

Bath & North East Somerset Council

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| MEETING: | Planning Transportation and Environment Panel |
| MEETING DATE: | 23 August 2012 |
| TITLE: | Green Infrastructure Strategy |
| WARD: | ALL |
| AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM | |
| List of attachments to this report: Appendix A - Extracts from the consultation draft including introduction, a draft vision and list of principles. | |

1 THE ISSUE

A healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustainable economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing. Core Strategy policy CP7 on Green Infrastructure addresses this issue and sets out a requirement to protect and enhance the Green Infrastructure network across the district. The Council is committed to preparing a Green Infrastructure Strategy to coordinate the delivery of this policy. The purpose of this report is to apprise the panel of the draft Green Infrastructure Strategy and key issues arising from the stakeholder Consultation in May 2012.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Planning Transportation and Environment Panel are asked to consider and comment on whether:

- 2.1 The draft Green Infrastructure strategy, amended to address key issues arising from the stakeholder consultation, will provide an effective framework for working with partners and within the council, towards realising the full benefits of the natural environment for the health and wellbeing of the local community, economy and wildlife.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The merit of the Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy is that it provides opportunities to add value to existing programmes and using existing resources. It highlights more sustainable solutions, making optimum use of existing budgets and resources to achieve multifunctional outcomes. Implementation of GI is also facilitated by invaluable volunteer efforts. Evidence has shown that some sustainable solutions can be less expensive than an engineered approach. Preparation of the GI Strategy has been undertaken within the existing Planning Environment Team budget.

- 3.2 The strategy will also provide the supporting framework to access funding sources external to the council including health, Water Framework Directive funds and a platform for bidding for heritage Lottery funds or similar. Opportunities also occur through Development Management processes to influence allocation of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106. Some seed funding may be required to explore and pilot new approaches, for example to managing land that could ultimately produce savings.
- 3.3 The strategy will be submitted to Cabinet in November for approval. Priority activities and projects will be worked up by task and finish groups including partners, as part of the delivery plan process following strategy approval. Any council led initiatives requiring additional resource will be agreed before action. Resourcing of the strategy will need to be considered in the context of financial pressures via the MTSRP process.

4 THE REPORT

Introduction

- 4.1 Green Infrastructure (GI) is the term used to describe the networks of natural spaces and corridors within our urban and rural areas. It's about using the natural environment in ways that deliver services essential to quality of life and about providing the natural infrastructure essential to help people live happier, healthier and more sustainable lives, within more prosperous communities.
- 4.2 Green infrastructure can have many functions and offers ways to prepare for climate change, build economic success, manage flood risk, provide alternative active travel options, provide green spaces for exercise and socialising and to conserve and enhance wildlife and habitats.
- 4.3 The Bath & NE Somerset area benefits from a unique and outstanding natural environment. This Strategy is about harnessing and sustaining the full benefits of these invaluable assets and offering cost effective, practical solutions to make a significant contribution to delivering the Councils vision and values.

Policy context

- 4.4 The Government White Paper (June 2011) – the Natural Choice: securing the value of nature, states that: *“A healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustainable economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing”*. The White paper *“requires us all to put the value of nature at the heart of decision making”* and supports the development of green infrastructure to achieve this.
- 4.5 The White Paper, Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our strategy for public health in England, also recognises the importance of the natural environment for mental and physical health.
- 4.6 The importance of green infrastructure is firmly embodied in the new National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012). The GI Strategy delivers Core Strategy policy C7 and will inform and support a number of related Local Development Framework documents including the Placemaking Plan, Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IPD) and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The Strategy will also inform other Council strategies including the Green Spaces Strategy, draft Allotments Strategy, World Heritage Site (WHS) Management Plan and the WHS setting Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Purpose of Strategy

4.7 The Strategy provides a long term vision and framework to enable smarter working by and between the Council, its working partners and the local community, to achieve added value and multiple benefits from the natural environment. The ambition is to provide a framework that will enable consideration of alternative solutions, using existing resources to delivery more and with stronger community engagement.

Process

4.8 The strategy is being developed by the Planning Policy & Environment Group within Planning & Transport Development with support from a cross council officer working group and was informed by early stakeholder engagement in 2011. Once the Strategy is approved by the Council the details of who will do what and by when, will be worked up in the Delivery plan.

Vision and Principles

4.9 The strategy sets out the vision and principles that will guide delivery of GI across B&NES to unlock the wide range of benefits that the natural environment can provide for the local community, economy and wildlife. Each principle has a set of objectives that detail what needs to happen to turn the principle into action. The principles include a mix of process and interest related guidelines. Extracts from the introduction, a draft vision and list of principles is attached as Appendix A.

Consultation responses

4.10 The overall response received during the recent consultation on the draft strategy was very positive. The draft was well received and there was strong support for the need for a strategy and endorsement of the importance of GI in achieving sustainable development.

4.11 A number of issues arising from consultation are currently being addressed for inclusion in the final document. These include:

- The need to clarify how the Strategy sits with related planning (in particular Placemaking Plan, CIL and IDP) and other council documents.
- The need to strengthen the document to achieve maximum weight with developers, stakeholders and within the council. Stakeholders wanted to ensure that opportunities to achieve improved GI through new developments are not lost.
- Status of the document - a number of stakeholders queried why the document was not a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Whilst the strategy parent policy stems from the Core Strategy, delivery of GI will be through a wide variety of mechanisms, many beyond the scope of the development planning processes as set out in paras 3.1 and 3.2 above. Application of the strategy principles to specific neighbourhoods and sites will be incorporated into and consulted upon and through the Placemaking Plan DPD as part of the statutory Development Plan.
- The need for more detail on the emerging strategic priorities that will be taken through to the delivery plan, for consideration by task and finish

groups, made up of the appropriate specialist organisations and partners.

- More emphasis to be given to the importance of the green setting of the WHS and need for coordinated approach to the positive management and improved access to this unique natural environment

4.12 Additional work is progressing to address these issues. Project profiles are being drafted for the key strategic priorities and process projects. These provide project outlines that will then be looked at in depth during the delivery plan process following Strategy approval. Two additional priority projects are being developed in response to the consultation. Firstly the Green Setting of Bath WHS and secondly the Railway Path which is already a significant multi user recreation route linking Bath to Bristol and beyond. A development management checklist is also being developed to achieve GI through new developments.

The Councils role

4.13 The council has an important role to play in GI planning and delivery with its broad environmental, health /social and economic responsibilities. Whilst awareness of the value of the natural environment and the benefits of green infrastructure are well developed in some services the concepts of GI are not generally embedded in the Council processes. Consequently major opportunities arising from an integrated approach to delivery and the resulting added benefits are being missed.

4.14 In addition to coordinating the development of the Strategy and initiating the delivery planning process the council will champion GI and lead on a number of initiatives including:

- (1) Planning and development management process - by developing tools such as the development GI checklist and accessible GI mapping system to secure GI opportunities through growth and to support neighbourhood planning.
- (2) Securing cultural change within the Council to put the value of the natural environment at the heart of decision making, through a programme of targeted training/workshops/guidance to build GI capacity of council staff and members and influencing project development processes, so that GI is addressed at the start of project development.
- (3) Reviewing opportunities for multifunction and different management regimes for Council owned land
- (4) Taking the lead on a number of strategic projects such as the River Avon/canal corridor, Wansdyke Greenway and further development of Outdoors West as an information portal to encourage greater use of GI.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT

5.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

6 EQUALITIES

6.1 A separate *Equalities Impact Assessment* (EqIA) has not been completed at this stage for the draft strategy however the parent Core Strategy policy CP7 has already been through a rigorous EqIA process. *“CP7 Green Infrastructure - This policy improves opportunities for improved health and wellbeing through a*

protected and improved network of green infrastructure (green places and space). This is positive for exercise, relaxation and general wellbeing. (all)”

6.2 In addition to enabling improved access to the natural environment for the whole community the draft strategy recommends positive promotion of activities for particular groups, including communities with lower life expectancy, the young and the elderly.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 *Cabinet Member; Parish Council; Town Council; Overview & Scrutiny Panel; Other B&NES Services; Service Users; Local Residents; Community Interest Groups; Stakeholders/Partners; Other Public Sector Bodies; Section 151 Finance Officer; Chief Executive; Monitoring Officer*

7.2 An initial workshop was held in March 2011 to engage key stakeholders in the development of the strategy. A second stakeholder event was held in May 2012 to launch the draft strategy, at the beginning of the four week consultation period. Draft documents including a comments form, were also made available on the Council Web site on the Green Infrastructure page.

8 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

8.1 *Social Inclusion; Customer Focus; Sustainability; Property; Young People; Corporate; Health & Safety;*

9 ADVICE SOUGHT

9.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

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| Contact person | <i>Sue Murtagh 01225 477618</i> |
| Background papers | <p><i>Core Strategy</i></p> <p><i>Core Strategy Equalities Impact Assessment</i></p> <p><i>Consultation draft GI Strategy May 2012</i></p> <p>http://tinyurl.com/bnegbpd</p> |
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