

**SUBJECT: GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY**

**MEETING: Cabinet**

**DATE: 20 December 2019**

**DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: ALL**

**1. PURPOSE:**

- 1.1 To approve the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That cabinet approve the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

**3. KEY ISSUES:**

Background

- 3.1 Green Infrastructure (GI) is the network of natural and semi-natural features, green spaces, rivers and lakes that intersperse and connect villages, towns and cities. Individually, these elements are *GI assets*, and the roles that these assets play are *GI functions*. When appropriately planned, designed and managed, the assets and functions have the potential to deliver a wide range of benefits – from providing active travel links to mitigating and adapting the effects of climate change.
- 3.2 Active Travel and creating Healthy Environments is a key consideration within the GI Strategy embracing Welsh Government, PSB and Council priorities and will be reinforced and explored further in the emerging Active Travel Plan. It is embraced within the core aims and is a key delivery mechanism to achieving Strategic Objective 1: “Improving Health and Well Being” which seeks to promote “actions that enable and encourage local communities to use, manage and enjoy their local areas for health, wellbeing and community cohesion – with a particular focus on disadvantaged communities and active travel routes”.
- 3.3 The GI Strategy sets out the Council's approach to enhancing biodiversity and increasing ecosystem resilience through GI in line with the Monmouthshire Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan prepared under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. It also sets out the Council's approach to improving health and wellbeing outcomes through GI in line with the objectives of the Monmouthshire Wellbeing Plan and the Corporate Plan action to Deliver Green Infrastructure Policy as part of a sustainable plan for enhancing the local environment.

### 3.3 The Strategy comprises of

#### *Volume 1 – Strategic Framework*

Volume 1 of the Strategy sets out the Council's strategic framework for GI provision. It identifies key priorities and strategic opportunities where the restoration, maintenance, creation or connection of green features and functions would deliver the most significant benefits, both on a countywide basis and for key settlements where growth is planned in the adopted Local Development Plan (2011-2021).

#### *Volume 2 – Delivery Plan*

Volume 2 of the Strategy provides the Council's delivery plan for GI. The Delivery Plan includes prioritised action plans for delivery of strategic/landscape-scale GI projects, and local GI projects to support development at the key growth locations and rural secondary settlements. The action plans are designed to support funding bids by the Council and its delivery partners.

#### *GIS Database of GI Assets*

A comprehensive and user-friendly GIS Database of GI assets and related information, which provides a tool for informing land use planning and land management decision-making with regards to GI.

- 3.4 The Green Infrastructure Strategy will be kept under review and updated as necessary to have regard to changing circumstances.

#### Vision and Core Aims

- 3.5 The Strategy sets out a vision, core aims, strategic objectives, a settlement based strategic network, key GI assets and a GI assessment of ecosystem services based on five key zones. It is based on a vision that:

*“Monmouthshire has a well-connected multifunctional green infrastructure network comprising high quality green spaces and links that offer many benefits for people and wildlife.*

*The network’s integrity and connectivity is maintained, protected and enhanced in a planned and managed way, which recognises the interdependency and multi-functionality of landscape, heritage and biodiversity elements.*

*Investment in green infrastructure underpins the County’s ongoing economic, social and environmental success by supporting sustainable growth, improving quality of life and place, delivering ecosystem services and tackling climate change.*

*Monmouthshire is a green and healthy place to live, with an increasingly coherent and resilient ecological network of wildlife.”*

This is underpinned by the Core Aims, which seek to:

- Enrich People's lives through engagement and activity
- Build strong and vibrant places and communities in Monmouthshire
- Conserve protect and enhance Monmouthshire's GI assets

Together the vision and the core aims provide the overarching framework for positive actions by all stakeholders involved in the future protection, management and enhancement of GI in Monmouthshire.

### Strategic Objectives & Priorities

- 3.6 Objectives and priorities were developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. It is acknowledged that the GI strategy is a living document. The development of GI priorities will evolve with the outputs of the landscape profile panels, forming part of the evidence base that will help inform the South East Wales Area Statement (required by the Environment Act and prepared by NRW to identify the priorities, risks and opportunities for the sustainable management of natural resources (SMNR) at the local level).

Objective 1: Improve Health and Well Being

Objective 2: Enhance Biodiversity & Increase Ecosystem Resilience

Objective 3: Strengthen Landscape Character & Distinctiveness

Objective 4: Increase Climate Change Resilience

Objective 5: Support Sustainable Economic Development

These principles align with the National Wellbeing Goals, Monmouthshire's Local wellbeing objectives and Monmouthshire's Biodiversity & Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan.

### GI Networks

- 3.7 The Strategic GI Network for Monmouthshire provides an overarching framework for GI planning, management and delivery across the County as an integral part of the wider Gwent Green Grid. The network embraces strategic GI corridors connecting GI assets within the County and in neighbouring areas providing important GI links to Monmouthshire's main and secondary settlements through a clear list of settlement specific opportunities and general GI opportunities and through a GI Network Plan.

### Key GI Assets

- 3.8 Key GI categories were identified within which a range of assets have been highlighted and assessed. Information identified will be updated with partners working closely with NRW in the development and update of their GI Assessment of Ecosystem Service Mapping. The following categories were identified:
- **Natural and semi- natural Greenspaces** including woodland & scrub, grassland, heath and moor, wetlands open/running water and coast.
  - **Green and Blue Corridors** including the larger Rivers Usk, Wye and Monnow, smaller watercourses including the River Trothy, Nedern Brook, Olway Brook and Mill

Reen, ditches and reens on Gwent Levels, the Severn estuary, the sea wall, historic green lanes and byways, highway and railway verges between settlements.

- **Productive landscapes** (identified across all five GI Zones) including farmland (both commercial farming businesses and small holdings), orchards, woodland, allotments
- **Cemeteries and Churchyards** (identified across all five GI Zones)
- **Parks and Gardens** (identified across all five GI)
- **Amenity Grassland** (identified across all five GI Zones)
- **Heritage Sites** (identified across all five GI Zones)

#### Green Infrastructure Zones (GI assessment of Ecosystem Service Assessment)

- 3.9 GI assets identified provide a wide range of benefits to society derived from functions or ecosystems services that they provide. Each zone provides a summary of the ecosystem service provided by these GI assets.

These are split across five Zones covering:

- A Gwent Levels
- B Wye Valley
- C Usk Catchment
- D Wye Catchment
- E Brecon Beacons Uplands

All identifying:

- *Supporting services*; including geology and soil character, soil formation, and pollination
- *Provisioning services*; including water availability, food provision, and fuel and fibre
- *Regulating Services*; including climate regulation, regulating water quality, water (flooding), soil erosion and quality, and coastal processes.
- *Cultural services*; including sense of place and inspiration, sense of history, leisure and recreation.

#### Links to other policy initiatives

- 3.10 The GI strategy together with the emerging Landscape Profile priorities will help inform the South East Wales Area Statement for Gwent and provide a key input into the delivery of projects supported under the Gwent Green Grid Partnership (subject to Welsh Governments approval of ENRaW funding beyond the current year).
- 3.11 As indicated above delivery of the GI strategy is an important component of meeting the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 duty to enhance biodiversity and increase ecosystem resilience, in line with the Monmouthshire Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan.
- 3.12 The Climate Emergency Action Plan includes securing more green infrastructure and actions to manage green spaces to reduce energy use, absorb carbon and build climate change resilient. A green infrastructure and tree asset working group has been established

to focus on these issues (including Operations, Estates, Countryside Access, Green Infrastructure and Highways). The GI Strategy provides the core framework for taking these actions forward forming the delivery mechanism for project work.

