

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION

Decision Made: 19 March 2010

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY FOR MAIDSTONE BOROUGH

Issue for Decision

To consider the proposed Green and Blue Infrastructure policy for inclusion in the forthcoming draft Core Strategy.

Decision Made

1. That the aims of the outlined draft policy CS15 Green and Blue Infrastructure as set out below be approved:-
 - a) Help to meet the challenge of climate change;
 - b) Connect and enrich biodiversity habitats;
 - c) Improve and enhance the strategic importance of the River Medway corridor and its tributaries;
 - d) Meet the recreation needs of the Borough;
 - e) Develop and enhance safe, sustainable transport routes for people and extensive networks for wildlife;
 - f) Enhance landscape character and respect local distinctiveness;
 - g) Realise the potential of historical and cultural heritage features to contribute to local identity and sense of place;
 - h) Meet the needs of both existing and new communities in Maidstone Borough.
 - i) Provide attractive and inspirational environments in which people want to live, work, learn and play; in which communities thrive and businesses want to invest;
 - j) Promote regeneration and tourism opportunities
 - k) Water resource/flood management.
 - l) Inform the future planning and management of the urban form of Maidstone urban area at the strategic scale
2. That the further development of a draft wording of Policy CS15, as shown below, together with other associated Policies and diagrams, to be included in the draft Core Strategy be agreed: -

"Draft - Policy CS15: Green and Blue Infrastructure

Open spaces provided as part of new development, either on-site or off-site, must, wherever practicable, be located where they can provide a safe connection, either directly or in the form of a stepping

stone, with the existing network of open spaces and wildlife corridors as identified on the Strategic Green and Blue Infrastructure Network Diagrams Figures XXXX.

Such connections will be required, where practicable, to provide opportunities for movement ,by walking, cycling and, where appropriate, by horse riding and water between and through open spaces, as well as opportunities for natural habitat creation and species migration.

New open spaces provided in association with new development must be designed and managed to facilitate natural habitat creation and to allow, wherever practicable, for species migration across the Green Infrastructure Network.”

Reasons for Decision

The Local Development Document Advisory Group considered the report of the Assistant Director of Development and Community Strategy regarding the Development of a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Maidstone Borough at their meeting on 24 February 2010.

A member felt that high quality agricultural land should be included as there is little of this land left in the Maidstone Borough and should be protected.

A grammatical amendment to the wording of draft Policy CS15 was suggested and agreed and is included in the recommendation above.

An A3 map of the proposed Strategic Green and Blue Infrastructure Network was circulated at the meeting. A slight re-positioning of one of the stars (depicting the Rural Service Centres) was suggested to ensure Marden’s railway station was shown and one member felt that there was a further “Flood Zone 3a” in the northern area of the map.

Policy background: National planning policy provides strong support for the provision of green infrastructure, in recognition of its contribution towards sustainable development. PPS12 (Local Spatial Planning) requires local planning authorities (lpas) to plan for the infrastructure of new development including green infrastructure. PPS12 also calls for lpas to make links with the strategies and investment plans of other organizations. This latter point is particularly relevant to green & blue infrastructure given that its many functions can help meet a broad range of policy objectives. As well as responsibilities for delivery, PPS12 notes that the infrastructure planning process should identify as far as possible infrastructure costs, phasing of development and funding sources. The Planning & Climate Change Supplement to PPS1(Delivering Sustainable Development) states that spatial strategies and development should help deliver amongst other things, green infrastructure and biodiversity as part of a strategy to address climate change and mitigation. This complements the statement in PPS1 itself which highlights the need for development to ensure an appropriate mix of uses including the incorporation of green space.

PPG17 and the adopted Open Space DPD Policy AH1 provide a set of evidence based local standards for a variety of types of green spaces in the Borough including play spaces. This needs to be incorporated into the new Core Strategy in concert with related and complementary policies and standards. Collectively, these Core Strategy policies and related SPD will provide strategy and development control policies and standards.

An appraisal of green infrastructure is required as part of the Growth Point funding agreement held with the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) and it is entirely appropriate to consider ("blue") infrastructure for water management as part of this.

The Regional Strategy (otherwise known as the South East Plan 2009 or SEP) sets out the regional perspective on green and blue infrastructure planning and lists the key features of such networks. Policy CC8 requires local authorities and partners to plan, provide and manage green and blue infrastructure networks. In particular it highlights the importance of these networks in those areas designated as regional hubs.

