

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

1 February 2022

Subject: Adoption of the Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Wiltshire - Wiltshire's Natural Environment Plan (2022-30)

Cabinet Member: Cllr Nick Botterill - Development Management, Strategic Planning and Climate Change.

Key Decision: Key

Executive Summary

Green Infrastructure is defined by the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) as 'a network of multifunctional green and blue 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.'

In February 2019 the council acknowledged the climate emergency and committed to seek to make the county of Wiltshire carbon neutral by 2030. The Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy (GBI) will support the delivery of the council's emerging Climate Strategy particularly around the themes of: Natural Environment, Food and Farming, Green Economy and Carbon Neutral Council (through carbon sequestration). The GBI Strategy will also support biodiversity recovery and health and wellbeing.

The draft strategy has been informed by a series of stakeholder workshops held in February 2020 and on 25th May 2021 as well as internal and external consultation.

Appended to this report is the final Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Wiltshire - Wiltshire's Natural Environment Plan 2022-30 (**Appendix 1**). The final strategy incorporates changes made in response to the public consultation which took place, alongside the Climate Strategy, in September and October 2021.

A consultation report, outlining the consultation process and the main findings from the consultation and online survey is provided in **Appendix 2** supported by **Annex 1**.

Appendix 3 sets out changes to Goal 1 with track changes shown in red for clarity.

Proposal(s)

That Cabinet:

1. Notes the consultation feedback on the draft Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Wiltshire - Wiltshire's Natural Environment Plan 2022-30.
2. Approves the final Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Wiltshire - Wiltshire's Natural Environment Plan and recommends it to Council for adoption as part of the council's policy framework.

Reason for Proposal(s)

To ensure Wiltshire has in place a strategy to support the council's Business Plan missions on climate, wellbeing, and the natural environment and fulfil the requirement set out in the Core Strategy to have a Green Infrastructure Strategy for Wiltshire.

Terence Herbert
Chief Executive

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

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Purpose of Report

1. To ask Cabinet to consider the consultation responses and recommend the Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Wiltshire – Wiltshire's Natural Environment Plan, to Council for adoption.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The goals, vision and delivery themes as set out in the Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy (GBI) will contribute to all four of the emerging Business Plan priorities (2022-32) of:
 - i. Empowered People
 - ii. Resilient Society
 - iii. Thriving Economy
 - iv. Sustainable Environment

Background

3. At its meeting held on 26 February 2019 the council debated the following notices of motion:

12b) Acknowledging a Climate Emergency and Proposing the Way Forward;

12c) Environment and Global Warming.

The council resolved to acknowledge that there is a climate emergency and to seek to make the county of Wiltshire carbon neutral by 2030.

The [minutes](#) of the meeting are available online (see pages 21 to 24). Cabinet has also pledged to make Wiltshire Council carbon neutral by 2030.

4. As of November 2021, The Climate Emergency Task Group revised objectives include the scrutiny of delivery plans, policies and programmes, such as the Local Plan, Local Transport Plan and Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy to ensure that they support the objective of making Wiltshire carbon neutral by 2030.
5. Both the Wiltshire Core Strategy and consultation on the emerging Wiltshire Local Plan Review, undertaken last year, recognise the need for a Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy.

Main Considerations for the council

6. The revised Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Wiltshire - Wiltshire's Natural Environment Plan (GBI) attached as **Appendix 1**, has been subject to significant internal as well as external consultation. Public consultation was undertaken between 1 September and 17 October 2021 alongside the Climate Strategy. The consultation webpage can be viewed via this [Link](#). The consultation sought the views of key stakeholders, community groups and individuals as well as statutory bodies on the draft strategy, it's goals, vision and key themes for delivery.
7. The consultation made both draft strategies public at the same time due to shared objectives that they each contained. Awareness raising and community engagement took place through an online survey, three webinars and four face to face library events, as well as extensive communications through social media and Wiltshire's parish/town/city councils.
8. This report also contains an overview of the main consultation results and the key changes contained in the final version of the strategy being brought forward for adoption.
9. The revised Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Wiltshire – Wiltshire's Natural Environment Plan, is attached as **Appendix 1** which reflects consultation feedback received. Further details can be found in **Appendix 2** (feedback report including the online survey results, email comments and the council's response) and **Appendix 3** (changes to Goal 1 shown with track changes shown in red for clarity).

Consultation Results

Overview of the strategy goals, vision and delivery themes

10. A total of 211 survey responses were received of which 88.8% of respondents found the GBI strategy either understandable or very clear and easy to understand. In addition, 96.6% of respondents having read the strategy felt the GBI Strategy was either important or very important.
11. 180 of these responses were from the online survey and 31 were additional written responses sent via email. Overall, the survey comments submitted can be placed under three broad headings and these are discussed below:

- **Timescales for action** – (the need for action, targets and urgency).
There was a clear desire for action and targets, however, whilst the need for this is agreed, this is an overarching long-term strategy that sets the goals and the vision up to 2030. The steps needed to reach the vision will come from separate shorter-term action plans with interim targets that can be tracked to monitor progress and reported against. These will also be linked with any national targets arising from the Environment Act 2021 which are as yet unknown.