- 3.13 The GI Strategy will also help provide a framework to respond to the impact of Chalara, ash dieback disease, a highly destructive disease of ash trees, which has already affected millions of trees in the UK. It is expected to kill up to 99% of all ash trees in Wales. Ash dieback is known to be present across the county although its impact is, as yet, unquantified. As well as the obvious effects to biodiversity and the natural environment, the disease has significant financial and legal implications due to the potential health and safety risks to the public. This is a corporate issue impacting across the Council's estates and highways etc. The green infrastructure and tree asset working group will work to quantify the potential impact and this will be the subject of a future report to cabinet.
- 3.14 It provides a platform for the delivery of Planning Policy Wales 10 wellbeing and place-making agenda, through the delivery of a GI approach towards planning. The Strategy sets the framework for strategic and development management policy in the existing and emerging LDP's and provides the context, and collaborative projects, for the GI SPG and the consideration of development management applications.
- 3.15 There are strong links between the GI Strategy, Active Travel and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan promoting opportunities for sustainable access and recreation that encourage healthy lifestyles and improve well-being for communities, including creating and improving safe and pleasant off-road active travel / multipurpose routes and well-connected, multifunctional greenspaces.
- 3.16 A green infrastructure approach will help deliver active travel embracing multifunctional benefits, this is set out in the "GI Needs and Opportunities Assessment for Improving Health and Wellbeing" for each of the 5 zones which seek to deliver active travel by:
- Identifying opportunities for focused investment that compliments Monmouthshire's special landscape,
  - Highlighting in which landscapes these opportunities can be maximised
  - Flagging up potential strategic gaps in networks and where better connectivity can be achieved.
- 3.17 The Delivery Plan is a living document and identifies a range of GI projects many of which include active travel opportunities. A recent addition is the Caldicot Regeneration Scheme and its expansion to include Church Road and deliver innovative active travel and GI opportunities between the town and the castle. Collaborative active travel and GI capital funding bids are being prepared to support these opportunities.
- 3.18 The Strategy provides the framework to support further partnership actions and future external funding applications.
- 3.19 The final published version of the strategy will include a preface to set the strategy into this wider policy context and some minor corrections / updates required to reflect contextual changes.

#### **4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):**

- 4.1 The delivery of a GI strategy contributes across the wellbeing goals including enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem / climate change resilience, encouraging healthy lifestyles and improving well-being for communities. The provision of further green infrastructure, its sympathetic management and the promotion of good quality access will assist the whole population (see Appendix 1).

#### **5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL**

<b>Option</b>	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Risks</b>
Not to progress the GI Strategy	No additional costs	Lack of progress in delivery of the corporate plan and unfavourable impact on the delivery of the climate emergency strategy / loss of opportunities to secure external funding and support existing or form new delivery partnerships.
To make progress on the GI Strategy	The clarity provided by an approved GI Strategy will significantly improve the opportunities for external funding, partnership working and coordinated delivery against its objectives helping to meet our obligations in respect of biodiversity and resilient ecosystems, placemaking, climate emergency strategy etc.	None

#### **6. EVALUATION CRITERIA**

- 6.1 Progress will be monitored against the Green Infrastructure Strategy and the monitoring and evaluation arrangements in place for specific programmes and projects

#### **7. REASONS:**

- 7.1 To inform members of the proposed Green Infrastructure Strategy. Delivering Green Infrastructure Policy is an identified action in the corporate plan as part of maximising the potential of the natural and built environment.
- 7.2 The climate emergency strategy identifies the role of creating and managing green spaces to absorb carbon & provide resilience to climate change including to:
- Secure more green infrastructure through development

- Plant more trees and increase area of woodland, improve and increase woodland management and retain existing woodland
- Maintain & enhance biodiversity & make ecosystems more resilient
- Promote sustainable land management and agricultural practices, including nutrient/soil management and natural flood management

## **8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

- 8.1 The preparation of the Green Infrastructure Strategy was funded through Welsh Government GI Funding and managed by the Green Infrastructure team, with input from across the authority, within existing staff resources.
- 8.2 The actions within the Green Infrastructure Strategy all have different resource implications and will be funded in different ways. Some are zero cost, some will be grant funded, and some will be funded by partners and developers contributions. If additional funds are needed these will be subject to subsequent decision making processes.

## **9. CONSULTEES:**

Cabinet and SLT  
 Chief Officer Enterprise  
 Chief Operating Officer MonLife  
 Strong Communities Select Committee

- 9.1 Strong Communities Select Committee considered the draft GI strategy on 7 November 2019 and resolved as follows:  
 We thank you for bringing this to us for pre-decision scrutiny. We have raised some questions which you have fully answered and we are in full support of this strategy which will provide the clarity needed and will ensure our approach is integrated to the work of our partners and communities. We fully endorse that this strategy should be adopted by the Executive and request a further report in due course on the implementation of the action plan.

## **10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Appendix 1: Equality and Future Generations Evaluation  
 Appendix 2: GI Strategy Executive Summary  
 Appendix 3: GI Strategy Volume 1 Strategic Framework

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