

Future-proofing the public realm: Building blocks for delivering social value



**The
Land Trust**

Introduction

The UK is facing a complex set of interconnected challenges: from rising health inequalities and a mental health crisis to climate change, biodiversity loss, and increasing pressure on public services. At the same time, ambitious housebuilding targets demand that the places people live, work and play actively contribute to tackling these issues.

High-quality, well-managed public realm is a vital part of the solution. Proven to improve health, support communities, enhance biodiversity and deliver cost savings to the public purse, it must be treated as essential infrastructure, not an afterthought. To truly maximise its potential, however, a long-term, adaptable, and socially driven approach to stewardship is essential – especially as pressures on urban and urban fringe land increase.

This document sets out how delivering social value can sit at the heart of public realm planning, development, and effective long-term management. It outlines the principles and building blocks needed to future-proof our public spaces and highlights the tangible benefits of long-term thinking: for communities, the environment, and stakeholders involved.

At the Land Trust, delivering social value is our core purpose. As a national land management charity, we specialise in creating and managing sustainable, high-quality green spaces with long-term social, economic and environmental benefits. We believe that the places people live, work and play should actively improve lives, and we have the experience, data and evidence to show how this can be done.

This report shares our learnings, highlights real-world examples, and sets out a roadmap for embedding social value delivery into the heart of new developments and long-term green space stewardship.



Wider context

The landscapes of society, health, and the environment are in a constant state of evolution, shaped by economic shifts, technological innovation, and cultural change, among other factors. Amid this continual transformation, however, certain priorities remain constant: the need for cohesive communities, improved health outcomes, and a thriving natural environment.

To celebrate its 20th anniversary, in 2024 the Land Trust undertook a pioneering 'future-scoping study' to explore the key trends likely to shape the next two decades. The Tomorrow's World report, developed using the Delphi model, sought to anticipate what can be expected across society, health, and the environment in the next 20 years, and to position the organisation ahead of emerging challenges.¹

The findings showed some worryingly negative, but largely unsurprising trajectories should we maintain the status quo, underlining that we are at a pivotal moment to take real, transformative action.

This need for change is reflected in the UK's national objectives, some of which are longstanding, others which have been ushered in since the change of government in July 2024. Ambitious housing targets of 1.5m new homes over this next parliament, revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework, the introduction of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill and a proposed Land Use Framework all reflect a growing recognition of the need for systemic reform. These developments sit alongside existing legislation around Biodiversity Net Gain, 30x30 commitments and green social prescribing, demonstrating an obvious consensus that bold, integrated action is essential to address the challenges facing communities, public health, and the environment.

Despite this knowledge, however, there remains a gap between the direction outlined in policy, and how to translate this into action.

The public realm is not a silver bullet in addressing these challenges – its benefits do not occur in a vacuum. However, when properly planned, delivered and managed, green, blue and grey spaces are a powerful tool within a wider arsenal in supporting national priorities and delivering tangible outcomes for people, places, and the planet.



Why the Land Trust?

Delivering social value to and for communities is the Land Trust's *raison d'être*.

Our vision is to improve the social and economic quality of people's lives by creating high quality, sustainable green spaces. We have an unparalleled breadth of skills in green space management, underpinned by a commitment to long-term, in-perpetuity, and financially sustainable stewardship on behalf of our clients and the communities we serve. As a charity, we are uniquely positioned to deliver enduring social, environmental, and economic value.

Looking ahead, the Land Trust will focus on the core building blocks outlined in this report to future-proof our approach to green space stewardship. By partnering with us, clients can be confident that their green spaces will not only meet today's regulatory and community needs, but will also be resilient, sustainable, and socially valuable assets for decades to come.

1. The Delphi method is a well-established qualitative research technique which is used to construct consensus forecasts from a group of experts. The research study collected qualitative, descriptive primary data from a panel of 27 experts representing the environment, social value, health, education and community. The invited participants included those from the Trust's advisory groups, Board of Trustees and other professional partners and used a series of broad questions designed by the Land Trust in the first instance, and a second, shorter round of questions to seek clarification and further depth. These consensus results formed the basis of the Tomorrow's World report



Building blocks

Following a thorough review of the findings from the Tomorrow's World report, the Land Trust has identified five fundamental workstreams to guide its focus over the coming years. We believe these represent the essential building blocks for delivering future-proofed social value and effective stewardship of the public realm.

