

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Service Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Panel

27 January 2021

TITLE:	Green Infrastructure Strategy Delivery Plan Update
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Joe Porter Council - Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Biodiversity
CONTACT OFFICER:	Joanna Bagnall - Senior Regeneration Officer
WARDS INVOLVED:	(All Wards);

Appendices Attached –

Appendix 1: Map of Green Infrastructure area opportunities
Appendix 2: Opportunity area descriptions
Appendix 3: Open Space enhancement opportunities – Leek
Appendix 4: Active travel enhancement opportunities – Leek
Appendix 5: Open Space enhancement opportunities – Biddulph
Appendix 6: Active travel enhancement opportunities - Biddulph
Appendix 7: Open Space enhancement opportunities – Cheadle
Appendix 8: Active travel enhancement opportunities - Cheadle
Appendix 9: Draft Schedule of Green Infrastructure projects

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 To provide an update on progress with preparation of a Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 To note progress on preparation of the Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan, including the mapping of opportunities for enhancing habitats and their connectivity, and the preparation of a first draft schedule of green infrastructure delivery projects.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 A Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy was adopted by the Council at the meeting of its Cabinet on 19th June 2018. The Strategy included the

commitment to prepare a Delivery Plan to support the Strategy's implementation. This report provides an update on progress.

- 3.2 Staffordshire Wildlife Trust have been commissioned to prepare detailed habitat mapping of the District to help identify opportunities for green infrastructure delivery. These maps are provided in the appendices to this report.
- 3.3 The mapping is supported by a description for each habitat opportunity area, providing detail of specific opportunities for creation, enhancement, or connectivity improvement within each habitat type. This is included as appendix 2 to this report.
- 3.4 The 2018 Strategy includes mapping to illustrate opportunities to support more walking and cycling for short journeys to key destinations, as well as to encourage leisure walking and cycling. These "active travel" opportunity maps are also included as appendices to this report.
- 3.5 A review of the evidence base mapping, alongside discussion with partners, has enabled a collection of potential GI delivery projects to be drawn together and recorded in a schedule – appendix 9 of this report.
- 3.6 The next steps for the work include integrating the map of GI area opportunities with the Council's GIS system so that the map can be used in a more interactive manner and to prepare full delivery plans for priority projects on the draft schedule.

4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan will have implications the following aims of the Corporate Plan:
 - Aim One - To help create a safer and healthier environment for our communities to live and work.
 - Aim Three - To help create a strong economy by supporting further regeneration of towns and villages.
 - Aim Four - To protect and improve the environment and respond to the climate emergency.

5. Alternative Options

- 5.1 There are none. This report is for information.

Neil Rodgers
Executive Director (Place)

6. Detail

Background

6.1 The National Planning Policy Framework defines green infrastructure (GI) as:

“A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.”

6.2 A Green Infrastructure Strategy was required as part of the suite of evidence base documents supporting preparation of the SMDC Local Plan. The Strategy was adopted by the Council at the meeting of its Cabinet on 19th June 2018.

6.3 The ten aims of the adopted Strategy are to:

1. Provide a wide variety of parks, wild areas and open spaces to meet the needs of both nature and people.
2. Create, improve and protect green travel links that enable people to access a range of jobs, services, facilities and recreation opportunities using sustainable transport options.
3. Create, improve and protect biodiversity and the ecological networks that provide the opportunity for species to move within the landscape.
4. Improve flood and water management including by contributing to maintaining waterways and managing surface water flow.
5. Protect and enhance the distinctive character of the District's towns and villages together with their landscape settings.
6. Protect and enhance historic landscape character and heritage assets.
7. Protect and enhance the ecosystem services our green infrastructure provides such as soil conservation, water management, air quality and crop pollination to ensure a healthy and resilient natural environment.
8. Promote the sustainable economic growth of the District.
9. Provide a clear framework for funding biodiversity enhancements appropriate to the size, scale and nature of a development.
10. Facilitate partnership working and improve access to resources through relevant funding regimes enabling green infrastructure to be funded on a similar basis to other local infrastructure.

6.4 The next step, as agreed by the Cabinet, and confirmed during the Hearing Sessions for the Local Plan Examination, has been to prepare an implementation plan for the Strategy. The implementation plan is designed to set out how the Council's GI objectives can be translated into a defined set of costed projects for delivery.

