



## Treeconomics

Explore how industrial Sheffield became one of Europe's greenest cities

**Time:** 2 hours

**Distance:** 3 ½ miles

**Landscape:** urban

Known for its steel manufacturing heritage, can a city with such a strong industrial identity really be one of the greenest in Europe?

Sheffield's green credentials are certainly high. It has over two million trees - more per person than any other UK city - and is the only one with a National Park within its boundaries.

This trail explores how Sheffield's hill rivers, parks and settlements all paint a picture of an eco-friendly city.

But what does the future hold for this growing and changing cityscape? And what price can be put on it?

**Location:**

Sheffield, South Yorkshire

**Start:**

Bole Hill Recreation Ground, Longfield Road S10 1QW

**Finish:**

Rustlings Road, Sheffield S11 7AD

**Grid reference:**

SK 32600 88100

**Keep an eye out for:**

The slightly odd hexagonal building of the University of Sheffield Geography Department, nestled behind the pond in Western Park

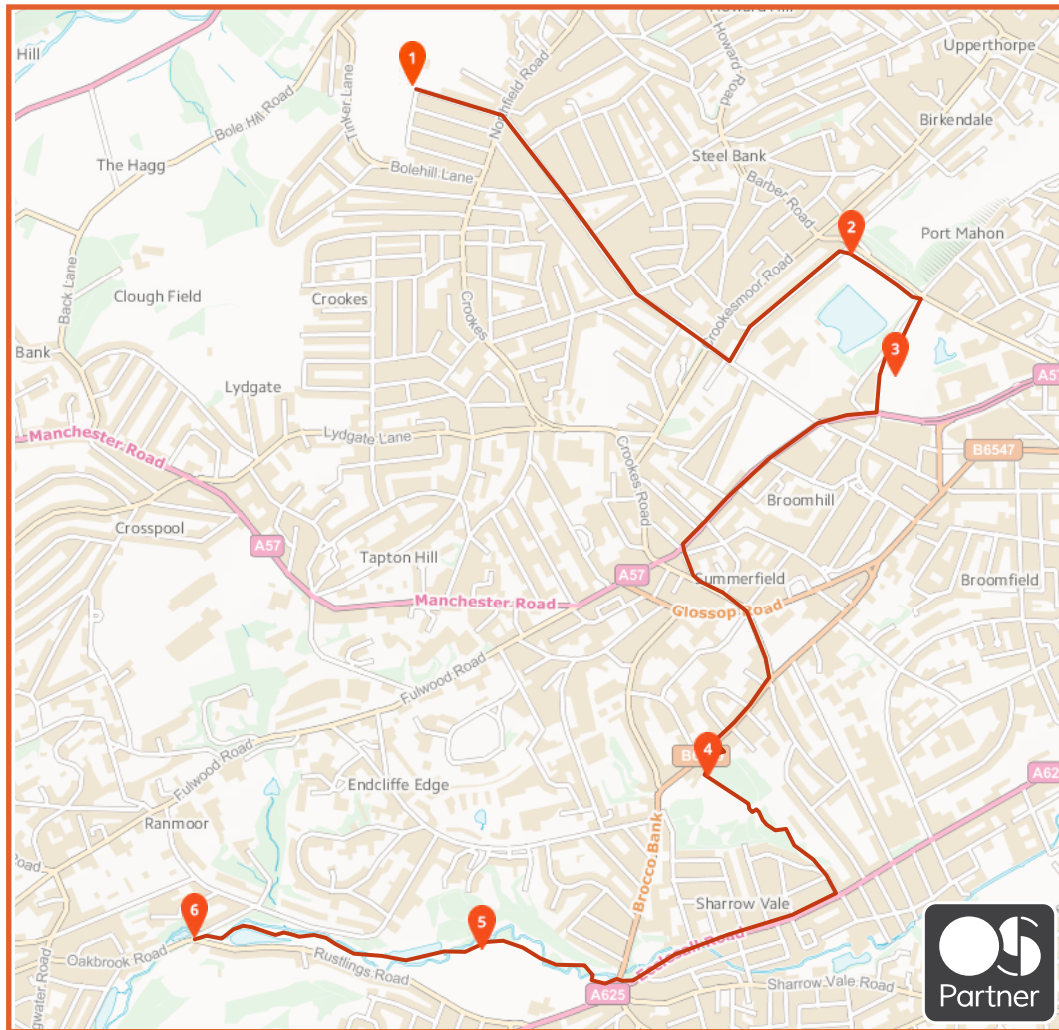
**Directions**



Enter Bolehill Park at the end of Longfield Road and the corner of Woodfield Road.  
Follow the path to the left alongside the high bank and railings.  
Stop when you reach a bench overlooking the edge of the city and the hills behind.



## Route and stopping points



- 01 Bole Hill Recreation Ground
- 02 Crookesmoor Park
- 03 Weston Park
- 04 Sheffield Botanical Gardens
- 05 Endcliffe Valley Park
- 06 Rustlings Road

## 01 Bole Hill Recreation Ground

Look from our vantage point in this expanse of parkland, breathe in the tranquillity. Up here the countryside seems to cushion the sounds of the city with a leafy blanket. The dramatic view from this hill also provides our first clue to why Sheffield is so green. From up here we can see one of the city's major links with nature.

Sheffield started life as a string of Anglo Saxon villages in the bottom of the valley. In these pre-industrial times, villages rarely crept higher than 150 metres above sea level due to bad weather, the infertile hill-side soils and the difficulty of transporting goods and services up steep sided slopes. It wasn't until the Industrial Revolution began in the mid 1700s that these villages began to be linked together as one city. Even today most of Sheffield's housing is below 200 metres. But what impact has this had on its greenery?

Well, below we can see the suburbs of Stannington and Hillsborough. They link to the rest of the city along the courses of three of Sheffield's five rivers – the Don, the Rivelin and the Loxley. In an era before steam technology, rivers were used to power grinding wheels and hammers. So five fast-flowing waterways gave Sheffield an economic advantage.

The introduction of steam power in the 18th century meant manufacturing could move to the flatter banks of the River Don. Sheffield's rapid growth and now renowned steel production started to boom. The rivers and the diverse woodlands that they nurtured remain to this day, intersecting the city with babbling brooks and valleys of greenery which bring character and valued woodlands into the city centre.

From high up here above the western edge of the city we can also see how close Sheffield is to the wilderness of the Peak District. Designated in 1951, this was the UK's first National Park. Its presence has ensured that the city cannot sprawl further to the west and south.

The Park has helped to preserve the physical boundaries between urban and rural, but may also have strangely blurred them slightly. The recreation ground we are in now is home to one of the UK's first urban mountain bike trails. Rural thrill-seeking may well have rubbed off onto the people of this city and their love for the outdoors and lush foliage.

On our leafy walk to the next stop keep an eye out for a memorial plaque on the left, two thirds of the way down Western Road. It commemorates the pupils of Westways School who died or served in the First World War. The trees along this street were planted as a living memorial to them but are now under threat of clearance by the end of 2017. We will find out why later in the trail...

### Directions

Walk back down Longfield Road, cross straight over Northfield Road and veer slightly left to head down Western Road. Follow this all the way until you meet School Road. Cross straight over and continue down Conduit Road – this is very steep so watch your step!

Continue down onto Northumberland Road before turning left onto Harcourt Road. Continue all the way along Harcourt Road to the end, and turn right into the park through the metal kissing gates on the corner of Harcourt and Crookes Valley Roads.

## 02 Crookesmoor Park

After working our way down through the tree-lined streets of Crookesmoor, we are now in the park of the same name. Did you notice all the trees and front gardens along the way? Crookes is now at the heart of the Sheffield University's student population. The housing here is typical though of the more affluent streets built towards the end of the 19th century.

People who could afford to lived up on the hills to be away from the industrial city's growing smog. As the hillsides gradually developed, trees and hedgerows gave this area its special feel. In the summer you can smell blossoms and fruits as you slog up or stumble down the steep hills that characterise the city's outskirts.

We can see more trees here inside the park. Standing tall against the steep-sided slope of Crookesmoor Park is a row of sturdy trees marking the divide between road and green space. But why is a public park hidden away behind this steep bank so we don't even know it's there?

The answer lies in how Sheffield's industry and population changed. In 1801 Sheffield was home to around 60,000 people. Industrial development meant that figure exploded to 451,000 a century later. With this rapid increase came the need for improved water supplies.

Covering almost 12 acres, Crookesmoor Park is mainly taken up with the big lake we can see down in its centre. The lake is the remains of a massive reservoir built here in 1875. Known as the Old Great Dam, it was built to meet Sheffield's growth. But soon its 21 billion gallons of water weren't enough. The steep banks to our left were the reservoir's original sides and today's lake is all that is left of the water. Now one of Sheffield's many parks, Crookesmoor shows how the economic history of this city is played out through its greenery.

#### Directions

Continue through the park alongside the road to the gate at the other end of the path. Go through the gate and cross Mushroom Lane. Immediately enter Western Park through its gates and turn right up onto its highest path. Stop outside the front of the Gallery, overlooking the bandstand.

### 03 Weston Park

We have already explored Sheffield's location nestled amongst the Peaks and how industrial growth brought people and development. But how do we get from small villages with lots of green space to an industrial workforce and back again to one of Europe's greenest cities in just a few hundred years?

Since the city grew from a scattering of rural settlements intersected with rivers and trees, Sheffield has managed to maintain a large amount of green space close to its people. Before 1800 everyone lived within 10-15 minute walk of open space. What a treat!

As the masses came to earn their living in steel however, the city had to make way for its burgeoning population. Much of the terraced housing that characterises Sheffield and other northern industrial cities was commissioned in the 1800s. They were built for the thousands of workers drawn to the factories and steel works that filled the city with chimneys and furnaces.

With this increase in housing and industry, can you imagine what the city might have begun to smell and feel like?

As the centre became more crowded with people and smog, growing health issues led prominent members of society to donate land for recreation. The city authorities also designated areas to form 'islands' of open space surrounded by development, such as here in Weston Park. It opened to the public in 1875 with the Sheffield Daily Telegraph reporting: *"The weather was fine. The Park looked in its gayest Summer dress. The walks were freshly graveled, the flower beds were trim and well ordered."*

Walking through this park, just metres from one of the main thoroughfares into the city, we can well imagine the green oasis that this would have been for the residents in the smog-filled valley of the city. But could such green spaces also be seen as a trade off? A way to keep the industrial workforce productive while they lived in high density squalor?

#### Directions

Pass the museum and exit the park, turning right onto the A57 (Whitham Road). Follow this road up the hill into Broomhill. Turn left onto Newbould Lane and follow it all the way down to Clarkenhouse Road (Newbould Lane forks a few times so make sure you remain on it all the way down the hill).

Turn right on Clarkenhouse Road and continue until you see the grand entrance gates to the Botanical Gardens on your left. Go down the steps into the Gardens and turn right. Stop outside the front of the glass Pavillion.

## 04 Sheffield Botanical Gardens

These elegant formal gardens make quite a change from the fervour of the bustling city streets we've just been through. Take a moment to absorb the stillness of this stunning spot. Looking down through the symmetrical walkway that leads up to the graceful glass pavilions, we can appreciate the grandeur of these gardens in the heart of industrial Sheffield.

The Botanical Gardens opened in 1836 and now contain 5,000 species of plants in 19 acres of land. But this land didn't always exist for this purpose. These gardens tell another story of the city's green heritage, and help us see why the roots and shoots of Sheffield play a part in the city's culture today.

The Gardens are a great showcase of how a community rallied around to make change happen. They were established by a group of local residents who sought somewhere to grow a different landscape for themselves. Concerned about the lack of public open space in Sheffield, they formed their own Society and purchased the land with £7,500 raised through shares.

Before we make our way down hill, use this vantage point to look across the horizon to the other side of Sheffield's southern banks. You will be hard pressed not to have to peer through layers of foliage and trees – Sheffield's green trophies in a city of industry and modern development.

### Directions

Walk down the promenade leading up to the pavilion. When you reach the fountains at the bottom you can choose which route to take to reach the Thompson Road entrance at the bottom corner of the Gardens. For the most direct route, turn left and then follow the main pathway round to the right. Continue out through the gates into Thompson Road.

Turn right at the bottom onto Eccleshall Road. Follow this all the way along until you reach the roundabout. Keep right and cross Brocco Bank to enter the main gates of Endcliffe Park on the other side of the roundabout. Continue through the park to the Endcliffe Park Café and toilets then look out over the green.

## 05 Endcliffe Valley Park

Endcliffe Park is a vast expanse of greenery and woodland. It nestles along one of the river-ways which were the original green corridors through the city. It is hard to imagine now that the river was once the lifeblood of Sheffield's metal industries. As we walk through the park and up through its woodland trails, you can get a real sense of how the river paths provided enclaves of quiet and space.

This park also signifies a Sheffield first. In 1880 the land was given to the city under a legal covenant. This ensured that it was only used as open space and could not be built over without a special Act of Parliament. The covenant came at the height of Sheffield's industrial expansion, when residents began to demand more green spaces to roam and play.

As you can tell from the play areas, café, and continual fire of footballs and children's bicycle bells swirling around you, Endcliffe Park is still well used!

This valley park also provides invaluable habitat for the city's wildlife - from birds to bats and butterflies - making it an incredibly important spot for biodiversity as well as peoples' well-being.

### Directions

Continue beyond the café and take the right fork of the path over the river. Continue winding your way through the park to reach its farthest tip then exit onto Rustlings Road, just below the Oakbrook Road roundabout.



## 06 Rustlings Road

Look out to the right and you will see row upon row of houses winding their way uphill. This mid-20th century housing looks quiet and green, dotted with lush front gardens and tree-lined streets. But these roads are now a battleground. The outcome could alter the look and feel of Sheffield.

Throughout this trail we have seen Sheffield's forward-thinking decisions to develop new green spaces. These suggest an acknowledgement of the benefits that urban trees can bring - to health, well-being and the environment. Trees such as the limes, oaks and sycamores here provide shade and reduce traffic noise. They also help to remove air pollution, alleviate flood risk and create carbon storage.

Wildlife gains too. Mature trees, with their wide foliage and spreading branches, provide great homes for birds and insects. Tree-lined streets become 'wildlife corridors', encouraging birds and pollinating insects to move between green spaces - rather like a wildlife motorway.

Besides benefits, however, Sheffield's two million trees also create challenges. Their roots sometimes pull up pavements and low-hanging branches can cause damage and traffic problems. These problems require constant maintenance but the city authorities are also under financial pressures. Critics say that the council has cut some of its costs by cutting down some of the city's trees.

The aptly named Rustlings Road has become a frontline of this debate. In 2016 some 11 or 12 mature trees along this road were due to be felled under a road improvement plan. This is a main thoroughfare into the city centre and council contractors felt the trees obstructed the pavements.

Any trees felled are due to be replaced with ornamental substitutes like acers and hazels. Such replacements are deemed to have less value, in both aesthetics and biodiversity, and unhappy locals refer to them as 'lolipop trees'.

In November 2016 Sheffield's trees made national headlines after a 'dawn raid' in this very street. Contractors woke residents in Rustlings Road at 5am and told to them move their cars so that the trees could be removed. When locals refused, they were arrested for public order offences.

The debate over the tree felling still rages as people question the trade-off between saving money and saving trees. Protests, campaign posters, petitions and legal action are all part of the challenge on behalf of the trees. Much like the communities of the 1880s who secured the Botanical Gardens, we can see people uprising now to protect Sheffield's trees and the value they bring to this urban area.

Though Sheffield's battle to balance the books of its 'Treeconomics' continues, what is clear is that this city is entwined with nature - both through its location within the open air playground of a National Park and its heritage of rivers and industry. The trees that line the streets, the grass that fills the parks and the views that showcase Sheffield's greenery all remind us that urban spaces are always linked to their wider environment. Nowhere more so than Sheffield - the industrial city of two million trees.

 **Trail complete - we hope you have enjoyed it!**



**Thank you to...**

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