While we have established a clear rationale for why these areas demand attention, the how is actively being developed. To support this, the Land Trust has recently established the Land Trust Advisory Group, a steering group comprising experts from across the built environment, health, society, and the natural world. This group will play a pivotal role in informing our strategy, ensuring these building blocks translate into tangible, effective delivery and working to ground-truth them with external research; progress on these points will be shared at a later date.



1. Working with communities to ensure access, both mental and physical

Why?

Access was the golden thread weaving together many of the themes in the Tomorrow's World report. The mental and physical barriers to high-quality green spaces - and their consequences - were identified as critical issues closely linked to widening health inequalities, diminished community cohesion, and unequal access to the benefits of the natural environment.

As the sharp edge of climate change is progressively felt, equitable access to green space will become an increasingly important social determinant of health and wellbeing. Failure to address this risks further entrenching disparities and undermining the role of green infrastructure in building resilient, inclusive communities.



2. Using technology and a data-led approach

Why?

Technology continues to transform the way people experience and interact with the world around them. The younger generation of digital natives already largely perceive the online and the physical as a seamless set of experiences, rather than at odds with one another.

While the value of unfiltered time in nature will remain irreplaceable, integrating technology into greenspaces presents opportunities for people to engage with them in new ways, enhancing educational experiences and improving accessibility for those who might feel excluded from traditional public realm environments.

Better use of technology can also facilitate a data-driven approach to community engagement, opening the floor for people whose voices typically go unheard in traditional community consultation. This will enable more inclusive, evidence-based decision making and community stewardship.



3. Collaborating with community organisations to better understand the challenges they face, and develop strategies to address these issues using green spaces

Why?

Tomorrow's World emphasised the fact that many of the challenges the UK faces are multi-faceted and cannot be tackled in silo, such as obesity and related diseases, mental ill health, and social inequality. Additionally, these issues are often highly localised, differing widely from place to place.

By collaborating with grassroots organisations embedded within the communities they serve, the Land Trust can gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the specific challenges facing local people. These organisations possess invaluable, lived insight into both the causes and symptoms of local issues, enabling the co-development of tailored strategies that use green spaces as practical, community-owned tools for positive change.

This collaborative, community-led approach ensures that the green spaces we manage are not only physically accessible, but socially and culturally meaningful to those who use them, reflecting the Land Trust's commitment to fostering community ownership where the people who live, work, and play in these places have a genuine voice in shaping their future.

The Land Trust is well positioned to align its offer with these ESG priorities, providing the private sector with opportunities to deliver measurable outcomes through partnership working. In doing so, we can unlock new forms of investment to enhance the long-term social, environmental, and economic value of the public realm.



4. Aligning with the development industry's ESG priorities

Why?

The dynamics of private finance are likely to change significantly in the next 20 years. The Government is looking for ways to leverage private sector capital to fund strategic interventions for nature, an onus that is likely to widen further as public services become increasingly overburdened. This shift could lead to more structured corporate partnerships, incentivised through ESG.



5. Profiling the local area to uncover needs and wants, including local council priorities

Why?

With a diverse national portfolio of sites - no two of which are the same - the Land Trust recognises the importance of building a deep understanding of the places and people it serves.

Enhanced local profiling will enable us to tailor management plans to reflect the specific social, environmental, and health needs of individual communities. It will also strengthen partnerships with local authorities, NHS trusts and other stakeholders, supporting them to deliver against shared priorities such as social prescribing, climate resilience, and community cohesion.

Laying the foundations for future-proofed public realm stewardship

While these building blocks will be instrumental in future-proofing stewardship of public realm, green space must begin from a strong, stable foundation if they are to meet the challenges of the years ahead.

As this government looks to accelerate housebuilding, the importance of placemaking, and crucially, placekeeping must remain at the forefront. It is not enough to design spaces for the immediate needs of new developments; we must consider how those places will continue to function as healthy, thriving, and inclusive environments for generations to come.

Although there is growing recognition of the value and benefits provided by high-quality public realm, there remains a significant gulf in understanding as to how built environment professionals can translate academic theory and policy into meaningful, tangible delivery on the ground.

The Land Trust has extensive experience in understanding what makes a healthy, thriving, sustainable community. The following principles are indispensable and should underpin all development projects:

Realistic and appropriate design

As the lifeblood of new places, green space needs to be given the same emphasis as other essential infrastructure, and front-loaded in the same way as roads, utilities and other amenities. It is vital that their design is prioritised early in the project lifecycle, with a clear understanding of the long-term social, health, and environmental value they will deliver.

The consequences of poor design are often difficult and costly to rectify further down the line. The Land Trust brings extensive expertise in identifying the features that enhance a site's long-term viability and social value and can offer specialist support from the outset.

Realistic and appropriate design means:

- Engaging communities from the earliest stages of a project to ensure the design responds to their needs and aspirations.
- Creating flexible, reviewable designs that can evolve over time in response to changing community and occupier needs.



High-quality, in-perpetuity management

Good design is only the beginning; the long-term value of public realm assets relies on a robust, sustainable approach to placekeeping. Management plans must be viable, collaborative, and capable of adapting to future demands.

To achieve this, stewardship organisations must have the appropriate expertise, governance, and financial resources in place. In many cases, this will require consulting with third-party specialists to mitigate ongoing liabilities. The Land Trust, for example, offers developers an attractive exit strategy by taking on freehold ownership and long-term management responsibilities, ensuring spaces continue to deliver social, environmental, and economic benefits in perpetuity.

Better use of data will support this approach, enabling more effective benchmarking and evidence-based decision making. Creating detailed site profiles will also allow for management strategies tailored to the unique needs of each community and location.

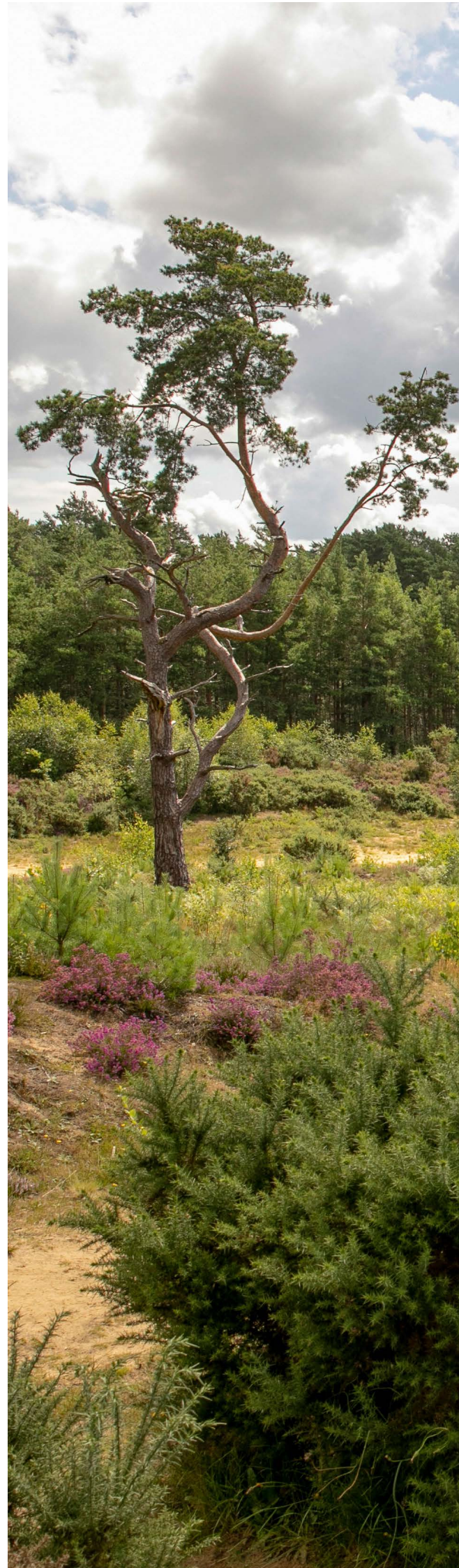
Astute, effective financing

One of the main concerns around social value delivery and in-perpetuity maintenance is the cost of long-term provision.

