

Report to:	SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP BOARD
Relevant Officer:	Lisa Arnold, Head of Parks, Leisure, Catering and Transport Services
Date of Meeting:	2 March 2022

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 (Appendix 5(a)) 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 This report provides an update on the performance of the Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Strategy and associated Action Plan adopted on 25 February 2019.

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 with 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

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 policy indicators.

6.2.2 The table below highlights the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR), submitted to the planning department in November 2020 against the Green Infrastructure CS6 indicators for 2019/20. This provides a baseline for the position before the Green Infrastructure Strategy was adopted.

CS6 Policy Indicator	2020/21 (reflects the position at 31/03/2021)
Number of green spaces managed to ‘Green Flag Award’	In 2020/21 there were no parks submitted for a Green Flag award in Blackpool. Measured against the Green Flag

standard	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 2020/21.
Amount (£) invested in green infrastructure.	£150,640
Percentage of new development providing open space (or developer contributions for off-site provision) in accordance with the council's approved standards	In 2020/21 100% 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	No developments were approved in the Green Belt
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.

6.3 Action Plan Update (Appendix 5(a))

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 A' and this report highlights below where the main focus to date (January 2022) has been.

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

6.3.2.1 A Stanley Park Masterplan is currently being developed to identify areas requiring significant refurbishment and areas that present opportunities for investment to increase footfall and potentially attract new target markets to the park. The masterplan will be developed with key stakeholders including the Friends of Stanley Park, ENVECO, park concessionaires, local Councilors as well as consultation with the local community including users and non-users of the park. A consultation timeline and approach can be found at Appendix 6(b). **Action 1.1**

6.3.2.2 An Expression of Interest was submitted to the Innovative Flood Resilience Fund for a nature based flood alleviation scheme which included £1million programme of works to improve Stanley Park Lake infrastructure and Lawsons Wetlands. Unfortunately this bid was unsuccessful and further funding is being sought for the required lake improvement works through the Masterplan process. **Action 1.1**

6.3.2.3 Five placements for young people were undertaken in 2021 working alongside the Park Ranger

Service gaining skills in community engagement, horticulture and ecological management. One role was a traditional apprenticeship funded through Head Start and four were funded through the Kickstart programme. These programmes have proven successful with some individuals progressing into employment with the Parks Development Service. **Action 1.1**

6.3.3.4 Blackpool's Open Spaces Assessment, which highlights the current condition of all Blackpool Parks and open spaces, has directed future priorities and is contributing to creating Park Development Plans. These are being used to create targeted site improvements with the view to obtaining Green Flag where possible. The Park Development Plans are shaping the future management of the spaces by the grounds maintenance team to ensure a consistent approach and quality of open spaces across Blackpool. Three parks (Anchorsholme, Highfield Road and Revoe) have initially been targeted to undergo the Park's Development process and community engagement has started to establish a community vision and aims for each park. **Action 1.3**

6.3.3.5 The Greening Blackpool Supplementary Planning document (SPD) has been through consultation and it is expected that the document will be adopted later in the year. The SPD requires 2 replacement trees for any tree felled across Blackpool. Emerging Policy DM21 requires the retention of trees and hedgerows wherever possible and the enhancement of trees and hedgerows through increased cover and where this is not possible, contributions will be sought towards off-site provision. **Action 1.7**

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

6.3.3.1 Approved designs for the DWP Regional Hub development (Appendix 5(c)) includes a new leafy town centre square with new cycle and pedestrian routes. The GBI includes a rain garden which will utilise the surface water run-off to irrigate the planting scheme. The development includes mature trees that have been chosen for town conditions and will be installed in soil cell systems to give the tree maximum opportunity to survive without damage to underground services. **Action 2.1**

6.3.3.2 Blackpool Council's Tree Strategy was adopted in July 2021. The strategy, which highlights a 'right tree in the right place' approach, aims to protect and improve the tree population of the town. The Tree Strategy has been well received by residents and has created a consistent approach and clear message that trees are important to the town. **Action 2.2**

6.3.3.3 In 2021 a Tree Survey was conducted to assess the condition of the Council's tree population within the Council's responsibility. Those trees which were highlighted for immediate works, have been attended to within 14 days of being identified and a programme of proactive works is being established to address those trees which are identified as being lower risk.

