

## Chapter 7

# Delivery and Policy Recommendations

This chapter identifies recommendations to shape the future planning, design and management of Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) within Herefordshire. It is structured using the Natural England Green Infrastructure (GI) Framework, using the 'Process Principles' to provide an overview of the steps needed for the successful delivery of GBI and how they might apply to Herefordshire's GBI network at a range of scales and locations. The Natural England GI Framework's GI Standards are also explored in this chapter, highlighting where they are, and are not, relevant to Herefordshire's rural and urban settings.

## Natural England's Process Principles - How to plan, design and nurture GBI

**7.1** As discussed in **Chapter 2**, Natural England launched the GI Framework in February 2023 [See reference 17]. The relationship of the Natural England GI Framework to other relevant policies and requirements can be seen below in **Figure 7.1**. As part of the GI Framework, a set of principles were produced to underpin the framework and to provide a baseline for stronger GBI policy and delivery. Five 'Process Principles' have been developed to guide the successful implementation of GI, alongside the five 'Benefits of GI' and five 'Descriptive Principles', as shown in the GI Principles Wheel in **Figure 7.2**.

Figure 7.1: Relationship of the Natural England GI Framework to other relevant policies and requirements

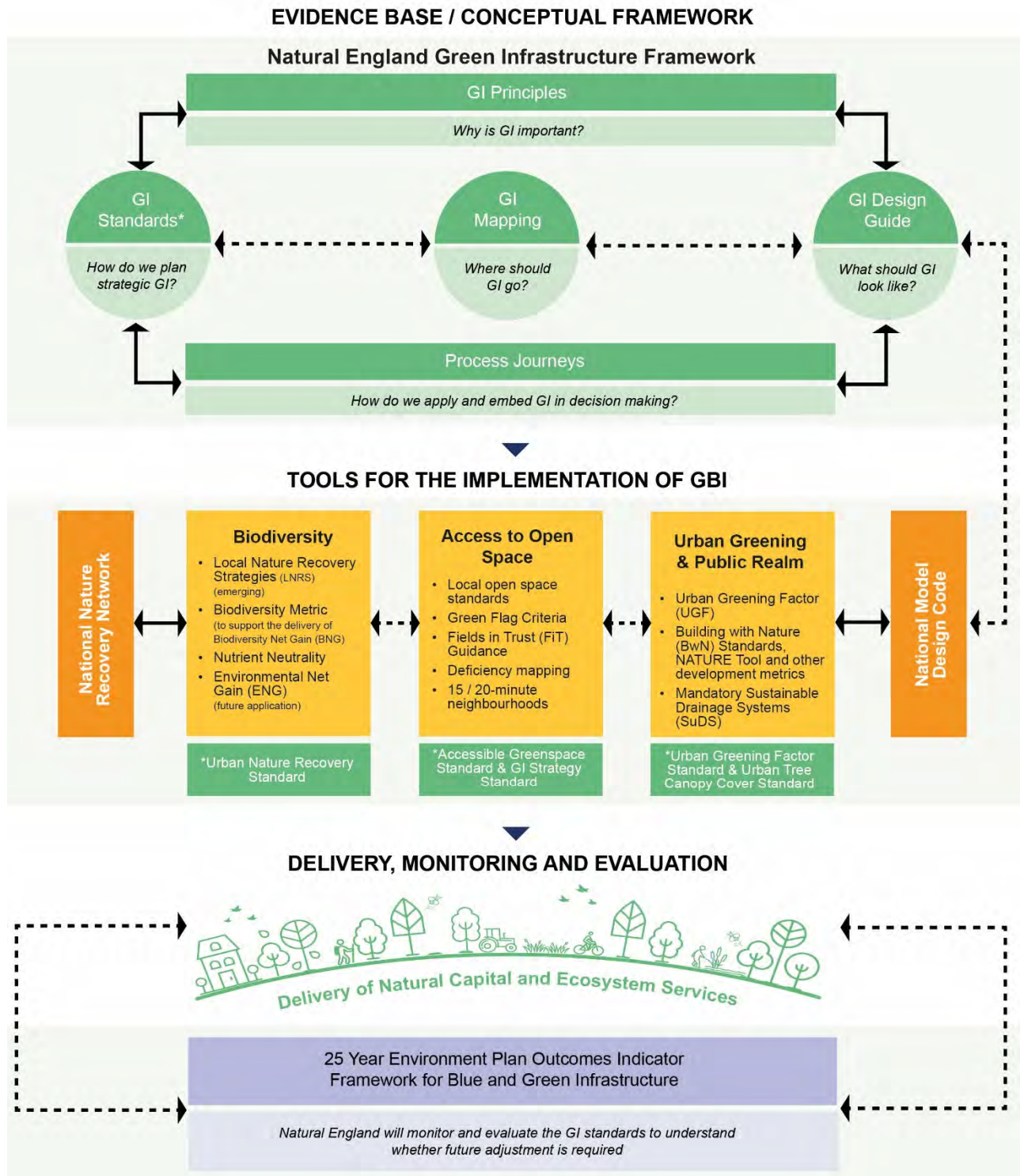
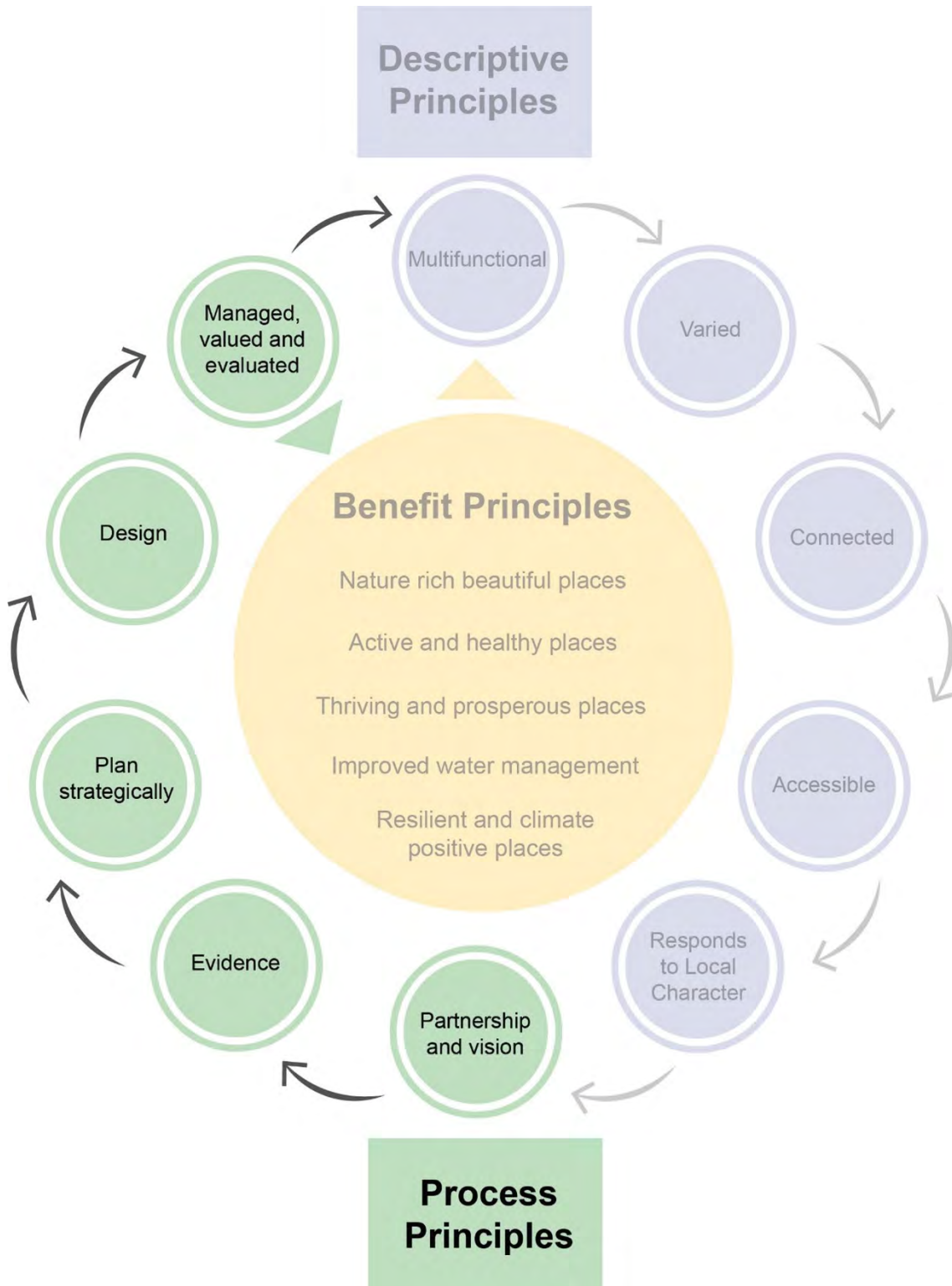