The answer is not to rely on continuous, escalating investment, but to establish resilient, well-structured financial models from the outset. These models must realistically assess future management costs, potential benefits, and returns.

The Land Trust's endowment model is a tried-and-tested, Treasury-approved example of how this can be achieved in practice. By investing an endowment and ringfencing the returns for site management, the model ensures long-term financial security, enabling the delivery of high-quality, sustainable public realm that remains a valuable community asset for generations to come.

A large portion of public realm on new freehold developments is currently funded via a service charge to residents. This model has, understandably, come under scrutiny recently due to poor service delivery, lack of consumer protection and unregulated, uncapped management fees.² The Government has expressed the long-term aim to remove the need for these management structures on newer developments, bringing them in line with older sites; however, we believe that the Land Trust's service charge model, based on transparency, accountability, fairness, and social value delivery, should be used in the meantime while another solution is found to make sure sites do not fall into disrepair. Longer term, local authority adoption or an endowment-funded solution could be viable alternatives and could be baked into the financing of sites over a 10- to 20-year period (due to lead times through land banking and pipelines which are already secured).



Benefits of long-term thinking around stewardship and social value delivery in the public realm

The public realm – the green, blue, and the grey – touches virtually every aspect of people's daily lives, playing an integral role in delivering social, economic, and environmental value. Through considered design, management, and long-term stewardship, these spaces have the potential to generate enormous, lasting benefits for the communities that live, work, and play within them.

The benefits of green spaces are well-documented, particularly in relation to public sector outcomes. High-quality, well-managed spaces reduce healthcare and education costs, improve local environments, strengthen community cohesion, and stimulate local economies.

As highlighted in the Tomorrow's World report:

- The benefits provided by the public realm will become even more important as society faces the challenges of climate change – for example through passive cooling measures and natural flood mitigation. There will be growing pressure on public spaces to deliver these outcomes, making it imperative to focus on long-term resilience and adaptability, rather than short-term gain.
- Green infrastructure will need to be designed and managed in ways that ensure it continues to meet the increasing pressures presented by evolving social, health, and environmental demands.

Our experience and learnings

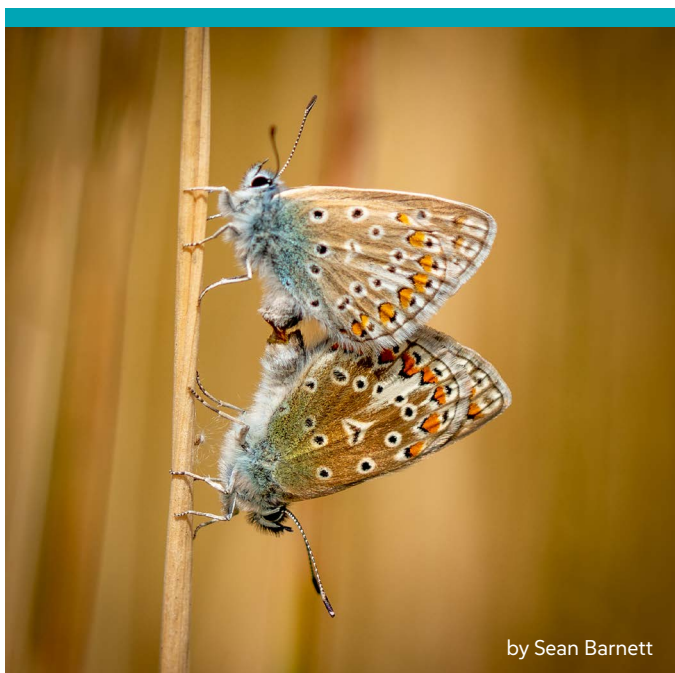
Delivering social value is at the heart of the Land Trust's purpose. Guided by our five charitable objectives, we aim to improve people's lives by managing high-quality, sustainable green spaces – but delivery is just part of the challenge. In order to properly understand the impact we have, we must also measure and understand the value we create.

