



How to Address Environmental Justice

Birmingham City Council devised the following steps to help address environmental inequalities that had come to light through its project work. The following guide lays out the steps taken.

1. Map environmental justice across your city or town

Gather the data you'll need to create an environmental justice scoring system for your city or town. As a minimum, you'll need Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data, along with four extra indicators:

- Access to green space (measured by distance to a park)
- Urban heat island intensity (measured by average temperatures),
- Flood risk (using Environment Agency flood maps)
- Poor health outcomes (measured by excess life years lost)

2. Use the data gathered to map the level of environmental justice in each ward or area

Using Geographical Information System (GIS), create a single spatial map of your area that shows the combined score for all five indicators. Use red for the lowest scoring areas, green for highest and orange and yellow for medium. This gives you a spatial view of the places and communities that benefit the least from green and blue infrastructure. You can map this data at ward level, but doing it at Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOA) level would provide greater insight.

3. Collaborate with other council departments

When developing an environmental justice plan and potential investment strategy, seeking out cross-council support will help you find the budget and the resources needed.

Departments of particular interest will likely include climate adaptation and resilience, public health, highways, and planning. There's an opportunity at this stage to reposition parks and green infrastructure as a key tool for a variety of local authority teams, which can help create a sense of shared endeavour.

4. Identify priority wards or areas to focus your investment

With backing from partners and stakeholders across council departments, seek approval to target red wards or areas for investment.

5. Undertake audits of green spaces and green infrastructure across your priority areas

You need to audit the green estate across your priority areas in two ways:

1. Parks and green spaces audit. In Birmingham, the team assessed parks and green spaces by measuring multiple factors: facilities and accessibility; perceived and actual value in terms of health and wellbeing as well as income generation; whether it addresses climate/biodiversity agendas; and community engagement and involvement. A minimum score – known as the Fair Park Standard (FPS) – was established through this process, and sites scoring below this value were prioritised for improvement.
2. Green / blue infrastructure audit. This involves reviewing your environmental justice map to identify opportunities to invest in green infrastructure interventions such as additional tree canopy cover, green walls or roofs, or nature-based solutions such as SUDs.

6. Create an environmental improvement plan for your priority areas

This plan should list prioritised improvements and interventions, including costs, that will address environmental inequalities in green and blue infrastructure, green spaces and parks in your priority areas. It might be accompanied with before-and-after visuals to aid understanding.

7. Share this plan with local community groups and potential partners

By going to the community with this plan, you may find improvements you hadn't thought of, or remove ones that are not deemed a priority. Community engagement may yield aspirations for a higher level of intervention than the minimum standard identified (e.g. Birmingham's Fair Park Standard) or to take more substantial actions in certain neighbourhoods of greater need. It is up to you to decide if/how to pursue those aspirations. Once this is done, you can then refine the final priorities, plans and costs.

8. Use the plan to seek funding

You might benefit from working with other parts of the council here as well as external partners. This will help you to provide as robust an outline as possible to secure funding to deliver the prioritised improvements and begin to address environmental injustice in your area.

9. Develop your implementation plan

Your implementation plan needs to set out the who, where, when and how of the priority interventions, before you start actioning them in priority areas.

10. Monitor the impacts and establish a feedback mechanism for improvements

As well as undertaking qualitative surveys with members of the local community to find out whether site improvements have been successful and well-received, you can conduct ecological assessments to measure improvements to biodiversity.

11. Report on findings from priority areas to gain further funding and support

Once you've gathered this data, you can create a report of your priority area findings. These will provide an evidence base to help you make the case for expanding the project across other sites. Use these findings to form part of a wider plan for the city to improve environmental justice for all.

Environmental justice is about the environment where people live, not just about their access to the calm oasis of parks across the city. We know that green space and improved infrastructure can help change people's lives for the better, and environmental justice is our way of doing that.

Future Parks
Accelerator



Heritage
Fund



National
Trust



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities