



## Greenways Countryside Project Strategy 2005 - 2010

### Introduction

The Greenways Countryside Project was set up in 1994 by Suffolk County Council, Ipswich Borough Council, Babergh District Council, and Suffolk Coastal District Council with grant aid from the then Countryside Commission (now Countryside Agency).

Grant aid from the Countryside Agency toward the core costs of running the Project ceased in March 2000, at the end of two three year agreements.

Highlights of the Project's first ten years include:

- More than 25,000 trees and shrubs planted
- Practical management work on more than 60 sites
- 5 major footpath improvement projects
- Involvement in more than 100 public events
- Dozens of illustrated talks and guided walks
- Leading the creation and implementation of the Ipswich River Strategy.
- Bringing together a wide partnership to manage Belstead Brook Park.

*And, perhaps most importantly,*

- Facilitating 7,181 volunteer days of work worth at least £359,000.

This Strategy document is intended to guide the direction of the Project through the period of 2005 - 2010, highlighting the Project's abilities and the links with the strategic aims of a very wide range of other organisations in the area.

The Greenways Countryside Project area covers about 100 square kilometres, and contains approximately one quarter of the total population of Suffolk. The effective management of the countryside in and around Ipswich is, therefore, very important.

There are numerous pressures on the land in the urban fringe, particularly relating to the rapid growth in the area leading to high demand for development sites, and the resulting increase in population requiring the use of open spaces and countryside.

The Project is a very effective mechanism for dealing with the interactions between the issues of wildlife and landscape conservation, public access, and the maintenance of a living, working countryside. Through close working relationships with local communities and relevant organisations, the Project is able to deliver a very wide range of services on behalf of its funding partners.

### Mission Statement

*The Greenways Countryside Project will work with its partners, local communities, local businesses and individuals to protect and enhance green space in Ipswich and its neighbouring parishes, for the benefit of local people and wildlife.*

### Aims and Objectives

- To promote the strategic development of open space in Ipswich and its neighbouring parishes through the statutory planning process and assist with the implementation of local authority Open Space Strategies.
- To develop opportunities for local people to better enjoy high quality green space near to their homes.
- To fully involve local people and businesses in caring for their local environment so encouraging a sense of "ownership". In particular supporting voluntary groups, individuals and the wider community in their efforts to improve their environment.
- To protect and enhance wildlife biodiversity, landscape quality and cultural heritage/archaeology by supporting local communities and where feasible offering practical assistance.
- To provide opportunities for lifelong learning about the local environment through targeted events and activities.
- To work with partners, local communities, landowners, other organisations and agencies in order to minimise land use conflicts in the urban fringe.

In order to achieve these aims, the Project will operate three guiding principles:

**Partnership** with local communities, interest groups, businesses, land owners and government agencies.

**Integration** with the work of existing and new partners seeking to manage and improve open space provision in the area.

**Co-operation** by involving as many different interests as possible in all aspects of our work.

## Main Issues and Actions

### Access to Green Space

Almost a quarter of Suffolk's people live within the Greenways Project area, and many more work in the area. It is therefore extremely important to provide high quality green space close to people's homes to allow recreation, healthy lifestyles, enjoyment and visual stimulus without the need to use a car to travel to well known countryside sites many miles away. Green spaces can be accessed by most people at any time and there is no charge for such use – an important characteristic as seven of the sixteen wards in Ipswich are in the 20% most

deprived in the country (based on combined indicators of deprivation). Access to high quality open space is recognised as a key factor in health and well-being.

The new Planning Policy Guidance 17 highlights the importance of open space, encouraging planning authorities to adopt a strategic approach and plan positively for the provision of high quality open space. The guidance also suggests that the strongest protection should be afforded to open space that already is or is potentially of value to the local community.

*The Project will:*

- Play a key role in supporting the production and implementation of the IBC Greenspace Strategy and Open Space Strategies of other partners. Outcome: By 2010, the project will be implementing parts of agreed strategies for each partner.
- Promote opportunities for healthier lifestyles through health initiatives and practical involvement of volunteers in conservation site management – the “green gym,” as well as providing opportunities for those visiting open spaces.
- Promote the availability of accessible green space.
- Assist with the management of green spaces in Ipswich and the neighbouring parishes, to ensure a high standard of provision.
- Work with existing and new partners to ensure effective and efficient management of green space across ownership and administrative boundaries.

### **Involving the Community**

The active involvement of local residents is vitally important in the management of green spaces. Local people have a strong interest in the open spaces in their area, often using them every day. The Greenways Project harnesses the help of local residents to act as “eyes and ears”, reporting any problems and suggesting improvements. Increasingly local people are coming together to form “friends” groups with the express purpose of helping to manage areas of green space for everyone’s enjoyment.

