The contributions of green infrastructure to the Healthy Streets Approach

Key points
- Green infrastructure (GI) in an urban setting like London may include parks, woodlands, private gardens, street trees, allotments, playing fields, green roofs and sustainable drainage systems (SuDS)
- Well-planned, designed and maintained GI can provide many different benefits. For example, GI can contribute to every indicator of the Healthy Streets Approach, as well as supporting biodiversity and contributing to ecological resilience.
- Since GI provides many different benefits, it’s one of the most cost-effective ways for TfL to meet the environmental and social requirements of the London Plan, Mayors’ Transport Strategy and London Environment Strategy.

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Early discussions can ensure the best opportunities are identified. Useful guidance documents include:
- Urban Design London rain garden guide: https://www.urban designlondon.com/resources/designing-rain-gardens-practical-guide/
- TfL SuDs guidance: https://tfl.gov.uk/corporate/publications-and-reports/streets-toolkit

Pedestrians from all walks of life
Good-quality local greeneries that is attractive, feels safe and welcoming, and is easy to access encourages a range of different groups and ages to be more physically active on and around the street.

Easy to cross
GI can be combined with measures that make streets easier to cross. For example, rain gardens can be incorporated into build outs that slow traffic. Rain gardens also help reduce or prevent flooding, which could itself form a barrier to crossing. Trees can also be used as bollards to protect crossing or refuge points.

Shade and shelter
Trees and hedges can provide shade from the sun: on a sunny day, a tree-lined street can be several degrees cooler than a similar one without any trees. Hedges and trees can also offer protection from rain, wind and other bad weather.

Places to stop and rest
GI-related infrastructure can double as a place to stop and rest. For example, places to sit can be installed on the edges of planter boxes. Placing benches around or under trees makes a resting place more inviting and sheltered.

Not too noisy
GI can act as a sound barrier to noise from traffic and other sources. By improving the ambience of the street, it can also reduce the subjective experience of noise. By making the street feel narrower, GI can also act as a form of ‘psychological traffic calming’, causing people to reduce speed, and so make the street a quieter and more relaxed place.

People choose to walk, cycle and use public transport
GI is an attractive asset for a street, making it somewhere people will choose to walk and cycle in order to enjoy the greenery. The street itself becomes the destination or a place for walking and cycling for leisure, rather than just a travel route. Greening streets is linked with uplifts in walking and cycling.

People feel safe
GI can improve the ambience of a street – we know that people feel safer when an area is attractive and well maintained. Green infrastructure in streets is linked to improved social behaviour and reduced traffic accidents.

Things to see and do
GI is an important part of London’s cultural heritage that is visually attractive, for example through flowers and changing leaf colour. It also supports biodiversity that captures public interest, such as butterflies and birds. When combined with schemes like community gardening to maintain flower beds, GI can also provide something to do on the street, and can help bring people together.

People feel relaxed
GI can help make streets more relaxing, and has a positive effect on stress and mental health.

Clean air
GI, such as hedges, can act as a barrier to air pollution, reducing the exposure of those on the street.

References: