

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Cabinet	
MEETING DATE:	14 November 2012	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 2389
TITLE:	Green Infrastructure Strategy	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		
Appendix 1: "Valuing people, place and nature" Green Infrastructure Strategy for Bath & NE Somerset - Nov 2012		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 A healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustainable economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing. Draft 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 (GIS) to coordinate the delivery of this policy.
- 1.2 A draft Strategy was published for consultation in May 2012. The purpose of this report is to summarise the changes made in response to Stakeholder comments and seek the Council's approval of the final Strategy.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet agrees to:

- 2.1 Approve "Valuing people, place and nature" a Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Bath and North East Somerset area
- 2.2 To support delivery of the Strategy by championing Green Infrastructure and commend the Strategy to the partners and stakeholders who have shaped it and invite them to continue to work with the Council to develop and deliver the action plan.
- 2.3 Delegate authority to the Divisional Director for Planning and Transport Development, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods, to make minor text changes and minor design changes to the layout, if required, and for the inclusion of the rest of the appendices and changes to the selection of photos to the Strategy

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The merit of the GI approach is that it provides opportunities to add value to existing programmes, by highlighting more sustainable solutions, making optimum use of existing budgets and resources to achieve multifunctional outcomes. Much can be achieved with existing resources including invaluable volunteer efforts. Evidence has shown that some sustainable solutions can be less expensive than an engineered approach.
- 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 and Section 106 contributions.
- 3.3 Priority activities and projects identified within the GIS will be worked up by task and finish groups including partners, as part of the action plan process following strategy approval. Any council led initiatives requiring additional resource will be agreed before action. Requests for this type of funding will be brought forward as part of individual business plans at appropriate times in the future and will be dealt with as part of the Council's budgetary approval process.
- 3.4 The Green Infrastructure Strategy is a commitment identified in the 2011/12 & 2012/13 Service Action Plans for Planning & Transport Development. The main cost has been staff time, mainly within Planning but due to the cross-service nature of the strategy, officers from all three Directorates have been involved; these costs have been funded by salary budgets in various departments. Consultants have been used to carry out an area based study and to assist with the two consultation events. The cost of this work was £13k, funded by grants from DEFRA and Natural England. The design and printing costs of the strategy (c£4k) is being funded from existing Planning Policy & Environment budgets

4 CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- 4.1 The GIS is all about people and places and making sure that the natural environment works for the community, by making the most of the benefits that the natural environment can and should be delivering for people place and wildlife. The strategy sets out a framework to deliver across a wide range of benefits and will provides opportunities to contribute to all of the following corporate objectives:
- *Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone*
 - *Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live*
 - *Building a stronger economy*

5 THE REPORT

Introduction

- 5.1 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.

5.2 GI 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.

5.3 The B&NES 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

5.4 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 GI to achieve this.

5.5 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.

5.6 The importance of GI is firmly embodied in the new National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012). The GI Strategy delivers draft 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

5.7 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.

5.8 The strategy sets out a vision and provides a variety of tools and mechanisms to support delivery including:

- **Strategy principles** - providing fundamental guidance on how GI should be delivered
- **Delivery aims and objectives** - setting out what needs to be done to deliver the GI benefits and providing a framework for the action plan
- **Mapping solutions** - district wide issues and urban vision maps to show what we could and should seek to achieve
- **Priority process projects** - to establish effective processes and procedures to deliver GI
- **Emerging geographical projects** - to act as catalysts to inspire and guide development of the action plan

Consultation responses

5.9 The overall response received during the consultation on the draft strategy in May 2012 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 sustainable development.

5.10 A number of issues arising from consultation have been addressed in the final document. These include:

- (1) The need to clarify how the Strategy sits with related planning (in particular Placemaking Plan, CIL and IDP) and other council documents (ref. diagram 1 in GI strategy)
- (2) 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. A development management project is outlined and an illustrative summary of key opportunities to engage with the planning process included in appendix 4 of the GIS.
- (3) 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. Application of the strategy principles to specific neighbourhoods and sites will be incorporated into policy through the Placemaking Plan as part of the Local Plan.
- (4) 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. Project profiles are now included in Appendix 1 to address this issue. These provide the starting point for project development through the action plan process.
- (5) 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. A green Setting of Bath WHS project is now included in the GIS.
- (6) The Bristol Bath Railway Path should be highlighted as a key sub regional asset. A project has been added to address this.
- (7) More detail was requested on mapping of GI assets and GI opportunities at district wide and urban scales. Additional maps have been developed and included in the GIS.

The Council's role

5.11 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.

5.12 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 and Canal, the Green Setting of Bath WHS and further development of Outdoors West as an information portal to encourage greater use of GI.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 The report author and Lead Cabinet member have fully reviewed the risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 An EqIA has been completed. No adverse or other significant issues were found.

8 RATIONALE

8.1 The Strategy provides a framework for the Council and partners to deliver a wide range of benefits and make a significant contribution to achieving the Council's Vision and Values. The need to address Green Infrastructure is embedded in national policy requirements and the Strategy specifically required to deliver draft Core Policy C7 on Green Infrastructure.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 None

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 *Cabinet members; Parish Council; Town Council; Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel; Other B&NES Services; Local Residents; Community Interest Groups; Stakeholders/Partners; Other Public Sector Bodies; Section 151 Finance Officer; Chief Executive; Monitoring Officer*

10.2 A Strategy Development Workshop was held on 31 March 2011 marking the beginning of the formal process of developing the GIS. The event involved key

stakeholders including all of the neighbouring authorities in developing the Strategy's direction and priorities. The workshop outputs were used to inform the draft strategy. The consultation draft strategy was launched to stakeholders at the start of the public consultation during May 2012. Workshop outputs and consultation responses have shaped the final form and content of the GIS.

10.3 The draft GIS has been considered by the LDF steering group, informal cabinet , Environmental Sustainability Partnership and the Planning Transportation & Environment Panel.

11 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

11.1 Social Inclusion; Sustainability; Property; Young People; Corporate;

12 ADVICE SOUGHT

12.1 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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Sponsoring Cabinet Member	<i>Councillor David Dixon</i>
Background papers	<i>Draft Core Strategy</i>
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	