



Designing innovative mechanisms to plan, implement, strengthen and manage green infrastructures in (peri)urban areas



# LAYMAN'S REPORT

May 2021 - April 2023

# About LIFE UrbanGreeningPlans

The LIFE UrbanGreeningPlans project ran for 2 years and brought together city planners, architects, urbanists, landscape architects, foresters, nature conservationists, agronomists and communication experts to

## DESIGN INNOVATIVE MECHANISMS TO PLAN, IMPLEMENT, STRENGTHEN AND MANAGE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURES IN (PERI-)URBAN AREAS.

This LIFE Preparatory project was made up of partners from 5 European cities and 2 NGOs:



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## PROJECT DETAILS

PROJECT TITLE: Designing innovative mechanisms to plan, implement, strengthen and manage green infrastructures in (peri)urban areas

TYPE OF PROJECT: LIFE PREPARATORY

PROJECT NUMBER: LIFE20 PRE/BE/000008

DURATION: 2 Years, 1 May 2021 – 30 April 2023

TOTAL COST: € 999.628 EU CONTRIBUTION: € 599.777

LEAD PARTNER: Brussels Environment

## CONTACTS:

BRUSSELS ENVIRONMENT: [eaulotte@environnement.brussels](mailto:eaulotte@environnement.brussels), [rdelestrange@environnement.brussels](mailto:rdelestrange@environnement.brussels)

EUROPARC FEDERATION: [teresa.pastor@europarc.org](mailto:teresa.pastor@europarc.org), [esther.bossink@europarc.org](mailto:esther.bossink@europarc.org)

BARCELONA METROPOLITAN AREA: [evidal@amb.cat](mailto:evidal@amb.cat), [kilousi@amb.cat](mailto:kilousi@amb.cat), [mcarbonell@amb.cat](mailto:mcarbonell@amb.cat)

CÂMARA MUNICIPAL LISBOA: [louro.alves@cm-lisboa.pt](mailto:louro.alves@cm-lisboa.pt)

NECCA: [e.katsirodi@necca.gov.gr](mailto:e.katsirodi@necca.gov.gr), [k.koumpis@necca.gov.gr](mailto:k.koumpis@necca.gov.gr)

PHILODASSIKI: [npangas@philodassiki.org](mailto:npangas@philodassiki.org), [basoulou.marianna@gmail.com](mailto:basoulou.marianna@gmail.com)

PARCO NORD MILANO: [riccardogini@parconord.milano.it](mailto:riccardogini@parconord.milano.it), [argentiero@parconord.milano.it](mailto:argentiero@parconord.milano.it)



# What are Urban Greening Plans?

*“To bring nature back to cities and reward community action, the [European] Commission calls on European cities of at least 20,000 inhabitants to develop ambitious **Urban Greening Plans** by the end of 2021.”*

## EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030

These plans should support biodiversity and mitigate climate change.

To help cities achieve this ambitious goal, the European Commission has created an EU Urban Greening Platform, which provides guidance and knowledge in enhancing and restoring urban nature and biodiversity, along with links to other relevant European Commission initiatives and policies.



## This is where the LIFE UrbanGreeningPlans project comes in!

Through demonstrating and implementing **innovative actions, sharing best practice case studies and producing guidelines**, the LIFE UrbanGreeningPlans project paved the way for urban areas throughout Europe to include Green Infrastructure (GI), Nature-based Solutions (NbS) and the promotion of healthy ecosystems in their urban planning.

## In doing so, the project supports one of EUROPARC's main messages:

**“the value of green (peri-)urban spaces for our daily physical and mental well-being”**

The project partners all worked on different greening actions. These actions focussed around the central elements of Urban Greening Plans as indicated by the European Commission. These are:



Biodiversity  
Enhancement



Climate Change  
Adaptation &  
Mitigation



Nature  
Restoration &  
Reforestation



Cross-sectoral  
Synergies



Citizens and  
Business  
Involvement



[tinyurl.com/EU-urban-greening-platform](https://tinyurl.com/EU-urban-greening-platform)



## Project Conclusions

### SOMETIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL URBAN GREENING PLANS:

- Agree on the fundamental **values and definitions** (nature, urban, plan, greening...);
- Create an **integrated & transversal** way of governance (across different sectors and scales), with a common agenda;
- Make Urban Greening Plans **mandatory**;
- **Integrate** them into the planning and management instruments of a territory;
- Be able to **change land use**.

To a large extent, our health and wellbeing depend on the capacity of cities to put in place successful Urban Greening Plans. That is why this LIFE Preparatory Project **collated and shared the extensive experience** gathered by leading cities in this field. This experience is presented in different formats in an online Knowledge Hub and constitutes a long-lasting legacy **ready to be used** by planners, (Park) managers and policy-makers.

Creating Urban Greening Plans (UGPs) should become an open process, with trial and error, experimentation and monitoring. There is no more time to first write the rules and then implement them. Urban Greening Plans need to become **urgent greening plans** to adequately respond to the current Biodiversity and Climate emergencies.

### At present: urbanism is mandatory - nature is not.

It is time for a new paradigm in which **Green Infrastructure should be prioritised** over other planning uses.

### Co-creating processes could lead to better planned cities.

By including different sectors in the planning process, more voices will be heard. Collaborative urban planning can **improve the quality of life** for those living in urban areas and create a stronger sense of belonging.

Two factors will shape our cities in the very near future: resilience against extreme climate phenomena and decarbonisation of lifestyles. Green Infrastructure, Nature-based Solutions and Urban Greening Plans will be instrumental for cities to meet these challenges.

**We need to rethink our understanding of a city.** We need to overcome the traditional City-Nature divide. There is a heightened importance of keeping the surrounding countryside around cities alive: the so-called periurban natural space, or Periurban Park (when the area is protected). These natural spaces will form part of this new city and will become key elements of the overall Green Infrastructure, and as such, of Urban Greening Plans. It is important that people already start using and valuing these natural spaces. In order for that to happen, **accessibility and better connectivity with the city**, through the creation of green corridors, needs to improve.



# Project Recommendations

Learnings from the project resulted in the following set of recommendations for policy-makers, planners and managers to green our cities and set-up Urban Greening Plans.



- 1 URBAN GREENING PLANS NEED TO BECOME URGENT GREENING PLANS** to adequately respond to Biodiversity loss and climate change.
- 2 INCLUDE DIFFERENT SECTORS IN THE PLANNING PROCESS.** Co-creating processes lead to better planned cities. By including different sectors and stakeholders in the planning process, more voices will be heard and acceptance will be higher.
- 3 INCREASE GREEN SPACES** through enlarging existing areas or purchasing new land to cool the city, increase biodiversity and give city dwellers more space for recreation.
- 4 EXPAND THE WORKING AREA OF URBAN GARDENER BRIGADES** to the outskirts of cities, also encompassing the periurban natural spaces.
- 5 IMPROVE PRIVATE GARDENS IN CITIES;** there is a huge potential to create more biodiverse private gardens through awareness-raising activities with citizens.
- 6 INVOLVE CITIZENS IN MONITORING ACTIVITIES.** It helps promote the importance of biodiversity and raises awareness of the public to biodiversity loss.
- 7 RETHINK CURRENT INDICATORS TO IMPROVE BIODIVERSITY MONITORING.** There is a need for a European index based on EU values regarding nature.



