

<b>Local Plan Panel Meeting</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> September 2020
<b>Report Title</b>	Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cllr Mike Baldock, Cabinet Member for Planning
<b>SMT Lead</b>	James Freeman
<b>Head of Service</b>	James Freeman
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Natalie Earl
<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Classification</b>	Open
<b>Recommendations</b>	1. It is recommended that Members note the content of this report and the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale in appendices I, II and III.

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report sets out the Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Strategy for Swale. The purpose of the GBI Strategy is to identify and guide opportunities for a greener, healthier, more biodiverse and prosperous Swale.
- 1.2 The Strategy looks at Swale’s current GBI resource, Swale’s priorities for GBI, the multi-functionality of GBI and the opportunities that we have in Swale both with our existing GBI and for new GBI provision. It then goes on to look at urban GI (Appendix II to this report) in Swale and then finally how to deliver these opportunities.
- 1.3 This Strategy will be part of the evidence base of the Local Plan Review and will help to inform the development of policies for the Local Plan; both strategic, site specific and for development management purposes.
- 1.4 The purpose of this report is to present the GBI Strategy and to seek Member endorsement of this as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan Review.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) defines green infrastructure 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.*” It is now best practice that ‘blue’ infrastructure is included in these strategies and these include rivers, creeks, streams, ponds, ditches, etc.
- 2.2 Green and Blue Infrastructure is recognised as critical infrastructure for the health of Swale’s residents, wildlife and habitats. GBI is the network of multi-functional green

and blue spaces which make up the essential ecosystems for both people and nature.

- 2.3 A large proportion (around 60%) of Swale's environment is already recognised internationally, nationally and locally for the diversity of its wildlife and habitats, recognising the quality of Swale's environment. The aim of the GBI Strategy is to improve the quality, accessibility and multi-functionality of these assets and the linkages between them.
- 2.4 Swale faces a number of challenges including high levels of inactivity amongst residents, concentrated pockets of poor air quality, a north-south wildlife corridor severance, pockets of traffic congestion and the challenge of sustainably managing a growing visitor economy. These can all be improved by enhancing and growing the GBI network in Swale.
- 2.5 While most types of GBI may have a primary purpose or function, by its nature GBI is multi-functional, providing a range of benefits. GIS analysis has been used to map the multi-functionality of Swale's existing GBI, giving a useful indication as to where investment in GBI would deliver maximum benefits for both people, wildlife and habitats. The need for creation and enhancement of protection of GBI has been assessed through a range of forums including an evidence base review, stakeholder consultation, qualitative analysis and mapping. Typology mapping has identified where certain types of GBI are lacking or are abundant in Swale.
- 2.6 To respond to Swale's context, to help to realise environmental goals and to highlight areas where investment in GBI could help to bring multiple benefits, the GBI plan identifies four opportunity areas:
1. A Green and Biodiverse Borough
  2. A Healthy Blue Environment
  3. A Healthy, Connected and Active Swale
  4. A Beacon for the Visitor Economy
- 2.7 Under each of these opportunity areas, the GBI Strategy provides practical advice for the optimisation of Swale's GBI resources. Though not an opportunity area in itself, the climate and ecological emergency, declared by Swale in 2019, spans all opportunity areas, and therefore forms a central role within the Strategy.
- 2.8 The vision of the Strategy is:

*'To develop a resilient, biodiverse and multi-functional GBI network to contribute to ensuring Swale is a great place to live, work, invest and visit, and respond to the climate emergency.'*

## Multi-functionality

- 2.9 One of the principal drivers of GBI planning is to manage land and water in a more sustainable way. While most types of GBI have a primary purpose or function, it is usually desirable for functions to co-exist, leading to multifunctional GI and the ability to use land more effectively and efficiently for the benefit of people and nature. By promoting multi-functionality, GBI allows the same area of land or water to perform several functions, offering a range of benefits for people and ecosystems.
- 2.10 The range of functions delivered by GBI include improving health and wellbeing, providing recreation spaces, the provision of food, improving air quality, supporting and enhancing wildlife and habitats, mitigating and adapting to climate change, managing water resources, reducing flood risk and supporting heritage and cultural assets. Across Swale, GBI can deliver up to 22 functions and this multi-functionality has been assessed and mapped.
- 2.11 GBI functions operate at multiple scales, all working together to form part of an interconnected green and blue network.

