

# Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee

12 July 2016

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

**Yes**

## Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	<b>Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee</b>
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning & Development
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Chris Smith, Planning Policy Manager (interim)
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

### **This report makes the following recommendation to this Committee:**

That the Committee adopts the Maidstone Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, an essential component of the Local Plan evidence base.

### **This report relates to the following corporate priorities:**

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all.
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough.

### **Timetable**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee	12 July 2016

# Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (Appendix A) is being brought back to this Committee for adoption following:
  - two reports to Committees in 2013 and 2014;
  - engagement with key stakeholders and local communities; and
  - a series of workshops with stakeholders and partners in 2015.
- 1.2 The Strategy will contribute to fulfilling the Council's duty to preserve biodiversity under Section 40 of Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and is an essential component of the Local Plan evidence base.
- 1.3 The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (GBIS) emphasises the importance of green and blue infrastructure for people and the natural environment. The GBIS will promote, guide and co-ordinate investment in Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure over the next 20 years contributing to the protection and enhancement of the borough's natural environment.
- 1.4 The strategy aims to be closely integrated with the following local strategies: Vision for Kent 2012-22, Growing the Garden of England: A strategy for environment and economy in Kent 2011, Kent Nature and Biodiversity Partnerships including the Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy, the Countryside and Coastal Access Improvement Plan 2013-2017, Maidstone Integrated Transport and walking and Cycling Strategies 2016 and the Sustainable Community Strategy for Maidstone; and others that have been adopted as the GBIS as progressed: A strategic framework for sport and physical activity 2012-2022 and the Draft Active Travel Strategy for Kent.
- 1.5 It points out that the borough's landscape, habitats, rivers and public rights of way do not stop at the administrative boundary and it is vital that the strategy responds to and influences the approach to green and blue infrastructure in the surrounding area.
- 1.6 Existing green and blue infrastructure resources are set out and described (including maps): landscape character, habitats, heritage assets, publically accessible green space, amenity green space, provision for children and young people, natural and semi-natural green space, allotments and community gardens, outdoor sports facilities, green and blue corridors and private green space.

### Open Spaces

- 1.7 An outline assessment of current deficiencies in accessible open space provision is provided using the Open Spaces Quality Audit, the Accessibility Maps and the Quantitative Assessment of Open Space Provision using the new (submitted Local Plan) standards to produce indicative open space deficiencies by place/ward:

- **Amenity Green Space**  
Current deficiency within Maidstone - North, Fant, High Street, Bearsted, Allington and North Wards
- **Children's Play Space**  
Considered as, at best, fair in most of the borough but deficient in the urban area of Maidstone and, possibly, Marden, Staplehurst, Headcorn and Sutton Valence.
- **Natural/Semi-natural Greenspace**  
Whilst considered as good in general, deficient in the urban area of Maidstone and Staplehurst, Headcorn and Marden and, possibly, Lenham, Coxheath and Sutton Valence.
- **Allotments**  
Deficient in most of the Maidstone urban area and Staplehurst.
- **Outdoor Sports Facilities**  
Considered as very poor with indications of deficiencies in most of the borough but will be informed by the commissioned Playing Pitches Strategy (2016/17).

1.8 Key issues identified to be addressed by the strategy are: impacts of climate change, gaps in the connectivity of blue and green resources, inequalities in accessibility to public open space, landscape and townscape quality, water and air quality, health inequalities and the need to accommodate development to meet the projected needs of the community.

- 1.9 Detailed objectives are set out to achieve the vision and guide the strategy's proposals for each of the strategy's seven key themes:
- mitigating and adapting to climate change;
  - integrating sustainable movement and access for all;
  - promoting a distinctive townscape and landscape;
  - maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, water and air quality;
  - providing opportunities for sport, recreation, quiet enjoyment and health;
  - retaining and enhancing a quality environment for investment and through development; and
  - providing community involvement and opportunities for education.

#### 1.10 Key Principles and Opportunities

The main purpose of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy is to maximise the functionality and therefore the benefits of the resource in Maidstone Borough and to help deliver the council's wider community and planning objectives. For each of the seven key themes identified, the following principles and opportunities for conserving, improving and creating green and blue infrastructure are considered:

- Key issues
- How can green and blue infrastructure help
- Examples of Good Practice
- Key principles and opportunities for Maidstone's green and blue infrastructure including conserving, improving and creating new opportunities.