Figure 7.2: 'GI Principles Wheel', as developed by Natural England



**7.2** The five 'Process Principles' summarise how to successfully implement GBI and to secure its long-term stewardship. These can be read in full on Natural England's GI Principles web page [See reference 18] and are referenced in relation to the Herefordshire context below.

## Partnership and Vision

*"Work in partnership, and collaborate with stakeholders from the outset to co-plan, develop and deliver a vision for GI in the area. Engage a diverse and inclusive range of people and organisations including citizens, local authorities, developers, communities, land owners, green space managers, environmental, health, climate, transport and business representatives."*

**7.3** When planning for GBI, it is essential to include key sectors and interest groups throughout the whole process, including in the development of a vision for GBI (see **Chapter 2**). This will allow for a wider range of delivery mechanisms, benefits and potential funding options to be explored. Examples of partners include public bodies and local authority departments, statutory consultees, utility providers, trusts, businesses, community groups and representatives and landowners.

A number of Herefordshire-specific potential partnerships include:

### **National**

- Natural England;
- Defra;
- Environment Agency;
- Canal and River Trust;
- Forestry England;
- Sustrans;

- RSPB; and
- Historic England.

### **Regional**

- The Wye and Usk Foundation;
- Marches Nature Partnership;
- Marches Local Enterprise Partnership;
- Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Trust;
- Shropshire Council;
- Worcestershire County Council;
- Gloucestershire County Council;
- Monmouthshire County Council;
- Powys County Council;
- Wye Valley AONB; and
- Malvern Hills AONB.

### **County-wide**

- Herefordshire Local Nature Partnership;
- Herefordshire Wildlife Trust;
- Herefordshire Tree Forum; and
- Herefordshire Green Network.

### **Local**

- Herefordshire Wildlife Trust City Branch;
- Hereford in Bloom; and

- Local food growing groups.

## Evidence

*"Use scientific evidence, and good land use practices when planning and enhancing green and blue infrastructure. Understand the evidence for the benefits of current GI assets; and data on environmental, social and economic challenges and needs in the area."*

**7.4** Both qualitative and quantitative evidence is needed to achieve good GBI which reflects the benefits that it can deliver. A sound evidence base will not only allow for a thorough understanding of the current provision of GBI, but also to understand the future needs. The Natural England GI Mapping is the first nationally consistent set of GBI data which can act as a starting point for understanding quantity, quality, accessibility, naturalness, functionality, and distribution of the GBI network nationally.

**7.5** As Herefordshire is predominantly rural, large parts of the county have poor access to open space, with access to natural greenspace generally concentrated around the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Malvern Hills AONB, Mortimer Forest and the English-Welsh borders. Poor access to open space in rural areas is a common but important issue and should be considered as part of future open space planning. Poor access to public open spaces may, to a certain degree, be mitigated through the promotion of enhanced connectivity across the Public Right of Way (PRoW) network and other active travel routes.

**7.6** Local Plans should be supported by strategic-scale evidence related to GBI, including supplementary local data which is in addition to the Natural England GI Mapping. This Strategy forms part of a county-wide Natural Environment Evidence Base which was commissioned to support the development of Herefordshire's emerging Local Plan. Other workstreams include the Herefordshire Open Space Assessment, data analysis and mapping of Habitat and Species and the Herefordshire County Landscape Character Assessment.

This evidence base should not only be used to inform Herefordshire's Local Plan, but also be readily available to Parish and Town Councils looking to produce Neighbourhood Plans.

**7.7** GBI evidence to support the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans should be tested with the public and key stakeholders through consultation drafts of plans.