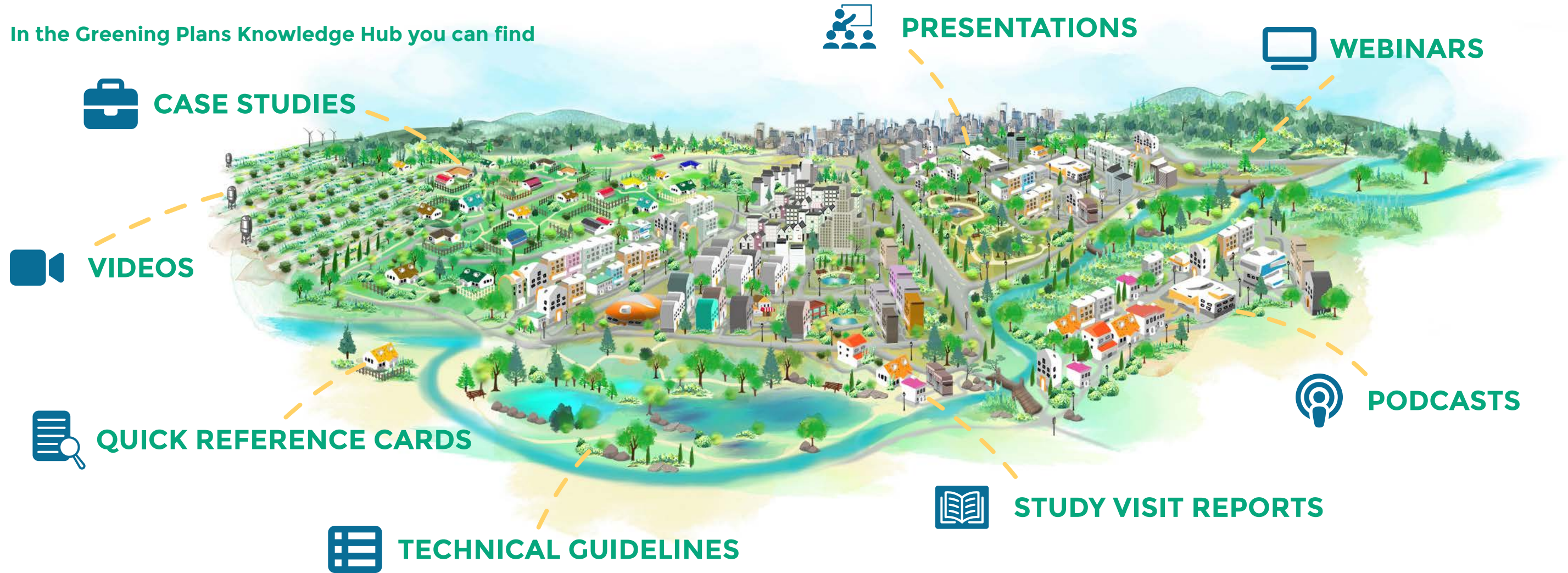
# LIFE Urban Greening Plans Knowledge Hub

**Is your city ready to start its greening process?** The Greening Plans Knowledge Hub on the EUROPARC website provides users with a wealth of resources on creating better, greener and more resilient cities. Furthermore, it includes useful materials for Periurban Parks to improve their management. The resources are organised by area type, as well as by Urban Greening Plan topic.

Check it out!



In the Greening Plans Knowledge Hub you can find



On the following pages, you can find what the cities within the project have been working on. The detailed resources can all be found in the Greening Plans Knowledge Hub!

## ATHENS

### Improving the largest green corridor in Athens & develop Corporate Social Responsibility and educational activities

Athens green corridor runs from Mount Hymettus Forest into the city of Athens and as such, has different management bodies. It has **important social and ecological functions** for the citizens of Athens. Philodassiki and N.E.C.C.A. worked on improving these functions by:

- Interviewing different management bodies to map out the challenges they face;
- Create a set of policy proposals;
- Produce a management guidance for the Kaisariani Forest managers.

In addition, Philodassiki created a **toolkit for CSR activities as well as a Framework of Cooperation for environmental education** in Periurban Parks to help other Parks develop similar actions. Involving citizens in Urban Greening is essential. Using Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes and cooperating with educational institutions generates income, solidifies the Protected Areas as a beneficial partner and brings nature close to city dwellers.



[www.europarc.org/greening-plans](http://www.europarc.org/greening-plans)

## BRUSSELS

### Boosting the implementation of urban street parks & mainstreaming biodiversity and climate adaptation measures in heritage conservation green sites in Brussels

Many urban areas have been developed to accommodate cars. To adapt to climate change, improve biodiversity and the overall quality of life, it is time we reverse this trend. Furthermore, heritage conservation green sites often form important green areas in urban centres, however they are **not optimised for biodiversity or climate change adaptation**. Within the project, Bruxelles Environment identified the following steps to improve these processes:

- Create a steering committee with representatives from different sectors, municipalities and residents;
- Organise co-design working sessions;
- Analyse different technical reports to better understand possible limitations;
- Make an inventory of existing trees;
- Interview sectoral stakeholders.



