

Report subject	BCP Green Infrastructure Strategy
Meeting date	7 September 2022
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>Green Infrastructure (GI) is the ‘network of multi-functional green and blue (see description below) spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity’ (National Planning Policy Framework, 2021).</p> <p>Connecting urban, countryside and coastal areas at a range of scales, our green infrastructure network includes not only parks, playing fields and other public open spaces, but also woodland, heathland and other wildlife habitats, street trees, allotments and private gardens.</p> <p>In addition, it embraces blue infrastructure assets such as rivers, streams and the sea. In urban areas the network also includes green engineering solutions, such as sustainable drainage systems, green roofs and living walls.</p> <p>A BCP Green Infrastructure Strategy has been written to highlight the importance of our Green and Blue assets and how they should be prioritised in the future for investment.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:</p> <p>a. Adopt the Green Infrastructure Strategy</p>
Reason for recommendations	<p>To provide strategy and future direction on our Green and Blue assets; to set best practice for new developments and our own estate; and to maximise the benefits for nature and our communities that GI provides.</p> <p>The Green Infrastructure Strategy will become part of the suite of supporting documents of the forthcoming BCP Local Plan.</p>

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Mark Anderson - Portfolio Holder for Environment and Place Councillor Philip Broadhead - Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Development, Growth and Regeneration
Corporate Director	Jess Gibbons, Chief Operations Officer
Report Authors	Martin Whitchurch, Strategic Lead Greenspace and Conservation
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. BCP Council has written a detailed Green Infrastructure Strategy that has the following elements:

- Summary document
- Full technical report
- Appendices and Annexes
- Delivery plan

If the recommendation to adopt these documents are made by Cabinet then all of these documents will be made publicly accessible on the BCP website.

2. The strategy draws on a comprehensive evidence base brought together and developed as part of the Future Parks programme of investment, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, The National Trust and Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Housing (DLUHC). This includes:
 - Over 400 site audits of green spaces undertaken by staff in the Environment Directorate and partners, assessing quality, provision and potential of our green spaces.
 - GIS mapping datasets, zoning of opportunities and demographic data.
 - Public survey, a survey was carried out to find out what it is that residents value most about green space and what changes they would like to see in the future. The survey was open for a month, from 18 May to 18 June 2021 and received 803 responses. The ideas board remains open and at the end of July had received 152 ideas, 73 comments and 493 likes
 - Natural Capital Account. Natural capital accounting creates a framework to link natural assets with the value of services they provide. The report shows that BCP parks receive and estimated 9.7m recreational visits per year; resulting in £231m pa in gross benefits to local communities; £209m pa in health benefits, averaging £20 per visit.
 - Case-studies and review of national planning policy and strategic context.
3. By Cabinet approving the recommendation for the GI Strategy it will later become part of the Local Plan evidence base, negating any further need for a Supplementary Planning Document and separate adoption.

4. The Council has been successful in receiving an extension to the Future Parks project and this relates to the GI Strategy through the development of a BCP Urban design code. This will highlight various means of embedding GI and nature recovery across the conurbation, whether that be for residents in their own spaces, on trading estates, school grounds, or for developers in designing new housing development.
5. The first step of the Urban design code will be public consultation that will seek ideas and thoughts on where and how GI interventions are possible, what support and advice is needed to aid implementation and how else this work can be developed. There will then be exemplar projects and coaches brought in to develop this work further and show-case best practice.

Environment Act 2021

6. The GI Strategy is adaptable for forthcoming changes in Government policy coming from the Environment Act. The Local Nature Recovery Strategies, delivered jointly with Dorset Council, are an England-wide system of spatial strategies that will establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits. Full guidance is still pending from Government and will be complimentary to the contents of the GI Strategy.
7. The GI strategy also sits alongside and complements forthcoming BCP policy on Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). Requiring a 10% improvement in biodiversity from development, the GI strategy sets out how this should be implemented.

Links to other Strategies and Projects

8. The following pieces of work are complementary and will build BCP Council's resilience and strategy to not only deliver BNG, but to create policy around Green Infrastructure and Greenspace standards and to understand the possibilities of 'green finance' and natural capital services.

Nature Recovery projects are being delivered by The Parks Foundation across 8 parks in BCP, working with local communities and stakeholders to activate the spaces, make nature accessible to park users and create more space and practical interventions such as hedges, ponds, bird boxes and meadows.