## Plan Strategically

*"Plan strategically and secure GI as a key asset in local strategy and policy, at all scales. Fully integrate and mainstream GI into environmental, social, health and economic policy. Create and maintain sustainable places for current and future populations, and address inequalities in GI provision."*

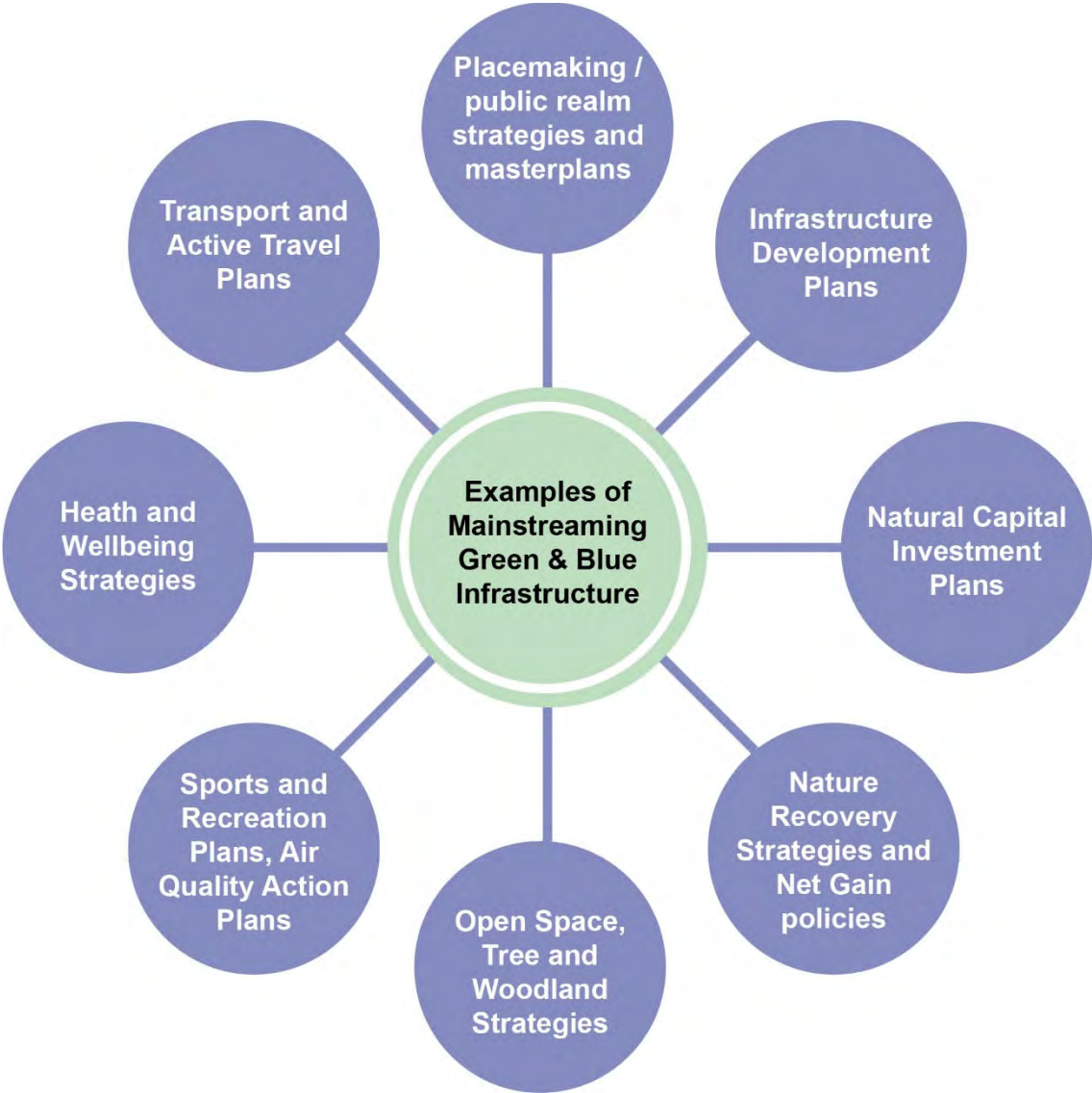
**7.8** The emerging Herefordshire Local Plan will play an integral role in the delivery of sustainable development across the county, alongside guiding appropriate land use change. The weight, breadth and timescale of the plan means it presents an essential opportunity to fully integrate GBI throughout its policies, therefore safeguarding the delivery of multifunctional enhancements to the GBI network. Despite the benefits of GBI now being widely recognised, it has previously been difficult to deliver on expectations due to competing priorities.

**7.9** The national, regional, and local need for development and housing is an ongoing issue which needs finely balancing, with the role of the Local Plan to coordinate the needs of communities, businesses, and the natural environment. However, development also provides an opportunity for funding and delivery mechanisms, with the Local Plan also having the ability to influence the direction of developer contributions to help mitigate the impacts of development. The backing of a project or opportunity within the Local Plan can also play a central role in securing outside funding and helping to promote the cooperation of various partnerships. However, local plans are inherently development-

focused, meaning that their influence over current land uses is very limited, unless they are proven to mitigate the impacts of planned development.

**7.10** The drive for GBI delivery should not just sit within this Strategy, but it should be mainstreamed through other policies and strategies. The Strategy should act as the detail in identifying local needs, gaps in provision and opportunities for enhancement. Examples of other policies, plans and strategies where GBI can be integrated are listed below in **Figure 7.3**.

**Figure 7.3: Examples of ways to integrate GBI into other policies, plans and strategies**





**7.11** To ensure the mainstreaming of GBI, it must be viewed as a purposeful design / management approach, which can be applied at all stages of the planning process. Local plan policies related to GBI can complement other agendas and bring together a range of environmental topics / tools which are defined at both the national and regional scale. These can include:

- Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Urban Greening Factor;
- Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS);
- Local nature recovery;
- Nutrient neutrality and nutrient credits;
- Suitable alternative natural greenspaces (SANGs);
- Climate / carbon credits; and
- Policies for open spaces, woodland and trees.

**7.12** GBI policies must work at a range of scales, for example, at the strategic scale by identifying regional nature recovery networks, or at the site-specific scale by helping to guide the retention and enhancement of habitat / landscape features. Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework provides further advice on preparing Local Plans and mainstreaming GBI within its 'Process Journeys' [See reference 19]. Another useful resource is the Mainstreaming Green Infrastructure project which has produced a Green Infrastructure Planning Policy Assessment Tool [See reference 20]. Herefordshire's Local Plan should be tested against this tool, which is guided by two key principles, including:

- **Functional coverage** – the extent to which GBI is covered across all policy areas, including the introduction and vision for the plan. The tool recognises the benefit of using placemaking as a uniting concept for GBI.
- **Strength of policy wording** – the phrasing used to convey the treatment of GBI, including whether it is explicitly stated within economic, social, health and climate change policies, alongside the degree of its mainstreaming outside of environmental policies.

**7.13** It is recommended that this assessment is undertaken independently by two assessors and their scoring compared. Pilots of how the tool was first tested within authorities in Scotland and examples of high scoring policies can be found in the TCPA's report 'What does good green infrastructure policy look like?' [\[See reference 21\]](#).

