

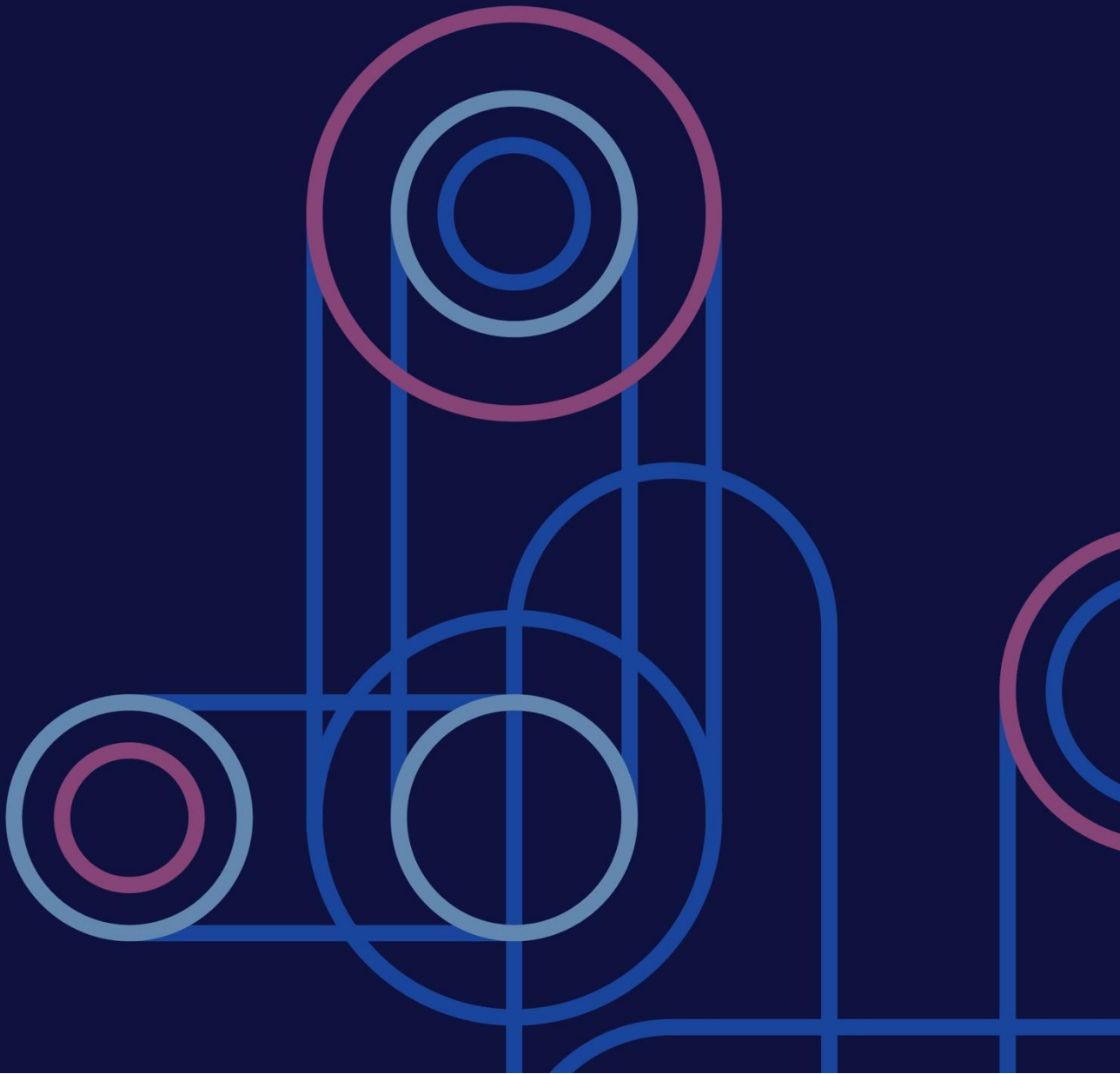


World Health  
Organization

CASE STUDY

*The Connswater Community Greenway, Belfast,  
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern  
Ireland*

