mainland, including the M275, Northern Parade, London Road, Copnor Road and Eastern Road. These routes are traversed by thousands of people on a daily basis, many of whom will be visiting Portsmouth for the very first time, yet are characterised by varying qualities of public realm. As such, one means by which the benefits of targeted enhancements to greenspaces could be maximised would be by focussing them in these areas with a particular focus on amenity green areas.
- 4.11.** To fulfil the finite scope of this short term delivery plan, the Council considers it prudent to focus its resources on one particular area, further rounds of improvements in future years could then be targeted to additional parts of the city. The Council has determined that it will therefore initially look to target measures around the upper parts of the London Road and Copnor Road areas to the north of the island, as well as further southwards down these roads. Not only do aspects of these roads suffer from a poorer quality/heavily urbanised public realm, but they are well used routes for people traversing the city. Furthermore, green infrastructure enhancements on these routes could make a valuable contribution towards the Council's emerging work in promoting a green grid across the city, where significant parts of these roads have already been identified as potential green corridors (see section 5 for more details).
- 4.12.** To inform the enhancement works going forwards, a number of sites have been identified. It is suggested that going forwards, these sites are subjected to more detailed site-specific investigations to assist in prioritising resources; to help to inform the types of green infrastructure enhancements most suitable in which areas; and to ascertain which functions and qualities would be most desired for strengthening. This last point is important, as already touched upon, green infrastructure is capable of performing multiple functions, be that improving biodiversity, adapting areas to climate change, or contributing to the health and wellbeing of people - thus to make the most of available resources, a well-defined objective(s) for the outcome of the enhancements to be targeted in each area will be vital to the success of this plan.

4.13. Success for this measure of the delivery plan will be quantified by any improvements to the functionality of each area of greenspace identified for enhancements in the London Road area. For example, has biodiversity been improved (or has the potential for its improvement been increased) in the space; has the capacity of the space for adapting the wider area to climate change been improved; or will the area make a greater contribution to the health and wellbeing of local residents?

5. Looking longer term

5.1. Looking towards the medium and long term, the Council will be actively working to promote green infrastructure in the new Local Plan. Whilst the benefits of including green infrastructure in new development for achieving various objectives will be promoted throughout the plan, the matter will also be addressed in its own specific policy.

5.2. At the heart of the Local Plan will be the intention to resist any development which results in a net loss of green infrastructure, and encouragement of designs that seek a net gain in green infrastructure in recognition of the various benefits that this type of infrastructure has for the development of Portsmouth. Furthermore, in recognition of the often limited space available in the more densely built up areas of the city, the plan will seek to encourage innovative design of green infrastructure in the urban environment that might utilise traditionally more wasted spaces, such as roof tops and walls of buildings in order to help meet net gains in green infrastructure. It will also seek to bring about enhancements to existing green infrastructure that serves to boost its multi-functionality and overall quality, this will be important for improving the resilience of these assets to the potential of increased pressures from future development needs and rising population in the city going forwards.

5.3. The emerging work is investigating the introduction of an 'urban greening factor' tool which new development would need to comply with, as well as the identification and creation of a strategic green grid of 'green corridors' across the city (figure 2) to help deliver more greening in Portsmouth and support the wider South Hampshire Green Grid which is being promoted by PUSH.

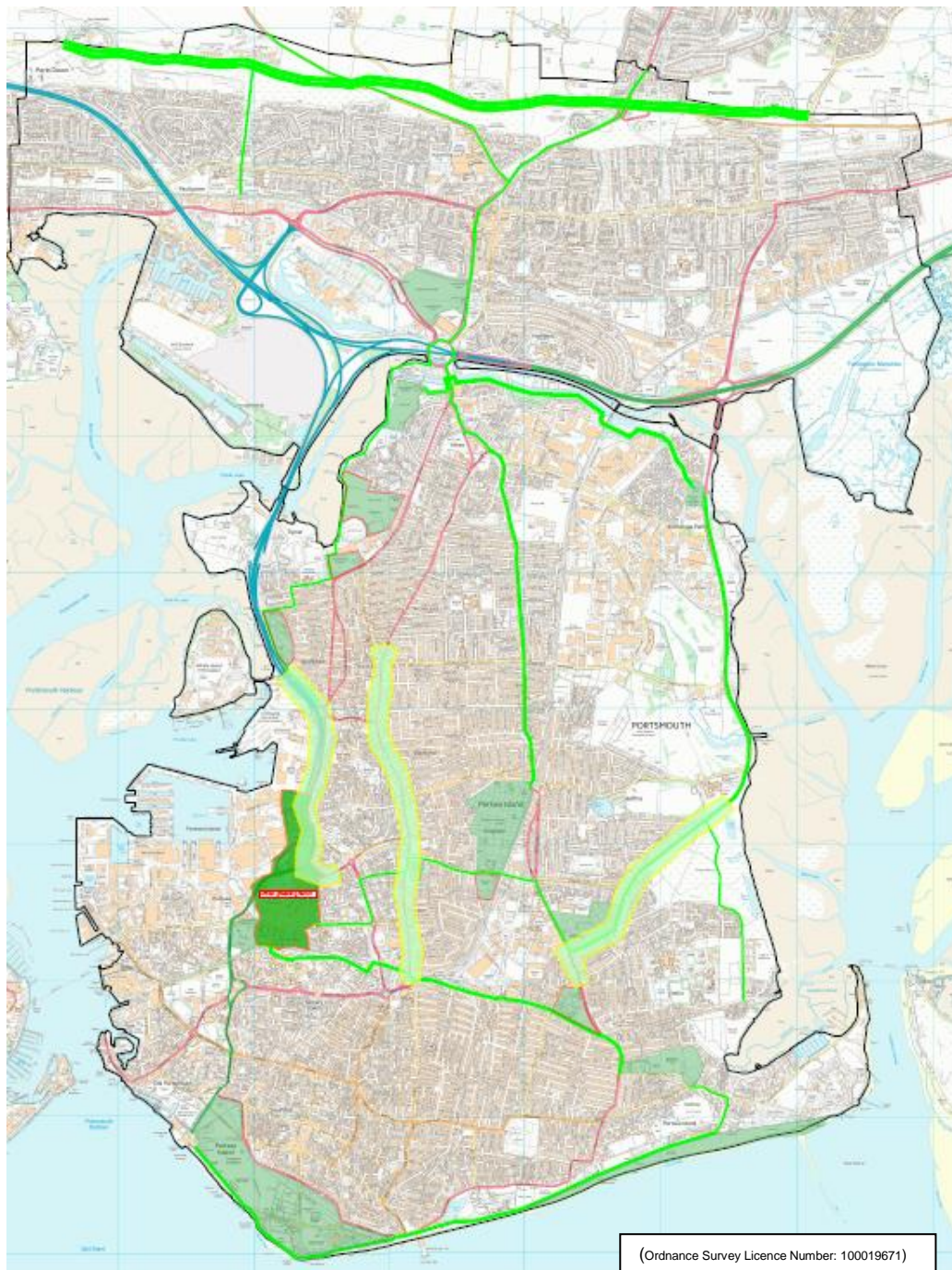


Figure 2: Emerging Portsmouth green grid

6. Conclusions

6.1. The Council is committed to protecting and strengthening the city's green infrastructure. Delivering on this commitment will take a variety of approaches targeting a variety of elements of the green infrastructure network.

6.2. This plan sets out a number of measures that the Council is planning to undertake in the short term to deliver improvements to green infrastructure across the city. Alongside these measures, it will continue to progress its work on more long term strategies for green infrastructure in Portsmouth through the development of the new Local Plan.