## Design

*"Understand an area's landscape / townscape, natural, historic and cultural character to create well-designed, beautiful and distinctive places."*

**7.14** Well-designed GBI takes into account its surrounding context, with design cues taken from the existing landscape and townscape character. As well as appropriately responding to place, well designed GBI should take account of the multiple potential benefits that it can deliver, as well as the multiple needs and gaps which it can fulfil. The Herefordshire County Landscape Character Assessment, Historic Landscape Characterisation, Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan, Wye Valley AONB Management Plan, Rapid Townscape Assessments and any future design codes and design guides, including the Hereford Design Code, should all be used to inform the design of GBI.

**7.15** The quality of design has been a significant focus for the government in recent years, with the publication of the National Design Guide in 2019 [\[See reference 22\]](#) and the National Model Design Code in 2021 [\[See reference 23\]](#). These publications were part of a wider drive to improve design quality which also included the 'Building Better, Building Beautiful' commission. Within these design documents there is a distinct promotion of good quality 'greening' as a way to improve design quality.

**7.16** Natural England's Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide [\[See reference 24\]](#), published as part of the GI Framework, aligns with the ten characteristics of a well-designed place, as set out within the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code. The GI Planning and Design Guide

should be used as a foundation for designing good GBI, as well as supporting Local Planning Authorities to incorporate multifunctional GBI at the heart of local design guides and design codes.

## Managed, Valued, Monitored, and Evaluated

*"Plan good governance, funding, management, monitoring, and evaluation of green infrastructure as a key asset from the outset and secure it for the long-term. Make the business case for GI. Engage communities in stewardship where appropriate. Celebrate success and raise awareness of GI benefits."*

**7.17** Securing the long-term maintenance and stewardship of GBI is just as essential as the successful implementation of projects to ensure the multifunctional benefits of GBI are continued to be delivered into the future. To achieve this, a good ongoing governance structure, continued management arrangements, analysis of value and clear funding streams are essential.

### Governance

**7.18** Strong governance which is applied in the long-term is essential for the successful management, ongoing funding, monitoring and evaluation of GBI. Who will be responsible and how stewardship will be secured must be considered at the outset of the GBI planning process. Good governance means involving the right people at the right time who have the resources available to deliver, however, also planning ahead for changing circumstances. Collaboration between a range of players can deliver a useful breadth of experience to deliver multifunctional GBI at a range of scales, however, a clear overall responsibility should always be determined.

**7.19** There are several options which can be explored to provide alternatives to ongoing council management of GBI assets, as listed below.

## Community Right to Bid

**7.20** The Localism Act (2011) and Assets of Community Value Regulations (2012) provide opportunities for the transfer of land from statutory bodies or the Council to the community through the Community Right to Bid scheme. Should one of these assets come up for sale, the community can request a moratorium on the sale, meaning the selling process can be paused to allow for funds to be pulled together by the community to purchase the asset. Once purchased, the community or parish council are responsible for its ongoing management to ensure the asset continues to serve the community.

## Community Asset Transfer

**7.21** Community Asset Transfer is the transfer of publicly owned assets, either and or buildings, to a community organisation. This could take several forms:

- The full transfer of the asset to a community organisation at less than the market value or for no cost.
- A long-term lease arrangement which generally includes low rental process.
- A service level agreement which will give the community ongoing management responsibility for the asset.

## Trusts

**7.22** The transfer of assets to a trust that can oversee the continued management of the asset is commonly seen across Herefordshire. The management of a number of nature reserves within the county by the Herefordshire Wildlife Trust is an example of this approach.

## Management

**7.23** Long-term management of GBI must be planned for and secured from the outset of projects. Furthermore, costs for maintenance and management of the entire GBI asset should be included in viability assessments. Landowners and developers in particular must be made aware of the need for continued positive management of GBI to secure long-term benefits. This is highlighted in the requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain assets to be secured and managed for at least 30 years.

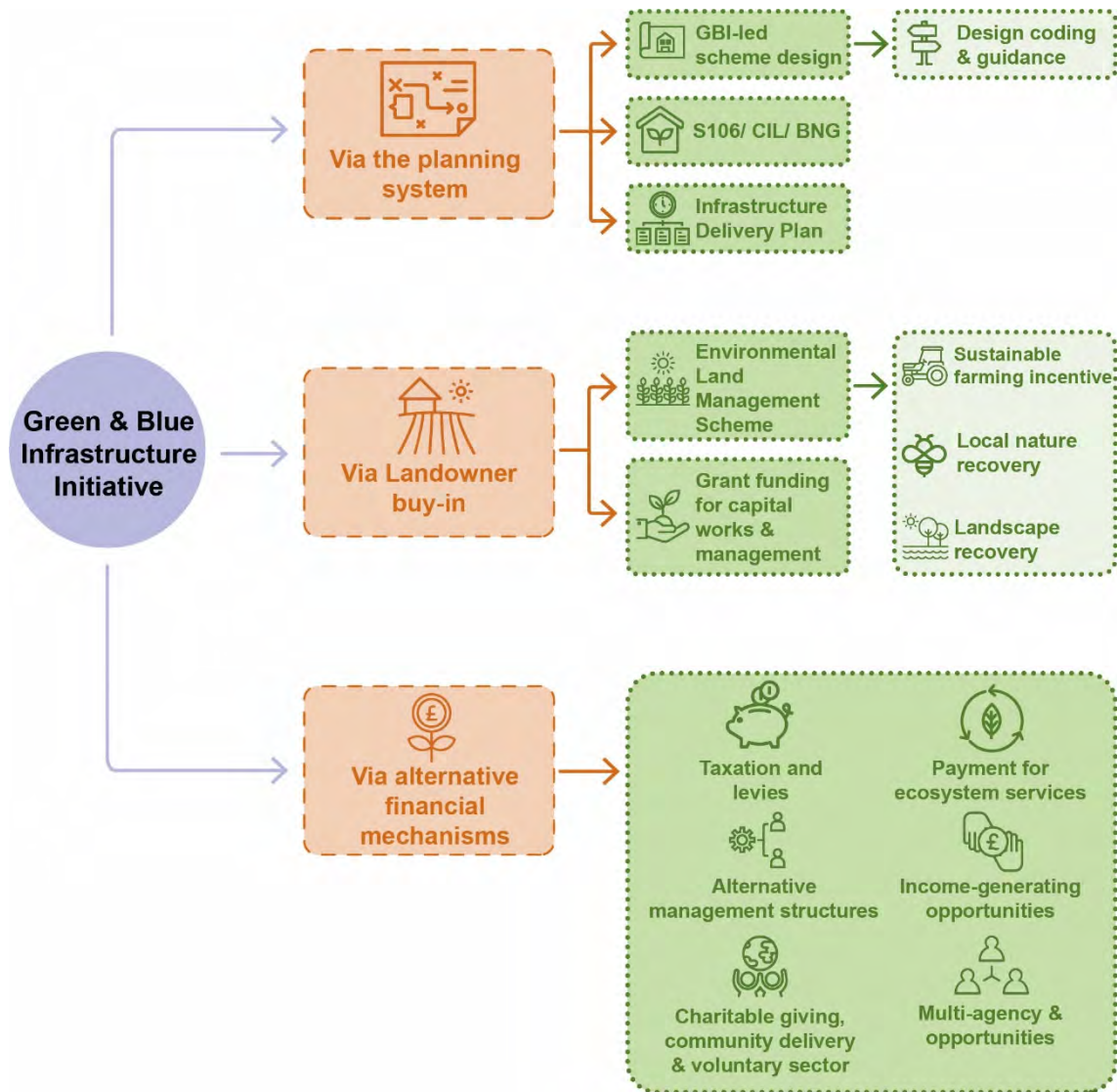
**7.24** The management of GBI should be considered at the strategic scale. This is because positive management of GBI in one location can potentially help another GBI asset to deliver better multifunctionality and therefore benefits, for example nature-based solutions to flooding and connecting nature networks.