- 1.11 The key opportunities and principles for conserving, improving and creating green and blue infrastructure are brought together in a strategic framework plan (Map 14). This identifies and prioritises four broad areas where green and blue infrastructure interventions will have the most impact on achieving the strategy objectives: the Capstone-Bredhurst area, the M20 corridor, River Beult corridor and Laddingford/Low Weald area. In addition it highlights designated Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, river catchment improvement areas and the eight poorest quality publicly accessible green space sites, which should be a priority for improvement.
- 1.12 Maidstone urban area is also a priority for improvements due to the high population levels, level of multiple deprivation and need to mitigate effects of air pollution through tree planting and encouraging active, sustainable travel. The framework plan indicates green and blue corridors in the urban area to conserve and improve to help achieve these objectives. Developing more detailed green and blue infrastructure plans for the Maidstone urban area will be an important next step and is included in the delivery framework.
- 1.13 The framework plan also identifies where spatially-specific proposals for Maidstone Borough's green and blue infrastructure will interact and link with green infrastructure proposals of adjoining districts, including Tunbridge Wells Council's High Weald/Low Weald links project, Tonbridge & Malling Council's 'Principal Green Corridors' and Swale Council's 'Strategic Green Grid Routes'.
- 1.14 **Delivering the Strategy**  
The vision, objectives and proposals of the strategy will be translated into action through its Delivery Framework (Appendix 1 of the GBIS). It describes:
- Evidence for the Local Plan
  - Sets strategic direction and vision for green and blue infrastructure for the borough and identifies delivery opportunities through partnership working and the seeking of external funding and investment.
  - Sets a framework that will underpin the 10 year Open Spaces Plan that will be drawn up by MBC Parks and Open Spaces Team.
  - Will provide a framework for partner agencies to agree and deliver actions to benefit green and blue infrastructure in the borough that are outside the direct control of MBC.
- 1.15 The Strategy recognises that as the planning, design and management of the green and blue infrastructure resource is the responsibility of many different organisations, the strategy can only be delivered successfully in partnership. Key stakeholders are: MBC councillors, KCC (Maidstone Borough) councillors, parish councillors, resident associations, resident groups, MBC (cross-departmental), KCC (Highways and Transportation and Public Rights of Way teams), Kent Downs AoNB Unit, Environment Agency, Medway Valley Countryside Partnership, Mid Kent Downs partnership, Kent Wildlife Trust, Kent High Weald Partnership, River Catchment Improvement Groups, Neighbouring Authorities and Friends of Parks and Allotment Association representatives.

- 1.16 Key stakeholders have discussed an action plan (Maidstone Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy: Action Plan April 2016), should opportunities arise to deliver the strategy. The action plan is grouped into a number of themes to help deliver the strategy's vision and objectives. Each action identifies which green and blue strategy objectives could be progressed to a timescale and with a lead partner.
- 1.17 The Maidstone Local Plan (2016) and planning decisions will play an important role in securing the protection and enhancement of the Borough's green and blue infrastructure. For this reason the strategy identifies specific planning actions detailed in the GBIS.

## **2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (GBIS) for targeted engagement in November 2013. Key stakeholders as well as local communities, Parish Councils and the wider public were invited to comment. An amended draft Strategy was considered at Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2014.
- 2.2 In 2015 a series of workshops were held with key stakeholders and partners involved in delivering improvements to the borough's green spaces and water environments. The result was a multi-agency delivery framework accompanying the GBIS.
- 2.3 The Strategy encourages the creation of links and stepping stones to help in the movement of people and wildlife across the built up urban area. In the rural areas the strategy is focused on land management and creating and enhancing the landscape and habitat networks.
- 2.4 The GBIS seeks to identify those areas of the Borough where deficiencies exist and provides guidance on how these can be overcome. It promotes a partnership approach with developers, land owners and neighbouring local authorities to help achieve the Strategy's objectives
- 2.5 The submitted Maidstone Borough Local Plan is cited by the GBIS as playing an important role in protecting existing open space and ensuring new green and blue infrastructure is provided to serve new development.
- 2.6 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) defines green infrastructure (GI) as a network of multifunctional green space, urban and rural which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. PPG states that GI is not simply an alternative description for conventional open space. As a network it includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, but also street trees, allotments and private gardens.

### **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 The Committee could resolve to adopt the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy as evidence for the Maidstone Borough Local Plan and approve the framework for delivery.
  - 3.2 Alternatively the Committee could resolve not to adopt the GBIS.
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### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 The Committee is recommended to agree to the option as set out above at 3.1.
  - 4.2 The Strategy is identified as part of the Evidence Base for the submitted Local Plan that will be subject to Examination.
  - 4.3 The submitted Local Plan notes the importance of green and blue infrastructure and the production of the GBIS.
  - 4.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), paragraph 117 sets out what planning policies should do to minimise impacts on biodiversity (and geodiversity). This will include planning for: biodiversity at a landscape-scale, local ecological networks, priority habitats and priority species. This will be provided through the GBIS which sets out the evidence and the framework.
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### **5. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

- 5.1 Subject to the agreement of the Committee to the recommendations of this report, no immediate action will be required in relation to the GBIS.
  - 5.2 However, should opportunities arise to deliver the GBIS; implementation would be through its delivery framework, in partnership with the key stakeholders.
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### **6. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Implications</b>	<b>Sign-off</b>
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy will be part of the Evidence Base for the submitted Local Plan.	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development
<b>Risk Management</b>	There is limited risk relating to this report.	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and

		Development
<b>Financial</b>	There are no additional related costs to adopting the Strategy	Paul Riley, Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Staffing</b>	There are no staffing implications relating to this report and its recommendations.	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development
<b>Legal</b>	N/A	Kate Jardine, Team Leader (Planning), Mid Kent Legal Services
<b>Equality Impact Needs Assessment</b>	N/A	Anna Collier, Policy & Information Manager
<b>Environmental/Sustainable Development</b>	N/A	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development
<b>Community Safety</b>	N/A	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development
<b>Human Rights Act</b>	N/A	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development
<b>Procurement</b>	N/A	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development & Paul Riley, Section 151 Officer
<b>Asset Management</b>	N/A	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development

## 7. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: Maidstone Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (2016)

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## **8. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

***None***