

Quality Blue Green Spaces

A practical guide for sports organisations



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BASIS
British Association for Sustainable Sport



Introduction

Sport takes place in, and depends on, real places.

Whether it is a local park, playing field, canal towpath, woodland trail, river, lake, coastal route or outdoor sports facility, the quality of the environment around sport directly affects participation, health, wellbeing and resilience.

Blue and green spaces are therefore critical infrastructure for physical activity.

Well-designed blue green environments can:

- increase participation in physical activity
- improve mental wellbeing
- strengthen biodiversity
- reduce pollution
- improve climate resilience
- support inclusion
- create stronger connections between communities and nature

Access to high-quality blue and green environments is part of what good environmental practice looks like in sport.



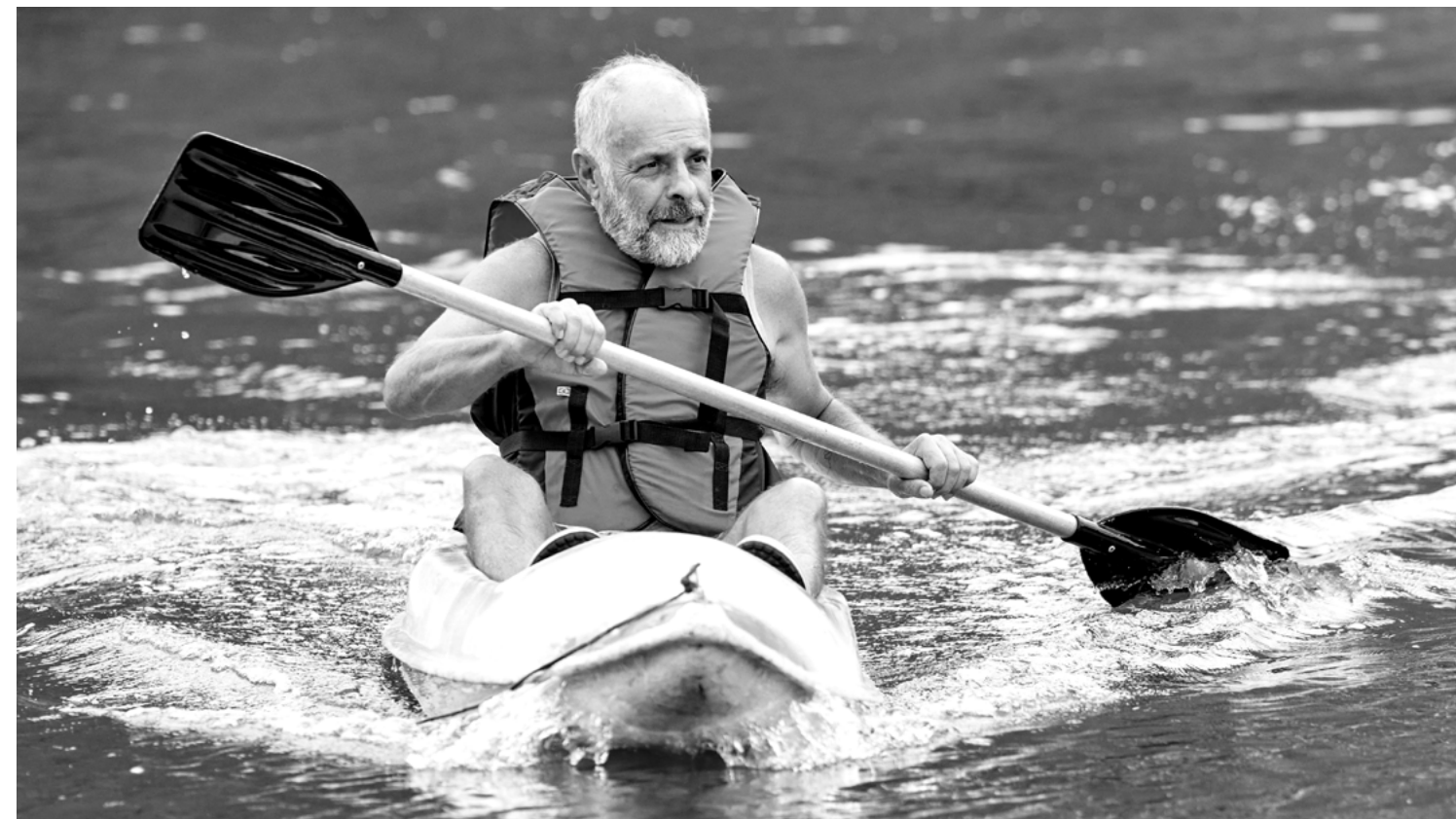
What is a blue green environment?

A blue green environment combines natural and managed green spaces with water-based environments that support physical activity, wellbeing and nature recovery.



Green spaces include:

- > parks
- > playing fields
- > woodlands
- > trails
- > community gardens
- > outdoor sports facilities



Blue spaces include:

- > rivers
- > lakes
- > canals
- > wetlands
- > beaches
- > waterfront recreation areas

Traditionally, the question for sport has been around access - essentially whether the access to outdoor space exists.

Now, as environmental hazards are increasing and our understanding is improving, we need to ask questions around quality as well:

- > Is it accessible?
- > Is it welcoming?
- > Is it safe?
- > Does it encourage activity?
- > Does it support nature?
- > Is it resilient to climate impacts?
- > Does it benefit communities as well as participants?

What blue green environment means in sport

Blue green environment is a holistic, systems-driven way of thinking about how sport interacts with places, landscapes and ecosystems.



For a sports club it may mean:

- improving access to outdoor spaces
- reducing pollution risks
- enhancing biodiversity around facilities
- creating nature-based activity opportunities



For a governing body or active partnership it may mean:

- embedding blue green principles into funding programmes
- supporting inclusive outdoor participation
- influencing local planning and infrastructure decisions



For a venue it may mean:

- improving drainage
- increasing tree cover
- reducing chemical use
- creating wildlife-friendly environments



For an event organiser it may mean:

- choosing locations carefully
- protecting sensitive habitats
- reducing environmental impacts
- encouraging active travel

Blue green environment goes beyond individual interventions

This is arguably the central message in the guide. Tree planting, wildflower meadows, habitat creation and all similar intervention matter and make a difference - but they are not the same thing as a blue green environment strategy.

A blue green approach asks bigger questions:

- > Who can access this space?
- > Does it encourage physical activity?
- > Is it resilient to flooding, drought and heat?
- > Does it improve biodiversity?
- > Does it reduce pollution?
- > Does it benefit local communities?

The strongest actions usually happen early in the process, based on proper planning:

- > improving access
- > reducing environmental pressures
- > managing water effectively
- > designing for nature
- > engaging communities
- > integrating physical activity with environmental improvement



Why it matters for sports organisations



It can increase participation.

People are often more active in attractive, accessible outdoor environments.

Walking routes, trails, parks, waterways and nature-rich spaces can reduce barriers to participation and encourage lifelong activity.



It can improve health and wellbeing

Nature-based activity is linked to improved physical health, reduced stress and better mental wellbeing.



It can improve inclusion

Blue and green spaces can often provide low-cost opportunities for activity and can help engage groups who may not access traditional facilities.

Why it matters for sports organisations



It can strengthen climate resilience

Trees, wetlands, sustainable drainage systems and natural landscapes help manage heat, flooding and extreme weather.



It can support biodiversity

Sport has significant opportunities to create habitats, improve ecological connectivity and contribute to nature recovery.



It can create visible action

Improved trails, restored habitats, cleaner waterways and enhanced public spaces are practical changes that people can see and experience.

Where are the biggest opportunities

Sports grounds and facilities

Questions to ask:

- > Are we managing land for nature as well as sport?
- > Can biodiversity be improved?
- > Are chemicals being reduced?
- > Can tree cover be increased?

Parks, trails and recreation spaces

Questions to ask:

- > Are routes safe and inclusive?
- > Are spaces welcoming for all users?
- > Do they encourage activity?

Water environments

Questions to ask:

- > Are nearby waterways protected?
- > Are pollution risks understood?
- > Can activity be increased without damaging habitats?

Active travel and accessibility

Questions to ask:

- > Can more people walk or cycle to activities?
- > Are routes connected?
- > Are barriers to access being removed?

Community engagement

Questions to ask:

- > Are local communities involved?
- > Do people feel ownership of the space?
- > Are environmental improvements supporting participation?



A simple framework for action

A useful framework for sport is:



This hierarchy encourages organisations to move beyond maintenance and towards long-term environmental improvement.

The BASIS Five Step Framework For Action



Step 1: Understand

What spaces do we influence and what opportunities exist?

Before taking action, understand your blue and green assets, how people use them, and where environmental challenges and opportunities exist.

Examples:

- > Map facilities and outdoor spaces
- > Assess biodiversity and habitat quality
- > Identify barriers to access
- > Understand the climate risks



Step 2: Connect

How can we help more people benefit from these spaces?

Create opportunities for people to access, enjoy and care for blue and green environments through sport and physical activity.

Examples:

- > Improve accessibility
- > Create inclusive routes and facilities
- > Encourage active travel
- > Support community engagement



Step 3: Protect

How can we reduce environmental harm?

Minimise negative impacts on nature, water and local ecosystems.

Examples:

- > Reduce pollution
- > Protect waterways
- > Minimise chemical use
- > Reduce waste and litter
- > Improve sustainable management practices



Step 4: Enhance

How can we improve places for people and nature?

Go beyond protection by creating healthier, more resilient and more biodiverse environments.

Examples:

- > Plant trees and native species
- > Create pollinator habitats
- > Improve green infrastructure
- > Increase shade and climate resilience
- > Improve water management



Step 5: Regenerate

How can we create lasting positive outcomes?

Use sport as a catalyst for environmental restoration, community wellbeing and nature recovery.

Examples:

- > Habitat restoration
- > Community stewardship programmes
- > Citizen science initiatives
- > Partnership projects
- > Measurable biodiversity gains
- > Long-term social and environmental value

What good practice looks like

Good blue green practice in sport usually has a few things in common.

- It starts with understanding places.
- It improves access and inclusion.
- It supports physical activity and nature together.
- It engages communities.
- It reduces environmental pressures.
- It measures outcomes.
- It creates wider social value.



What to do first



Start with a baseline.

Review:

- spaces you manage
- how they are used
- who uses them
- environmental strengths
- environmental challenges



Carry out a simple assessment.

Look at:

- biodiversity
- water management
- accessibility
- physical activity opportunities
- pollution risks



Choose three to five priority actions.

A strong first-year mix might include:

- one accessibility improvement
- one biodiversity enhancement
- one pollution reduction action
- one community engagement initiative
- one monitoring measure

Common mistakes to avoid



1. Focusing only on appearance

A tidy space is not necessarily a healthy or inclusive one.



2. Treating biodiversity as separate from sport

The strongest projects improve both nature and participation.



3. Ignoring accessibility

A space cannot deliver social value if large groups cannot use it.



4. Doing one-off projects

Lasting impact comes from integrating blue green thinking into ongoing operations.

A practical checklist

A good blue green programme should increasingly be able to answer yes to these questions:

- Do we understand our blue green assets?
- Do we assess biodiversity and environmental quality?
- Are our spaces accessible and inclusive?
- Are we reducing pollution risks?
- Are we improving nature as well as activity opportunities?
- Are communities involved in decision-making?
- Are we monitoring outcomes?
- Is someone accountable?
- Are we contributing to climate resilience?
- Are we creating positive outcomes for people, place and nature?





Key message

Blue green environments in sport go far beyond the management of outdoor space. It's about creating places that help people become active, support wellbeing, strengthen communities and restore nature.

Done well, blue green approaches can increase participation, improve health, enhance biodiversity, strengthen climate resilience and create lasting social value.

The closing message

Sport takes place in places.

The quality of those places shapes participation, wellbeing, environmental impact and community outcomes.

Improving blue green environments does not require a large-scale transformation overnight. It starts with understanding the spaces you influence, improving access, reducing environmental pressures and making nature part of the solution.

Over time those actions can create something much more powerful: healthier people, stronger communities and more resilient natural environments.

The goal is not simply better spaces.

It is better outcomes for people, place and nature.



Key Resources

[Moving In Blue Spaces Playbook](#)

[Accessible Places and Spaces](#)

Case Studies

[Paddle UK - Protecting Our Blue Green Environments](#)





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