

**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT TO THE CABINET**

**HEADING:** Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategies – Adoption

**DATE:** 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017

**SUBMITTED BY:** Head of Operations – Roger Tait

**PORTFOLIO:** Environment and Recycling (with implications for Planning and Housing and Town Centres, Property and Business)

**WARD(S) AFFECTED:** All

**Purpose of the Report**

To review the consultation feed back and to enable a member decision on adoption of the Open Spaces and Green Infrastructure Strategies.

**Recommendations**

- a) That Cabinet agrees to adopt the Open Spaces and Green Infrastructure Strategies (as amended following the outcome of the consultation with stakeholders as detailed in this report).
- b) That an annual report on progress with the strategies is brought to future meetings of the Cabinet.
- c) That Cabinet notes the aims and objectives of the strategies and agrees to their use as part of the evidence base for the emerging joint Local Plan, including the consequential updating of other elements of the evidence base such as the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.
- d) That Cabinet, in its capacity representing the Council as a land owner, notes the content of the Strategies and authorises officers to takes appropriate steps to both:
  - i. report back to Cabinet upon the implications of these Strategies for the Council's Asset Management Strategy and;
  - ii. to take all reasonable and proportionate steps to protect the Council's interests in the future management and maintenance of Council-owned land in the overall public interest.

**Reasons**

This report presents the reviewed Open Spaces Strategy (formerly the Green Space Strategy) and the Green Infrastructure Strategy. The strategies identify a range of strategic aims and objectives for future open space and 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. The strategies have been developed through inter-departmental working and have been informed through engagement with a number of key stakeholders. In the future they will form part of the evidence base for the Joint Local Plan and inform decision-making in the local planning authority's Development Management function.

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1** At the cabinet meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> October 2016 it was resolved that the draft Open Spaces Strategy and Green Infrastructure Strategy be approved for wider consultation with stakeholders.
- 1.2** A consultation plan (attached to this report at Appendix 1) was approved and implemented; the closing date for consultation was 16<sup>th</sup> December 2016. The responses to the consultation were collated by the consultant who is preparing the strategies and are presented in a report which is attached at Appendix 2.

## **2. ISSUES**

- 2.1** The consultants have now considered the responses to the consultation and have suggested a number of minor amendments to the draft strategies as a result. The suggested amendments are listed in Appendix 2 and have been incorporated into the final strategy documents in Appendix 4. Responses to the consultation from neighbouring local authorities, parish councils and Staffordshire County Council were supportive, with the majority of other respondents agreeing with the principles put forward in the draft strategies. Some detailed questions and points of clarification were raised and responses are set out in Appendix 2. It is not considered that the amendments make any fundamental change to the aims and objectives of the strategies.
- 2.2** The open space and green infrastructure strategies outline the current position in relation to the provision of open space and green infrastructure to meet community needs and provide a framework for future maintenance and management, taking into account reducing resource levels and limited capacity to develop opportunities for alternative service delivery models. The strategies include Action Plans which prioritise projects to enable limited resources to be focused onto key objectives which will provide the greatest overall benefits to the communities of interest. The Action Plans are summarised at Appendix 3.
- 2.3** The open space strategy outlines the key requirements for high quality, accessible open space to ensure that community needs are met. It indicates where the use of open space can be increased by improving multi-functionality, thereby focusing resources on a smaller number of higher quality and more accessible sites. The strategy also considers maintaining areas for biodiversity and encouraging linkages to other open space sites to improve green infrastructure and make it more resilient.
- 2.4** 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 future needs of communities. The strategy also covers funding options for open space over the life of the strategy, utilising Section 106 Agreements and/or CIL and grant funding sources to maintain the required quality of open spaces.
- 2.5** Preparation of these strategies is a vitally important element of the evolving evidence base that will support the emerging Local Plan (the next stage of which will be the subject of public consultation in the coming months). In addition, up-to-date information about the status of the various parcels of Council-owned land will assist in refreshing the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA).
- 2.6** Also the adoption of these strategies will inform the Council's approach to managing its physical assets (from a strategic asset management perspective), including the taking of any necessary steps to protect the Council's position as the owner of many of the areas of land referred to in these documents.

- 2.7 It is proposed to now formally adopt the strategy documents with the minor amendments listed as a result of consultation with relevant stakeholders.

### **3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 3.1 The first option is to consider adoption of the strategies (including the minor amendments listed as a result of wider consultation with stakeholders) to ensure that a robust evidence base can be provided to support the emerging Joint Local Plan and to inform the Council's approach to management of its physical assets.
- 3.2 The alternative option is to not adopt the strategies. This would have potentially serious consequences because it would mean that the Council has failed to provide an up-to-date and comprehensive element of the evidence base required to support the emerging Joint Local Plan. In addition it would undermine the Council's ability to provide a clear framework for the future strategic management of its assets.

### **4. PROPOSAL**

- 4.1 It is proposed to adopt the open space and green infrastructure strategies with the minor amendments listed as a result of wider consultation with stakeholders and to take associated actions both as local planning authority and land owner.

### **5. REASONS FOR PROPOSAL**

- 5.1 This report presents the reviewed Open Spaces Strategy (formerly the Green Space Strategy) and the Green Infrastructure Strategy. The strategies identify a range of strategic aims and objectives for future open space and 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. The draft strategies have been developed through inter-departmental working and have been informed through engagement with a number of key stakeholders. They will form part of the evidence base for the Joint Local Plan and provide a clear framework for the future strategic management of the Council's land assets.

### **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.
- 7.3 These strategy documents will provide a clear framework for the Council in exercising its duties and powers in relation to the ownership and management of land in the public interest.

## **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, 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** The adoption of these strategies would impact directly upon all wards of the borough, and is included in the Forward Plan.

## **13. EARLIER CABINET/COMMITTEE RESOLUTIONS**

- 13.1** Cabinet 10<sup>th</sup> December 2014                      Item 5  
Cabinet 16<sup>th</sup> September 2016  
Cabinet 19<sup>th</sup> October 2016

**14. LIST OF APPENDICES**

- 14.1** Appendix 1 – Consultation plan – Available on request
- 14.2** Appendix 2 – Consultation report – Available on request
- 14.3** Appendix 3 – Action Plan
- 14.4** Appendix 4–Open Space Strategy and Green Infrastructure Strategy (including Executive Summaries and Framework Plans)

**15. BACKGROUND PAPERS / OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS**

- 15.1** The emerging joint Local Plan
- 15.2** Current and future Asset Management Strategies