The Land Trust has been honing how we capture and measure our impact since 2017. Our bespoke social and economic value model, designed in partnership with an external team of economists, allows us to place an evidence-based, monetary value on the work we do.³ This model has been continually refined over the years, allowing us to visualise the social value we deliver and communicate the tangible benefits of well-managed green space effectively to a range of stakeholders.

Every organisation is different, and while there is currently no universally recognised standard for social value accounting, significant progress has been made in recent years in providing off-the-shelf tools and frameworks to help businesses begin benchmarking and tracking their impact. While not every tool will suit every organisation's operations, scope, or objectives, these frameworks can be a good starting point in understanding where the most impact is delivered, using insights to take a more strategic, considered approach to operational delivery.

The Land Trust's social value model provides evidence-based, measurable indicators of the benefits of well-managed green space for communities, and assesses these benefits against our five charitable objectives: environment and biodiversity; health and wellbeing; education; economic uplift; and community and place.

Throughout the year, we gather data from each of our sites against a list of determined metrics, such as number of events run, how many children visit on school trips, and how many organised health activities take place. This data is then fed into the social value model.



by Sean Barnett

3. Developed in partnership with AMION Consulting.

The core calculation behind this model is simple and transparent, designed to make the value of green space activities easily measurable. The basic formula looks like this:

$$[\text{Measurable input e.g. volunteer hours or mental health sessions}] \times [\text{proxy value per hour or session}] = \text{value per annum.}^4$$

An economic value assessment worksheet then summarises the benefits generated through the model, providing an overall measure of economic value. These can then be used to understand the:

- **GVA (Gross Value Added) contribution**
- **Fiscal savings/benefits**
- **Wider economic or social value**

Table 1: Community and place (2024-25)

Input	Input value	Value (per annum)	Type of value
Volunteer hours	47,647	£783,793	GVA
Visitor numbers	9,551,616	£40,116,787	Economic value
One-off event visits	47,159	£1,697,724	Economic value

The output of this model allows us to translate on-the-ground activity into quantifiable social, economic, and environmental value, showing the tangible outcomes of our work in a way that can be clearly understood by all stakeholders, whether that be the developer, landowner, local authority or the community. Over time, this data-driven, adaptive approach has enabled us to increase the total social value we deliver each year by focusing resources and activities in areas that provide the greatest benefit for the communities we work with.

What are the benefits to prioritising social value delivery?

Embedding social value delivery within operational and financial models offers significant, long-term benefits for a wide range of stakeholders. High-quality, well-managed public realm can generate substantial efficiencies, reducing pressures on health, education, and community services by fostering healthier, more connected communities.

For organisations, prioritising social value contributes to the creation of stronger, more sustainable business models. Those that actively deliver social value often perform better, attract and retain talent more effectively, and enjoy stronger reputations within their sectors and communities. This, in turn, can have a positive impact on everything from operational resilience to market competitiveness.

Additionally, embedding social value within project delivery directly enhances ESG performance – a major motivator for many private sector businesses. As ESG reporting and scrutiny increase, organisations with demonstrable, evidence-based social value outcomes will be better placed to attract investment and meet the expectations of funders, regulators, and communities alike.

4.Proxy values are extracted from a variety of sources, e.g. ONS, government statistics, unit cost databases. These values are updated periodically to incorporate new data and supersede older values. This does mean that proxy values can sometimes go down. The model uses multiple inputs to reach a value figure in some instances, and also excludes any possible double counting.

Prioritising social value delivery also improves the likelihood of securing planning approvals, particularly where schemes can evidence credible, long-term benefits for the local area. Well-defined, locally relevant social value strategies are increasingly viewed as essential components of successful, future-proofed development proposals.

Perhaps most importantly, long-term, data-informed stewardship ensures that public realm assets remain adaptable, resilient, and relevant as the needs of communities - and the challenges of climate change and public health - continue to evolve. By placing social value at the core of public realm management, organisations can deliver lasting benefits while securing a sustainable, future-proofed approach to public realm delivery.

