

MEETING: WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY SCRUTINY

DATE: 21 MARCH 2018

REPORT TITLE: WEST OF ENGLAND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN UPDATE

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Purpose of Report

1. To provide Members with an overview of the scope and purpose for the West of England Green Infrastructure Plan. This report provides an early opportunity for Members to engage and comment on the Green Infrastructure Plan. Future updates and opportunities to engage will be provided as the project advances.

Background

- 2.0 The West of England Joint Spatial Plan (JSP) commits the four Unitary Authorities of Bath & North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, North Somerset Council and South Gloucestershire Council to produce a joint West of England Green Infrastructure (GI) Plan.
- 2.1 The GI Plan will identify the strategic measures and mechanisms to support, guide and implement the delivery of environmental commitments set within the JSP. This policy commitment will ensure that through the delivery of GI the JSP; meets the requirements of the Habitat Regulation Assessment agreed through Natural England, addresses and outlines a strategic GI network and delivers GI within new development to conform with the place shaping principles set within policy 5 of the JSP.
- 2.2 Whilst the GI Plan will be read as a whole, it may take the form of a suite of interrelated documents.
- 2.3 Work has already been undertaken to assess GI assets and opportunities for each of the JSP Strategic Development Locations appraised against 8 GI multifunctional objectives derived from the adopted West of England GI Framework (2011). The GI Plan will advance these outputs integrating GI across a range of development types and geographies.

Definition of Green Infrastructure

- 2.4 The West of England Green Infrastructure Framework (2011) states; *Green Infrastructure is a planned network of green (and blue) spaces and corridors within, around and between towns and cities, which can be designed, maintained, and improved to meet the needs of local communities, wildlife and the environment.*
- 2.5 *Green Infrastructure assets may be publicly or privately owned, may be with or without public access, and may be in urban and rural locations.*

A network of green infrastructure offers multiple benefits, which are essential to the sustainable growth of communities and the economy. These include:

- *Promoting economic growth, employment and skills improvement*
- *Supporting resilient ecosystems and biodiversity*
- *Mitigating and adapting the natural and built environment to climate change*
- *Recognising and enhancing a legible network of physical green spaces and corridors*
- *Reducing and managing flood risks*
- *Improving mental and physical health, and the cohesion of local communities*
- *Increasing sustainable food production*
- *Maintaining and enhancing cultural heritage, landscapes and natural resources*

2.6 This definition is supported by National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) paragraph 27 which recommends embedding GI into the development process at an early stage linking it explicitly to ecosystem services to provides multiple benefits at a range of scales, for the individual, for society, the economy and the environment.

2.7 Natural England further outlines that GI should be a strategically planned and delivered network comprising a broad range of high quality green spaces and other environmental features. GI should be designed and managed including established green spaces and new sites and should be delivered across all spatial scales integrating through the built environment and connecting urban area to rural.

Project Scope

2.8 The GI Plan will provide the evidence and guidance needed to support the JSP examination and preparation of Local Plans. The GI Plan will:

- Define what GI is for the West of England.
- Identify a clear vision.
- Appraise GI function against 8 objectives (derived from the 2011 West of England GI Framework).
- Ensure there is a robust and up-to-date evidence base.
- Identify measurable targets and indicators.
- Demonstrate the importance of GI in the delivery of sustainable development and place-making.
- Identify GI-related issues to be addressed in local plans and other policy documents, including opportunities to enhance or extend the GI network.

Governance

2.9 The Green Infrastructure Plan is being developed to support the JSP and will be supported and approved by the JSP Project Board. The Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) will be supported by a Project Manager and technical team comprising officers from the 4 Unitary Authorities, and key prescribed bodies. The SRO will ensure WECA Scrutiny are regularly informed of the plans development via the delivery of formal reports and presentations.

Next steps

- 2.10 The GI Plan along with other key workstreams will continue through the JSP examination process and provide outputs to inform the examination and Local Plan preparation as required. The proposed timetable for key deliverables are set below

1. *Baseline stock take of current position. – End March 2018*
2. *Core document – Nov 18- March 19*
3. *HRA mitigations to support JSP examination and local plan development – March to April 2018*
4. *Planning policy development and support – May/June 2018*
5. *Delivery and implementation – Late 2018*

Consultation:

- 3 The Joint Spatial Plan: Publication Consultation (November 2017 to January 2018), where the Publication document included in policy the commitment to produce a West of England Green Infrastructure Plan.

Other Options Considered:

- 4 The Green Infrastructure Plan is a requirement set within the West of England Joint Spatial Plan policy 6.

Risk Management/Assessment:

- 5 There are no direct implications arising from this report. Any risks will be reviewed through the Joint Spatial Plan Project Board.

Public Sector Equality Duties:

- 6 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken as part of the Joint Spatial Plan. The outputs of the Green Infrastructure Plan will need to be consistent with the Joint Spatial Plan Equalities Impact Assessment.

Economic Impact Assessment:

- 7 The Green Infrastructure Plan will evaluate options for funding, investment and economic implications of Green Infrastructure.

Finance Implications:

- 8 The Green Infrastructure Plan will be resourced by the four Unitary Authorities, via the JSP Budget for which B&NES is the lead authority

Advice given by: Tim Richens, Director of Investment & Corporate Services, West of England Combined Authority.

Legal Implications:

- 9 The delivery of Green Infrastructure is in accordance with the requirements of the Joint Spatial Plan Habitat Regulation Assessment.

Advice given by: John McCormack, Monitoring Officer & Head of Legal, Governance and Democratic Services, South Gloucestershire Council

Land/Property Implications:

- 10 These implications will be reviewed through the development of the Green Infrastructure Plan.

Human Resources Implications:

- 11 The Green Infrastructure Plan will be resourced by Unitary Authority officers. As this project evolves, the resource requirements will be reviewed to ensure effective delivery of the project.

Advice given by: Alex Holly, Head of Human Resources, West of England Combined Authority.

Recommendation:

- 12 Members are asked to give their views and note the report.