To clarify the purpose and function of the GBI Strategy the introduction and explanation of the role of the strategy and mechanisms for its delivery through implementation and action plans has been re-written. It is therefore now hoped that the function of the GBI Strategy and how it provides an overview for more detailed plans coming forward shortly, can be better understood.

- **Clarity of message** – there were some comments regarding the graphics and font size. These issues have been addressed where possible throughout the document and a glossary of terms has also been added to cover phrases and terminology that cannot be simplified. The opportunity has been taken to correct any other typographical errors or minor changes in the interest of clarity and accuracy.

In addition, it is proposed to include more hyperlinks on the web-based version, both across the document to make navigation through the document easier, but also to outside sources to ensure maps and references can be more easily accessed.

- **Inclusivity** - Given the somewhat technical nature of the strategy, it is positive to know that 88.7% of those who responded, found the document either clear and easy to understand or understandable. However, there were some comments regarding the use of technical language and phrases and a lack of explanation as to their meaning. The inclusion of a glossary, referred to above, will assist in this regard.

It is also proposed to produce an 'easy read' version of the finalised document to assist those with learning difficulties and other disability impairments who may not cope with the long-read version. This was trialled with the Climate Strategy and found to be very successful in engaging a demographic who often feel excluded from consultations on public policy.

12. The survey contained an optional set of questions to help establish if the consultation had reached a full representation of the community. The key findings are summarised below with further details appended to this report.

- 2011 census records black and minority ethnic (BME) communities making up 6% of the population of Wiltshire (excluding Swindon) however only 3% who responded to the demographic questions identified as BME.
- 12% of respondents who responded to the demographic questions stated they had a disability or long-term illness which is slightly higher

than the 9% for the population of Wiltshire showing a good level of engagement.

- There was a slight underrepresentation of those who identified as male under the gender demographic at 35.8%.
- Proportionally, younger and working age people were underrepresented and those of 55+ years overrepresented. Only 4% of respondents were aged between 18-34 years compared to 17% of the population of Wiltshire being in this age bracket.

13. The 3 goals of the strategy were supported and although, when asked to rank the goals 'halting loss and improving biodiversity' was ranked as more important than 'adaption and resilience to climate change' and 'contribution to health and wellbeing' respectively. However, a number of comments came back to say that they generally felt all three were equally important and felt they captured the key objectives of a GBI strategy.

14. The Wiltshire Climate Alliance did propose that a further goal around net zero 'Goal Zero' be added or that the ambition to reach zero carbon emissions be more adequately reflected in the climate change goal. As support for the 3 goals was comprehensive bar this suggestion, it is felt that adding a further goal is not needed. Instead, it is proposed that Goal 1 text be amended to emphasise mitigation of climate change and nature-based solutions more clearly to support working towards net zero carbon. The changes are identified in **Appendix 3**.

15. There were no adverse comments or suggestions related to the vision, therefore no changes are proposed.

16. The six delivery themes were well supported through the survey, and feedback indicated support for all of them without the need for changes or deletions. It is therefore not proposed to change them and so these will remain as follows:

- Nature Recovery & Landscape Management
- Sustainable Farming & Land Management
- Woodland & Trees
- Flood & Water Management
- Healthy Living
- Economic Recovery & Valuing Natural Capital

17. Comments related to the content under each theme was received, most of which came through the more detailed email responses. These have been considered and where appropriate changes to the wording have been incorporated. These comments and the council's response to them is set out in **Appendix 2 - Annex 1**.

18. Overall, the strategy was extremely well supported and welcomed. Future community engagement and partnership working was also well supported with over 77% confirming that they would either like to be fully involved or kept

actively engaged in some way and interested in partnership working in the future. 56% of respondents were already members of an environmental group of some sort, which again shows active engagement in the subject with those involved.

19. Delivery will be heavily reliant on partnership working and community projects on the ground and so a key focus will now be directed at how best to capitalise on this through; the finalisation of the GBI Settlement Frameworks, which will look at identifying key strategic GBI within the 15 principal settlements and market towns; the roll out of the Community Environmental Toolkit; and development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (a requirement of the Environment Act, 2021).

Summary of comments

20. Whilst there was some criticism of the format of the GBI Strategy and the lack of targets, the importance of the Strategy overall and its goals and themes were overwhelming endorsed. Many of the respondents are already actively engaged in this sphere in either a personal or professional capacity and are therefore pleased to see Wiltshire Council engaging actively in this topic and willing it to move as fast as possible in developing and adopting policy that benefits the environment.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

21. As part of the governance supporting the development and delivery the GBI Strategy the draft was discussed with the Climate Emergency Task Group prior to the public consultation on 5th August and following it on 10th December 2021. The Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee is also chairman of the Climate Emergency Task Group which reports to the Environment Select Committee.

Safeguarding Implications

22. The 3 goals of the strategy focus on climate change, biodiversity loss and the wellbeing of our communities which can impact all sectors of society, but particularly the most vulnerable. The consultation undertaken on the Strategy has looked to be representative of all groups in Wiltshire and has made efforts to reach vulnerable groups such as those with disabilities (please see **Appendix 2** for further information). The final strategy also looks to be inclusive and will be supported by an 'easy read' version.