2026



## Basic information

<b>WHO Region</b>	EURO
<b>City or Country</b>	Belfast, United Kingdom
<b>Timeline</b>	2010 – ongoing
<b>Type of intervention</b>	Infrastructure
<b>Primary level of implementation</b>	City
<b>Primary sectors involved</b>	Environment; transport; housing; public space; community development
<b>Primary health outcomes or challenges</b>	Physical activity; mental wellbeing; environmental deprivation; flood risk

## Case description

The Connswater Community Greenway is a 16km linear park and urban regeneration developed in east Belfast to address long-standing challenges related to physical inactivity, poor environmental quality and recurrent flooding. The project covers 29 electoral wards, including several among the most deprived in Northern Ireland, with a combined population of more than 110 000 residents. At the outset of the project, the area was characterised by high levels of ill health, limited access to quality outdoor space and substantial physical inactivity. Parts of the neighbourhood were also affected by environmental degradation and elevated flood risk linked to the Connswater, Loop and Knock rivers.

EastSide Partnership, a community led neighbourhood regeneration charity, guided by a multi-sectoral board, led the visioning, planning and delivery of the Connswater Community Greenway following a £40million investment from key funders including the National Lottery Community Fund and Belfast City Council. Working with the Council, regional government departments and other agencies, the Partnership coordinated a multifaceted programme of infrastructure, community engagement and behavioural change initiatives over more than a decade. A Delivery Board, comprising EastSide Partnership and Belfast City Council, met regularly to guide implementation. The Board was supported by a series of technical and thematic subgroups responsible for capital works, land assembly, community engagement, management and maintenance, political issues and environmental works. These subgroups brought together expertise from local authorities, community organisations, statutory bodies and private sector



The Hollow, Connswater Community Greenway. Belfast, United Kingdom.

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partners, ensuring coordinated decision-making across sectors. EastSide Greenways (Formerly Connswater Community Greenway Trust) was created as a subsidiary of EastSide Partnership to provide operational leadership and expert oversight, with major decisions endorsed by the parent company board.

Construction of the Greenway took place primarily between 2011 and 2017. Works included development of approximately 16 km of new footpaths and cycle routes, planting of trees and shrubs, installation of public art and restoration of degraded river corridors. Infrastructure improvements were integrated with a major flood alleviation scheme that reduced flood risk for around 1,700 homes. Alongside physical investments, the project supported neighbourhood walking groups, school-based programmes, community-led events and social marketing initiatives to encourage residents to use the new spaces.

Use of the Greenway has increased substantially. From 2010 to 2025, the number of users increased threefold, with recent estimates indicating around 300 000 annual visits. Cycling at the Flora Street Walkway and C.S. Lewis Square sites along the Greenway has increased by 320% and 430%, respectively. Significant increases have also been observed in the number of females using the Greenway, including in the evenings – showing the value of round-the-clock lighting. The proportion of visitors from outside the immediate area also doubled during this period, supporting local economic activity, particularly around newly developed public spaces such as C.S. Lewis Square. Peer-reviewed evaluations and natural experiment studies conducted before and after the intervention reported improvements in mental wellbeing, social capital, perceived

environmental quality and quality of life. Survey research has shown that the Greenway contributed to changes in physical activity at population level, while modelling studies demonstrate its potential for long-term reductions in noncommunicable disease burden. A social return on investment analysis estimated that each £1 invested generated between £2 and £6 in social value. Ongoing research seeks to identify 5-6-year follow-on impacts of the intervention.

The Greenway's long-term management model has evolved as the project has matured. Since 2020, an innovative co-management arrangement defined by a Memorandum of Understanding assigns Belfast City Council responsibility for land management and maintenance while EastSide Greenways leads community engagement, animation and promotion. This 40-year agreement provides continuity for stewardship and programming, allowing the Greenway to remain an active public space that supports health, environmental and social benefits.

