

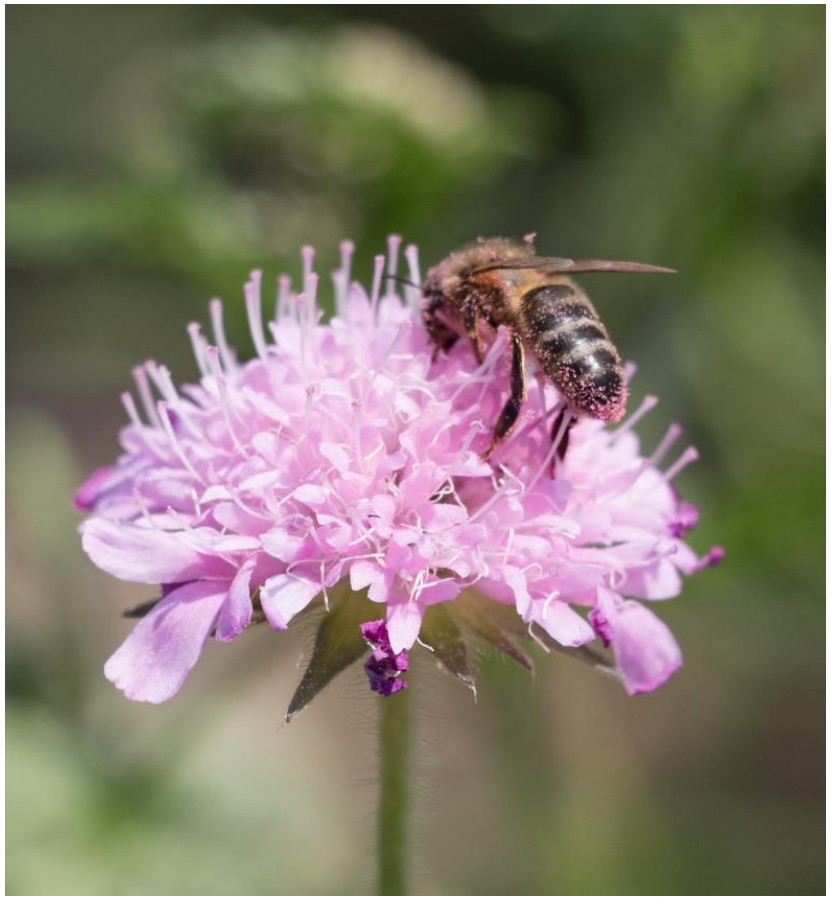

A Fresh Look at Local Authority Green Space

Creating greater value for people, place and nature

12 November 2026 Melissa Ralph CMLI

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CORNWALL COUNCIL
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CORMAC

Equitable Access
why it matters…

High-quality green space delivers many **ecosystem services**. This matters most in more deprived communities.

Income-related health inequalities can narrow, with better physical, social and mental health opportunities.

Everyone should have safe, functional and ecologically rich nature, within a short walk of their homes.

Not all green space is equal!

A 20-minute **nature break** in good quality green space helps relieve stress

connect, be active, take notice, keep learning & give



Cormac is seeing and doing things differently

Cornwall is beautiful but… 75% agricultural, plus post-industrial landscape, all with **diminishing baselines.** Reasons for poor ‘state of nature’ are well known.

Biggest threat is **human indifference**

‘No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced.’ David Attenborough

Local Authorities can tackle this **providing inclusive, nature rich experiences. Cultivate a longing to live with nature**



Good urban green space is ESSENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Making Space for Nature 2017-2023

Urban Green Shoots 2023-2025

Forest for Cornwall 2019 onwards (8000ha) new DEFRA funds 2026-2030

- Increase biodiversity – with connected nature networks
- Greater climate resilience
- Community health and wellbeing benefits – support stewardship
- More accessible green spaces an invitation to 'come outside!'



Equitable Access – where to focus energy











Long list of sites → Desk based study and initial screening to filter sites → Baseline site surveys and assessment by Project Staff → **Community engagement by Project Staff** → Selection criteria inc. value for money assessment → Shortlist of preferred sites

Gwavas Play Area, Newlyn reimagining a community green space together

An underused ‘grass desert’ transformed:

- Community co-design
- Improve **sense of place**
- Increase habitat for wildlife
- Encourage people to enjoy time outside in nature – regular engagement



‘We must imagine while we build – always both’ Mariame Kaba



Co-design in Practice

NOT ‘We've designed it. What do you think?’

‘Help us design and create this project together’

- Building trust
- Listening before drawing
- Understanding local knowledge and concerns
- Sharing learning and decision-making, bringing energy
- Allowing time for partnership



Shared Learning
as part of co-design

Basic ecology training for staff and volunteers: **habitat** (food + shelter) **succession**, **food webs**, **metapopulations**

Consider life cycle of invertebrates - rough grass, dandelions, nettles, **brambles** and **ivy** are heroes!

Plant palettes developed: Natives – peak nectar and pollen in June and July. Non-natives included to extend flowering season

Maximise diversity of conditions – substrates, aspect, drainage, dead material, disturbance.

It's not just about the plants!

Promote Volunteer friendly tasks and build skills



Maximise value and minimise the costs

Wildlife Meadows

managed for people and nature

- Highway verges – a network for nature across Cornwall, with Cornish Hedges
- Take an ecological approach: close mow, scarify, overseed
- Include Cornish seed when possible, for local genetic mix

Wildflower Collective: Home

fact-sheet-grass-cutting.pdf

- Great community interest
- Promote the value of rough grass and winter refuge space



Community Orchards
a new opportunity

Orchards provide:

- Climate resilience - diversity
- Habitat connectivity
- Food production
- Cultural value
- Community involvement

Co-design/ create opportunities:

- Community orchards
- School engagement
- Volunteer planting



Stewardship – the magic ingredient

Many projects focus on:

Planning → Design → Construction

But often neglect: **Stewardship**
remember to ask:

Who will care for this place in the future?
Empower communities to help

Offer a **welcoming pathway** for volunteers

Cormac Engagement Team – **Urban Rangers** host sessions – build confidence and connections. **Community Partnership Officers** register and support long term



RECIPE FOR SUCCESS:

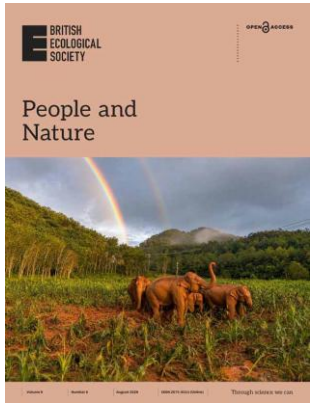
Site context

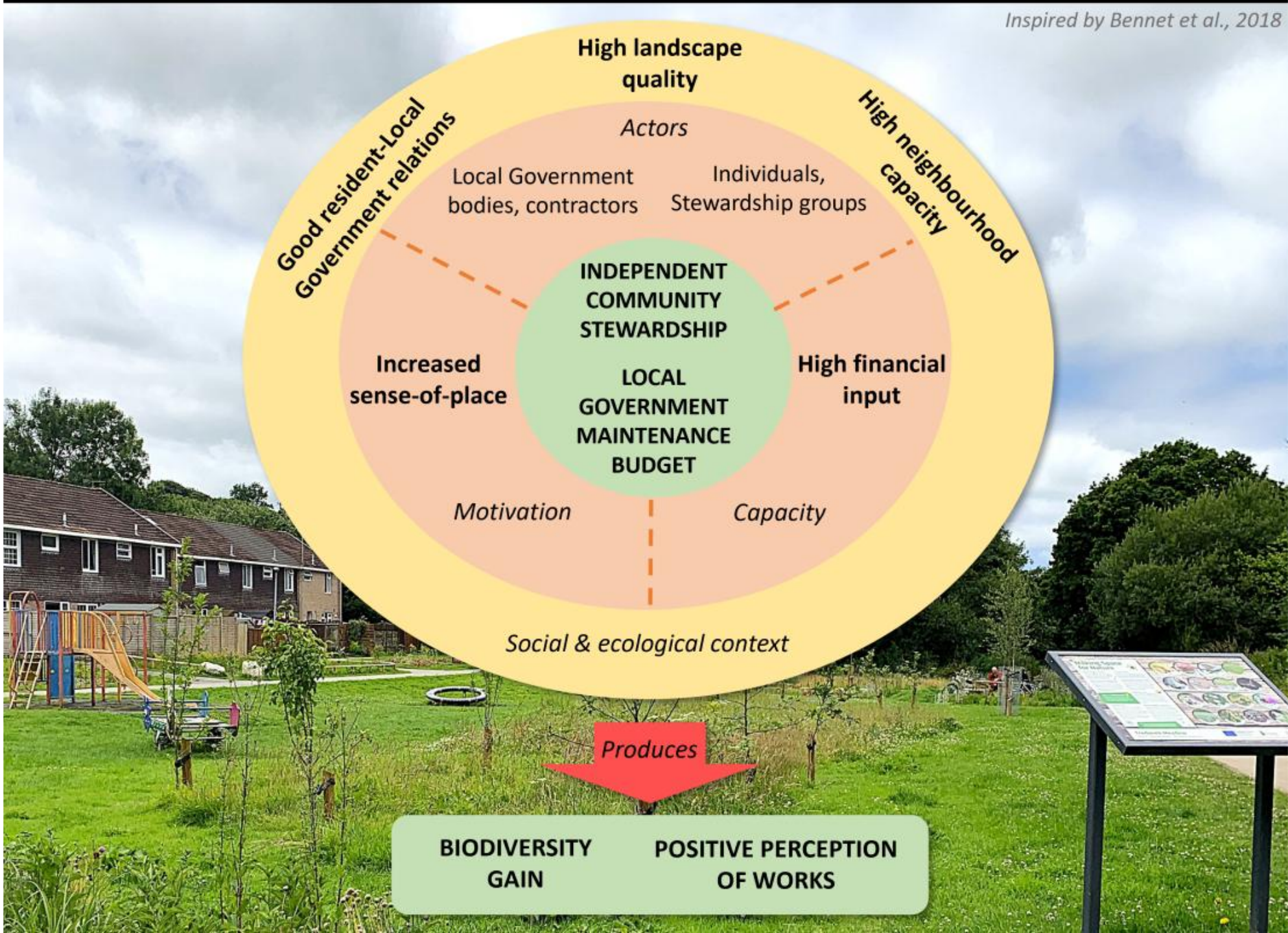
People, motivation and capacity

Long term management Plan

Partnership approach

Uni of Exeter study





Effective Community Stewardship

Offer a **fantastic volunteer experience** – support with tools, plants, bulbs, seed . take away green waste to local composting company

Encourage Volunteering for life. Cormac registration covers 18+ but we also promote ‘family friendly’ sessions

Focus volunteering efforts to offer nature, climate and community resilience

Ensure the **team has capacity and capability** to support communities – we need an enabling and participative culture.

Share confidence and learning with partners



Key Takeaways

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1. Set ambitious goals with

Collaboration, innovation and determination

2. Change the way we think and do urban green space

Improve the physical and social infrastructure, even with tight budgets

3. Stewardship secures legacy

Long-term benefits depend on a shared approach

