

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2014

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

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1. GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY - UPDATE

1.1 Issue for consideration

1.1.1 To consider two issues relating to the preparation of the Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Strategy and make recommendations as necessary.

1.1.2 Issue one: to consider key issues raised in the responses to the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy stakeholder engagement. Attached at Appendix A is a full summary of the key issues raised in the stakeholder engagement exercise.

1.1.3 Issue two: to consider progress of the open space audit, which provides a key piece of evidence underpinning the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and action plan.

1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Planning and Development

1.2.1 That the Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee (PTD OSC) considers the two issues presented and makes recommendations as necessary.

1.2.2 Issue one: the key issues raised in the responses to the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy stakeholder engagement. Attached at Appendix A is a full summary of the key issues raised in the stakeholder engagement exercise.

1.2.3 Issue two: the progress of the open space audit, which provides a key piece of evidence underpinning the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and action plan.

1.3 Reasons for recommendation

1.3.1 The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy is a corporate strategy, covering the borough's open spaces and water bodies. It is being prepared for a number of reasons:

- To bring increased certainty about the importance of this key part of the borough's environment.
- To maximise the number of overlapping benefits of green and blue infrastructure by looking holistically at each area to ensure it is delivering as many benefits as possible.
- To co-ordinate a wide range of stakeholder interests and focus limited resources on a number of interlinked proposals to maximise the benefits for green and blue infrastructure.
- To act as a basis for attracting resources including grant funding and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – where qualifying infrastructure projects are identified.
- To form the basis for GBI delivery, through policies in the Maidstone Borough Local Plan (MBLP) and a supplementary planning document (SPD), which will set quantitative and qualitative standards for types of open space and provide detailed guidance to developers, partners and decision makers on its future provision.

1.3.2 The Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved the GBI Strategy for targeted stakeholder engagement at its meeting on 19 November 2013. The targeted engagement involved a stakeholder workshop held on 16 December 2013 and a six week open consultation period held from December 2013 until late January 2014.

1.3.3 There has been no update since the end of the stakeholder engagement period, this is for two reasons. The open space audit and the MBLP regulation 18 consultation. The open space audit is still ongoing and provides a key piece of evidence to underpin the strategy and action plan. The MBLP regulation 18 consultation, which ran from 21 March 2014 until 7 May 2014, required significant resources, as has

the subsequent and ongoing exercise to analyse the comments that were made.

1.3.4 **Stakeholder engagement – key issues**

1.3.5 Attached as Appendix A to this report is a full summary of key issues raised during the GBI strategy stakeholder engagement exercise. In all there were 48 respondents to the stakeholder engagement, as well as comments raised at the stakeholder event, which followed the same themes.

1.3.6 The preparation of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy was in itself supported, however, concerns were raised on a number of issues.

1.3.7 **Process:**

- Concern that the process of developing the strategy and action plan was too slow and would not be able to impact on the local plan.
- No implementation plan means that there is no confidence in the council being able to deliver.
- Concern was raised over how adequate the consultation was with the parish councils.
- Concern was raised that the strategy may impede economic development.

1.3.8 **Content:**

- The strategy was considered by some to be too focused on the urban area, while others were concerned that there was too much distinction between urban and rural areas.
- The strategy needs a matrix of actions and benefits, including a needs analysis of what improvements are needed and where.
- Concern was raised over the loss of agricultural land (relating to the proposals in the MBLP).
- The strategy needs to link and cross reference existing documents, strategies and projects such as the local biodiversity action plan (LBAP) or biodiversity improvement areas (BOA).

1.3.9 Further comments were made relating to the specifics of the document, making detailed suggestions for improvement and further elements to be included. A range of location specific suggestions were also made. These were either made as suggestions to improve the

document, or as actual improvements to the locations themselves, which would more appropriately be included in an eventual action plan. These comments are summarised in Appendix A.

1.3.10 **Open space audit - update**

1.3.11 The open space audit is a PPG17¹ style assessment of open spaces in the borough. This means that the open spaces are assessed by **quantity, quality and accessibility**.

1.3.12 The two main reasons for the audit are to enable to the council to assess at a strategic level where there is a need for open space provision, either new or improved, and to provide the evidence base to enable the council to require development contributions to open space on a development by development basis. At the strategic level this might translate as new open space provision, perhaps funded by pooling CIL receipts. When looking at a development by development scenario, it might translate as a per head contribution to open space on site, delivered by section 106 planning obligations or by a CIL payment in kind (potentially a land payment instead of money).

1.3.13 **Methodology**

1.3.14 The last time that a comprehensive open space audit was conducted in the borough was in 2004. This was updated partially in 2007. For the 2014 audit, the methodology has been amended to more accurately reflect the desired outcomes of local plan policy.

1.3.15 The 2004 and 2007 audit exercises researched only the quantitative information on open space sites in the borough, i.e. how much open space there is by area. This allowed a quantitative standard to be set per 1000 head of population. This standard provides the basis for the contributions sought through the Open Space DPD and policy OS1, adopted in December 2006.

1.3.16 The 2014 audit researches also qualitative and accessibility information. This will enable the council to seek and apply open space contributions on a more targeted basis. The qualitative information can be used to discriminate where funds might more appropriately be used

¹ PPG17, published in 2002, was the national planning policy guidance note: Planning for Open space, Sport and Recreation. The companion guide, also published in 2002, provided guidance on the assessment of open spaces in respect of quantity, quality and accessibility.

to improve the quality of existing open spaces. Accessibility information can be used on a similar basis, seeking to improve access to existing open space in preference to the provision of new space. Accessibility information can be used also at the strategic scale to identify which communities have existing deficiencies accessing open spaces of any given type.

1.3.17 Other changes to the methodology are that:

- The open space must be publicly accessible.
- The open space types must be quantifiable.
- The recording of open space types should accurately reflect fine grain differences within a given open space site.
- The open space type must be something that is appropriately delivered through/in connection to local plan policy.

1.3.18 This means that whereas the 2004 audit included the following open space types:

1. Parks and gardens
2. Natural and semi-natural green space
3. Amenity green space
4. Provision for children and young people
5. Green corridors
6. Outdoor sports facilities
7. Allotments and community gardens
8. Cemeteries and graveyards

The 2014 audit no longer covers categories 1, 5 and 8.

1.3.19 The reasoning behind the 2014 methodology is that:

- **Parks and gardens** – as entities, parks and gardens in the borough are already assessed against Green Flag standards. For the purpose of the audit, this category has been removed in order to more accurately understand the component open space types that a given park is comprised of e.g. Mote Park has a substantial mixture of natural and semi-natural green space, amenity green space, provision for children and young people and outdoor sports facilities.
- **Green corridors** – it is difficult to quantify green corridors as a single entity and to make determinations of where boundaries lie.

It is also difficult to deliver a green corridor through local plan policy intervention. For the purposes of the audit and ongoing strategy, these are more accurately assessed as their component types e.g. natural and semi-natural green space or amenity green space. These areas can still be identified on a strategic scale within the GBI strategy.

- **Cemeteries and graveyards** – the provision of cemeteries and graveyards is more appropriately dealt with through corporate policy, rather than as an expression of open space planning policy.

1.3.20 **Audit progress to date**

1.3.21 The Parks and Open Spaces team completed the quantitative element of the open space audit in May 2014. This element of the audit involved re-categorising open space sites subject to the revised methodology described at 1.3.17 and 1.3.19.

1.3.22 The council has commissioned consultants to undertake the qualitative element of the audit, with initial results expected at the end of October 2014. The qualitative survey involves the setting of appropriate criteria against which to judge sites, dependent on their categorisation under the five remaining open space types. This is a resource intensive exercise, involving site visits, however, the council has sought to minimise the time taken by using existing information, such as the work already undertaken by the Parks and Open Spaces team on children's play areas, and by applying a size threshold under which sites will not be surveyed.

1.3.23 The accessibility element of the audit is a desktop exercise, which is being completed in house with GIS software. This will be completed in line with the qualitative audit. Using straight line (as the crow flies) radii, which represent accessibility [as distance] standards, it is possible to identify in relative terms where accessibility deficiencies exist.

1.3.24 **Using the results of the audit**

1.3.25 **GBI strategy and action plan** – taken with the stakeholder comments, the results of the audit will inform further discussion with stakeholders to amend the GBI strategy and develop an action plan for implementation.

1.3.26 The timescale for completion and adoption of the GBI strategy is dependent in part on the outcome of the open space audit. Information from the audit will help to guide discussions with the key stakeholders and will enable the development of an appropriate and relevant action plan to sit as part of the strategy.

1.3.27 The next stage of consultation on the local plan (regulation 19) will be in the summer of 2015. However, amendments to local plan allocations and any potential new local plan allocations will be presented to the PTD OSC and Cabinet in January 2015 for recommendation/approval. Any location specific actions developed in the GBI strategy, that require planning policy support e.g. developer contributions from specific sites, would need to be presented to these meetings.

1.3.28 **Green and blue infrastructure supplementary planning document** – the results of the audit will inform the standards for inclusion in the GBI SPD. The open space standards, which will be used to either seek or guide the application of developer contributions, will reflect the audit in the sense that they will come as three sets of standards per open space type – a quantity standard, a quality standard and an accessibility standard.

1.3.29 The GBI SPD will be adopted following the MBLP in early to mid 2016. The SPD must be supplementary to an adopted policy/policies – in this case the relevant policies are DM10 – Historic and natural environment and DM11 – Open space and recreation. Preparation of the SPD can take place in tandem with and prior to the adoption of the local plan, however, the necessary public consultation and adoption must take place afterwards.

1.4 Alternative action and why not recommended

1.4.1 This is an update report for information purposes. There is no alternative action in this case.

1.5 Impact on corporate objectives

1.5.1 **For Maidstone to be a decent place to live.** The three core elements to sustainable development are society, economy and environment. The GBI strategy is involved primarily with improving the environment. The GBI strategy and GBI SPD, with incorporated open space standards, provide the basis on which to request and apply development contributions for open space.

1.6 Risk management

1.6.1 This is an update report for information purposes. No risks are associated with any recommendations in this report.

1.7 Other implications

1.7.1

1. Financial	
2. Staffing	
3. Legal	
4. Equality impact needs assessment	
5. Environmental/sustainable development	X
6. Community safety	
7. Human Rights Act	
8. Procurement	X
9. Asset management	X

1.7.2 **Environmental/sustainable development.** The three core elements of sustainable development are society, economy and environment. The GBI strategy is involved primarily with improving the environment. The GBI strategy and GBI SPD, with incorporated open space

standards, provide the basis on which to request and apply development contributions for open space.

1.7.3 **Procurement.** In the long term the implications coming from the GBI strategy and GBI SPD are that the council may be involved in procuring land for the purposes of GBI provision.

1.7.4 **Asset management.** In the long term, the provision of further GBI assets could require funding for ongoing maintenance and management. A solution to address this would need to be found either through the identification of funds within the council budget or by other means such as ongoing management arrangements with community associations or parish councils.

1.8 Relevant documents

1.8.1 Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy Consultation Draft – October 2013.

1.8.2 Appendices

1.8.3 Appendix A – Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy – key issues raised in stakeholder engagement.

<u>IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT? THIS BOX MUST BE COMPLETED</u>			
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If yes, this is a Key Decision because:			
Wards/Parishes affected:			