

# Oakfield



**Development Name:** Oakfield

**Location:** Swindon

**Type of Project:** Residential

**Developed by:** Nationwide Building Society

**Supported by:** igloo Regeneration

**BwN Assessor:** James Sleight, The Landmark Practice

**BwN Award:** Design

**O**akfield, Swindon is Nationwide's first housing scheme and is being delivered with the support of sustainable Development Managers, igloo Regeneration. The scheme provides 239 intergenerational homes with a mixture of tenures, for people at every stage of their life. Arranging homes in terraces around communal gardens is designed to foster community spirit and enable a higher proportion of the site to be devoted to landscape. Habitable rooms are designed to overlook streets to create a well overlooked public realm and optimise visual access to green infrastructure assets. 'Pocket parks' are included where streets and paths meet. At the heart of the neighbourhood, a new larger park is proposed to draw people in to enjoy the space which includes a natural themed play area set within swaths of native planting, meadow grassland and variety of native trees.

New cycle links will encourage active travel, and the masterplan has been developed with the '15-minute neighbourhood' concept in mind, to try and provide the basic amenities that residents would need close by, without dependency on car usage. Building for a Healthy Life principles were integrated as part of igloo's Footprint approach, and the project team instructed a Building with Nature Assessor to guide the design proposals from an early stage, resulting in the project being accredited with a BwN Design Award.

*A Building with Nature Design Award externally certifies that a design meets the BwN Standards and delivers high-quality green infrastructure. This award is used at an early stage of design i.e. an outline planning application in larger schemes.*



## Introducing Building with Nature

At Building with Nature our mission is to put high-quality green infrastructure at the heart of placemaking in the UK, maximising benefits for people and wildlife. By bringing people closer to nature and building great places for us to live, work and play, development can make a major contribution towards better health and wellbeing in our communities and tackling the climate and ecological emergencies.

Building with Nature is the first evidence-based benchmark for high-quality green infrastructure in the UK. The BwN Standards Framework has been created in partnership with planners, developers, and other key stakeholders, providing a shared understanding of 'what good looks like' throughout the whole lifecycle of green infrastructure – from the policy framework and early-stage design, through to implementation, and long-term management and maintenance. The BwN Standards are free to use and can be downloaded from the BwN website. Building with Nature also provide a voluntary accreditation process, helping developers and other stakeholders move through the planning process more effectively, and providing an independent verification of quality when it comes to green infrastructure assets.

This case study demonstrates how this scheme's green infrastructure meets the BwN Standards, illustrated through the BwN themes of Core, Wellbeing, Water and Wildlife.

## Scheme Green Infrastructure Objectives

The green infrastructure vision for the development of this partly brownfield site into a residential development centred on delivering an effective range of connected features, designed to benefit people and wildlife, and which link with the wider environment. The design of the green infrastructure is context driven and opportunities for multifunctionality of features have also been built into the design.

Key design priorities were to support a strong sense of place, to foster community cohesion, promote active travel, and help to secure positive outcomes for people's physical and mental health, and wellbeing. The scheme's design also promotes inclusion, integrating a range of green infrastructure features that respond to a wide range of different strengths and needs within the local community.

The green infrastructure design for this scheme demonstrates a clear commitment by Nationwide to a robust long term management arrangement, which will help to maintain the quality of the green infrastructure into the future.



**Figure 1: Green Infrastructure Parameter Plan**

## CORE Standards

- Standard 1** Optimises Multifunctionality and Connectivity
- Standard 2** Positively responds to the Climate Emergency
- Standard 3** Maximises Environmental Net Gains
- Standard 4** Champions a Context Driven Approach
- Standard 5** Creates Distinctive Places
- Standard 6** Secures Effective Place-keeping

The scheme demonstrates an approach to master planning which encompasses the functions and benefits of green infrastructure features retained, created, and enhanced as part of a connected and multi-functional green infrastructure network.

The landscaping and green infrastructure strategies are designed to deliver a range of benefits for people and wildlife. A network of **multifunctional green infrastructure** features will deliver biodiversity enhancements, tree planting, urban cooling, SuDS, formal and informal play, active travel routes and amenity for residents and visitors.

**Image 2: Street trees will supply shade**

The proposals respond to local landscape features and add to these with a series of well-designed green infrastructure features that will enhance the character of the landscape and the surrounding area. Examples include a **central green spine** which optimises connectivity through an existing swathe of green space across the area and tree planting plans that reference the local character.

Nationwide and igloo have gone well beyond the minimum consultation needed for a development of this scale, and have involved older people, schools and used a variety of techniques and methods to engage the local community including employing a community organiser. The masterplan shows several ways in which the design and green infrastructure features have been influenced directly as a result of feedback from the community.





# WELLBEING Standards

- Standard 7** Brings Nature Closer to People
- Standard 8** Supports Equitable and Inclusive Places

Oakfield includes a range of green infrastructure features designed to promote health, wellbeing, active living, and community cohesion, optimising use and enjoyment for a wide range of residents and visitors. Features include play for children and young people, homestead gardens, new and improved cycle and footpath networks, and **a new public park** designed to support children of all ages and abilities.



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**Image 3: The new public park at centre of development offering opportunities for the whole community to enjoy nature**

Oakfield’s network of green infrastructure features, including the main park, will be connected via internal footpaths and are easily accessible on foot to the wider community beyond the site. The layout, location, and range of green features throughout the site aim to optimise use and enjoyment for all, improving health and wellbeing outcomes for as many end users as possible, including vulnerable or marginalised groups. The homesteads, included in the masterplan to reflect **community viewpoints** shared during community engagement, have been designed to focus on the needs and strengths of older people, families, and those looking to live in an environment which encourages increased community connectivity and interaction.

Oakfield responds to community needs for safety by supplying **integrated lighting solutions** that ensure pedestrian routes and seating are well lit, and green infrastructure areas designed for public use are located to optimise natural surveillance.



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**Image 4: Showing community interaction at street-scale**

# WATER Standards

- Standard 9** Delivers Climate Resilient Water Management
- Standard 10** Brings Water Closer to People

Oakfield’s green infrastructure network incorporates integral SuDS features including **rain gardens**, a swale along the boundary of the public park, permeable surfaces in many of the parking bays and front gardens. The approach to sustainable water management across the site is clear, with patios and footpaths designed to drain off and irrigate soft landscaping (soil and vegetation), rather than being positively drained.



**Image 5: Permeable paving is used throughout the site**

The quality of the water that needs to be discharged off site, into the surface water drainage system, will be improved via **permeable paving** on parking bays and front gardens, a long swale running north to south in the central park, and rain garden features.



**The Landmark Practice**

**Figure 2: Snapshot from Oakfield Green Infrastructure Strategy showing proposed spaces, swale running along edge of development**

SuDS features with the green infrastructure have been utilised for biodiversity enhancements and will add visual interest, educational opportunities and amenity value for residents and visitors to the site.

The SuDS have also been optimised for **biodiversity enhancement** to increase benefits for wildlife. For example, the swale will be seeded with damp tolerant plants and wildflower meadow, and the rain gardens will be planted up with pollinator species and help provide a focal point in homestead gardens.

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# WILDLIFE Standards

**Standard 11** Delivers Wildlife Enhancement

**Standard 12** Underpins Nature's Recovery

One of the key underlying aims of the **landscape strategy** is to enhance the site for wildlife. Although the current site is of low ecological value, the design proposals will keep and enhance most existing green infrastructure assets, including the boundary hedgerows and some mature trees.



The Landmark Practice

**Figure 3: Snapshot from Oakfield Green Infrastructure Strategy showing existing vegetation**

The proposals relate well to the existing and potential for priority species in the area and are designed to maximise the connectivity between green spaces to the north and south of the site using tree planting and other species rich planting and linear features to encourage and represent a significant enhancement to the site's biodiversity.

A variety of biodiversity measures will ensure that the more valuable habitats and features with ecological value or potential for supporting priority species will be protected, enhanced and where there are losses, compensated for. Features include wet and dry meadow planting, **extensive tree planting**, log piles as well as integrated bat and bird boxes and gaps in garden fences (for hedgehogs etc) across the built environment.



The Landmark Practice

**Figure 4: Snapshot from Oakfield Green Infrastructure Strategy showing proposed habitat provision**

Wildlife management is considered throughout the construction process with clear guidance on the **protection of retained features of value**, with the appointment of ecological and landscape professionals to guide the landscaping element of the scheme through the construction phase and for a 5-year maintenance period. Robust long-term management and maintenance plans are also secured through the Landscape Management Plan.

## Policy Applications

The type, quality, and function of green infrastructure features provided on site respond to the local requirements, as set out in the local plan policies. However, the scheme goes beyond this and incorporates a range of other features which respond to the local community feedback. For example, the homestead garden features, cycle network connections and park design were included and designed in direct response to community engagement at the pre-application stage.



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**Image 6: Green infrastructure features support active travel and permeability across the site**

“Community, sustainability and the environment go to the very heart of Oakfield, Nationwide’s first housing development. Collaborating with the community to develop homes and a neighbourhood they wanted, needed and have felt part of has been key. Working with igloo Regeneration, our development manager, the scheme has focussed on some really important environmental and sustainable elements which we’re really proud of, and which we hope will

## Summary

The Oakfield masterplan has been designed to seamlessly integrate with the surrounding area. This includes quiet tertiary streets, and shared spaces with a focus on cycling and walking. The neighbourhood is arranged around a grid of streets and lanes that respond to its local context by linking surrounding neighbourhoods together, connecting people to new and existing local amenities including existing shops, and a new Community Hub. Oakfield, Swindon will provide new and enhanced routes for walking and segregated cycling routes, to promote active lifestyles, sustainable transport, and opportunities for modal shift supported by safe, green, and convenient routes. From a Building with Nature perspective, the quality of development is improved through the creation and enhancement of a network of multi-functional green spaces including public and private green spaces, extensive planting to the north of the site, new park/amphitheatre, and associated play spaces. Thoughtful decisions were made about the location of the on-site infrastructure to connect with those off-site to create a green corridor for nature, wildlife and the community.

*benefit not only the residents and wildlife of Oakfield but the communities around it too. We’re really pleased to have been awarded a Building with Nature accreditation which demonstrates our continued commitment to helping communities and the wildlife and environment around them to benefit from each other.*

**Kat Quigley, Social Investment Manager, Nationwide Building Society**

## Useful Links

**Building with Nature:** [www.buildingwithnature.org.uk](http://www.buildingwithnature.org.uk)

**Project website:** [www.oakfieldswindon.co.uk](http://www.oakfieldswindon.co.uk)

**Developed by:** [www.nationwide.co.uk/about-us/building-a-better-society/oakfield/](http://www.nationwide.co.uk/about-us/building-a-better-society/oakfield/)

**Applicant:** [www.iglooregeneration.co.uk](http://www.iglooregeneration.co.uk)

**BwN Assessor:** [www.thelandmarkpractice.com](http://www.thelandmarkpractice.com)

**Download the BwN Standards:** [www.buildingwithnature.org.uk/standards-form](http://www.buildingwithnature.org.uk/standards-form)



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