ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUNTINY PANEL – 17 JUNE 2021

PORTFOLIO: PLANNING, REGENERATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

i. That the Panel supports and agrees the scope Green Infrastructure Strategy work outlined in this report.

ii. Agrees that an all Member workshop be held.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Green infrastructure is a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services such as water purification, air quality, space for recreation and climate mitigation and adaptation.

2.2 Elements of green infrastructure include formal and informal public open spaces, play areas, country parks, cemeteries and churchyards, assessable natural green spaces, woodlands, hedgerows, trees (including street trees and verges), landscape features, allotments, beaches, ponds, rivers and watercourses, wetlands and marshes and public rights of way. While usually referred to as 'green' infrastructure, some important elements are 'blue' water-based assets.

2.3 Green Infrastructure is both part of our countryside and part of our towns and villages. It is the 'green lungs' of the places we live in. It provides important space for wildlife habitats and enhances the health and well-being of local communities.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Local Plan Part 2: Sites and Development Management adopted by the Council in 2014 recognised the growing significance of green infrastructure in planning for the district and the need to 'plan' for green infrastructure as well as plan for development recognising that development itself is not the only delivery route. It recognised the important role that green infrastructure plays in creating well designed healthy communities, building low carbon communities and supporting nature recovery by delivering new or improving existing green infrastructure. (Policy DM9 Green Infrastructure Linkages)

3.2 Since that Plan was adopted the importance of green infrastructure for delivering a wider environmental agenda has grown. This became clear during work on the Local Plan Review and, at a national level, with the Government's emerging environmental policies, seeking biodiversity net gain, nature recovery, tackling climate change by reducing carbon dependency and spending up targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions. It is now widely recognised that green infrastructure has an important role to play, not just as nice places to be and enjoy, but to address issues such as climate change, carbon capture, air quality, water quality, habitat creation and biodiversity enhancement Further, the presence (and absence) of green infrastructure can have a significant impact on the health (physical and mental) and well-being of communities.

3.3 The report to Cabinet on 5th May 2021 on The Local Plan Review Part Two and supporting work (http://go-moderngov01:9070/documents/s17781/The%20Local%20Plan%20Review%20Part%20Two%20and%20Supporting%20Work.pdf) identified (in Section 5 of the Report) Green infrastructure as a priority work area for Local Plan Part 2. The Local Plan work will include appropriate policies to ensure longer-term sustainability and resilience to climate change in new development. Section 6 of the report identified a need for a wider piece of work, the preparation of a district-wide Green Infrastructure Strategy, reflecting the role of the Council, not just as a local planning authority, but as an owner and manager of green infrastructure across the district.

4. WHY WE NEED A GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY AND WHAT IT WILL COVER

4.1 Sustainable development cannot be achieved without recognising the fundamental role played by green infrastructure. Green infrastructure can be vulnerable to pressures from development, and yet it is also essential to support new development and has potential to deliver on important environmental issues such as:

- Biodiversity net gain and nature recovery
- Carbon capture and storage
- Mitigation of the impacts of development and climate change – cooling, air quality, flooding, sea level rise

It is important that in recognising the value of enhancing existing and providing further green infrastructure it is not simply linked and triggered by development. Whilst this Strategy will be used to inform Local Plan Part 2 it will also be used to inform future projects that are not directly linked to development.

4.2 The value of Green Infrastructure is significantly enhanced if it is joined up to form a network. For example, while isolated pieces of public open space may have some value, the benefits of joining those up with 'green' corridors (linear routes with space for trees, hedgerows and grassland) and footpath routes, (including Public Rights of Way) can significantly increase their value for both people and wildlife. This requires a wider 'strategic' approach to green infrastructure.

4.3 The work will include looking at the Council's own open spaces and coastline, which include woods, grass areas, streams and ponds, and vary in size from a few square metres to several hectares. It will consider how the Council could help deliver wider environmental gains for our local communities.

4.4 The work on the Green Infrastructure Strategy will include:

- An audit and mapping of existing strategic green infrastructure across the district
- Identification of network of important habitats – designations, SINCs, ancient woodland, coastal marshes, areas of biodiversity potential
- Identifying important linkages and green infrastructure corridors – and identifying where and how they need strengthening.
- Identification of 'areas of opportunity' for BNG, mitigation, carbon storage and for supporting nature recovery

- Consideration of the potential of NFDC landholdings

4.5 Output will be:

- Overview Strategy setting out objectives
- Strategic Green Infrastructure Framework – map based
- Identifying potential areas for Green Infrastructure improvement and projects.
- Projects including on NFDC land

4.6 This work will need to involve partnership working with organisations outside the Council as well as across Council services.

5. THE NEXT STEPS

5.1 This piece of work is multi-dimensional. It brings together consideration of many environmental issues and the potential to deliver cross-cutting measures benefiting the environment and our communities.

5.2 It will be valuable for all Members to have the opportunity to input to this area of work from an early stage. It is suggested that a Member Workshop be held as soon as it can be arranged, to enable Members to discuss these issues and put forward their thoughts and ideas.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 This is an important piece of work that will make a significant contribution to the delivery of the ‘green agenda’ and ‘green growth’ in the whole of New Forest District.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 No direct immediate implications.

8. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There will be significant potential for environmental benefits to be achieved through this work.

10. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None

11. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

11.1 None

For further information contact:

Claire Upton-Brown
Chief Planning Officer
023 8028 5409
Claire.upton-brown@nfdc.gov.uk

Louise Evans
Service Manager Policy and Strategy
023 8028 5345
Louise.evans@nfdc.gov.uk

Background Papers:

None