Benefits/Functions: The functions and benefits of a green infrastructure are manifold:

- Biodiversity conservation and enhancement;
- Sense of place, visual and environmental landscape and cultural heritage;
- Recreational opportunities and supporting healthy living;
- Improved water resource and flood management;
- Sustainable design;
- Climate change adaptation & mitigation (environmental services);
- Green routes and sustainable transport links and patterns that encourage walking and cycling;
- Improved education and skills (outdoor education);
- Active community engagement and civic pride;
- Higher quality, better utilized green space;
- Food, fibre & fuel production.

Delivery: There are many definitions of green infrastructure in existence. In the case of spatial planning in the south east region the most relevant is that provided by the South East Plan¹.

Common to all successful infrastructure strategies though are three key elements:

- Multi-functionality
- Connectivity
- Networks

Multi-functionality refers to the potential of an area to have a range of adaptable physical functions. A green space adjacent to a river may be able to deliver biodiversity functions (habitat conservation, creation and

¹ The term green infrastructure relates to the active planning and management of sub-regional networks of multi-functional open space. These networks should be managed and designed to support biodiversity and wider quality of life, particularly in areas undergoing large-scale change.'

enhancement) as well as flood storage, recreational opportunities (riverside walk), educational (outdoor classroom) and visual amenity. Connectivity, or integration, takes a number of forms: spatial (linear connections, corridors or stepping stones between green spaces); potential connectivity between different components (the interaction between people, wildlife and plants); connectivity between different human interest in the use of GBI (residents, visitors, workers, landowners etc); administrative connectivity (between Council departments and different administrative organizations); connectivity between different professions and different parts of the organizational structures of local authorities; and finally, connectivity across time.

Individually these two components would not create the synergy needed to lead to a successful green infrastructure. However, when put together these two components form a third - an interconnected network of multifunctional spaces. The effect of this whole is greater than the effect of the sum of its parts and herein lies its strength.

Green infrastructure is most commonly considered in respect of major new development largely perhaps because of the ease in which it possible to influence new development. However, it is not wholly confined to the provision of new development. Adaptation and retrofitting to provide multiple functions to existing communities are also well within the capabilities of green infrastructure planning and, more importantly is as critical.

In the case of new development, opportunities to provide for green infrastructure are often reliant on the delivery of large new areas of green space. However, in the case of retrofitting and adaptation, the opportunities lie more with individual green infrastructure elements (such as green roofs and rooftop gardens in town centres, swales or tree planting, as part of traffic calming schemes, neighbourhood play areas or open access as part of land management agreements).

As a local authority, Maidstone Borough Council is responsible for undertaking a wide range of remits including development control and setting of strategies: planning for sustainable communities; protecting and enhancing biodiversity; managing air quality; encouraging sustainable economic development and tourism; seeking sustainable patterns of development; achieving integrated transport systems; positively managing water resources, surface water drainage and flood waters to name a few. All have potential to deliver green infrastructure objectives.

Maidstone Borough Council must plan for, implement and manage for the long term a green infrastructure. Rather than having to start from scratch though, many of the components needed to deliver a successful green infrastructure are already in place. Development of an "umbrella" strategy together with a Core Strategy policy and supporting Supplementary Planning Document (to provide detailed planning guidance in support of the broader policy) would help provide a focus to these strategies whilst helping to secure identified benefits and meet legislative and policy requirements.

Local Delivery: Maidstone Borough is blessed with a large number of environmental assets including the North Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Medway river and its tributaries, orchards and

woodland, species-rich grassland, and a good overall level of open space provision. In the case of Maidstone Borough fluvial/riverine elements play a very strong part in the character and nature of the borough as a whole. Hence, it is more suitable for the Council to refer to a green and blue infrastructure. In view of this, all future references within this report with regard to the Maidstone context will be to green and blue infrastructure (or GBI).

There are a range of opportunities available with which to make best use of the Borough's assets and contribute to the development of a strategic green and blue infrastructure approach – major development sites, neighbourhood renewal schemes, and biodiversity planning approaches at a landscape scale (e.g. Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and Living Landscapes).