The Project is also very successful at involving volunteers to help with practical site management and other activities from promoting and helping organise events through to supervising other volunteers and placement students. Direct involvement in the management of sites gives local people a sense of ownership and pride that helps to create a sustainable mechanism for managing open spaces into the future.

The further involvement of Parish Councils and other community groups will be encouraged through opportunities to attend the Joint Advisory Committee meetings and tours.

*The Project will:*

- Utilise the respective Local Strategic Partnerships & Community Strategies to expand community involvement in caring for their local environment.
- Provide opportunities for direct involvement in looking after green spaces. Outcome: Sustain regular volunteer input at 800 days per year.
- Support the work of new and existing “friends” groups.
- Encourage volunteer groups and individuals to develop their skills, providing training and support where appropriate.
- Develop partnerships with the business community to encourage a greener working environment and greater involvement in the local area..
- Offer opportunities to New Deal (Work Experience) placements to gain skills in practical green space management.

### **Safeguarding our Biodiversity (or Wildlife)**

The project area is rich in Biodiversity priority habitats and species. This is acknowledged by the presence of 6 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), 47 County Wildlife Sites (CWS) and many more Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). The project area also includes part of the Stour/Orwell Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA). The general public has many opportunities to appreciate and enjoy this wealth of wildlife, in particular at the 10 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs).

The Project supports the owners of many of these designated sites with management works that are crucial to the maintenance of their biodiversity.

*The Project will:*

- Support and where necessary facilitate the practical management of wildlife habitats throughout the Project area, with particular priority being given to Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats and species, Local Nature Reserves and sites with local commitment. Outcome: All such sites receiving some active management.
- Advise partners and landowners on environmentally friendly land management practices.
- Promote the importance of linking green spaces by wildlife corridors in Open Space Strategies

### **Raising Awareness**

The ready availability of accessible information about wildlife, countryside and wider environmental issues is essential to the Project gaining the continued support of partners and local communities. Well informed local people will be able to shape the future of their environment and change their own behaviour to minimise their environmental impact.

*The Project will:*

- Offer a programme of educational events, guided walks and talks for people of all ages and backgrounds.
- Provide high quality information to the local community through on-site interpretation panels and notices and through publications (including walking and cycling routes etc) and media articles.
- Support the establishment of a Riverside Environment Centre in Ipswich. Outcome: New Project office in the Centre by 2010!
- Continue to offer placements and work experience opportunities to school and college students.
- Work with the Suffolk Biological Records Centre and other bodies to highlight the importance of green space to Ipswich.

### **Sustainable Development – Looking to the Future**

The Project has a key role to play in influencing the shape of future development in Ipswich and its neighbouring parishes, in particular through the creation and management of new green spaces. The Project will also have a role in supporting local people wishing to make better use of existing open spaces or protect them from inappropriate development. Not only will a healthy and attractive environment remain important for local people but it is increasingly important in attracting new investment to the area. The Project is well placed to work with local authority planners and prospective developers in encouraging a balanced approach to development where green space is considered as a necessity and not an afterthought.

*The Project will:*

- Liaise with local authority development control staff on major planning applications to advise on green space opportunities. Outcome: Evidence of improved provision of natural green space by 2010.
- Submit comments on planning applications that may conflict with the Greenways Strategic Aims and Objectives.
- Keep the Greenways Strategy under review & propose minor amendments if circumstances require.
- Maintain an independent voice on issues that may affect the quality of the environment of Ipswich and its neighbouring parishes.

#### **Implementation**

The Project will continue to operate with a Project Manager and Ranger, guided by an Officer Steering Group and Joint Advisory Committee.

The Project will produce a work programme each year and an Annual Report on progress.

#### **Existing partners**

Ipswich Borough Council are the employing authority, Suffolk County Council, Babergh District Council and Suffolk Coastal District Council are the main funding partners.

Since the withdrawal of funding from the Countryside Agency, the Project has developed a very wide range of supporters including Parish and Town Councils, land owners, businesses and grant giving bodies.

New partners might include members of the Local Strategic Partnership such as the Primary Care Trust, Social Care and Education services. The Environment Agency, area fora and other community groups could be more involved as partners in the future. Generally there should be a move towards more partnership with the community.

#### **Funding**

In addition to the core funding from the partner authorities, the Project hopes that each partner will investigate all other possible ways of funding the Project including establishing a mechanism for achieving strategic funding for open space provision from all new developments.

The Project staff will continue to seek funding from the widest possible range of sources to enable site maintenance and improvement to continue.

#### **Monitoring and Review**

This strategy will be reviewed continuously and will form the basis of the Annual Work Programme. A full review of the strategy will be carried out in 2009/10.

Published [Annual Reports](#) will monitor progress towards the aims and objectives.