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| Report to: | SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP BOARD |
| Relevant Officer: | John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services |
| Date of Meeting: | 5 March 2020 |

GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To review progress on the implementation of the Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Strategy and associated action plan.

2.0 Recommendation:

2.1 To consider the progress of the GBI Strategy and Action Plan and to identify any further areas for scrutiny as appropriate.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation:

3.1 To ensure effective scrutiny of the GBI Strategy and progress on the associated Action Plan

3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

None

4.0 Council Priority:

4.1 The relevant Council Priorities are:

- The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool
- Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience

5.0 Background information

5.1 The report provides an update on the performance of the Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Strategy and associated Action Plan (Appendix 3(a)) which on 25 February 2019, the Executive

resolved:

1. To approve the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and Action Plan for Blackpool as attached at Appendix 3a, to the Executive report, with effect from 1 March 2019 to 28 February 2029.
2. To request the Director of Community and Environmental Services to take steps prior to the publication to ensure that the strategy and action plan are converted into suitable accessible formats.

5.2 Throughout this report references are made to Green and Blue Infrastructure or GBI, which is defined within the strategy as: *“a network of multifunctional green space, which delivers a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities... As a network it includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, but also street trees, allotments and private gardens. It can also include streams, the sea and other water bodies and features such as green roofs and walls.”*

5.3 Blackpool’s GBI strategy is to be delivered by Blackpool Council in partnership amongst internal directorates, private developers, landowners, schools, healthcare providers, infrastructure managers and the local community.

5.4 Blackpool’s GBI Strategy has identified 6 strategic goals and implementation priorities:

- Engaging People in Health and Well-being
- Enhancing the Visitor Experience
- Greener Housing and Infrastructure
- Enabling Productive Green Business and Workers
- Promoting a Green Image and Culture
- Improving Habitats and Benefitting Pollinators

5.5 In order to deliver the GBI strategy an Action Plan has been developed with 4 objectives, aligning with Core Strategy Policy CS6.

- Protect and Enhance GBI
- Create and Restore GBI
- Connect and Link GBI
- Promote GBI

6.0 Progress on GBI Strategy

6.1 GBI Delivery Mechanism and Governance

6.1.1 In order to ensure the strategy is delivered in a coordinated approach, officers’ prioritised Action 4.4 to “Appoint a GBI Officer to take ownership and to deliver the GBI Strategy and Action Plan, forming partnerships with health, housing, town centre, schools, cultural and arts specialists.”

6.1.2 In September 2019, Annie Heslop Green Infrastructure Development Manager was recruited as part

of the Community and Environmental Services Directorate.

6.1.3 Since appointment work has focussed on:

- Establishing progress on each action within the action plan document
- Developing Key Performance Indicators in line with the Strategy’s objectives and the Core Strategy
- Developing a multi-directorate group of officers to oversee the delivery of the GBI
- Investigating best practice
- Establishing key partnerships with stakeholders
- Progressing priority actions

6.1.4 It is proposed that the remit and representation on the Corporate Sport and Physical Activity Group is expanded to include Green and Blue Infrastructure. That the 10 year plan is reviewed annually to agree those actions to be taken forward in that financial year, dependant on the wider Council plans and available external funding sources.

6.1.5 Long term Key Performance Indicators and annual Key Performance Indicators will be agreed by the group.

6.2 Performance Indicators

6.2.1 The Blackpool Local Plan identifies Green Infrastructure as one of the Core Policies, CS6, in the Core Strategy (2012-27). The objectives for the GBI Strategy were produced in line with those already identified within Green Infrastructure CS6 of Core Strategy using 9 policies indicators.

6.2.2 The table below highlights the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) against the Green Infrastructure CS6 indicators for 2018/19. This provides a baseline for the position before the Green Infrastructure Strategy was adopted.

| CS6 Policy Indicator | 2018/19 (reflects the position at 31/03/2019) |
|---|---|
| Number of green spaces managed to ‘Green Flag Award’ standard | In 2018/19 there were no parks submitted for a Green Flag award in Blackpool. Measured against the Green Flag award criteria, the Open Spaces Assessment found that Stanley Park was maintained to the excellent standard and Watson Road Park to the very good standard. There has been no change recorded since 2014. |
| Amount (sqm) of public open space and playing fields lost to other uses | No public open spaces/playing fields were lost to other uses in 2018/19. |
| Commuted sums payments received and spent | In 2018/19 £83,426.00 commuted sum monies were spent and £8,772.80 commuted sum monies were received. |
| Amount (£) invested in green infrastructure. | £147,145 invested by Parks Service infrastructure and planting and through Highways schemes including tree planting with Quality Corridors. |

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| Percentage of new development providing open space (or developer contributions for off-site provision) in accordance with the council's approved standards | In 2018/19 100% of developments met the Council's approved standards for open space. |
| Area (ha) designated as green belt | There has been no change in the area designated as Green Belt. |
| Number of developments approved in the green belt | Two developments were approved in the green belt in 2018/19. 18/0370 granted permission for 2 temporary cremators with 2.8m high boundary fencing at Carleton Crematorium. Application 18/0371 was for a single storey extension at Carleton Crematorium. |
| Change in areas and populations of biodiversity importance | No change recorded. |
| Condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest | In September 2010, the Marton Mere SSSI received a 100% 'Favorable' rating. There has been no recorded change. |

6.2.3 No public open spaces/playing fields were lost to other uses in 2018/19.

6.2.4 In addition to the Core Strategy Green Infrastructure Policy Indicators, further Performance indicators are being established to monitor the progress of the GBI strategy.

6.3 Action Plan Update

6.3.1 The GBI strategy was adopted in March 2019 and significant progress has been made on many of the projects and programmes within the Action Plan. A complete update of all these actions is attached in 'Appendix B' and this report highlights below where the main focus has been.

6.3.2 **Objective 1 Protect and Enhance Green and Blue Infrastructure**

6.3.2.1 In 2019 enhanced public open spaces and a new play area within the new Queens Park housing development were opened to the public. Layton Recreation Ground includes 74 new standard sized trees, wildflower spaces and a £100,000 new playground enhanced through additional funding of £60,000 from Blackpool Better Start. **Action 1.2**

6.3.2.2 The Strategy highlights the use of Parks as training centres, focusing on apprentices and skills training. This year the Parks Service have been able to employ two new members of staff who were previously volunteers with the service on long term placements. This includes a teenager from the Pupil Referral Unit who is now employed as an Apprentice Gardener, a scheme which includes formal qualifications in Horticulture gained at Myerscough college. **Action 1.3**

6.3.2.3 A £2,000,000 ERDF bid has been submitted to create 'Grange Park Garden Estate.' The project

includes £120,000 of improvements to Green Infrastructure through the introduction of tree planting alongside behaviour change projects encouraging a 'greener' culture through a place-based approach to tackling climate change. **Action 1.2**

6.3.2.4 An Open Spaces Assessment, currently in final draft form, has been undertaken to all Blackpool's Open Spaces to establish the current condition of all Blackpool Parks and open spaces. This is currently being used to direct future priorities and create Park Development Plans. These will be used to create targeted site improvements with the view to obtaining Green Flag where possible. **Action 1.3**

6.3.2.5 A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) entitled Greening Blackpool has been drafted for consultation in early 2020. **Action 1.7**

6.3.2.5 Initial steps have been undertaken to scope requirements for HLF funding for Stanley Park. Projects will be aimed at increasing park usage and ownership including infrastructure improvements to the lake, bandstand, terraces and sports facilities along with a programme of public engagement activities. **Action 1.1**

6.3.2.6 Stanley Park was voted 2019 Fields in Trust Best UK Park by the public, resulting in national media coverage and promotion of the park. **Action 1.1**

6.3.3 **Objective 2 Create and Restore Green and Blue Infrastructure**

6.3.3.1 A Policy Framework Proposal (Appendix 'C') is being taken to Corporate Leadership Team, which highlights the requirement for a Tree Strategy. This will include a Tree planting plan identifying suitable locations for planting, under the 'right tree in the right place' principle. The tree strategy will be written in house involving a range of both internal and external stakeholders to enable an ambitious yet deliverable tree strategy. A Street Tree Priorities report has been produced and will feed into the Tree Strategy to ensure key gateways in the town are prioritised. **Action 2.2, Action 1.7**

6.3.3.2 Within an approved planning application, Carlton Cemetery planting scheme was submitted and approved which enhances the landscape character and biodiversity of the new extension including the addition of 45 trees. **Action 2.2**

6.3.3.3 The planning policy framework is in place to support the inclusion of GBI with key town centre development projects such as Talbot Gateway, Central Leisure Quarter and the Central Business District. The Core Strategy identifies that 'all development should incorporate new or enhance existing green infrastructure of an appropriate size, type and standard. Where on-site provision is not possible, financial contributions will be sought to make appropriate provision for open space and green infrastructure.' **Action 1.8**

6.3.4 **Objective 3 Connect Green and Blue Infrastructure**

6.3.4.1 The ERDF programme includes the enhancement of walking and cycleways to encourage active travel around the estate and connecting Green Infrastructure. **Action 3.3**

6.3.4.2 Links have been established across boundaries with Lancashire Local Authorities working together to

create a Lancashire Woodland. Connections and projects are being developed with the Wyre and Ribble Rivers Trust to enable a catchment based approach to developing woodlands and tree planting. **Action 3.4**

