

Westminster City Council Green Infrastructure Audit - Summary

In September 2023, Westminster City Council declared an Ecological Emergency. Part of achieving this is to ensure the land we own such as housing estates, parks and open spaces, as well as those owned by other stakeholders in the city, is hospitable to both people and nature, helping to reverse the decline in biodiversity we are experiencing locally, nationally and globally.

To better understand the current state of green and blue spaces in Westminster, consultants LUC and Bosky Trees Ltd were commissioned to undertake an independent Green Infrastructure Audit (GI) of the city. Green infrastructure is the network of green spaces, and other spaces such as blue infrastructure like rivers and canals, that work together and function to support nature, biodiversity, climate resilience and overall wellbeing. In Westminster, this broadly means public and private parks and open spaces, land surrounding public and private housing, public realm, highways and waterways and other pockets of supporting spaces such as green walls, private gardens and roof gardens.

The GI assets considered for the purpose of the Audit are listed and visually displayed below.

Managed and natural green space

- 1 Public parks and gardens, including water features;
- 2 Formal and informal open space, including civic spaces, amenity green spaces, play spaces and outdoor leisure facilities;
- 3 Nature conservation sites, including Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs);
- 4 Tree cover; and
- 5 Allotments, community gardens, city farms and orchards.

Linear linkages and corridors

- 6 Footpaths, towpaths, promoted walking routes and cycle infrastructure;
- 7 Railway lines; and
- 8 River and canal corridors.

Elements of the built environment

- 9 Roadside verges;
- 10 Street trees, trees in gardens and hedges;
- 11 Urban greening features, including green walls, green roofs, parklets and planters;
- 12 Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), for example rain gardens and swales; and
- 13 Private gardens, including square gardens, educational institutions, pseudo-public spaces, places of worship and housing estate land.



The GI Audit is a technical report providing an evidence base intended as a first step towards the successful delivery of improved greening and biodiversity across Westminster. The Audit sets out a number of key recommendations to address the green space challenges in the borough. The council has utilised the findings from the audit to inform our emerging Greening & Biodiversity Strategy 2024 which will outline the approach and initiatives to address the Ecological Emergency with a focus on collaboration and ongoing stewardship to enhance greening and biodiversity across the borough. We hope that this audit will enable ourselves and others to better understand how we can work collaboratively with other landowners and residents who are also working towards improving nature and biodiversity in the city – the recommendations are not exclusively for the council to deliver; we all have a role to play in tackling the ecological emergency. This list is also not exhaustive and over

time we will learn from others and share best practice to ensure we are continuing to refine and develop the actions that will follow this report.

Green Infrastructure Audit Recommendations

Table 1. Summary of the Green Infrastructure Audit recommendations

Recommendation	Overview
Address areas of green space deficiency in NW & SE of the borough	There is a deficiency in the quantity and accessibility of multiple types of open space, primarily within both the northwest and southeast of the borough
Address gaps in active travel network	Active travel networks can be enhanced through the integration of green infrastructure, offering the opportunity to increase the accessibility of greenspaces, encourage modal shift to bikes and improve air quality.
Reduce the impact of high visitor pressures on existing green spaces	Visitor pressure can have a negative impact on our green spaces – we need to balance recreational demand with habitat protection, enabling public access whilst ensuring areas of sensitive ecological areas are preserved.
Integrate new GI into key streets experiencing declining footfall	The integration of new green infrastructure along high streets experiencing declining footfall provides opportunities to increase the attractiveness for visitors as well as deliver multi-functional benefits.
Maximise GI opportunities provided by Westminster’s historic environment	A balance is required between preserving historic character and maximising opportunities for bold public realm interventions which help address the climate emergency and provide greening opportunities.
Mitigate impacts due to the urban heat island effect, particularly where these are disproportionately higher in areas to the NW	Concentrating actions to reduce the urban heat island effect can help to mitigate the effects of climate change, whilst also tackling injustices in access to greenspace and poor health outcomes
Deliver a bigger, better, more joined up SINC network	A bigger, better, more joined up SINC network is required to ensure it supports thriving ecosystems, underpin its resilience to climate change and to continue to meet the needs of a growing population.
Protect existing trees and woodland	The protection of existing trees on public and private land prevents unnecessary tree removal, protects canopy cover both now and in the future.
Deliver nature recovery and climate change resilience	Planning and design of green infrastructure needs to accommodate bold interventions that deliver nature-rich assets which complement Westminster’s cultural heritage and improve its resilience to the impact of climate change.
Encourage new tree planting within the borough	Increased canopy cover has numerous environmental benefits. Tree planting should focus on quality rather than quantity, planting the right tree in the right place.
Adopt and encourage tree pit designs that optimise Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) benefits	Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are one example of a nature-based solution which can provide both improved resilience to extreme weather and opportunities to increase biodiversity. Trees pits are one type of SuDS, which can also provide amenity and supporting local biodiversity.
Restore lost rivers	The restoration of lost rivers in Westminster can contribute to catchment scale revival and promote climate change mitigation through natural flood management and urban cooling.
Address the risk of surface water flooding through the borough	Areas in the east as well as central areas of Westminster are subject to high levels or surface water flood risk.
Develop a borough-wide green spine	There are opportunities to build on existing green spines created within the Church Street Regeneration project, expanding this to the North and South of the borough through a variety of green interventions and initiatives.

By sharing the results of the independent audit, we aim to initiate broader collaboration with key stakeholders across the city, including local schools, businesses, and community groups to protect and enhance habitats. Together we can better respond to the Ecological Emergency and realise the benefits for nature and people across the city



City of Westminster

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