This is not a theoretical opportunity. In 2024, the Land Trust revealed that if high-quality green spaces were properly designed, delivered and managed with the Government's proposed 1.5 million new homes, it could unlock £5 billion every year in social value benefits for communities across the country.⁵ This includes health and wellbeing improvements, environmental services, community cohesion, and economic uplift that would be felt for years in these newly-created communities. This powerful figure demonstrates the tangible, cost-effective long-term return on investing in meaningful, properly stewarded public realm.

5 Figure of £5b based upon the social value delivered at Beaulieu development, Chelmsford, Essex across 1,341 units. The Land Trust has managed this development since 2016.

Total social value delivered at Beaulieu in 2022/23 = £4,338,629
£4,338,629/1,341 units = £3,235.36838
£3,235.36838 x 1,500,000 = £4.85billion





Case studies

Prince Philip Park & Hogmoor Inclosure

Location: Bordon, Hampshire

Size: 2,400 homes with 114 hectares of green space

Client: The Whitehill & Bordon Regeneration Company

Funding: Service charge (Prince Philip Park) and endowment (Hogmoor Inclosure)

Formerly a British Army training base, Prince Philip Park is a new development within what will become one of Hampshire's largest towns. Once complete, it will contain 2,400 sustainable new homes, including social rent and shared ownership, alongside a large variety of public green space totalling 114 hectares, managed by the Land Trust.

At the heart of the development lies Hogmoor Inclosure, the more natural of the site's green spaces. Previously an off-road tracked vehicle training area, Hogmoor Inclosure is the third largest Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) in the country, providing an alternative recreation area to avoid increased pressure from new development on the Wealden Heaths Phase II Special Protection Area (SPA), a complex of heathlands that support rare and protected wildlife.

Hogmoor Inclosure is a 54-hectare woodland and heathland which gives residents of Prince Philip Park doorstep access to nature, featuring walking, running and cycling trails, a play and picnic area, and great opportunities for wildlife spotting.

There is an on-site café which includes an education room, toilets, and changing facilities, and since 2023, visitors have been able to hire an all-terrain mobility scooter to allow everyone to explore the site. Despite its role being to divert visitor activity from sensitive habitats, Hogmoor itself supports a rich ecosystem, with species such as woodlark, slow worm, and sawflies recorded on site.

The green spaces are designed to bring communities together, and provide a safe, welcoming environment for all. A key success factor has been the active community engagement facilitated by the Land Trust's dedicated Estates and Community Officer, working in close partnership with the Deadwater Valley Trust, the site's managing partner. Together, they have helped to embed the site within the local community since the Land Trust took over the site in 2021: in 2024,25 alone, over 19,000 people took part in organised health visits, and over 13,000 attending one-off community events.

Value breakdown examples

Table 2

Health and Wellbeing	Value (per annum)	Type of value
Health care cost savings	£371,160	Cost saving
Health wellbeing value	£237,660	Economic value
Mental health	£4,475	Cost saving
Labour productivity	£64,449	GVA

Table 3

Community and Place	Value (per annum)	Type of value
Volunteering (i)	£11,154	GVA
Volunteering (ii)	£6,711	Economic value
Recreational & cultural value	£2,164,184	Economic value
Community engagement	£480,167	Economic value

Total social value delivered 2024/25: £3,780,399



Linmere

Location: Houghton Regis, Bedfordshire

Size: 5,000 homes with 90 acres of green space

Client: Lands Improvement

Funding: Service charge

Linmere is a newer development which prioritises access to the natural environment, wellbeing and community. Over the next 15 years, Linmere will see 5,000 homes built in a series of interconnected neighbourhoods, with 90 acres of public open space managed by the Land Trust.

One third of Linmere's total area is dedicated to green space. These areas have been designed to offer multifunctional benefits — including SuDS, looped walking and cycling routes, children's play areas, and future allotments and playing fields. The layout ensures that all residents live within a five-minute walk of green space, with safe and convenient access to local amenities by foot or bike.