Natural Environment Readiness Fund (NEIRF) is a successful external funding bid submitted by National Trust (on behalf of the Future Parks Accelerator Project), with BCP Council as a partner, to create a National Urban Nature Fund. A Defra grant scheme that supports projects that use private investment to deliver improvements to the natural environment that result in BNG sellable credits.

The Stour Valley Park (SVP) is a nationally significant opportunity and BCP Council are working with the National Trust (NT) to appoint a Programme Manager to progress the SVP project; working with multiple landowners to restore the riverine habitat, as well as deliver significant social, environmental and cultural benefits.

Landscape Recovery Scheme is part of the DEFRA's new suite of funding for agriculture and nature recovery. BCP and partners were unsuccessful in the first round of grant funding opportunities, but further rounds will be available, and we received very favourable feedback on our bid.

Tree and Woodland Strategy – consultant appointed and currently in the early stages of development with the initial draft due June 2023. An accessible document providing a long-term framework (i.e., 10 to 25 years) and supported by a shorter-term action plan to be subject to regular revisions and updates. Any future tree planting target will need to be considered as part of the strategy document.

Options Appraisal

9. Option 1 – as per the recommendations above.

Pro's

- a. The recommendations would ensure the council has a strategy in place to support all related green space and green infrastructure needs in the next 10 years, supporting key government policy and changes in the finance and environmental sectors.
- b. Supports the Climate and Ecological Emergency and related work to reach carbon zero and deliver on nature recovery to support our biodiversity.
- c. Consultation on what people value and like most about green spaces supported the development of the strategy.
- d. The Strategy will be an important tool in future external grant funding bids, showing clear priorities for investment and intent to embed GI, support health and well-being, climate and ecological emergency etc.

Con's

- a. None identified.

10. Option 2- do nothing

Pro's

- a. None identified.

Con's

- a. The council are open to challenge on its ability to meet the Climate and Ecological Emergency.
- b. Delivery of projects is not based upon strategy and best practice.
- c. Limits ability to bid for external grant funds

Summary of financial implications

11. The Strategy has been funded by the Future Parks Accelerator project, jointly funded by National Lottery heritage Fund, National trust and DLUHC.
12. No direct future costs are associated with the writing of the Strategy. The next phase of the Future Parks project has attracted additional external funding and will deliver means of embedding GI deliverables and a design code for best practice. This will work closely with planning Services and the other complimentary work shown in section 6.
13. Future projects and service delivery of GI interventions will be managed within Environment's Green Space Strategy team, working in close collaboration with

Planning Services and Climate and Sustainability team. Wider links with Future Places, regeneration teams, housing and other estate managers will also ensure the strategy is embedded across the organisation.

Summary of legal implications

14. There are no specific legal implications, however the Council has enabling powers to propose and advocate for GI improvements and work across its own estate and wider.

Summary of human resources implications

15. All resources are in place to deliver this work.

Summary of sustainability impact

16. The Council has declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency. Having a GI Strategy shall help in delivering on those emergencies and embedding GI across our estate, improving sustainability, climate adaptation, nature recovery etc.
17. The Decision Impact Assessment has been approved and the GI Strategy is well placed to deliver and support all the aims within the assessment.

Summary of public health implications

18. Parks and other accessible green spaces have long contributed to the wellbeing of urban communities. In the context of the challenges from health inequalities, investment in the provision of high quality, biodiverse and accessible green and blue infrastructure has never been more vital. For many communities, the coronavirus pandemic lockdowns have changed their relationship with green spaces, both highlighting their value and introducing more people to their benefits. In response to these challenges, our towns of tomorrow need to become more liveable and resilient by making them greener and healthier places. The health and well-being benefits are well known – people are healthier of mind and body the more access they have to green spaces. Close working with the Integrated Care Board and developing strategy on community working and community-based interventions.

Summary of equality implications

19. Delivering high quality Green Infrastructure across BCP is of vital importance to ensure that there is equity of access to green space, that we cool urban environments where it is most needed, often the most deprived areas; to mitigate air pollution and storm water flooding; to create access to nature from every door-step and to have a clear delivery plan.
20. EQIA screening assessment attached.

Summary of risk assessment

21. There is a risk that the Government may amend the Environment Bill and the finance and funding climate may change. However, the GI Strategy stands BCP Council in good stead regardless of the national setting and should dictate future green space work and delivery.

Background papers

Appendices

1. GI Strategy Summary
2. EQIA screening assessment.
3. Consultation report
4. Summary of relevant Local Plan consultation