

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT TO THE CABINET

DECISION

HEADING: Draft Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategies – Consultation

DATE: 19th October 2016

SUBMITTED BY: Head of Operations – Roger Tait

PORTFOLIO: Planning and Housing/Environment and Recycling

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All

Purpose of the Report

- To approve the draft Open Spaces and Green Infrastructure Strategies for consultation.

Recommendations

- That the Cabinet receive the draft Open Spaces and Green Infrastructure Strategies and approve them for wider consultation with stakeholders as detailed in this report.
- That as part of the planned consultation process, the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Communities Scrutiny Committee receive a copy of the draft strategies for consideration and comment.
- That a report on the outcome of the consultation is brought to a future meeting of the Cabinet for consideration prior to adoption of the strategies.

Reasons

- This report presents the first draft of the reviewed Open Spaces Strategy (formerly the Green Space Strategy) and the new Green Infrastructure Strategy. The strategies identify a range of strategic aims and objectives for open space requirements in the borough as well as green infrastructure planning, provision, management, maintenance and alternative use to ensure that these assets fulfil their potential to deliver a wide range of environmental, economic and social benefits. A number of key stakeholders – Locality Action Partnerships, parish council, local councils – have been involved in developing the documents. Once adopted, they will form part of the evidence base for the Joint Local Plan.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** On 10 December 2014, Cabinet resolved that, in order to ensure that the existing Urban North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy remains a robust evidence base for the emerging Joint Local Plan, it should be reviewed to reflect changes in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), local government finance and projected resources.

- 1.2** Cabinet considered a report on 16 September 2015 which provided a progress report on the delivery of the Urban North Staffordshire Green Space Strategy and an update on the commissioning of a review of the strategy. The link between the Green Space Strategy and the Asset Management Plan was re-affirmed. This means green spaces which are identified as not required to deliver local standards for green space nor for operational purposes are included in the Asset Management Plan for consideration for alternative uses.
- 1.3** During the early stages of the review, it was identified that a Green Infrastructure Strategy was also required to complete the evidence base for the Joint Local Plan. This was commissioned and has been prepared at the same time as the review of the Green Space Strategy.

2. ISSUES

- 2.1** Consultants have now completed a review of the existing Green Space Strategy using the National Planning Policy Framework to give the review context. They have also produced a draft Open Space Strategy and a draft Green Infrastructure Strategy with associated Action Plans. The strategies cover the whole of the borough and include 553 sites - 326 in urban areas and 227 in rural areas. The sites are owned by a range of organisations or individuals, but most have some degree of public access. The draft strategies are appended to this report at Appendix one.
- 2.2** Discussions were held with a number of stakeholders as part of the preparation of the strategies. This included workshops with council officers and operational staff; elected members and representatives of Locality Action Partnerships (LAPs), parish councils and environmental organisations; representatives of Friends' Groups and residents. A "Great Outdoors Survey" was also carried out both online and manually to get the views of the community including young people. A summary of the consultation results can be seen in Appendix two.
- 2.3** The consultants also analysed the quantity and accessibility of the sites against national standards, as well as a "nearest neighbour" comparisons with the 16 councils that provide the closest match to the borough in terms of size, population and character.
- 2.4** All of the work outlined above has enabled the consultants to come up with a set of proposed local standards for open space and these are in Appendix three for consideration by Cabinet. The main difference from the previous local standards is the inclusion of a standard for allotment provision, reflecting the resurgence of popularity in allotment gardening and its associated health and well-being benefits, and the inclusion of a local standard for amenity green space, reflecting feedback from local people who place a value on having access to such spaces close to where they live for general recreational purposes. Standards for outdoor sport have been omitted from the Open Spaces Strategy as they are set out in the Council's adopted Playing Pitch Strategy.
- 2.5** The consultants assessed the quality of open spaces as well as quantity and accessibility. Their assessment is that around four out of every five sites in the borough can be regarded as "good quality" sites.
- 2.6** The draft strategies outline the current position in relation to open space and green infrastructure and provide a framework for moving forward. They take into account reducing resource levels at the Council and limited capacity to develop opportunities for alternative delivery models. The strategies include draft Action Plans which prioritise projects to enable limited resources to be focused onto key objectives which will provide the greatest overall benefits for our communities. The Action Plan is attached to the report as Appendix four.

- 2.7** The draft Open Space Strategy outlines the requirements for high quality, accessible open space to ensure community needs across the borough are met. It also indicates where the use of open space can be increased by improving the range of purposes it is used for how this will, in turn, enable resources to be focused on a smaller number of higher quality and more accessible sites. The strategy also considers maintaining areas for biodiversity and encouraging links to other open space sites to improve green infrastructure and make it more resilient.
- 2.8** The Open Space Strategy discusses planning for open space and new open space in developments to ensure that quantity and accessibility standards are maintained in growth areas and that open space is provided in the most suitable places to meet the needs of our communities. The strategy also covers funding options for open space over the life of the strategy through the use of Section 106 Agreements and other sources to maintain quality standards.
- 2.9** Cabinet is now being asked to consult on the draft strategies and for the documents to be available on the Council's website for an appropriate period to allow community comment and feedback. It is proposed that the documents and response questionnaire are also e-mailed to interested parties. All responses will be forwarded to the consultants for inclusion into the consultation report and this will be presented to Cabinet along with officer responses and any proposed amendments to the strategies early in 2017.

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1** The options considered are to receive the draft strategies and approve them for wider consultation with stakeholders to ensure that a robust evidence base can be provided to support the emerging Joint Local Plan.
- 3.2** Not receive the draft strategies nor approve them for wider consultation with stakeholders and fail to provide sufficient evidence to support the emerging Joint Local Plan.

4. PROPOSAL

- 4.1** It is proposed to receive the draft open space and green infrastructure strategies and approve them for wider consultation with stakeholders and for the outcome to be reported to Cabinet prior to adoption.

5. REASONS FOR PROPOSAL

- 5.1** This report presents the first draft of the reviewed Open Spaces Strategy (formerly the Green Space Strategy) and the new Green Infrastructure Strategy. The strategies identify a range of strategic aims and objectives for future open space and green infrastructure planning, provision, management and maintenance to ensure that these assets fulfil their potential to deliver a wide range of environmental, economic and social benefits.

6. OUTCOMES LINKED TO CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 6.1** Creating a clean, safe and sustainable borough.
- 6.2** Creating a healthy and active community.
- 6.3** A borough of opportunity.
- 6.4** Becoming a co-operative Council, delivering high-value, community-driven services.

7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct legal or statutory implications associated with this report.
- 7.2 The preparation of the Joint Local Plan is a statutory process and although the Open Space Strategy and Green Infrastructure Strategy are not statutory documents, they support and form part of the evidence base for the Joint Local Plan.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 It is considered that there would be a positive impact on equality issues resulting from this project.

9. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no direct budget or resource implications associated with this report at the present time.
- 9.2 The future delivery of the strategies, if approved and adopted, will involve a number of providers and the financial implications will not rest solely with the Borough Council. The delivery and timescale of identified projects and actions will be dependent on funding being secured from appropriate sources.
- 9.3 The delivery of the strategies will have an impact on the Council's Asset Management Plan and the ability to fund future capital programmes.
- 9.4 The development of the strategies has been funded from within approved revenue budgets for the delivery of the Joint Local Plan.

10. MAJOR RISKS

- 10.1 Major Risks
- Failure to provide robust evidence base for the emerging joint Local Plan.
 - Failure to meet the timetable for the preparation and adoption of the Joint Local Plan.
 - Failure to transparently engage and consult with stakeholders on strategy development.

11. SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 It is considered that the project will have a positive impact on sustainability and climate change by identifying greater opportunities for open space and green infrastructure as part of the strategic level planning for the borough.

12. KEY DECISION INFORMATION

- 12.1 It impacts directly all wards of the borough, and is included in the Forward Plan.

13. EARLIER CABINET/COMMITTEE RESOLUTIONS

- 13.1 Cabinet 10th December 2014 Item 5
Cabinet 16th September 2016

14. LIST OF APPENDICES

- 14.1** Appendix 1 – draft Open Space Strategy and draft Green Infrastructure Strategy (available online)
- 14.2** Appendix 2 – Summary of Consultation
- 14.3** Appendix 3 – draft Local Standards for Open Space
- 14.4** Appendix 4 – draft Action Plan and table of sites required to meet local standards