6.3.5 **Objective 4 Promote the benefits of Green and Blue Infrastructure**

6.3.5.1 From January 2019 to date, the Parks Service has recorded 11,700 volunteer hours undertaken on Blackpool's Open spaces through Friends groups or supervised volunteer activities. There is a network of Volunteer Rangers who undertake practical site maintenance of ecological sites including Marton Mere Local Nature Reserve. The Parks Service supports 13 Friends Groups who are volunteer led and provide opportunities for local residents to get involved in their local park through practical tasks, fundraising and running events. Representatives from the Friends groups attend the Open Spaces Network which shares best practices and networks groups to work together. **Action 4.2**

6.3.5.2 In 2019 the Better Start funded Park Ranger Service was extended and expanded and now includes a team of 6 including a Head Start part funded post of Junior Park Ranger Coordinator. The Park Ranger Service deliver events across the town to encourage local residents to enjoy their local park and get involved in looking after it. A business plan is being developed to create a long-term sustainable strategy to enable the Ranger Service to continue post external funding. **Action 4.1**

6.3.5.3 A Green bus shelter has been created at Grange Park in partnership with students at the nearby Pupil Referral Unit. **Action 4.2**

7.0 **Future opportunities/priorities**

7.1 Short –term (within 3 months)

7.1.1 Anchorsholme Park has been redeveloped in partnership with United utilities and includes new facilities including a café, play area, amphitheatre, multi-use games area, bowling pavilion and species rich meadows. The park is programmed to be open to the public in spring 2020. **Action 1.3**

7.1.2 Harold Larkwood park on Chance Street is undergoing regeneration with new play facilities, removal of the wall to open up sightlines and tree planting. This is due to be complete by April 2020. **Action 1.3**

7.1.3 Consultation is being undertaken for the Tree Strategy and associated tree planting plan with internal and external stakeholders. **Action 2.2, Action 1.7**

7.1.4 The Active Lives Strategy will be developed which will identify and highlighting the importance of utilising green and blue spaces across the town as active spaces and the cross cutting work opportunities identified within the GBI strategy **Action 4.7**

7.1.5 Consultation for Part 2 of Local Plan will commence in May 2020 following Executive and Full Council approval. The consultation process for adopting the greening Supplementary Planning Document and open space assessment will be carried out in the next 12 months following consultation for Part 2 of the Local Plan. **Action 1.7**

7.2 Medium term (within 12 months)

7.2.1 Submission of Stanley Park Stage 1 application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. **Action 1.1**

7.2.2 Completion of Tree Strategy and Planting plan. **Action 2.2, Action 1.7**

7.2.3 Completion of Park development plans to focus investment and engagement. **Action 1.3**

7.2.4 Completion of business plan for Park Ranger Service. **Action 4.3**

7.2.5 Development of Park and green space Volunteer opportunities. Signposting those interested to all available opportunities across the town. **Action 1.4**

7.2.6 An ecological audit undertaken of all Biological Heritage Sites (BHS) and identify priorities for management and those sites at risk. **Action 1.5**

7.2.7 Completion of the updated Management Plan for Marton Mere Local Nature reserve, Site of Special scientific Interest (SSSI). **Action 1.4**

8.0 **List of Appendices**

Appendix 3(a): Green and Blue Infrastructure Action Plan.

Appendix 3(b): Action Plan update.

Appendix 3(c): Tree Strategy proposal.

9.0 **Legal considerations**

Legal considerations will be dealt with as they arise.

10.0 **Human Resources considerations**

The aim is to embed green and blue thinking across the Council, therefore involving all staff who are able through their work or volunteering to make a contribution.

11.0 **Equalities considerations**

This strategy takes into consideration mental health and physical wellbeing, aims to reduce inequalities and promote community cohesion.

12.0 **Financial considerations**

The Action plan will be reviewed on an annual basis and is dependent on being able to direct revenue funding to the plan and also achieving external funding from partners and various funding streams available.

13.0 **Risk management considerations**

The key risk relates to Green and Blue not being a part of 'Making Blackpool Better' in relation to

inclusion in all our major capital schemes and developments.

Also not being able to release revenue funding to support the plan and achieve capital funding.

14.0 **Ethical considerations**

This strategy aims to reduce inequalities and promote community cohesion in line with the Council's ethical policy.

15.0 **Internal/External Consultation undertaken**

During the development of the Strategy, consultation was undertaken with:

1. Interdepartmental steering group
2. Focus groups and 1 to 1 interviews with key individuals
3. Councillor information sessions
4. Attendance at all Scrutiny Committees and special scrutiny committee organised
5. Attendance at Health and wellbeing Board
6. Public consultation
7. Consultation through Open Spaces Network
8. Local Business Forum
9. Schools Forum.

16.0 **Background papers**

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.