

GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

Item CE 25/14 referred from Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee of 5 March 2025

Consideration was given to a draft Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, attached at Annex 1, which provided evidence for the Local Plan and a strategic framework for protecting, enhancing and connecting the borough's natural infrastructure and assets, as well as identifying potential mechanisms for delivery through a range of council activities, in order to achieve benefits for communities and local places.

As highlighted, the Strategy supported delivery of the Borough Council's Corporate Strategy priorities and was important in supporting the Kent and Medway Nature Recovery Strategy. Beginning by setting out the context and a baseline assessment of existing assets in the borough and mapping the borough's Green and Blue Infrastructure network, the Strategy concluded with a set of recommendations/actions that covered four inter-connected areas of council activity: the Local Plan, Climate Change, Infrastructure, and Council-owned Land.

It was anticipated that the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy would help demonstrate how the Borough Council was meeting its Biodiversity Duty as required under the Environment Act 2021, alongside any subsequent Action Plan that would be developed to support implementation of the recommendations arising from the Strategy as outlined in Section 5 of the report.

Introduction of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy was welcomed by Members, who recognised the significance for the Borough Council to adopt such an important strategy in order to meet the legislative requirements in respect of fulfilling its Biodiversity Duty as well as the vital role of such a strategy in conserving and enhancing existing green and blue infrastructure assets, improving natural and urban environment's resilience to climate change, reducing carbon emissions, managing flood risks and ensuring communities had access to green spaces and nature to promote health and wellbeing opportunities.

As suggested by Members, consideration would be given to including performance data relating to the Strategy as part of a future Action Plan for monitoring, which would be reported to the Scrutiny Select Committee in due course.

Meanwhile, a clarification was made to explain the difference between the 'Local Green Space' as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework within the Local Plan context and the 'greenspaces' as referenced in the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and it was supported that the definition be clarified in the Strategy. In addition, Officers also committed to investigate a number of discrepancies identified in some maps within the draft Strategy.

Furthermore, Members noted that while 12 large Council owned sites had been identified in the Strategy to be prioritised for intervention work, based on the multiple opportunity they presented to deliver multifunctional benefits, this would not preclude projects taking place at other sites where management opportunities were identified.

Finally, Members were encouraged to refer to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy which was out for consultation at present for further context.

***RECOMMENDED:** That the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, as set out in Annex 1, be endorsed by Cabinet for publication.

***Recommended to Cabinet**