**7.25** Opportunities to involve communities and local stakeholders in the ongoing management of GBI assets should also be explored due to their local insight into needs and issues. The health and wellbeing benefits of conservation and management activities should also be fully explored through social prescribing schemes.

## Funding

**7.26** Financing projects is often the biggest obstacle to overcome when planning for GBI. In recent years, there have been far fewer public resources available for funding the delivery and ongoing maintenance of GBI. Traditional models of local government-funded projects are becoming increasingly rare, meaning alternative delivery mechanisms and sources of funding are becoming progressively popular. **Figure 7.4** demonstrates some of the potential routes for the delivery of GBI which can create a variety of government-backed, local authority-led, private sector or alternative financing options.

**Figure 7.4: Summary of potential delivery and funding mechanisms**



**7.27** Looking at funding from a multi-disciplinary perspective can help to create a diverse funding portfolio. However, this fragmentation of funding mechanisms can lead to a disconnect between the needs of the GBI network and its potential to deliver multifunctional benefits, with a number of funding opportunities being directed at single or siloed goals. Therefore, the robust mainstreaming of GBI across all areas of policy is essential to create joined-up thinking across different sectors.

## Delivering GBI through the planning process in Herefordshire

**7.28** Growth is expected across Herefordshire in the coming years. GBI can be delivered directly through masterplans for new development. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) policies, nutrient neutrality requirements, design codes and developer checklists should be used as levers to ensure high-quality interventions. BNG offsetting also provides an opportunity for GBI enhancements away from development sites where BNG requirements cannot be met on site. Recent guidance from DEFRA [See reference 25], published in February 2023, identifies the opportunity to combine environmental payments. This process is anticipated to be refined during the lifespan of this Strategy but as it currently stands where projects deliver nutrient neutrality, credits from Biodiversity Net Gain can be stacked on top. Therefore, these combined mechanisms offer significant opportunity for delivering multifunctional GBI.

**7.29** New development can fund GBI either directly or through levies and planning obligations. The government is proposing a new Infrastructure Levy which will replace CIL and will scale back s106 agreements. It is intended that this new scheme will raise more funding towards infrastructure, including GBI. Dispersal of this funding will require a more detailed infrastructure needs and viability assessment.

## Strengthening GBI through Environmental Land Management

**7.30** As highlighted in **Chapter 2**, approximately 95% of Herefordshire is classified as 'rural', meaning significant proportions of the county falls into private ownership. A significant opportunity for the county-wide enhancement of the nature recovery network will be through the roll out of the Environmental Land Management (ELMs) scheme. This will support Herefordshire's largely agricultural landscape to deliver benefits beyond just food production. Although this largely falls outside of the remit of the Council and the planning process, the

Council could play a role in encouraging its uptake and helping to support the farming community through the process. There are three tiers in ELMs:

- **Sustainable Farming Incentive** – Intended to be accessible by all land holders to ensure good environmental practices are conducted as a baseline standard.
- **Local Nature Recovery** – Encouraging land managers to work collaboratively for local nature recovery and deliver local environmental benefits.
- **Landscape Recovery** – Long-term, land use change projects such as woodland, peatland and wetland restoration.

### Alternative financing routes for GBI in Herefordshire

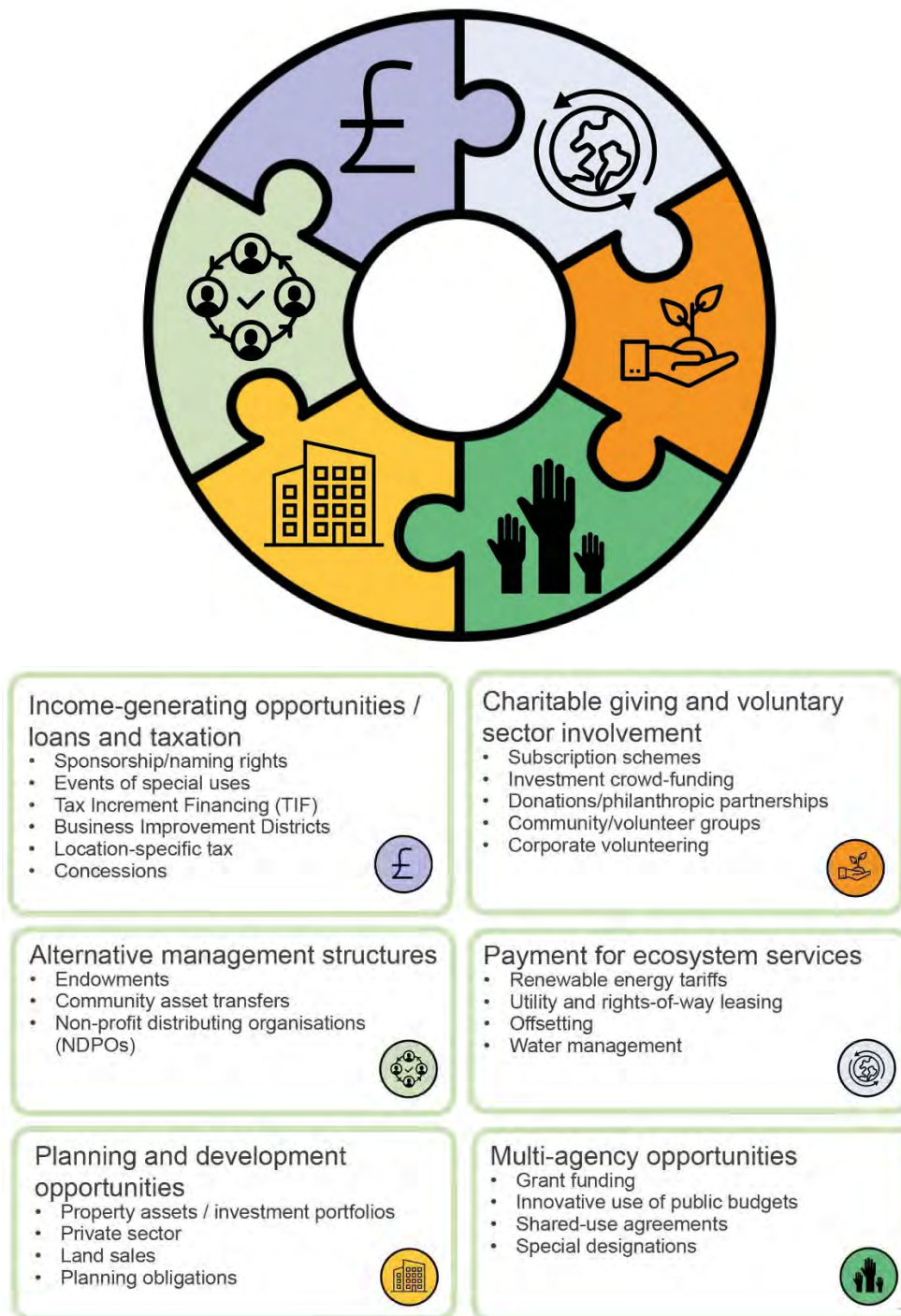
**7.31** In 2021, a coalition of public and private partners called the South West Partnership for Environment & Economic Prosperity (SWEEP) produced the report *Alternative Funding Mechanisms for Green Space*. These mechanisms look beyond public sector funding and planning mechanisms for delivery, instead requiring collaboration with the private sector, local communities and local businesses. An overview of the various financing mechanisms can be seen below in **Figure 7.5** and include:

- **Income generating opportunities**, where GBI is used for commercial purposes.
- **Loans and taxation**, for example through location-specific taxes and business levies.
- **Alternative management structures**, where the management of specific GBI features are transferred to a charitable trust.
- **Charitable giving and voluntary sector** for both funding and providing time to help manage assets.
- **Payment for ecosystem services**, for example offsetting biodiversity or nutrient credits.



- **Multi-agency opportunities**, where multiple organisations collaborate to piece together different funding sources, including grants.

**Figure 7.5: An overview of potential financing mechanisms for funding GBI within Herefordshire**



**7.32** Although not all of these options will be applicable to all types and scales of GBI, the report's findings reflect the diversity of funding options which can be applied to the network. Strategic-scale projects which seek alternative funding sources will require significant scope and viability assessments. This will need considerable in-house capacity and therefore these alternative funding mechanisms may only be suitable for smaller-scale projects.

### Valued

**7.33** By considering the value of the natural environment for people and the economy, it helps to 'make the case' for GBI. A natural capital approach to policy creation and decision making can be a useful approach for recognising and communicating the need for change. By establishing a baseline of GBI assets, the continued contribution of GBI can be valued over time. This continued monitoring and evaluation will allow for best practice to be applied across different projects using types of interventions and management techniques which provide the most benefits.

**7.34** Measurable standards provide the most robust way of monitoring the success of GBI projects. A number of GI standards have been produced as part of the Natural England GI Framework [\[See reference 26\]](#) and are explored in more detail below. Other standards include the new Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Metric 4.0 [\[See reference 27\]](#). Furthermore, GBI accreditation schemes such as Building with Nature can also be used as a measurable standard for success.

## Policy recommendations for Herefordshire

**7.35** This Strategy recommends a series of new policies which could be incorporated into the Herefordshire Local Plan to guide the delivery of GBI, as well as to support the ongoing stewardship of the network. Key GBI policy recommendations are identified below and discussed in relation to the new Natural England Green Infrastructure Standards.

### Natural England Green Infrastructure Standards

#### S1 Green Infrastructure Strategy Standard

**7.36** Natural England's Green Infrastructure Strategy Standard highlights the need for local authorities to produce a strategic plan for GBI provisions in partnership with stakeholders. A successful Strategy should apply the 15 GI Principles and the GI Standards, making them relevant to the local context where appropriate. The Council could utilise this Strategy to help it to set GBI policies, set development requirements and apply in local design codes.

**7.37** The Council could explore the opportunity to set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely) targets for GBI within a Delivery Plan to achieve these local policies over a set period of time, as well as to provide a plan for the long-term management of GBI assets. It is recommended that this plan is monitored and evaluated against the delivery of these local targets every five years. Guidance on how to achieve this can be found in the Natural England GI Framework Process Journey for Local Planning Authorities.

**7.38** Where major developments are proposed, the Council could establish a GBI Plan as part of the Design and Access Statement. This would set out how

the scheme will deliver the GI Framework's 15 GI Principles and the GI Standards. The council could also stipulate that any new GBI delivered as part of, or in association with, a major new development is required to be managed for a minimum of 30 years.