Barriers during development included economic austerity and competing demands on public budgets, which required strong justification for investment. Complex land ownership patterns and the location of the Greenway in an interface area between communities with a history of conflict also posed challenges for land assembly and community trust. These were addressed through ongoing engagement, transparent communication and collaboration across multiple sectors.

Looking forward, a 2023 climate and nature action vision developed by partners identifies 23 priorities over one-, three- and ten-year horizons. These focus on emissions reduction, carbon capture, biodiversity enhancement, flood resilience, community awareness, research collaboration and sustained programme delivery, areas with clear and significant health implications for local residents. The vision emphasises the need for diversified and stable funding to ensure the Greenway continues to deliver a broad range of benefits over coming decades. Building on this foundational work, EastSide Partnership, in partnership with Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and Belfast City Council, have secured £1.3m funding from the National Lottery for a Community Climate Action project.

## Strategic Highlight

Durable, well-structured partnerships can create the long-term perspective required for strategic action on urban health. The Connswater Community Greenway evolved over more than a decade, from design and construction through evaluation, adaptation and long-term stewardship, with a vision that stretches decades into the future. At each stage, partnerships enabled continuity of purpose, alignment across sectors and the capacity to maintain progress despite changes in economic conditions, political priorities and organisational leadership.

The initial vision was championed by EastSide Partnership as a grassroots agency, which provided an early platform for coordination among local authorities, regional government, environmental agencies, academic institutions and community organisations. This broad coalition strengthened the project's legitimacy and enabled partners to articulate shared objectives extending beyond infrastructure development, including improvements in health, wellbeing, environmental quality and flood resilience. In setting long-term goals, partners created space for phased capital works, successive funding applications and incremental programme development aligned with local needs.

During implementation, formal governance structures further supported long-term planning. The Delivery Board and its subgroups ensured that decisions reflected technical requirements, community priorities and interdepartmental considerations, helping partners to manage complex land ownership issues, address challenges in interface areas and maintain progress during periods of fiscal constraint. EastSide Greenways continues to provide operational continuity, enabling the project to advance even as external conditions shift.

Partnerships with universities played a central role. QUB embedded research within the project, supporting evaluation, monitoring and learning over multiple phases over a 15-year period – this is currently ongoing and will continue for at least another 5 years under the Community Climate Action partnership. These long-standing collaborations helped generate evidence on physical activity, mental wellbeing, social cohesion and environmental improvements, informing adaptations and reinforcing the case for continued investment. Research partners also led the development of the 2023 climate and nature action vision, funded by the GroundsWell consortium, which sets priorities for the coming decade and underscores the Greenway's role as an ongoing living laboratory.

The 40-year agreement between Belfast City Council and EastSide Greenways ensures sustained, generational stewardship, with distributed responsibilities to leverage the strengths of each organisation. This framework provides stability, enabling the project to continue to deliver while evolving in response to emerging health, climate and social challenges.

Overall, the Connswater Community Greenway highlights how partnerships that combine local leadership, government support, academic collaboration and community involvement can create, and then benefit from, the lasting structures needed to pursue urban health improvements over extended time horizons. It illustrates how long-term perspectives become feasible when responsibilities, resources and learning processes are shared among committed partners.

## Further Information

- [The Connswater Community Greenway: 15 Years of Research, Partnership and Impact](#)
- [Climate and Nature Action: A Vision for the Connswater Community Greenway](#)
- [Social return on investment analysis of an urban greenway](#)
- [Investigating the physical activity, health, wellbeing, social and environmental effects of a new urban greenway: a natural experiment \(the PARC study\)](#)
- [Investigating the long-term public health and co-benefit impacts of an urban greenway intervention in the UK: a natural experiment evaluation – study protocol](#)
- [Eastside Greenways](#)