The Tree Survey allows the Parks Development Service to take a pro-active approach to enquiries from local residents when concerns or requests are made to remove or prune a council tree. It has allowed a timely response to enquiries and ensures informed decisions based on the condition of the tree can be made. **Action 2.2**

6.3.3.4 There has been an extensive tree planting programme across Blackpool including;

The Park Ranger Service have facilitated the planting of 50 trees with the Baby Ranger' families at Revoe Park.

In addition, the Park Ranger Services have supported the planting of trees across numerous parks and open spaces including 500 whips and 14 standards at Mereside and 2,000 whips at Revoe park.

Groundworks in partnership with Blackpool Council have planted over 2000 trees in Bridgehouse, the Carlton Cemetery, Lawsons Field and Carr road.

In addition, 1,400 trees are due to be planted in Grange Park in March 2022 as part of the ERDF Grange Park carbon reduction programme.

Action 2.2

6.3.3.5 In six locations, pine trees were planted to be used as sustainable Christmas trees. These were primarily funded by ward councillors and associated lighting infrastructure was installed by the illuminations service. This initiative has been well supported by local councillors, clearly demonstrating their commitment to the GBI Strategy.

6.3.3.6 On Edward Street 6 street trees were planted in soil cell system tree pits. These were to replace trees which initially failed due to dry conditions. This scheme demonstrates the positive impact of the Tree Strategy's 'right tree in the right place' ethos as the species were changed. This project also demonstrates the improved collaborative approach of council services as a direct result of the cross cutting GBI strategy.

6.3.3.7 A new playing pitch plateau of 115,000sq has been developed at Common Edge as part of the wider Enterprise Zone developments which will include a 3G pitch and new changing room facilities. The grass pitches are now open and have been well received by the football community. **Action 2.4**

The Enterprise Zone is a fantastic example of a building green infrastructure into a new commercial and industrial development, with the concept being fully embraced. There will be Sustainable Urban Drainage system and open swales along the new Eastern Gateway access highway which will link Common edge to Amy Johnson Way to form part of the Highway and plot drainage systems with the inclusion of footpaths and cycleways in the design. **Action 2.4**

6.3.3.8 Bridgehouse open space located adjacent to Yeadon Way is undergoing a GBI improvement scheme to increase public access, biodiversity and amenity value of the site. A public consultation was held in November 2021 to discuss with residents what they wished to see from the space. The majority of residents were in support of a scheme which kept open areas for informal sports and included extensive tree planting and pathway network to enable full site access. The project, supported by Groundwork and ward Councillors has seen a hedgerow and trees planted for the first phase of his project and funding is being explored for the pathway network. **Action 2.7**

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

6.3.4.1 Funding has been secured via the Department for Transport Capability Fund, to map in more detail the activity route with particular focus on the 'pinch points' and costed solutions. The circular route connects a number of green and blue spaces across the town including the promenade, north ponds trail and herons reach, measuring roughly 25 miles in distance, connecting local residents to their local green and blue spaces.

6.3.4.2 The Living Streets project has been refreshed for 2022, following the confirmation of funding and appointment of a new officer who is located in the Active Lives team alongside a Cycling Officer employed via Cycling UK. Both roles have a focus on connecting local residents with green spaces through walking and cycling, including raising awareness of local green spaces and supporting people to gain the confidence to enjoy them.

6.3.4.3 The Live Longer Better campaign is a great example of collaborative working between the Parks Development Service and the Active Lives Team, to encourage people to be more active through their local green spaces. A six-month pilot is currently underway working with health partners at Moor Park Health & Leisure Centre to encourage individuals to 'move more' by connecting them to their local nature reserve the North Ponds Trail, through led walks and volunteering activities.

