

Report to:

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Relevant Officer:

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Lisa Arnold, Assistant Director of Community and Environmental Services (Community and Wellbeing).

Date of meeting:

15 November 2023

GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY UPDATE AND REVIEW

1.0 Purpose of the report

1.1 To provide the scrutiny committee with an overview of the refreshed Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (GBI) and its action plan and provide members with an opportunity to make any relevant recommendations.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 To review and make recommendations to the refreshed Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and action plan.

3.0 Reason for recommendation(s)

3.1 The Green and Blue Infrastructure strategy and action plan requires an update to take into account new and/or updated legislation, policies and procedures such as biodiversity net gain and local nature recovery strategy requirements. Furthermore, it will take an overarching view on master planning when developing existing or new green and blue infrastructure.

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

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

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered

4.1 None

5.0 Council priority

5.1 The relevant Council priority is:

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

6.0 Background and key information

6.1 The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy was adopted in 2019 and since that time, it has been utilised to promote and enhance green and blue infrastructure within Blackpool. The strategy has enabled a focus and increased awareness around the importance of green and blue infrastructure and has achieved a significant number of actions outlined in the previous action plan, including:

- The adoption of a Tree Strategy
- The development of a 'Community Farm' at @The Grange
- The adoption of a 'greening' supplementary planning document (SPD)
- Improvements in influencing and embedding green and blue infrastructure within services such as planning, Highways and Growth and Prosperity.
- Deliver the Common Edge Sports Village Project.
- An increase in improvement to parks and green open spaces, allowing local communities to enjoy outdoor spaces and facilities such as Stanley Park, Boundary Park, Bispham Cliff Tops and Carr Road play area.

6.2 It is a highly significant document and has been utilised by many services within Blackpool Council to inform greening projects, proposed developments, highlight the importance of parks and green open spaces, identify biodiversity has an important aspect when considering urban planning and identifies the importance of community involvement.

6.3 Therefore, to enhance the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy further the action plan was reviewed on the 20th September with relevant services and external partners attending. Along with further information gained through discussions, research and reference to further Blackpool Council Strategies to create a collaborative and combined approach at achieving the updated actions, whilst taking into account the new and/or updated legislation, best practices and policies.

6.4 Blackpool Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2024-2033

The previous GBI strategy was well considered in the context of the local requirements and aspirations, and set a sensible direction for the development of GBI, which has not drastically changed. However since that strategy was produced, we have gone through the COVID pandemic, recognised the climate emergency, and seen substantial progression of the government's 25-year environment plan. With this has come the application of new financial mechanisms for GBI such as the Biodiversity Net Gain requirement for developers, and programmes of funding for COVID recovery and Levelling Up. These will be considered in the new strategy, to refresh details and

emphasis as necessary.

We are briefly checking the mapping information and evidence base, although we are not anticipating any change to these. We will update the recommended 'Next Steps' covering the 7 step process for planning application and resourcing details. We will also be updating some of the case studies, as some are still relevant but there are more recent examples of projects that are now available and should be highlighted.

6.5 **Blackpool Green Infrastructure Action Plan 2024-2033**

This supersedes the previous Green Infrastructure Action Plan from 2019, but will keep the same 4 Objectives:

- Objective 1: Protect and Enhance Green and Blue Infrastructure
- Objective 2: Create and Restore Green and Blue Infrastructure
- Objective 3: Connect Green and Blue infrastructure
- Objective 4: Promote the Benefits of GBI

Some actions have been removed as they have been completed, in the case of particular projects or development sites, or considered less relevant. Some of the main actions added include an up to date Open Space Assessment from which specific deficiencies and requirements will be identified and resolved. An additional biodiversity audit to identify and assess the quality and value of habitats and wildlife corridors, creating a full parks development plan to pull together some previous actions and timetables for individual parks, and the creation of a communications strategy and plan for all GBI in Blackpool.

The action plan will refer to other plans where GBI is mentioned specifically (e.g. section 1B of the Town Centre Strategy) and will cross reference with other relevant plans and strategies wherever possible. It has also put more of a focus on measurable 'SMART' objectives with a suggested timeline, and measurable outcomes – for example the suggested action for Stanley Park to achieve Green Flag status within 12 months, for all major parks to achieve the same within 2 years. This is intended to make it easy to review progress yearly/ at desired intervals, and provide short, medium and long-term goals.

6.6 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 **List of appendices**

- 7.1 Appendix 6(a) – Draft GBI Strategy
- 7.2 Appendix 6(b) – Draft Action Plan

8.0 Financial considerations

8.1 Many of the actions outlined in the plan will require external funding. Any external funding bids will consider the financial commitment required from Blackpool Council on a bid-by-bid basis.

9.0 Legal considerations

9.1 The strategy and action plan has been updated to reflect the authority's requirements to function in accordance with the Environmental Act. 2021 and Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act. 2006.

10.0 Risk management considerations

10.1 None.

11.0 Equalities considerations and the impact of this decision for our children and young people

11.1 None.

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations

12.1 The entire document and its review contributes significantly to sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations and has been updated to reflect and complement the council's ambitions in this area.

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken

13.1 Significant consultation has taken place with internal and external partners through the review process via small working groups, individual meetings and a collaborative action-planning day with key partners. The Environmental Partnership – TEP (external consultants) have led the consultation and have provided the draft refreshed strategy and action plan.

14.0 Background papers

14.1 None.