

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report to Cabinet

19th June 2018

TITLE:	Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan: Green Infrastructure Strategy; May 2018
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Edwin Wain – Cabinet Member for Planning, Development and Property
CONTACT OFFICER:	Pranali Parikh – Regeneration Manager
WARDS INVOLVED:	Non-Specific

Appendix A – Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan: Green Infrastructure Strategy; May 2018

Appendix B – Summary consultation responses and action taken

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 A Green Infrastructure Strategy has been prepared to support the Local Plan. The Strategy has been prepared in collaboration with a number of external partners and has been subject to public consultation. This report sets out the results of the consultation and recommends that the amended GI Strategy is adopted.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Cabinet notes the preparation of a Staffordshire Moorlands Green Infrastructure Strategy, the consultation feedback received, subsequent action taken and approves adoption of the attached Strategy.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approves adoption of the strategy to be used as background evidence to support and inform the development of the policies in the local plan.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework requires local planning authorities to set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure. A commitment to green infrastructure planning was made in the Core Strategy adopted in March 2014.

- 3.2 The Staffordshire Moorlands Green Infrastructure Strategy identifies and describes the network of green spaces, wildlife habitats, water courses, footpaths and trails that together deliver a range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. The Strategy also sets out priorities and actions proposed to conserve and enhance the network.
- 3.3 The Strategy is supported by a Steering Group comprising external partners including Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency, Natural England, RSPB and Woodland Trust.
- 3.4 Public consultation on a draft Strategy was carried out alongside the Preferred Option Local Plan for a six-week period between 24th July and 15th September 2017. The consultation responses show a general support for the Strategy, along with a number of observations and detailed comments. This consultation feedback is summarised in section 7 of this report and set out in more detail, including the action taken in response, in a table at Appendix B.
- 3.5 It is proposed that the Council adopt the GI Strategy (May 2018) and for the Strategy to form part of the evidence base of documents submitted alongside the Local Plan.
- 3.6 The strategy will be supported by a Delivery Plan that is intended to show how the key partners and agencies involved will support the delivery of green infrastructure and contribute to the aims of the Strategy. The Delivery Plan will include a series of delivery and action plans for key projects to be developed as the focus of the next phase of this work.

4. **How this report links to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 This report identifies a strategic approach to delivering a network of green infrastructure. This will help enable the Council to meet aims 1 and 4 of Corporate Plan 2017 -19.
- Aim One: To help create a safer and healthier environment for our communities to live and work.
 - Aim Four: To protect and improve the environment – measured through high recycling rates, quality parks and open spaces, and clean streets.

5. **Options and Analysis**

- 5.1 There are three options:

Option 1 – Decline to adopt the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan: Green Infrastructure Strategy; May 2018.

A GI Strategy for the District is required by national and local planning policy. Failure to include a GI Strategy with the evidence base supporting the Local Plan risks the plan being found unsound at Examination. **Not recommended**

Option 2 – Approve the adoption of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan: Green Infrastructure Strategy; May 2018, but subject to fundamental modification of the document.

The May 2018 GI Strategy has been approved by a Steering Group of external partners who have collaborated in its preparation and who will, alongside the Council, be principal partners in its delivery. Fundamental revision of the Strategy will require further consultation and this may delay preparation of the Strategy such that it can not be submitted alongside the Local Plan. **Not recommended**

Option 3 – Adopt the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan: Green Infrastructure Strategy; May 2018

The adoption of the GI Strategy will provide a strategic framework for the development of a network of habitat corridors and linked green spaces in the District that will form part of the evidence base for Local Plan policies, inform the Local Plan Infrastructure Delivery Plan, assist with development management decisions and inform the contributions required from new developments. **Recommended**

6. Implications

6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)

No implications

6.2 Workforce

The regeneration team is able to provide project management support for the GI Strategy. Delivery of the Strategy can only be achieved through partnership working.

6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment

This report has been prepared in accordance with the Council's Diversity and Equality Policies.

6.4 Financial Considerations

There are no financial considerations for the Council relating to the recommendations of this report.

6.5 Legal

This report informs Cabinet of the strategy produced and requests authority to authorise its adoption for use in determining planning policy associated with the local plan.

6.6 Sustainability

Green infrastructure can play a key role in helping to achieve the vision for economic regeneration and sustainable growth set out in

the Local Plan.

6.7 Internal and External Consultation

The Strategy has been subject to a six week period of public consultation alongside the Preferred Options Local Plan from July 2017, the results of which are included at Appendix B.

6.8 Risk Assessment

Risks have been addressed in the body of the report.

Dai Lerner
Executive Director of Place

Web Links and Background Papers	Location	Contact details
Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan: Green Infrastructure Strategy; May 2018	Moorlands House, Leek	Pranali Parikh Regeneration Manager Pranali.parikh@staffs-moorlands.gov.uk Phone- 07583055366

7. **Background and Detail**

- 7.1 The requirement for green infrastructure planning is set out at paragraph 114 of the National Planning Policy Framework that states that local planning authorities should plan positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure. In addition, national planning practice guidance states that:

“Green infrastructure is important to the delivery of high quality sustainable development, alongside other forms of infrastructure such as transport, energy, waste and water. Green infrastructure provides multiple benefits, notably ecosystem services, at a range of scales, derived from natural systems and processes, for the individual, for society, the economy and the environment. To ensure that these benefits are delivered, green infrastructure must be well planned, designed and maintained. Green infrastructure should, therefore, be a key consideration in both local plans and planning decisions where relevant.”

- 7.2 The context for the Staffordshire Moorlands Green Infrastructure Strategy was established in the Core Strategy and is set out in Core Strategy Policy C3: Green Infrastructure. This policy states that the Council will, through partnership working with local communities, organisations, landowners and developers, develop an integrated network of high quality and multi-functional green infrastructure that will:

- Support and improve the provision of open space, sport and recreational facilities for local communities and enhance the settings of neighbourhoods;
- Link existing and potential sites of nature conservation value and historic landscape features, create new wildlife habitats, increase biodiversity, and increase tree cover where it is appropriate to the landscape;
- Enhance the natural, man-made and cultural features that are crucial to the local landscape and create opportunities for the restoration of degraded landscapes and the enhancement of the urban fringe;
- Mitigate the negative effects of climate change and maximise potential climate change benefits including effective flood risk and waterways management;
- Create appropriate access for a wide range of users to enjoy the countryside, including improved linkages to and provision of formal and informal recreation opportunities and accessible woodland areas, encouraging walking, cycling and horse riding;
- Contribute to the diversification of the local economy and tourist development through the enhancement of existing, and provision of new facilities.

7.3 The Staffordshire Moorlands GI Strategy appended as Appendix A is the culmination of a period of research identifying and mapping the existing green infrastructure assets in the District, coupled with an analysis of proposed priorities for green infrastructure. It sets out the vision for green infrastructure in the district, a spatial framework showing the broad geographical areas where green infrastructure investment is most needed, and delivery priorities.

7.4 The document has been prepared in agreement with a group of partner organisations operating as a Steering Group. The organisations are:

- Staffordshire County Council
- Peak District National Park Authority
- Staffordshire Local Nature Partnership
- Staffordshire Wildlife Trust
- Environment Agency
- Natural England
- RSPB
- Woodland Trust
- Forestry Commission

7.5 The Strategy sets out details of eleven strategic corridors / areas of green infrastructure in the Local Plan area of the District. These are summarised below.

1. Churnet Valley Corridor: At the heart of the Staffordshire Moorlands Green Infrastructure Network, the Churnet Valley Corridor runs the length of the District and is subject to its own Masterplan SPD and habitat network modelling. Proposed priorities and actions include to: conserve and enhance the Churnet Valley area for its historic interest, recreation, education and nature conservation value; in

particular to help deliver the aims and objectives of the Churnet Valley Masterplan. Also to assist with the delivery of the Churnet Valley Living Landscape Partnership ambition to support and develop a linear route along the River Churnet from Rudyard to Denstone as a multi-user trail that is well connected to other green infrastructure.

2. Leek town strategic area: The town is a significant gateway into the Churnet Valley and the Peak District National Park from the north and west. The strategy can be used to help promote Leek's special character and heritage and strengthen its role as a visitor destination. There is scope for developing a series of green radial routes linking the town with surrounding countryside.
3. Churnet Valley North: this is a distinct blue corridor that includes a key recreational hub in the north of the Churnet Valley dominated by Rudyard Lake which lends itself to a range of leisure and recreational activities. The corridor follows the river Churnet to Ladderedge and Deep Hayes Country Parks, picking up Endon Brook and the Caldon Canal to Endon, Stockton Brook and over the border into Stoke-on-Trent, linking with the River Trent / Caldon Canal corridor within the City. There is scope for woodland planting to link habitats and manage water flow along the floodplains.
4. Churnet Valley Central: this woodland corridor is an area of high landscape value and a strategic wildlife corridor potentially 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. There is scope to increase connectivity of habitats by linking, buffering and expanding existing sites of importance.
5. Biddulph Moor Corridor: A potential wildlife corridor linking a series of key habitats (in particular heathland and woodland) and villages to the east of Biddulph. There is scope to extend and improve green infrastructure within the corridor to help support the delivery of a network of well-connected pathways providing routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders and a functional mosaic of woodland and heathland habitats.
6. Biddulph corridor (along the Biddulph Valley Way): This is a major green network component and route of the former Biddulph Valley Railway Line. It is suitable for walkers, cyclists and horseriders. The Whitemoor Local Nature Reserve at the northern end of Biddulph Valley Way is a Staffordshire Site of Biological Importance due to its woodland wildlife. At the southern end, the corridor could link beyond the district boundary to the heritage country park at the site of the former Chatterley Whitfield Colliery. There is scope for increasing connections from the corridor to Biddulph town centre.
7. Gritstone Corridor (along the Staffordshire Way): The Staffordshire Way

is a long distance footpath which has been established by Staffordshire County Council. Proposed priorities and actions are to protect and improve the Staffordshire Way as an established greenway, to increase its use and enjoyment by people for health and recreation and to enhance its function as a wildlife corridor.

