

## LOCAL PLAN SUB COMMITTEE - 22 JUNE 2020

### PART I – NOT DELEGATED

#### 5. LOCAL PLAN – GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE (DCES)

##### 1 Summary

- 1.1 This topic paper sets out the issues which the new Local Plan will need to address in relation to Green and Blue Infrastructure for the Local Plan and proposes wording to be contained within the new Local Plan.

##### 2 Details

- 2.1 Green Infrastructure is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 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”. Green infrastructure includes a range of spaces and assets including, but not limited to, parks and gardens, playing fields, woodlands, wildlife habitats, street trees, amenity greenspace and other open spaces. Green infrastructure networks also include ‘blue infrastructure’ features, such as ponds, rivers, canals and other water bodies<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, where Green Infrastructure is referred to in this report and the Draft Policy (Appendix 1), it should be noted that the term also encompasses blue infrastructure features.
- 2.2 Green Infrastructure provides for multi-functional uses, including: the promotion of health and wellbeing through opportunities for recreation, exercise and social interaction; mitigation against climate change and flooding through the migration of species to more suitable habitats, the protection of water quality and the provision of sustainable drainage systems; the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity through better ecological connectivity and the facilitation of biodiversity net gain and the enhancement of local landscape character and economic growth through the creation high-quality environments.
- 2.3 The NPPF requires that plans take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing Green Infrastructure. Paragraph 20 of the NPPF sets out that strategic policies should make sufficient provision for conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, including green infrastructure. The NPPF goes on to recognise the role of green infrastructure in enabling and supporting healthy lifestyles and requires that planning policies ensure this, also stating that green infrastructure should be safe and accessible (Paragraph 91). Green Infrastructure also has role in planning for climate change and the NPPF states that new development should be planned for in ways that avoids the increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change, including through the planning of Green Infrastructure (Paragraph 20).
- 2.4 The key Green Infrastructure assets in Three Rivers include:
- the corridors of the Rivers Chess, Colne and Gade and the Grand Union Canal;
  - the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;

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<sup>1</sup> NPPG Natural Environment, Paragraph 004 Reference ID: 8-004-20190721

- the District's Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Nature Reserves, Wildlife Sites, key biodiversity areas<sup>2</sup> and priority habitats and species identified by the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan; and
- the Colne Valley Park.

- 2.5 Whilst these are particularly important assets to be conserved and enhanced, they also connect to adjoining spaces within the Green Infrastructure network which should also be conserved and enhanced. Appendix 2 contains the current Green Infrastructure map, as set out in the Core Strategy (2011). This map will be updated in the new Local Plan to incorporate new spaces in the Green Infrastructure network that have been provided since 2011 as well as new areas of open space that may be provided through new housing allocations which will form part of the District's Green and Blue Infrastructure in the future.
- 2.6 Given the level of growth identified for Three Rivers and the surrounding area, and the multi-functional benefits which the networks provide, there is a strong need to conserve and enhance green infrastructure. In order to provide for green infrastructure for Three Rivers in the future, a net gain in the quality and quantity of green infrastructure in the District should be sought through the protection and enhancement of assets and provision of new green spaces.
- 2.7 In order to ensure that Green and Blue Infrastructure in the District is extended and enhanced, the Draft Green and Blue Infrastructure Policy requires that development makes provision for green infrastructure which is accessible and safe and prevents the fragmentation of and damage to the network as a result of development. The Draft Policy also seeks to maximise the social and environmental benefits of Green Infrastructure through the protection and improvement of walking and cycling routes between spaces in the Green Infrastructure network.
- 2.8 Other draft Local Plan policies which have been reported to the Local Plan Sub-Committee support the draft Green and Blue Infrastructure Policy in seeking the promotion and enhancement of its network. These draft policies include Biodiversity, Trees and Woodlands (16 June 2020 LPSC), Flood Risk and Water Resources (16 June 2020 LPSC), Adapting to Climate Change and Sustainable Construction (8 August 2019 LPSC), Waterways (8 August 2019 LPSC) and Open Space, Sport and Recreation (4 July 2019 LPSC).
- 2.9 The Three Rivers Open Space Assessment and Standards Paper, which forms part of the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study (OSSR) (2019), assessed the quality and value of 200 sites providing open spaces<sup>3</sup> in Three Rivers. The outcomes of the assessments and conclusions of the Study were reported to the Local Plan Sub-Committee on 4 July 2019. The majority of the sites (72%) rated above the quality threshold. Only three sites rated below the value threshold. Appendix 1 sets out the criteria used in the quality and value assessments.
- 2.10 The OSSR recommends that open spaces which were assessed as low quality should be considered for enhancement where possible and that open spaces

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<sup>2</sup> The three key biodiversity areas are: the Mid-Colne Valley (wetlands and grasslands), Whippendell Woods and surrounds (woodlands, grassland and wetlands) and the River Chess Valley (wetlands, grasslands, woodland and heath).

<sup>3</sup> Including parks and gardens, natural and semi-natural greenspaces, amenity greenspace, provision for children and young people, allotments and cemeteries and churchyards.

highlighted as having the potential to serve gaps in accessibility should be prioritised in the first instance. In order to enhance spaces in the Green Infrastructure network which are currently the lowest in quality and value, the OSSR should be used as a guide to determine which green spaces should be prioritised for enhancement.

- 2.11 To ensure that a strategic approach is taken to maintaining and enhancing Green Infrastructure, the Council will plan for Green Infrastructure in partnership with neighbouring local authorities, the County Council, relevant interest groups and landowners/developers.
- 2.12 The Hertfordshire Strategic Green Infrastructure Plan was produced in 2011 and provides the strategic framework for Green Infrastructure planning and design in Hertfordshire and outlines a series of potential projects to take forward.
- 2.13 Hertfordshire County Council are now leading on a Green Infrastructure Project with the purposes of identifying the constraints and opportunities for the delivery of Green Infrastructure across the county and proposing mechanisms to ensure a consistent approach to the provision of high quality Green Infrastructure in Hertfordshire. It is likely that Hertfordshire County Council will revise and update the existing Hertfordshire Strategic Green Infrastructure Plan which was published in 2011.
- 2.14 The Colne Valley Regional Park Strategy<sup>4</sup> was published in 2019 highlights opportunities to improve blue and green infrastructure within the Colne Valley and access and connectivity within the network. The projects identified in the Strategy can be used to guide the development of projects and enhancements/extensions to the Green and Blue Infrastructure network.
- 2.15 Specific projects to enhance of Green and Blue Infrastructure in the District will also be identified in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
- 2.16 Green Infrastructure is important at all scales and will inform the site allocations proposed in the Draft Local Plan and will be considered in assessing applications for new development.
- 2.17 Appendix 1 contains the Draft Green and Blue Infrastructure Policy which aims to support the conservation and enhancement of the District's Green Infrastructure.

### **3 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications**

The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policy and budgets.

### **4 Financial, Legal, Equal Opportunities, Staffing, Environmental, Community Safety, Public Health, Customer Services Centre, Communications & Website, Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications**

- 4.1 None specific.

### **5 Recommendation**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.colnevalleypark.org.uk/project/green-infrastructure-strategy-colne-and-crane-valleys/>  
<https://www.colnevalleypark.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/GI-Strategy-AREA1-North-Colne-pages-31-41.pdf>

- 5.1 That the Local Plan Sub Committee note the contents of this report and recommend to the Policy and Resources Committee the Draft Green and Blue Infrastructure Policy as set out in Appendix 1

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**Background Papers**

National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study (2019)

Three Rivers Green Infrastructure Background Paper (2010)

Hertfordshire Strategic Green Infrastructure Plan (2011)

The Colne Valley Regional Park Strategy (2019)

**APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Green and Blue Infrastructure Policy

Appendix 2 Existing Green Infrastructure Map, Core Strategy (2011)

Appendix 3 Open Space Quality and Value Assessments