- 6.5 The Council invited Staffordshire Wildlife Trust to help prepare the SMDC GI Delivery Plan - given the Trust's management responsibilities for the Council's countryside sites. The specification for the work identified the following deliverables:
- A map illustrating strategic opportunities for GI enhancement. A District wide opportunity map is included as Appendix 1 to this report. Appendices 3 to 8 provide a summary for the main towns.
 - A schedule of key GI projects, based on the opportunities identified by the mapping, each project with an associated delivery plan. A draft of the schedule is included as Appendix 9 to this report.
- 6.6 A Project Board was established to oversee the project. Membership of the Board includes Staffordshire County Council, Peak District National Park Authority, National Farmers Union, Environment Agency and Natural England. SMDC Officers from Regeneration, Development and Leisure Services also attend the Board to ensure capture of opportunities for joint working across the Council.
- 6.7 The Project Board met in September and November to review the green infrastructure opportunities identified and to comment on the initial projects proposed.

GI Opportunities

- 6.8 Appendix 1 is a map that portrays key locations where habitats may be created or enhanced to create a network of green infrastructure. The map has been created using specific habitat connectivity modelling software to define Habitat Connectivity Opportunity (HCO) areas.
- 6.9 A total of seven separate HCO habitat types have been identified and mapped as follows:
1. Grassland
 2. Moorland
 3. Heathland
 4. Wetland
 5. Woodland
 6. Pasture and arable land
 7. Urban
- 6.11 Each HCO habitat type is also described in terms of the species and other habitats they support, the threats posed to the habitat, and the opportunities to improve network connections, with any potential additional benefits that could be achieved.
- 6.12 The opportunity area maps and descriptions are provided as Appendix 2 to this report. Key opportunities for green infrastructure project delivery, as set

out in the opportunity area descriptions, are summarised below. The mapping illustrates opportunities to:

- 6.13 Increase the connectivity of **woodland** habitats in the Churnet Valley by linking, buffering and expanding existing sites of importance. Woodlands represent a very important part of the District's habitats. The Churnet Valley is one of the most important woodland areas in the county, both in terms of the overall area of habitat, the connectivity it provides, and as a source habitat for several species. There is potential for a woodland corridor linking Park Hall Country Park, Caverswall Common and Creswell's Piece to Consall Wood and Nature Park through the Combes Valley to further woodland at Apesford.
- 6.14 Ensure that all high-quality **grassland** sites remain in positive conservation management, with enhancement of existing grassland sites, or restoration of degraded sites, with the aim of achieving Local Wildlife Site status. The district is the most important area for species-rich grasslands in the county, possessing many semi-improved and un-improved meadows and pastures. In particular, the areas of calcareous grassland around Cauldon and Waterhouses are some of the most diverse grasslands in the county. There are specific opportunities to enhance the diversity of grassland sites in urban green spaces, for example parks, gardens and cemeteries in Leek, Biddulph, Cheadle, Werrington, Endon and Blythe Bridge.
- 6.15 Protect and enhance the **heathland** in the district that runs primarily in a line from the edge of Park Hall Country Park in Stoke, northwards through Wetley Moor, Brown Edge and Endon. Potentially connecting with sites such as Marshes Hill and Wickenstones ridgeline, through Biddulph and Biddulph Moor, and continuing further northwards through Long Edge until reaching the county boundary at The Cloud, continuing into the southern Cheshire heathlands. There are specific opportunities to expand upon existing heathland restoration schemes, such as those carried out at Moneystone quarry, and to expand smaller areas of heathland around Whiston, and further south in areas such as Mobberley/Freehay quarry, Greatgate and surrounds.
- 6.16 Protect existing areas of **moorland** through sympathetic management, and ensure that positive management continues. Staffordshire Moorlands is the only local authority in the county possessing moorland habitat. Whilst a large proportion of this lies within the Peak District National Park there are several moorland sites outside the Park - along Ipstones Edge, Morridge, Gun Moor, Biddulph Moor and The Cloud - all of which provide good connectivity between moorlands outside of county to the north, and lowland heathland further south. There are specific opportunities for the creation and/or enhancement of moorland habitats, particularly along the Morridge and around Ipstones Edge.
- 6.17 Watercourses and **wetland** habitats form a vitally important part of the District's ecology. Staffordshire Moorlands has several areas which may be suitable for the re-introduction of beaver, particularly in the Churnet Valley, which would benefit both diversity and flood resilience. The Cecilly Brook through Cheadle needs appropriate management given the site's history of supporting a population of Water Vole, which are now regionally and nationally scarce. There are also opportunities to encourage slowing the flow of water,

and holding back water, on the higher ridgelines, both for flood prevention and to provide additional wetland habitats. Particular areas of focus for this are Ipstones Edge, the Morridge, Biddulph, Biddulph Moor, Brown Edge and around Rushton Spencer.