8. Biddulph town: The Biddulph Town strategic area presents opportunities for a network of vital green / blue infrastructure connections, utilising water courses and retained woodland. The corridor running along Biddulph Brook from Hawthorn Grove to the Leisure Centre is especially important, as are key sites along Biddulph Brook which connect to the Biddulph Valley Way. There is scope to use the GI strategy to help improve the image and identity of Biddulph and strengthen its role as a visitor destination, including by improving and creating green spaces within the town and strengthening and promoting links between the town and countryside, in particular with the Biddulph Valley Way, Biddulph Grange Garden and the Country Parks.
9. Cecilly Brook Corridor: A key blue corridor principally following the River Tean and Cecilly Brook to the east of Cheadle, this is a strategic wildlife corridor running from Checkley in the south of the district via Upper Tean and Mobberley Brook to follow the route of Cecilly Brook, finally running north via Cheadle Park towards Broad Hays. The corridor is key to help strengthen the population of water voles in Cecilly Brook.
10. Cheadle town strategic area: Proposed priorities and actions are to protect and extend green infrastructure within Cheadle to improve access to green spaces within the town and links out to the surrounding countryside including Cheadle Park; Cecilly Brook and Hales Hall Pool Local Nature Reserves and Huntley Wood, as well as investigating the potential for improving connectivity to centres of employment such as JCB, Brookhouses and land off New Haden Road.
11. Blythe Bridge Opportunity corridor: This corridor has scope to create and contribute to significant GI networks for people and wildlife as part of development of the strategic site at Blythe Vale. Proposed priorities and actions are to protect and extend green infrastructure within the corridor to improve access to surrounding settlements and links out to the surrounding countryside, and in particular to contribute to the strategic Green Infrastructure supporting the emerging Northern Gateway initiative.

7.7 The full document is at Appendix A. As well as describing the strategic network of corridors and areas as set out above, the Strategy also identifies key priorities and actions for each part of the identified network.

Results of the public consultation

- 7.8 A draft GI Strategy was consulted on alongside the Preferred Option Local Plan for a six-week period between 24th July and 15th September 2017. A total of 23 respondents made 74 comments on the document. A summary of the responses is set out as Appendix B to this report. The responses in full can be seen at the following link:
http://staffs Moorlands-consult.objective.co.uk/portal/local_plan/gi_strategy
- 7.9 There was general support for the aims and opportunities of the strategy and for protecting the district's countryside. Although people were keen to see details of how the strategy will be implemented. Key issues raised included:
- There should be more explicit reference to encouraging young people into green spaces.
 - The value of roadside verges and railway banks should be included.
 - The strategy should set out how the district's green / blue infrastructure links to adjacent areas such as the Peak District.
 - The Biddulph Valley needs a specific focus on managing rainfall runoff. Tree planting schemes and wet meadow creation should be encouraged.
 - More habitat mapping is needed in areas away from the Churnet corridor.
 - The Greenways and the Sabrina Way should be added to the Green Travel Links section and SCC Country Parks included.
 - A simplified combined map of assets should be included to give a comprehensive picture and help identify areas of deprivation.
 - The Knypersley corridor should be renamed Biddulph Moor Corridor.
 - Part of the Blythe Bridge Opportunity corridor is shown as being within Stafford Borough's boundary and should be redrawn.
 - Illustrating the strategic GI network as lines is misleading as it indicates that GI is linear rather than the actual complex network of habitat patches and linear sites.
 - There is potential for a joint working initiative with East Staffordshire Borough Council and the County Council regarding grassland habitat connectivity and footpaths in the Cauldon and Weaver Hills area.
 - The historic environment should form part of the implementation plan.
 - A discussion on carbon should be included within the section on ecosystem services.
 - Concern that the strategy may add to the regulatory burden for farmers. Vision should include the role and contribution of agriculture.
- 7.10 All issues raised in the consultation have been addressed in the revised version (May 2018) strategy wherever possible.

Next steps

- 7.11 The proposed priorities and actions identified in the GI Strategy will be used to:
- Form part of the evidence base for Local Plan policies.
 - Inform the Local Plan Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

- Inform scheme design and use of financial contributions required from new developments.
- Help identify potential sites for any biodiversity off-setting and opportunities to conserve and enhance the setting of heritage assets.
- Identify and inform any future partnership projects.
- Support broader ecological networks, for example through the Local Nature Partnership and Duty to Cooperate with the strategies of neighbouring authorities.
- Support and encourage community engagement and participation around GI assets.

7.12 A Delivery Plan will be prepared setting a delivery framework for the Green Infrastructure Strategy. The Delivery Plan will show how the key partners and agencies involved will support the delivery of green infrastructure and contribute to the aims of the Strategy.

7.13 The Plan will include a series of delivery and action plans for key projects and these will be developed as the focus of the next phase of this work. A proposed Delivery Plan will be brought for scrutiny at a later date.

Appendix A

INSERT STRATEGY

Appendix B

INSERT CONSULTATION RESPONSES TABLE