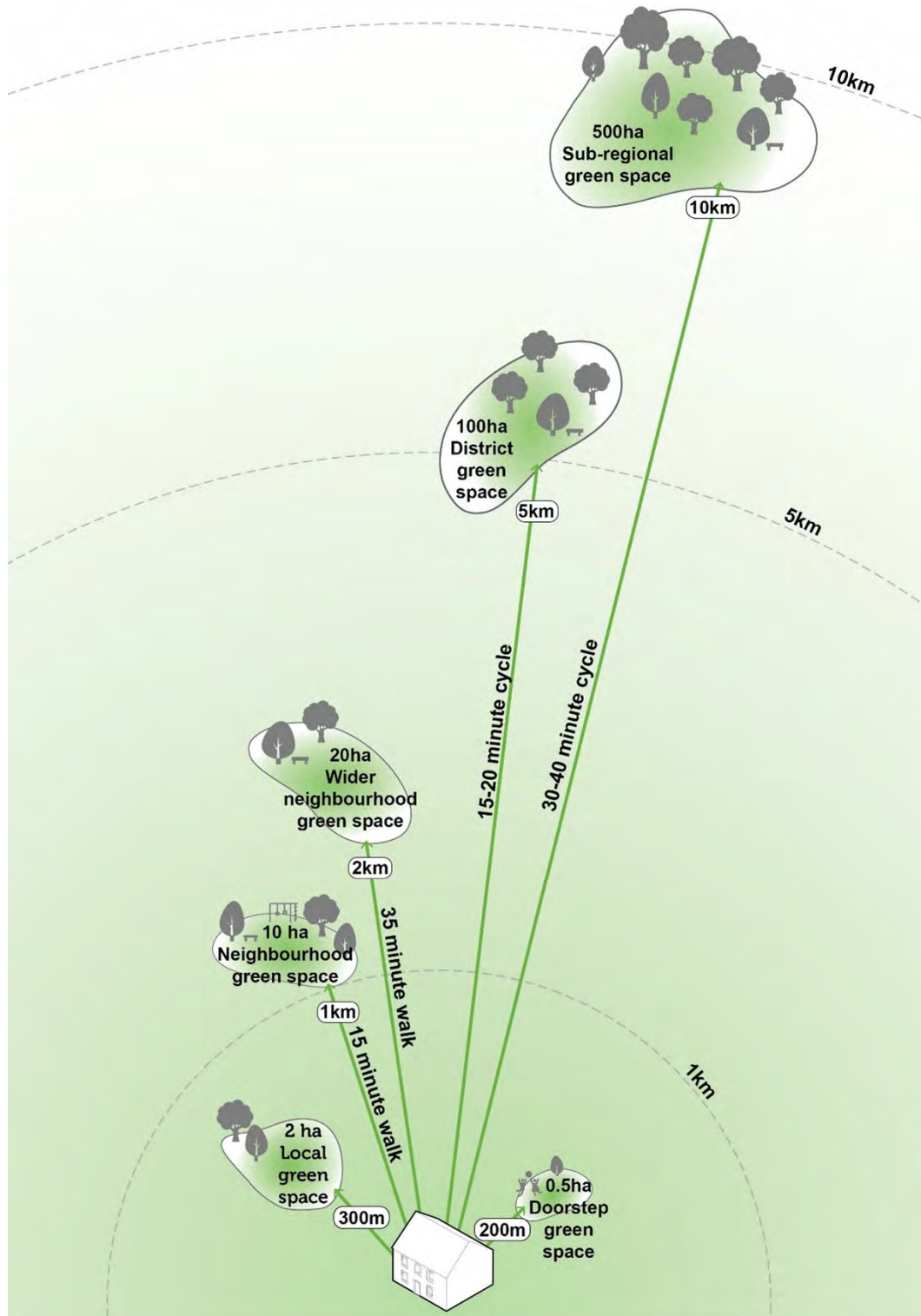
## S2 Accessible Greenspace Standards, including Quality Standards

**7.39** It is recommended that robust open space standards are applied across Herefordshire to ensure communities have a suitable quantity and quality of open space which is easy to access from where they live and work.

**7.40** Natural England's previous Accessible Natural Green Space Standards (ANGSt) have been updated and re-named to Accessible Greenspace Standards (AGS). This is to reflect the importance of local doorstep spaces for people's health and wellbeing, despite the fact they may not provide considerable provisions for biodiversity. The Natural England GI Framework sets out the following Accessible Greenspace Standards which could be applied across the whole county:

- **Size and Proximity Criteria** – Everyone has access to good quality green and blue spaces close to home for health and wellbeing, as well as interactions with nature. An initial focus is on access to green and blue spaces within a 15 minute walk from home, as highlighted below on **Figure 7.6**.

Figure 7.6: Accessible Greenspace Standards, as highlighted in Natural England's GI Framework Standard 2



- **Capacity Criteria** – It is suggested that local authorities provide at least three hectares of publicly accessible greenspace per 1,000 population. It is recommended that all major developments are designed to meet these capacity targets.
- **Quality Criteria** – The opportunity exists for accessible greenspace to meet Green Flag Award criteria where possible. It is recommended that all new accessible greenspace within new developments meet this criterion.

**7.41** Levels of provision and need within rural areas of Herefordshire are likely to differ from the needs of Hereford and the five market towns. As a result, access to accessible green and blue spaces within 15 minutes' walk from home across Herefordshire is unlikely to be practicable. Sustainable access by foot, bike, wheeling and public transport could therefore be a key consideration. Pressure for new accessible open spaces is likely to be most concentrated in peri-urban areas where growth is most likely to be focussed. In many instances, formal accessible greenspace will be essential to help manage recreational pressure on surrounding fragile habitats, for example the Lugg Corridor adjacent to Hereford and Leominster, parts of the Malvern Hills AONB adjacent to Ledbury and parts of the Wye Valley AONB adjacent to Ross-on-Wye.

**7.42** It is recommended that the Herefordshire Open Space Assessment is used as a baseline guide to developers in understanding the type of open space provisions they could be delivering as part of their scheme. Consultation with the Council and appropriate stakeholders could then inform how these provisions can help to reduce the recreational pressures on nearby sites. Through the use of s106 payments, developers could also contribute to the re-purposing or enhancing of existing nearby greenspaces to help mitigate the pressures of the new development. This, for example, could apply to amenity greenspaces which have the potential to function as a park or to provide access to nature on the smaller scale through educational trails and biodiversity interventions.

## S3 Urban Nature Recovery Standard

**7.43** Within Herefordshire's urban and urban fringe areas, the opportunity exists to increase the proportion of GBI which is designed and managed specifically for nature recovery. The Council could define this as an agreed percentage based on a locally defined baseline which takes into account the local need for wildlife sites, opportunities for habitat creation and constraints to its successful delivery. This could be undertaken in collaboration with the existing Local Wildlife Site review being undertaken by Herefordshire Wildlife Trust.

**7.44** Targets for the provision of Local Nature Reserves (LNR) and Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) within Herefordshire's urban and urban fringes could be applied where possible, including:

- Providing 1 hectare of LNRs per 1,000 population; and
- Enhance existing and identify new areas that qualify as LWSs.

**7.45** Within major development sites, opportunities for the creation or enhancement of LNRs or LWSs could be provided in the Green Infrastructure Plan, as part of the Design and Access Statement.

## S4 Urban Greening Factor Standard and S5 Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard

**7.46** It is recommended that the emerging Herefordshire Local Plan references both the Urban Greening Factor (UGF) standard and the Urban Tree Canopy Cover standard where relevant across Hereford and the market towns. A review of urban greening and urban tree canopy cover within existing urban areas could be undertaken to understand the current baseline, recognising that tree canopy cover within urban areas in the county currently lies at 13%. It is recommended that the Local Plan evidence base could seek to test different standards to see how they might impact on viability and to see whether development sites across Hereford and Herefordshire's market towns could

accommodate these requirements. These may be best understood by using case studies. It is anticipated that with the statutory requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain, additional UGF requirements will not result in a materially different site design.