- 6.18 **Pastures** and improved grasslands form the majority of semi-natural habitats in the district. There are opportunities to link up existing semi-natural habitats through the creation of habitat corridors and networks using hedgerows, arable field margins and watercourses. There are also specific opportunities to engage with landowners in the south of the district to facilitate improved habitat connectivity between high quality habitats further south and those further north.
- 6.19 The key objective in the **urban** areas is to help enable permeability between rural and urban landscapes, both to benefit habitat connectivity, and to bring wildlife closer to people. The smaller settlements in the district are in the main small enough, or have sufficient available green space, to allow wildlife to move relatively freely through them. The larger towns of Leek, Cheadle and Biddulph also have examples of good green space corridors that provide habitat connectivity.

Schedule of GI projects

- 6.20 Opportunities described above, supplemented by discussions with partners on the Project Board and others including Town Councils, have helped to identify initial GI project proposals. These proposals are set out in the form of a schedule, included as Appendix 9 to this report.
- 6.21 The schedule captures some ongoing GI delivery work such as restoration of 150 acres of moorland, woodland and heathland at the Roaches following the 2018 fire.
- 6.22 It also includes GI projects where the Council has existing commitment to GI delivery, for example using the evidence mapping to develop and implement enhancement measures to Council maintained greenspaces across the district.
- 6.23 Potential projects are also recorded, such as the ambition to enhance the SMDC promoted walks network. This is an example of a GI project for which no resource or funding has yet been identified, but a proposal outline has been worked up so that a project can be ready to go, should a suitable grant funding stream become available.
- 6.24 Meetings were held with the Town Council clerks to understand ambitions for GI delivery in Leek, Cheadle and Biddulph. The schedule also records outputs from these discussions, for example a potential project to improve connectivity between canal towpaths and the town centres. A project to improve signage and wayfinding for leisure users of the canal network, encouraging walkers and cyclists to stop off and visit the town centres, may be beneficial as part of recovery from COVID-19.

- 6.25 Specific projects recorded in the schedule also include the long-standing ambition of the Council to support the development of a Greenway between Tean and Cheadle, using the disused railway line.
- 6.26 The schedule of GI projects will be supported by costed delivery plans for individual projects as these are developed. The schedule itself is considered a “living document” and will be reviewed and updated as projects are proposed and completed.

Links to other service areas

- 6.27 It should be noted that GI delivery is relevant to the work of many Council service areas. Development Services are engaging with the work to assist in “place making”, following the adoption of the Local Plan in September 2020.
- 6.28 Leisure Services have included a project proposal in the GI schedule to work with residents of the Haregate area of Leek to develop “door-step walks”, supporting people to “move more” and take advantage of the recreation routes on their doorstep.
- 6.29 Discussions are ongoing between the District and Town Councils in relation to parks management and opportunities to enhance green areas maintained by the Council to improve biodiversity, potentially starting with Brough Park, Leek.

Links to Climate Change Plan and work of the subgroups

- 6.30 The GI Delivery Plan contributes to meeting the Council’s plans to make the Staffordshire Moorlands carbon neutral by 2030. Green Infrastructure can help to combat climate change in a number of ways, including by:
- Reducing the need to travel by car – providing local recreation areas and green travel routes to encourage walking and cycling.
 - Carbon storage and sequestration – storing carbon in soils and vegetation.
 - Managing surface water and other water resources – green infrastructure can provide places to store water for re-use, allowing water to infiltrate into the ground, it can also help to manage surface water and sewer flooding by reducing the rate and volume of water runoff.
 - Helping other species to adapt – providing a more vegetated and permeable landscape through which species can move as they adapt to rising temperatures.
- 6.31 The evidence base for the GI Delivery Plan can support the work of the subgroups of the Climate Change working groups, for example in the development of a local cycling and walking infrastructure plan and preparation of a woodland strategy to focus the planting of the right trees in the right places.

Next steps

- 6.32 Currently the opportunity map is only available as an image in report form (as attached in appendix 1 to this report). This means that it is difficult to use it to

zoom in at village or site level and identify specific opportunities for GI creation or enhancement.

- 6.33 The Council is working with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust to help resolve the software difficulties currently preventing use of the map in an interactive format. It is hoped that when the issues are resolved, the opportunities map can be made available on the Council's website and used in a similar manner to the interactive planning map.
- 6.34 The draft schedule consists of a large number of potential GI delivery projects. The Council will need to work with partners to prioritise a much smaller number of deliverable projects. These projects will need to be described in greater detail, with specific and costed outputs.
- 6.35 It should be noted that inclusion of a project in the GI Delivery Plan is not a commitment by the Council to deliver it, but a record of a potential GI proposal that can be delivered once resources have been identified.