The Land Trust took over management over the public open space at Linmere in 2022. Thanks to early collaboration with the strategic developer, the Trust manages all public green space across Linmere, despite the involvement of multiple housebuilders. This coordinated approach ensures consistent management standards, a single service charge for residents,

and a holistic programme of community engagement across the development, directly influencing the amount of social value the Land Trust is able to deliver on site.

Since 2023, Linmere has had a dedicated Estates and Community Officer from the Land Trust, who has overseen a marked increase in community engagement activities. As the site continues to be built out and more residents move in, the level of activity and value delivered is expected to grow in tandem (current occupancy at Linmere stands at around 15%).

Linmere demonstrates how integrated green space planning, supported by long-term stewardship, can contribute meaningfully to the development of new, healthy, and sustainable communities. The figures below highlight the change in social value delivery since the site was taken under Land Trust management.

Table 4: Increase in value delivery between site take-on (22/23) and last year of complete figures (24/25)

Input	Value 22/23	Value 24/25
Event visits	£312	£34,060
School visits	£718	£20,700
Land management & use	£0	£561,818
Total social value	£72,541	£1,155,627



The Avenue Country Park and Nature Reserve

Location: Chesterfield, Derbyshire

Size: 90 hectares

Client: Homes England

Funding: Endowment

The Avenue is one of the most ambitious and effective remediation projects ever undertaken in the UK, and is testament to the power of collaboration and the resilience of nature.

The site was once home to Europe's most polluted site, Avenue Coking Works, which processed 2,175 tonnes of coal daily at its peak. When the plant closed in 1992, it left behind a legacy of contamination: leaky tanks, pipelines, waste tips, tar-filled lagoons, and soil poisoned with cyanide and arsenic.

The site remained abandoned until 1999, when the extensive cleanup effort began through the National Coalfield Programme. Work to bring the Avenue back into public use spanned over two decades and required the experience, ingenuity and collaboration of a range of partners, plus significant investment by Homes England and its predecessors. Today, it comprises an award-winning parkland and wildlife reserve, featuring waterways, grasslands, and woodlands which are home to a vast array of wildlife. A masterplan was also developed to create nearly 500 new homes alongside the high-quality public park.

The Avenue transferred to the Land Trust's management in 2019.

Like all Land Trust sites, the management regime is underpinned by a placekeeping approach. Building on the work already delivered by Homes England and other stakeholders, the Land Trust has continued to enhance the site's green infrastructure and ensure it delivers social, environmental, and economic value for the community.

The coking works was once the focal point of the community for over 30 years, employing over 800 people at its peak where community clubs and social networks flourished. The Land Trust's vision for the future of the Avenue reflects this legacy, aiming to establish the site as a valued local resource once again.

Managed in partnership with Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, the Avenue is a thriving community asset providing the community with easy access to nature. Visitors are actively encouraged to report wildlife sightings, and there is strong local appreciation for the transformation of the site and the new opportunities it provides.

The results of the project are clear to see. The Avenue is now a safe, well-used public space, representing what can be achieved with a long-term, collaborative approach.

Table 5

Health and Wellbeing	Value (per annum)	Type of value
Health care cost savings	£22,338	Cost saving
Health wellbeing value	£40,044	Economic value
Mental health	£137,293	Cost saving
Labour productivity	£10,859	GVA

Conclusion

As we look ahead to the challenges of the next two decades, it is clear that high-quality public realm will play an increasingly vital role in supporting healthier, more resilient, and better-connected communities. Delivering meaningful social value through these spaces is not just a desirable outcome – it is a necessity.

Good management and robust, long-term financial models are essential to achieving this, but it is equally important to recognise that these models are not fixed. They must be flexible, adaptable and continually finessed to reflect changing social, environmental and economic pressures. The principles set out in this document show that social value can be effectively managed, measured and proactively used to support highly impactful, sustainable places.

When done well, this benefits everyone: from the communities who use and rely on these spaces, to the developers, landowners and investors who help bring them to life. As our Tomorrow's World report makes clear, the importance of anticipating future needs and embedding social value at the heart of placekeeping strategies has never been greater. The time to act is now – and it will take collective effort to make it happen.

