

Interim Earley Green Infrastructure Action Plan

April 2022

Context and Purpose

Green Infrastructure (GI) is vital to our planet and to the quality of life for existing and future generations. GI includes all soil, vegetation and water – this would also include animals and fungi. It does not include paved or sealed surfaces or buildings, but it does include features on buildings such as green roofs and green walls. GI can be accessible or inaccessible, publicly or privately owned, managed or unmanaged, designated as open space, for nature conservation, or not.

Many of the actions in the Earley Climate Emergency Action Plan will help to promote and protect Earley's GI. However, Earley Town Council (ETC) recognises that there are many measures not specifically related to addressing the Climate Emergency, such as protecting and creating new wildlife corridors, and use of private gardens to improve amenity biodiversity and manage surface water, that are also hugely beneficial to the environment and human physical and mental well-being.

Earley residents have told ETC that they want the environment to be at the heart of life in Earley. Recognising the importance of GI, ETC seeks to co-produce and implement with Earley residents and local groups, an Earley Green Infrastructure Action Plan (EGIAP) to work in harmony with the Earley Climate Emergency Action Plan. Once adopted, this Action Plan will be a live document and will be updated at least annually.

The Aim of the Earley Green Infrastructure Action Plan is to set out a realistic and sustainable strategy to enable ETC to help Earley's GI to become bigger, better and more joined together.

This version incorporates much input from residents who attended a participatory workshop on the 28th September 2021 to co-produce the EGIAP as well as the Earley Town Council Climate Emergency Working Group and the Rangers.

The EGIAP will be a publicly available live document with ongoing refinement and monitoring by local residents and groups. An annual review by ETC's Policy and Resources Committee, including performance and progress made during the previous 12 months, will be posted each year on ETC's website. It should be noted that this is a live document and adaptable to new initiative.

Earley Green Infrastructure Action Plan

Key Objectives	Steps and Actions	Funding	Performance indicators	RAG rating
<p>Provide a high quality, nature rich green infrastructure</p>	<p>Obtain maps of Earley's existing green spaces, highlighting green corridors.</p> <p>A Green Corridor Map being prepared by the Earley Environmental Group will be the hub of all Green Infrastructure policies</p> <p>Investigate options for increasing the tree canopy in Earley. This must be done carefully so as not to be at the expense of biodiversity rich grass land.</p> <p>Identify opportunities for 'tiny forests', typically undevelopable sites into thriving microcosms of nature. See for instance: Urban-Forests-report-The-Miyawaki-method—Data-concepts.pdf. Care will be needed to ensure that this doesn't just produce dense scrub.</p> <p>Work with organisations such as the Veteran Tree Association and Earley Environmental Group to maintain a comprehensive database of all trees of significance in Earley seeking, where appropriate, for each to be protected with a Tree Protection Order. It is essential that this should be a rapid and large increase in TPOs.</p>			

	<p>Identify and support opportunities for increasing biodiversity, such as extending hedgerows at Sol Joel Park and at May's Lane Cemetery. These must be of sufficient width, height, density and complexity to be useful to wildlife</p> <p>Produce and make available on the ETC website, management plans for all green spaces owned or controlled by ETC.</p> <p>Whenever GI is proposed, prepare a budget and maintenance plan which identifies the purpose, responsibilities, upkeep and contingency for unforeseen measures.</p> <p>Explore local opportunities for disseminating information about trees and plants able to cope with likelihood of future lower rainfall. The ETC and EEG websites should be utilised to disseminate the limited information on dryer summers.</p> <p>Except where there is a specific requirement for a particular type of lawn for amenity or recreational purposes, where practical, lawns on ETC-owned land should be planted with a range of low-growing wildflowers to attract pollinating insects. This will have to be done gradually.</p> <p>Prepare and implement a strategy that enables land along the edges of mown ETC-owned or controlled land to be</p>			
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managed in ways that will attract pollinators and add to biodiversity.

