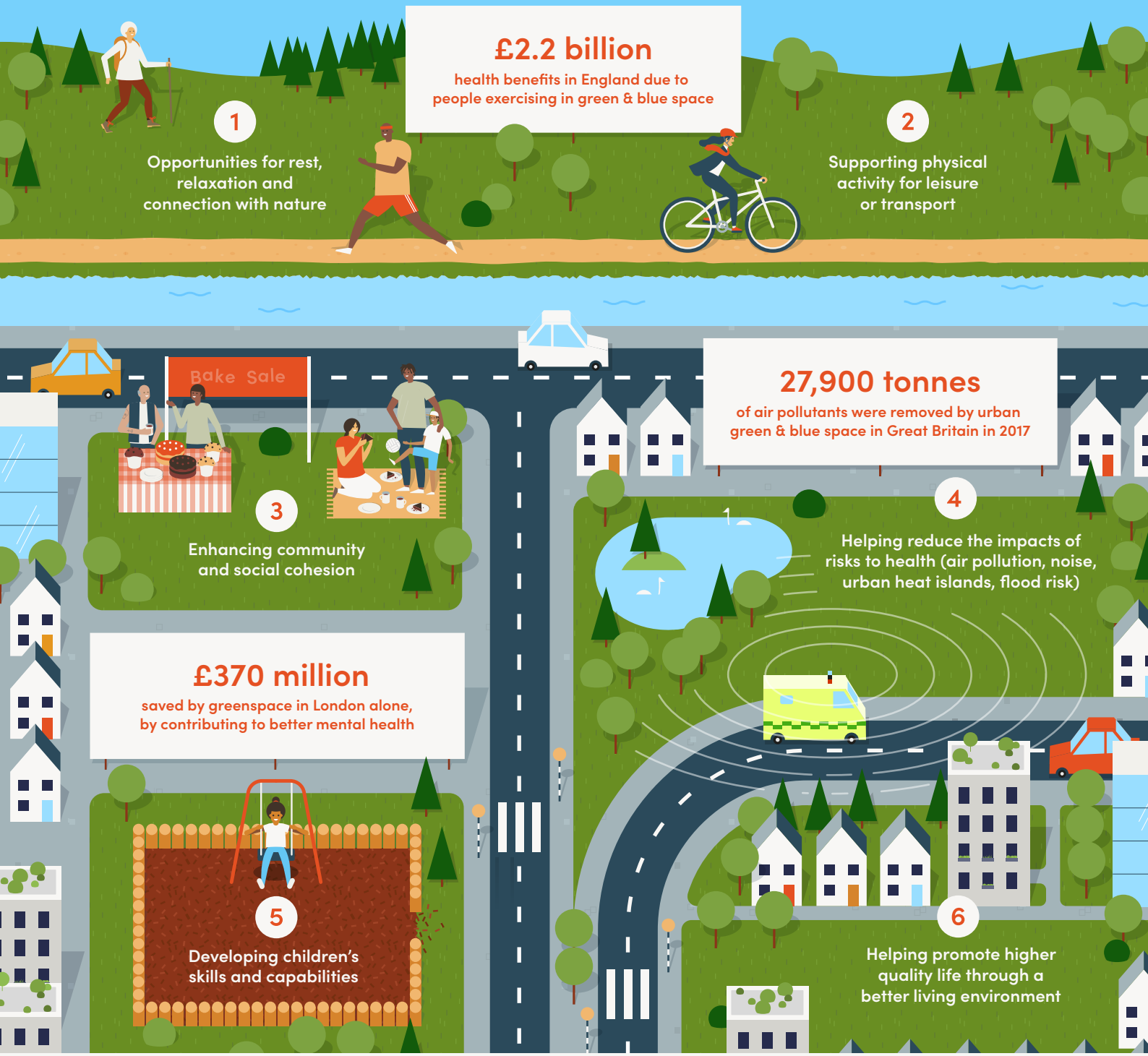
Making the most of green space for people's health



Interventions to increase or improve urban green space can deliver positive health, social and environmental outcomes for all population groups, particularly among lower socioeconomic status groups. There are very few, if any, other public health interventions that can achieve all of this.

WHO Report 2017
Urban Green Space Interventions and Health

University of Exeter Medical School

sweep

European Centre for Environment & Human Health

BlueHealth
Linking environment, climate & health

NIHR | Health Protection Research Unit in Environmental Change and Health at London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

Green spaces have the potential to help local authorities address other key delivery issues. They can help:

Reduce health inequalities

Provide a setting for physical activity

Support action on climate change

Tackle excessive noise

Combat loneliness and improve social cohesion

Improve air quality

Keep people healthy & help them recover more quickly

Promote active travel

What can local authorities do to enhance health benefits of green space:

Improve

Improve, maintain and protect existing green space to ensure they are being used for maximum effect.

Improve transport links, pathways and other means of access to green space.

Provide imaginative routes linking areas of green space for active travel.

Engage

Establish interventions, such as community or green social prescribing initiatives.

Introduce natural capital accounting to demonstrate value of green spaces.

Act as a green space ambassador and work with colleagues in other departments to make the links.

Incorporate health into Local Plan and develop supplementary planning documents that cover green space.

Expand

Provide new, good quality green space that is inclusive and equitable (especially in new developments).

Increase green infrastructure within and between public spaces and promote healthy streets.

Principles of successful interventions:

A dual approach of physical changes to green space and well-targeted social promotion activities has been shown to be most effective in encouraging use and benefit.

Accessibility of green space needs to be considered, for all communities. This includes the distance from home to green space, the ease and safety of the route and the familiarity of different groups with visiting green spaces.

Also consider how the capabilities of individuals in the local community and the local context may affect accessibility.

Quality of green space has an impact on benefits – both the ecological quality (biodiversity and planting) and the condition of the space (amenities, how well they are maintained, aesthetics, perceived safety).

Essential to incorporate inclusive design.

Community engagement is key – at all stages, from designing and maintaining to supporting people to use green space – this is especially important to reach more disadvantaged/ excluded groups.

To do this it is vital to understand the barriers to using green space for different communities.

Further information, evidence and resources, including case studies are available at http://beyondgreenspace.net/making-the-most/