**7.47** It is recommended that development requirements could explore the opportunity to reflect the need for new and existing trees to be incorporated into new developments and for all new streets to be tree lined, in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

## Additional Policy Recommendations

**7.48** Alongside implementing the Natural England GI Framework's GI Standards, a number of other policies are recommended for consideration with the emerging Herefordshire Local Plan.

### Identify areas for environmental protection and improvement

**7.49** It is recommended that the Local Plan clearly sets out what GBI is and what makes it distinctive in Herefordshire, including a strong statement on what the multifunctional benefits of GBI are. Within this, areas to protect and enhance could be identified, for example designated sites, ancient woodland, river corridors and open spaces.

**7.50** Priority areas of environmental protection and enhancement could include or be based on modified versions of the Strategic Priority Zones identified within **Chapter 6**, which not only focus on existing GBI assets but also where this is the most GBI need. This could be achieved in conjunction with the Herefordshire Local Nature Partnership to highlight the areas which will form the backbone of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The requirement for this work is set out within the 25 Year Environment Plan and Environment Act, and



guidance for producing is set out within Local nature recovery strategy statutory guidance [See reference 28].

## **Support the development of a county-wide design code**

**7.51** Soon to become a requirement for all Local Planning Authorities, local design codes will use the National Model Design Code (2021) and the National Design Guide (2019) as a reference for what good design should look like. A countywide design code for Herefordshire is currently underway, alongside a design code for Hereford.

**7.52** By producing a locally relevant and context-led design code, the delivery of high-quality GBI across all new development will be ensured, as well as streamlining the planning process by making it clear to developers what is expected from them at the start of the process. This could be reinforced through a developer checklist for GBI, as included within **Appendix G**.

## **The Building with Nature Standards**

**7.53** This Strategy recommends the exploration of the Building with Nature accreditation to set out the expectations for new development to ensure it is GBI-led. The standards provide both planners and developers with a ‘how to’ guide on what high-quality GBI should look like in practice. It also reinforces the concept that it is not just about how the GBI looks, but also how it functions for both people and wildlife.

**7.54** It is recommended that major development within Herefordshire is encouraged to adopt the Building with Nature standards, including for future management of the site. All developers could be encouraged to engage with the Council prior to the planning process to understand the expectation for GBI on their site. Responsibility for the Building with Nature standard could lie with the

existing Natural Environment team and would involve pursuing training for key members of the Local Authority team.

## Set a requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain at 20%

**7.55** From November 2023, a minimum of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is set to become a mandatory requirement for all new development in England following Royal Assent of the Environment Act in November 2021. BNG is calculated using a metric produced by Defra which evaluates the amount of 'biodiversity units' before and after development, taking into account the area, type and condition of habitats. Not only will the net gain need to be delivered by the end of the development process, but it will also need to be maintained for the next 30 years, ensuring the long-term stewardship of biodiversity interventions.

**7.56** The UK Government's consultation on BNG concluded that 10% net gain "strikes the right balance between ambition, certainty in achieving environmental outcomes, and deliverability and costs for developers". However, this takes into account the vast discrepancies in baseline conditions across the country, ranging from large-scale strategic sites in a rural setting down to small urban infill developments. Furthermore, the Environment Act highlights the importance of 10% as a **minimum**.

**7.57** It is recommended that the Council commissions a local viability assessment to explore the opportunity to adopt a requirement for up to 20% BNG in the county for certain development types, for example strategic housing sites. This will help the county be at the forefront of enabling nature recovery networks and increasing access to nature. It will also safeguard against anecdotal evidence that 10% may not be sufficient for buffering the margins of error which can emerge from these calculations. Further still, the existing pressures which are placed on Herefordshire's designated sites reinforces the need for BNG to be at the top of the agenda to help support sustainable new development in the county.

**7.58** The Doubling Nature Strategy [See reference 29], prepared by South Cambridgeshire District Council, begins to set out how 20% BNG can be delivered across all developments. Following the promotion of a 20% minimum BNG target by the Kent Nature Partnership, Kent County Council, with funding from Natural England, commissioned a strategic viability assessment of BNG in Kent, looking at 10%, 15% and 20% minimum requirements [See reference 30]. In summary, the assessment concluded that a shift from 10% to 15% to 20% would not materially affect viability in the majority of instances when delivered on-site or off-site.

**7.59** A number of Herefordshire's infill and smaller development sites will likely require the opportunity to deliver off-site BNG. Therefore, it is recommended that the Council creates an off-site BNG catalogue, identifying council-owned land which is suitable for biodiversity improvement, as well as engaging with willing landowners to be included within biodiversity credit schemes.

### Trees

**7.60** It is recommended that Herefordshire's emerging Local Plan includes a robust tree policy which sets the expectation for both urban and rural tree planting. 20% tree coverage forms the overall target for the county, with targets for specific urban locations due to be defined in the future. Specific targets for Hereford and the market towns should also be determined, in line with any plans for an Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard. How these targets are achieved across the county could be developed within a Tree and Woodland Strategy or Action Plan.

**7.61** The policy could also reinforce the requirement for tree preservation in all scenarios, unless there is a justified reason for their removal, for example dangerous trees or those which are diseased. In the situation where a tree is to be removed, the replacement ratio must be at least 3:1 (at least three trees must replace the loss of one tree). Any future Tree and Woodland Strategy / Action Plan could also include provisions for the ongoing management and maintenance of Herefordshire's tree stock.

## Soils

**7.62** Fertile soils are characteristic of Herefordshire, leading to the productive agricultural landscape which spans the county today. However, agricultural intensification and poor rural land management activities threaten the health and structure of Herefordshire's soils. It is recommended that the Council works alongside Farm Herefordshire and Herefordshire Meadows to promote the better management of the county's soils to reduce erosion and enhance condition, as well as increasing the capacity for carbon sequestration. This could be achieved through the creation of a county-wide Soil Strategy.

## Destination green space

**7.63** Analysis of access to natural green space using Natural England's Accessible Green Space (AGS) standards has shown significant gaps in provision in some of Herefordshire's central areas. Furthermore, recreation pressures on protected sites, such as the Malvern Hills SSSI and Lugg and Hampton Meadows SSSI has proven the need for mitigatory action to be taken. It is recommended that the Council works with relevant partners and landowners to scope out a new destination green space which would help to meet this deficiency in access to natural green space, as well as reduce recreational pressures on sensitive sites.

**7.64** To achieve the status of a destination site, the new green space could include facilities such as accessible walking trails, toilets and opportunities for interactions with nature. Sub-regional scale sites of around 500ha could be sought in central Herefordshire which would help to meet the needs of residents within a 10km buffer. Alternatively, several district-scale sites of around 100ha could be identified to help meet the needs of residents within a 5km buffer.