Accept as Policy that ETC will strive to remove invasive species from the whole of Earley and in particular, the Maiden Erlegh Lake and assist where practicable with this in nearby waterways to increase the ecological quality of wetland habitat.

Review annually and publish on the ETC website the ETC Tree Strategy.

Explore opportunities for creating rain gardens on ETC - owned land, and signpost residents to information that they might consider adopting in their own properties.

Accept as Policy that ETC will explore possibilities for adding swales and use of woody debris within the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve to hold back surface water flow in ways that could also create new and even more bio-diverse existing habitats.

Tree felling is sometimes the right thing to do. Felled wood in areas other than the Reserve should be moved where practical, to the Reserve to make more deadwood habitats. ETC's Strategy must address what will happen to embodied carbon in any trees on ETC land after felling or any form of surgery. ETC will also explore opportunities for providing more community wood chip bins within Earley to make their management easier.

	<p>Review ETC's pesticide usage and agree a zero target to reduce pesticide as soon as possible.</p> <p>Encourage allotment holders at Culver Lane to include some flowers for pollinating insects and to avoid use of chemicals that harm wildlife. Also, to encourage organic growing.</p> <p>Encourage all residents to make provision of bug hotels, bird boxes, bat boxes etc.</p>			
<p>Funding</p>	<p>Provide a budget line in the ETC budget for GI – related activities.</p> <p>Identify external sources of funding, such as from WBC, The Woodland Trust and local businesses (including support-in-kind, such as from local garden centres, and sponsored gardens)</p> <p>Signpost local residents and groups to sources of GI – related funding that they may be able to access.</p>			
<p>Community and wider engagement</p>	<p>Ensure / improve access to green space for all residents – including people with disabilities (eg: sensory gardens).</p> <p>Support the Earley Green Fair and pop-up events organised by ETC and local groups.</p>			

		<p>Continue to support and explore opportunities for further GI -related volunteering activities such as the Earley Environmental Group Wednesday Volunteers. Consider supporting voluntary projects producing information to encourage more walking and cycling.</p> <p>Help build local knowledge and skills around the opportunities and benefits of GI.</p> <p>Form partnerships, including with all local schools, youth groups, faith groups and ethnic minorities, to implement GI projects and share learning.</p> <p>Support existing and encourage new initiatives such as the Earley Environmental Group's nature walks and bug hunts, working collaboratively with input from ETC staff.</p> <p>Facilitate community involvement in the good design of GI schemes.</p> <p>Promote and support wildlife friendly gardening within private gardens and school grounds; bird and bat boxes, bug hotels, hedgehog runs etc. This may include joint working with the EEG.</p> <p>Promote initiatives such as Hedgehog Streets to residents by encouraging residents to work with neighbours on GI related initiatives, such as leaving gaps at the bottom of fences to enable wildlife</p>	

	<p>such as hedgehogs to move from plot-to-plot, and finding out what neighbours are growing in order help wildlife corridors that cut across fence lines.</p> <p>Once the Green Corridor Mapping is complete, communication will be necessary with residents whose gardens will fall within the se Corridors.</p> <p>Support opportunities for local food production, in people's gardens, community allotments, and community orchards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robust, strategic lobbying of WBC to ensure, for instance, that Wokingham's Borough Design Guide and Local Plan Updates are complimentary to: GI thinking and approach; • Earley Environmental Group proposals for a Lower Earley Nature Reserve; • Plantlife Good Verge Guidelines <p><u>Road verge guide 2021 WEB.pdf</u> <u>(plantlife.org.uk)</u></p> <p>The Green Corridor Map should become an intrinsic part of considerations related to Planning Applications by both ETC and WBC.</p>			
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<p>Celebrating and sharing success.</p>	<p>Competitions and awards for GI initiatives by school and groups working with young people and other residents.</p> <p>Annual Earley in Bloom (from 2023)</p> <p>Earley Home Grown Market</p> <p>Annual Allotment Holder's Awards</p> <p>Criteria to be determined for all of the above to enhance biodiversity.</p>	
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