*“Adapting a co-design process, which has a climate of openness, of free thought and speech, encourages innovation and is crucial for the success of Urban Greening projects”.*



# BARCELONA

## Assessing currently implemented Nature-based Solutions in Llobregat Riverside to design new urban greening plans for the wider metropolitan river environment

The Barcelona Metropolitan Area (BMA) has assessed the efficiency of already implemented NbS along the Llobregat Riverside in order to **detect gaps and opportunities** regarding their application in the river environment and surrounding areas.

The NbS were assessed for their potential in increasing biodiversity, improving the landscape, encouraging public use and contributing to the overall recovery of the site.

## Exploring and evaluating alternative land-use scenarios in socio-ecological terms with the use of the Socioecological Integrated Analysis Tool.

The BMA has also explored and **evaluated alternative land-use scenarios in socio-ecological terms**, defined by the Barcelona Metropolitan Area Land Use Master Plan, to help **shape the long-term vision** of these areas. In addition, the socioecological implications of transforming the current peri-urban **conventional agriculture into agroecological agriculture** were assessed.

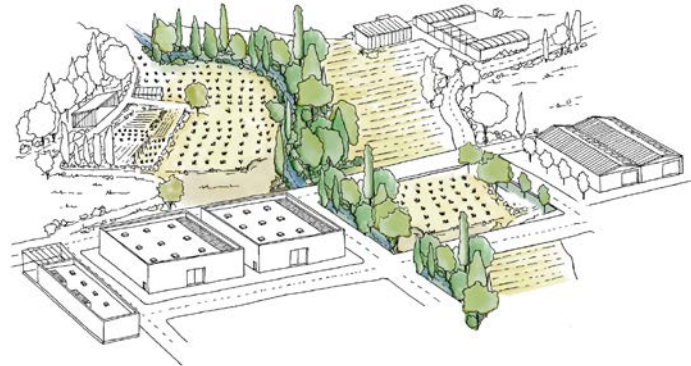
These analyses have improved the current master plan proposal in two ways:

- by identifying which land cover scenarios will better adapt to climate change;
- by analysing the technical and political response of the proposal and its effects.

Decision-makers will consider, accept or discard and thereafter modify the Master Plan according to the results of these analyses.

## MAIN LESSONS LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

- It is key to **identify and prioritize the desired ecosystem services to be enhanced** to outline the most suitable NbS;
- It is important to have a **deep knowledge of the territory**;
- **Monitoring** NbS from the onset is key;
- NbS have a **certain experimental character** - a **trial and error** exercise allows one to find the best solution;
- **Maintenance** is the number one success factor for the vast majority of NbS.



**“NBS: Nature is the Best Solution!”**





*“Citizen science constitutes an important communication and nature education tool that can help raise awareness and (re) connect people with nature”.*

## MILANO

Connecting Periurban Areas to cities does not just mean creating green corridors, it also means **connecting the entire community to the park!** Parco Nord Milano (PNM) undertook a range of activities to do just that.

Businesses and organisations are very interested in planting trees as a team building exercise, and PNM has created **a guide with protocols on how to implement communication campaigns and enhance CSR activities** in Periurban Parks in favour of biodiversity.

Furthermore, the Park created a 3 km long **“Bee Highway”**, consisting of strips of flowering plants, specifically designed for pollinators. This again involved Milans citizens, as parts of this ‘highway’, were funded through a special Christmas Campaign. It was a huge success, for nature and for people:

- Many social media posts featured the flowering plants, drawing people into the green space;
- The Bee Highway itself became a great educational tool, as it received a high amount of attention;
- The University of Milano-Bicocca analysed the strip of flowers and concluded that its pollinator usage was similar to that of wild meadows.

Additionally, the project allowed PNM to start the process of achieving the **PEFC Certification of Sustainable Management of Urban Forests**. This certification adds value to the CRS activities and is a reliable way of **measuring the management effectiveness of the Park**. Parco Nord Milano was the first Park in Europe to apply for this certification!

## LISBON



### Enhancing urban biodiversity while spreading know-how in the local population

Restoring and enhancing biodiversity is such a big challenge that, ideally, the whole of society should be involved in tackling it. This is the approach taken by the City of Lisbon.

The Câmara Municipal de Lisboa has opted to **actively involve the local population**, especially private gardens owners and school centres, in several actions. They’ve done this by:

- **Guiding and supporting private garden owners** in the selection of appropriate plants for their gardens. Focussing not just on aesthetic values, but also to biodiversity enhancement and climate change adaptation;
- **Involving citizens in Biodiversity Monitoring** through BioBlitz - Snapshots of Biodiversity in the Parque Florestal de Monsanto, a large Periurban Park in Lisbon. This kind of activity involving the public in scientific research is referred to as Citizen Science and has the potential to bring together science, policy makers, and society as a whole in an impactful way.
- **Involving the public through field trips** in the introduction and implementation of Nature-based Solutions to enhance biodiversity. This was done when creating shelters for foxes, small ponds for amphibians and nests for squirrels in public parks and schools.



## MAIN LESSONS LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

### How can we utilise positive communication for policymakers and citizens to accelerate awareness of the climate emergency and the importance of Nature-based Solutions and Green Infrastructure?

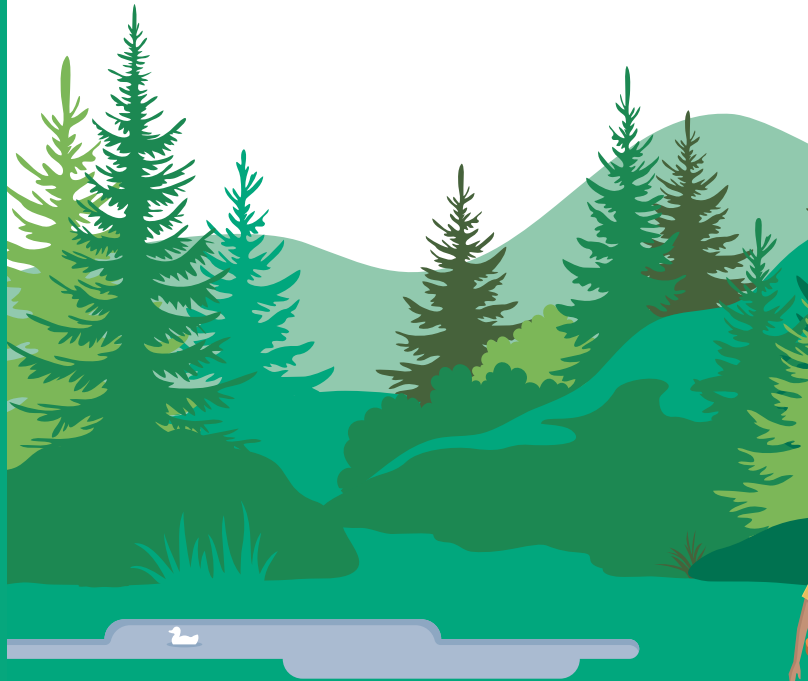
Communications around Urban Greening Plans are twofold: for UGPs to be successful, political support is needed - and for political support, it is important to have citizens “on your side”. Different methods of communication are needed. When communicating about the climate emergency, NbS and Green Infrastructure to citizens, it’s critical to make it:

- **Tangible:** There is a knowledge gap amongst the public when it comes to the link between Climate Change, Biodiversity loss and the potential of NbS. Giving real-life examples helps to illustrate them.
- **Manageable:** “make it small”; make big issues like Climate Change manageable for people in a positive way, where they believe their actions have positive consequences.
- **Personal:** focus communications around how people are not disconnected from nature, but a part of it.

Additionally, remember to avoid **academic language** when explaining these processes. It is also a lot more effective to have people **experience** the power of NbS and GI, and **involve them** in the “renaturing” process.

Communication is also essential in gaining political support. Policymakers are often looking for “selling point”. As such, it’s important to underline:

- How NBS and GI have the potential to **greatly improve the quality of life** in cities;
- The opportunities for so-called “**green jobs**”;
- The potential for NBS to make **nature economically measurable** (for example through carbon budgeting)



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