In turn, there are a number of ways in which the Borough is able to take advantage of these opportunities whilst respecting the environmental capacities of the assets. One major tool is the Local Development Framework. In order to maximize its influence, a green and blue infrastructure policy is required in the Core Strategy. This would provide the necessary 'hook' for other tools, including Supplementary Planning Documents on the implementation of open space standards and more detailed guidelines for development control based on landscape character. The policy will also provide the framework for the preparation of a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy SPD and to identify items for inclusion in the Infrastructure delivery Plan alongside other forms of strategic infrastructure.

Policy Aims: The proposed Core Strategy Policy CS15 (Green and Blue Infrastructure) will have a number of aims, to:

- Help to meet the challenge of climate change;
- Connect and enrich biodiversity habitats;
- Improve and enhance the strategic importance of the River Medway corridor and its tributaries;
- Improve access, recreation and tourism opportunities;
- Develop and enhance green routes for people and wildlife;
- Enhance landscape character and respect local distinctiveness;
- Realise the potential of historical and cultural heritage features to contribute to local identity and sense of place;
- Meet the needs of both existing and new communities in Maidstone Borough.
- Provide attractive and inspirational environments in which people want to live, work, learn and play; in which communities thrive and businesses want to invest;
- Water resource/flood management.
- Inform the future planning and management of the urban form of Maidstone urban area at the strategic scale

Draft Policy CS15: The Policy will set criteria for the protection, management, enhancement and access to the borough's green spaces and rivers. It will consider the function of the green wedges and review the Open Space DPD. The policy will provide a framework to prepare a

green and blue network strategy and to develop the implementation of open space standards.

The first draft policy wording is proposed for consideration and development and subsequent inclusion in the draft Core Strategy, as follows:

"Draft - Policy CS15: Green and Blue Infrastructure

Open spaces provided as part of new development, either on-site or off-site, must, wherever practicable, be located where they can provide a safe connection, either directly or in the form of a stepping stone, with the existing network of open spaces and wildlife corridors as identified on the Strategic Green and Blue Infrastructure Network Diagrams Figures XXXX.

Such connections will be required, where practicable, to provide opportunities for movement ,by walking, cycling and, where appropriate, by horse riding and water between and through open spaces, as well as opportunities for natural habitat creation and species migration.

New open spaces provided in association with new development must be designed and managed to facilitate natural habitat creation and to allow, wherever practicable, for species migration across the Green Infrastructure Network."

The draft Policy will be refined and developed in coordinated with other complementary policies and standards as the Core Strategies developed. It may also need address: the protection of the integrity of the G&BI network; opportunities to enhance existing G&BI; opportunity areas such as the proposed urban extension and major strategic allocations; the protection of certain heritage features such as historic parkland and Ancient Woodlands. The policy will also be accompanied by diagrams of the strategic green and blue infrastructure networks for the Borough as well as Maidstone town and its immediate setting. Draft diagrams will be available for Members at the meeting.

Robust Core Strategy policies require robust evidence. The Green Spaces Strategy provides local evidence of existing green and some other open spaces. Landscape character assessments are an important part of this evidence base. Landscape character assessment is also an important tool to guide the planning and design of green and blue infrastructure. Indeed a key principle of green and blue infrastructure planning is that consideration is shown for local landscape character and local distinctiveness, and that it should utilize the existing character of the landscape and enhance the sense of place.

Maidstone Borough Council has commissioned consultants to undertake a landscape character assessment of the Borough. The first part of this assessment, looking at the setting of Maidstone town, is nearing completion. This will form part of the wider Borough-wide assessment which will take place later in the year.

A second important part of successful green and blue infrastructure is partnership working. Consultation with key stakeholders (Natural England, Environment Agency and Kent Wildlife Trust) has already begun.

This consultation and dialogue will continue and widen to encompass a broader range of stakeholders at various levels across the Borough. Liaison is also taking place across the various Directorates within Maidstone Borough Council to ensure all the elements of the green and blue infrastructure are identified and captured.

Alternatives considered and why rejected

Government policy (PPS1, PPS12) directs local authorities to include policies on green and blue infrastructure within their core strategies. It is a condition of Growth Point status, at the request of both the Environment Agency and Natural England, that all designated Growth Points include green infrastructure strategies in their Core Strategies. PPG17 requires local standards to be developed for open spaces and the existing DPD AH1 Open Space policy was produced as an urgent response to assess local needs (identified in the Green Spaces Strategy) and to operate alongside the adopted Maidstone Borough Wide Local Plan; the approach now needs to be integrated with the Core Strategy.

Background Papers

None

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Head of Change and Scrutiny by: 26 March 2010
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