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

6.3.5.1 The Parks Service has recently recruited a Parks Community Engagement Officer to ensure that communities are at the centre of greening projects within Blackpool. They will work closely with the volunteer coordinator and Friends groups to lead community involvement and grow greenspace volunteering. Many Parks Friends Groups are reporting a drop in active members since COVID, with the exception of Anchorholme who have grown a network of engaged community members. Work will now focus on supporting those existing groups and creating new opportunities. **Action 4.2**

6.3.5.2 The BetterStart Park ranger scheme has continued to deliver high quality nature based activities and events to families with young children. Since April 2021 there have been 450 individual 0-4s attending sessions with many repeat visits on top of this. The Park Ranger Service is now OFSTED registered allowing for full day programmes throughout the school holidays to be delivered, which will enhance the overall Park Ranger programme and meet identified demand locally. **Action 4.3**

6.3.5.3 Community garden spaces have been developing in recent years across the town with a variety of different management models specific to each site. Below are a few examples of community growing spaces in the town.

@theGrange – is managed by Groundwork through a programme of funded staff of GrowBlackpool and an extensive network of volunteers and community groups.

Revoe Community Garden – is managed by Blackpool Park Rangers in partnership with volunteers.

Strawberry Gardens – is self managed through a volunteer committee.

Bloomfield Road – is a new community space which is being developed in partnership with the Youth Council, Blackpool Council Park Rangers and ward councillors.

Moor Park – the health centre have created a community growing space.

Secret Garden – is managed by the volunteers of Watson Road Park.

Ibison Court – a community growing space is run by volunteers from the REVOELUTION project.

Adopt-an-alleyway – is a scheme set up to encourage and empower local residents to adopt their alley and improve the space.

These open spaces have all been improved by local residents and organisations working in partnership together resulting in each space being unique in how it is funded, managed and designed. These models act as a pilot to enable a larger rollout of community growing spaces across the town.

6.3.5.4 Working alongside ENVECO colleagues it has been agreed that the base of trees will no longer be routinely sprayed with glyphosate in the interests of reducing glyphosate use and increasing biodiversity. Prominent trees continue to have the basal vegetation controlled, such as street trees and main highway routes with alternative methods to glyphosate being used for these where possible.

7.0 **Future priorities**

7.1 In order to ensure GBI is delivered through wider town centre schemes, greater focus will be placed on Influence through future development programmes and plans such as the updated Town Centre strategy.

7.1.1 Stanley Park Masterplan will be delivered in accordance to the programme laid out in Appendix 6(b).

7.1.2 The continued development of Park and green space Volunteer opportunities for communities and Blackpool Council staff following the recent challenges COVID has brought, remains a priority. We aim to develop clear signposting of all available opportunities across the town across partner organisations. We recognise the role green space has to improve mental health and wellbeing and future work will prioritise this links and partnerships.

7.1.3 A town wide ecological audit will be undertaken to identify priorities for ecological management and highlight those sites at risk. This will include a detailed Management Plan for Marton Mere and an ecological public perception survey.

7.1.4 Continue the tree planting programme to ensure the 10,000 trees planted goal is exceeded within the first 4 years of the strategy and review this target to be more ambitious with our plans to increase the tree canopy.

7.1.5 Prioritisation will be given to promotion of green spaces and GBI through additional marketing and communications. The website will be reviewed and updated to sign post people to their local spaces and the information they need.

7.1.6 Links will be strengthened with the Climate Emergency agenda to understand and promote the role GBI has in climate mitigation and adaptation.

8.0 **List of Appendices**

Appendix 5(a): Action Plan update

Appendix 5(b): Stanley Park Masterplan

Appendix 5(c): DWP Planting Strategy

9.0 **Financial considerations:**

9.1 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.

10.0 **Legal considerations:**

10.1 Legal considerations will be dealt with as they arise.

11.0 **Risk management considerations:**

11.1 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.

A further risk is not being able to release revenue funding to support the plan and achieve capital funding.

12.0 **Equalities considerations:**

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

13.0 **Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:**

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

14.0 **Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:**

14.1 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.

15.0 Background papers:

15.1 None.