## Priority Themes

- 2.12 Seven priority themes have been identified for the delivery of tangible and impactful action to deliver a resilient GBI network across Swale. All the priority themes are interconnected, with the ability to deliver multiple benefits. These themes are translated into Opportunity Areas within the Strategy. The themes are:
1. Wildlife and Biodiversity
  2. Recreation and Active Travel
  3. Water Resources
  4. Trees and Woodlands
  5. Landscape Character
  6. Health and Wellbeing
  7. Growing the Visitor Economy
- 2.13 As the Strategy highlights, there are already a wealth of existing projects within Swale run by communities, organisations and Swale Borough Council (SBC) which protect and enhance GBI through community engagement and improving the environment for local residents. These projects need to continue; alongside new ones.
- 2.14 The Strategy highlights the need for effective and collaborative partnership approaches for the delivery of the Strategy. GBI transcends administrative boundaries and our work with groups such as the North Kent Environmental Planning Group, will continue to be vital in the delivery of this Strategy, as will collaborative working with partners and stakeholders in the planning for GBI in Swale. Suggestions of potential funding streams are provided, including through the

Local Plan (via S106 contributions) or as part of Masterplanning for larger development sites and additionally as funding streams become available from other sources. This Strategy is a long-term project and success will only be achieved with the continued support and involvement of a wide range of partners.

### 3 Proposals

3.1 The proposal is that the Strategy forms part of the evidence base for the Local Plan process. The recommendation is therefore:

- I. That Members note the content of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale.

### 4 Alternative Options

4.1 The NPPF requires local plans to have an up to date evidence base and this includes on green and blue infrastructure. It is a cross cutting issue which affects air quality, climate change, healthy communities, tourism, biodiversity and leisure and should be considered at the plan making stage. The information contained within the document has been prepared with stakeholders and in line with best practice and government policy.

4.2 There would be no benefit for Members to disregard the content of the attached Strategy given that it provides an evidence base from which the relevant Local Plan policies can be prepared that will help to deliver many of the Council's objectives. Therefore, there are no realistic alternatives.

### 5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1 The consultant has had a number of detailed conversations with officers from within the council in the planning, leisure, tourism, economic development, urban design/landscape and Sheerness Town centre teams, as well as with specific Members and also with outside bodies such as the Kent Wildlife Trust, as the document has evolved. This was to gain local knowledge and expertise and to have their input into the final document.

5.2 The Local Plan Review process is subject to public consultation. This report will be used with other technical work to draft the content of the local plan document that will be brought to members of this panel for endorsement in due course.

### 6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Priority 2: Investing in our environment and responding positively to global challenges

	Priority 3: Tackling deprivation and creating equal opportunities for everyone
Financial, Resource and Property	The cost and resources for this piece of work were from within the Local Plan budget.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	The Local Plan review is being prepared in accordance with Government regulations and the Council's constitution.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Environment and Sustainability	The whole Local Plan will be subject to a Sustainability Appraisal in the coming months. And the Strategy has taken into account the Swale Climate Change Action plan.
Health and Wellbeing	Health and wellbeing is a golden thread running through the production of the Local Plan.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	The whole Local Plan will require a full community impact assessment.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.

## 7 Appendices

- 7.1 The following document is to be published with this report and forms part of the report (It has been split into three documents due to its size):
- Appendix I: Draft Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale (Main document) (August 2020)
  - Appendix II: Urban GBI Strategies (August 2020)
  - Appendix III: Swale GBI Strategy Appendices (August 2020)

## 8 Background Papers

- 8.1 None.