Public Health Implications

23. Adopting the GBI Strategy, which looks to: improve physical and mental wellbeing through increased opportunities to connection with nature and access green spaces; and protect and enhance green and blue spaces within urban settings, to help improve air quality and mitigate against temperature extremes such as urban heating, should have an overall positive impact on public health. New active travel routes for walking and cycling, that could follow through

implementation projects, will also have the potential to have a positive impact on the health of the population.

Procurement Implications

24. There are no direct procurement implications as a result of the strategy itself. Much of the delivery will be through partnership working. New requirements in the Environment Act 2021 will align with the aspirations of the strategy and will attract new burden funding and grants. These are not quantified at present.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

25. One of the key principles is for the GBI Strategy to be equitable, ensuring the transition to a climate and ecological resilient future is fair.

26. The consultation and engagement approach for the GBI strategy has been undertaken so that it is inclusive with specific efforts to reach groups of society traditionally seen as harder to reach (please see **Appendix 2**). An 'easy read' version of the final Strategy will be produced and made readily available.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

27. This report sets out the council's response to environmental and climate change considerations following the acknowledgement of a climate emergency and agreement by full Council. The proposed adoption of a GBI strategy for Wiltshire should have a positive impact on the environment and climate of Wiltshire. The GBI Strategy and Climate Strategy are interlinked, and both strategies have implications for the council's services, as well as partnership work.

28. The strategy will be delivered in conjunction with the emerging Business Plan principle 'Sustainable Environment' which includes the mission that 'we take responsibility for our environment' and 'we are on the path to carbon neutral (net zero)'. This should mean that in time all of the council's activities, underpinned by the GBI Strategy and Climate Strategy objectives, will be able to optimise their contribution to climate and environmental impacts.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

29. The Wiltshire Core Strategy identified that a Green Infrastructure Strategy would be in place shortly following adoption. The lack of one could impact the current Local Plan Review and so there is a significant reputational risk associated.

30. Work to enhance and deliver a strong green and blue infrastructure will improve health and support the transition to a greener more sustainable future so all of these elements would be negatively impacted if, the strategy and the projects that will flow from it, did not go ahead.

Financial Implications

31. The GBI strategy sets a framework for delivery in partnership across multiple agencies. The Strategy, in itself, does not have any financial implications

however it does make reference to further policy and guidance documents and potential projects that will require resourcing for example, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

32. The council will also have responsibility for overseeing delivery through the new Climate and Environment Forum, supporting community initiatives with advice and guidance as well as through crosscutting projects such as: improvements to the active travel network; nature-based solutions to climate change and carbon reduction; and biodiversity improvements.
33. These projects will require funding as well as officer resources. The scope and scale of this will be detailed in a separate implementation and action plan report as more information becomes available particularly from DEFRA following on from the Environment Act. That report will set out all the known and estimated associated costs and funding opportunities related to implementation for approval.

Legal Implications

34. The GBI Strategy is not a statutory document and as such there were no statutory requirements for the consultation. However, Consultation was undertaken in respect of this strategy and the consultation that was undertaken is considered sound as it was undertaken when proposals were still at a formative stage and provided sufficient information and time for consultees to provide appropriate comment.
35. The consultation feedback, as set out in appendices to this report and in particular **Appendix 2**, provides the detail of the consultation responses and these responses have led to changes to the final proposed strategy and provides an appropriate summary for the decision maker to have due regard.
36. This Policy once adopted by full Council will form part of the Budget and Policy framework as set out in Part 3 section B of the Council's constitution. All decisions made by Cabinet, Committees and Officers have to be made in accordance with the Budget and Policy framework including this policy.

Workforce Implications

37. Changes to how the council maintains and manages assets under the council's control will affect the focus of work to be implemented. However, it is not anticipated to add any increased workforce burden.
38. As outlined in the financial implications section above there is likely to be additional resources required to support projects, these will be scoped as further information becomes available and will be presented in a future report.

Options Considered

39. The proposed adoption of the GBI strategy is the reason this item has been highlighted as a key decision. The other main options are to not adopt the Wiltshire GBI Strategy, or to not adopt this version and send it back for further

drafting. These options would have a direct impact on the ability of the council to meet its commitment to producing a GBI strategy as set out in the Core Strategy.

40. Delaying adoption will also impact the council's ability to make delivery plans and continue work to address biodiversity loss a requirement in the Environment Act 2021.

Conclusions

41. The adoption of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Wiltshire - Wiltshire's Natural Environment Plan (2022-2030) will be instrumental in setting the framework for improving the natural environment for biodiversity, Wiltshire's communities and to help sequester carbon and use nature-based solutions to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.
42. The next steps will include the development of an implementation and action plan which will complement the Strategy.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Final Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Wiltshire - Wiltshire's Natural Environment Plan 2022-30 (final version).

Appendix 2: Consultation feedback and evaluation report supported by Annex 1 (consultation feedback via written comments and the council's response).

Appendix 3: Goal 1 amendments (with track changes in red).