

# Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee

05 March 2025

## Part 1 - Public

### Matters for Cabinet - Key Decision



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Cabinet Member	Cllr Robin Betts, Climate Change, Property and Regeneration and Cllr Mike Taylor, Planning
Responsible Officer	Eleanor Hoyle, Director of Planning, Housing & Environmental Health
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### Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

#### 1 Summary and Purpose of Report

1.1 To seek approval for the publication of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.

#### 2 Corporate Strategy Priority Area

2.1 Sustaining a borough which cares for the environment.

2.2 Improving housing options for local people whilst protecting our outdoor areas of importance.

2.3 The identification of existing green and blue infrastructure in the borough, along with proposed actions for how to conserve and enhance these assets, provides a strategic approach to delivering a range of corporate priorities and statutory duties as set out in section 4 of this report.

#### 3 Recommendations

3.1 That Cabinet ENDORSE the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy as set out in Annex 1 for publication.

#### 4 Introduction and Background

4.1 The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (GI Strategy) provides evidence for the Local Plan and a strategic framework for protecting, enhancing and connecting the borough's natural infrastructure to achieve benefits for communities and local places. The UK, like most other countries worldwide, has seen significant loss of its habitats and species over the past 50 years since widespread data gathering began. Changes in the way land is managed for

farming, and climate change are recognised as the biggest causes of this decline, but development has also played its part. In 2019, like many other local authorities, the Council declared a climate and biodiversity emergency and is seeking opportunities to try and address these issues at local level.

- 4.2 Green infrastructure is defined as *“A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and well-being benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity.”* Understanding the existing baseline and opportunities for habitats and species through strategic placed-based approach to the borough helps to provide evidence for the Local Plan, identifies opportunities for climate change mitigation and adaptation and Biodiversity Net Gain, and makes recommendations for council-owned land that support environmental enhancements and access to open and green spaces.
- 4.3 In terms of legal context, the Environment Act 2021 establishes goals and a framework for improvements to the environment, habitats, biodiversity, air and water quality and resource use. The Act includes a statutory ‘biodiversity duty’ on local authorities that requires identifying and reporting on the council’s work that helps to conserve and enhance biodiversity. The GI strategy, and any subsequent Action Plan, help to demonstrate how the council is meeting its Biodiversity Duty under the Environment Act.

## **5 Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy**

- 5.1 The GI Strategy (Annex 1) provides a 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. The GI Strategy supports delivery of Corporate Strategy priorities, provides evidence for the Local Plan and is important in supporting the Kent and Medway Nature Recovery Strategy.
- 5.2 The Strategy begins by setting out the context for the strategy and a baseline assessment of existing assets in the borough and maps the boroughs GI network. It acknowledges the positive impact that access to green space can have on health and well-being by undertaking an assessment of accessible natural green space in the borough (including having regard to green spaces within 1km of the borough boundary) in line with Natural England Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards and 15-minute walking distances. This assessment identifies locations in the borough where new or expanded provision could be targeted to help improve access to green space to those communities. The Strategy then goes on to consider how council owned land can contribute to and support the GI network through a range of ecosystem services (including potential for delivering Biodiversity Net Gain) and identifies 12 priority sites which offer the best chance to deliver new or enhanced GI.

- 5.3 The Strategy concludes with a set of recommendations/actions that cover four inter-connected areas of council activity: the Local Plan, Climate Change, Infrastructure, and Council-owned Land. Identifying recommendations to take forward in an Action Plan can help ensure that spaces and habitats are well adapted to a changing climate and deliver net gains in biodiversity, as well as promoting opportunities for environmental management and enhancement. Recommendations/ actions from the Strategy will be taken as the starting point for a Green Infrastructure Action Plan, to be brought to Members later in the year, along with a report on activities under the Biodiversity Duty.

## **6 Other Options**

- 6.1 None. The publication of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy is necessary evidence for Planning policy and how the Council is seeking to meet the requirements of the Biodiversity Duty.

## **7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 7.1 There are no financial implications for the Council associated with the publication of the Strategy. Some of the recommendations, if taken forward, would have costs associated with them and funding streams would need to be explored by the relevant department as necessary. An action plan is currently in development and will be brought to Members later in the year.

## **8 Risk Assessment**

- 8.1 There is a reputational risk of not publishing the strategy and action plan, and the risk that the council would not be able to draw on these publications for evidence for the Local Plan, Biodiversity Duty, or in making other enhancements to council owned land.

## **9 Legal Implications**

- 9.1 The matters raised in this report are considered routine, uncontroversial or not legally complex and a legal opinion has not been sought on these proposals.

## **10 Consultation and Communications**

- 10.1 Publication of report provided in Annex 1 on the TMBC Local Plan Evidence and Biodiversity Duty webpages.

## **11 Implementation**

- 11.1 There is no requirement that any specific proposed actions must be carried out. Instead, the proposals are intended to guide decision making across a range of council functions.

## 12 Cross Cutting Issues

### 12.1 Climate Change and Biodiversity

12.1.1 Adaptation and resilience have been considered.

12.1.2 Climate change advice has been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report.

12.1.3 A strategy for understanding the location of existing green and blue infrastructure assets and how these can be conserved and enhanced can help create and restore habitats that help wildlife populations to recover, grow, move, thrive and adapt to a changing climate as well as improve the natural and urban environment's resilience to climate change, provide natural based solutions to help reduce carbon emissions and manage flood risk, and ensure communities have access to green spaces and nature to promote health and well-being opportunities.

### 12.2 Equalities and Diversity

12.2.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

### 12.3 Other If Relevant

- None

Background Papers	None
Annexes	Annex 1: Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy