MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

FINAL REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL –

GREEN STRATEGY

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AIM OF THE INVESTIGATION

1. The aim of the investigation is to determine how the Council can best implement its Green Strategy and increase biodiversity across Middlesbrough.

MAYOR'S PRIORITIES

2. The scrutiny of this topic fits within the following of the Mayor's Priorities:

    - Physical Environment - We will work closely with local communities to protect our green spaces and make sure that our roads, streets and open spaces are well-designed, clean and safe.

    - Climate Change - We will ensure our town acts to tackle climate change, promoting sustainable lifestyles.

COUNCIL'S CORE OBJECTIVES

3. The scrutiny of this topic aligns with the following Council core objectives as detailed in the Strategic Plan 2021-2024[1]:

    - People - working with communities and other public services to improve the lives of our residents.

    - Place - securing improvements in Middlesbrough's housing, infrastructure and attractiveness, improving the town's reputation, creating opportunities for local people and improving our finances.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

4. The terms of reference for the scrutiny panel's review are:

    A) To examine the Council's proposals to meet Government targets for greenhouse gas emissions, make Middlesbrough more climate resilient, and minimise the environmental impact of services.

    B) To investigate in detail the following elements of Middlesbrough Council's Green Strategy Action Plan:

        - Land Use and Wildlife
        - Culture and Communities
        - Sustainable Transport

    C) To identify and investigate examples of best practice that can be adopted in Middlesbrough.

[1] Middlesbrough Council's Strategic Plan 2021-2024

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

5. In November 2021 the UK Government's Environment Act became law. The aim of this legislation is to improve air and water quality, tackle waste, increase recycling, halt the decline of species and improve the natural environment.

6. In line with the terms of reference, the Scrutiny Panel gathered information in relation to Middlesbrough Council's current plans to make Middlesbrough a greener and healthier place to live and work.

TERM OF REFERENCE A

7. **To examine the Council's proposals to meet Government targets for greenhouse gas emissions, make Middlesbrough more climate resilient, and minimise the environmental impact of services.**

8. Middlesbrough Council declared a climate crisis in 2019 and has set out an ambitious ten year plan to develop a green agenda to rise to the challenge of global warming: aiming to reduce it by its actions. The Council has three broad aims to make Middlesbrough a more sustainable town which are:

    - To make Middlesbrough Council net carbon neutral by 2029.
    - To ensure Middlesbrough as a town is net carbon neutral by 2039.
    - For Middlesbrough Council to be a lead authority on environmental issues.

9. In 2012 Middlesbrough Council adopted the ten One Planet Living principles – a sustainability model based on the United Nations 17 sustainable development goals. As well as environmental improvements, standards and awareness, the principles include: community cohesion, culture, wildlife, landscape, travel, the materials we use and the products we buy, as well as zero waste and carbon energy. The Council's Green Strategy is based on the ten One Planet Living principles.

10. In terms of decarbonisation the two biggest producers are transport and homes. Working with a range of partners, businesses and organisations, as well as communities and residents across Middlesbrough, will be key to the delivery of the Green Strategy. Actions to de-carbonise the transport fleet and other assets, measure carbon output, set carbon budgets, and introduce reduction measures are in place to assist with the net carbon neutral ambition for 2029 but the Council needs to go further and consider more radical methods.

11. The UK Government's aim is to have no new internal combustion vehicles on the roads by the end of 2029. The Council will work with public transport providers to enable their move to sustainable fuel use and develop the installation of an infrastructure to provide electric vehicle charging points across the town. At the time of writing this report, the Council has purchased five electric vehicles.

12. To increase and improve biodiversity the Council intends to create rich and diverse habitats and promote the use of parks and open spaces. This will involve community engagement to encourage residents to support their local green spaces.

13. The Council works with community groups and volunteers and schools and groups to promote greater environmental awareness and make Middlesbrough a greener and better place to live. Community engagement activities and initiatives such as the Boro Champions and Green Spaces Forum are two examples.

14. The Council has responsibilities in relation to purchasing, where to procure services, the type of goods are purchased, and engagement with local suppliers. The Procurement Team is developing a social model of engagement to ensure it has an impact in terms of the local community and business.

15. Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, recycling levels in Middlesbrough had fallen 33% that had been the average for a number of years, to 28%. An Officer has been employed to work on the most challenging areas and implement regular engagement programmes to try and improve recycling rates to a target rate of 40%. Recycling rates are calculated on domestic household waste and an increased number of people have been working at home throughout the pandemic. Accordingly, more domestic waste, which would ordinarily have been disposed of by people at their workplace, has been collected. In addition, many items that are put into recycling are contaminated with food and therefore not recyclable. The level of green waste collected has also risen. Promotion of waste reduction and recycling via social media and education campaigns to raise awareness will help address this issue.

16. The Council is working with Middlesbrough Food Partnership through Environment City to develop and maintain a sustainable and fair food system. Middlesbrough is currently at silver level and aims to become a Gold Sustainable Food place by reducing food poverty and insecurity and promoting food access. Middlesbrough will continue to be a Fair Trade Town and intends to establish a surplus food redistribution hub. There is also an ambition to engage people in farming on an urban scale with a Farm Start Scheme.

17. It is acknowledged that cleaner air and access to green space and sustainable travel and food has significant physical and mental wellbeing benefits. A South Tees Clean Air Strategy will be implemented to improve air quality in Middlesbrough in October 2022. A Beat the Street programme took place in Middlesbrough from September to November 2021 to encourage children discover more about the area by walking, running and cycling. Building on existing practice and local initiatives the Council will explore the development of action zones around schools focusing on areas of environmental benefit, for example car free zones. Environmental opportunities for mental health and wellbeing through the expansion of green social prescribing opportunities will also be implemented.

18. A town-wide Green Strategy Action Plan, led by individual Action Plan Groups is being developed to assist the Council in achieving its objectives. Each Action Plan Group is supervised by a Head of Service and has an Action Plan based on each of the Ten One Planet Living principles. Performance reporting and monitoring of actions and targets is overseen by the Strategy Group, who reports to the Council's Leadership Management Team.

19. During the first year of the development of the Green Strategy, achievements include:

    - Public consultation – good feedback and supportive comments have been received.

- Action Plan Groups and individual Action Plans have been formed and developed.

- Climate Action Middlesbrough: Middlesbrough Environment City has been awarded £1.5 million to develop an action plan for climate change. Community led and focussed projects are underway. A Big Green Week of action was held from 18-26 September 2021 – which was part of the climate action programme and engagement with the public.

- Biodiversity improvements: tree cover has been increased, urban meadows created, bee hives installed, a new wildlife sanctuary and new grasslands have been created.

- A new mowing regime has been introduced in some areas of the town. 'No Mow May' allows flowers such as clover and speedwell to flower and also has a positive impact on pollinators.

- A carbon audit for Middlesbrough Council's vehicle fleet was completed in 2020 which provides a baseline as to how much carbon is being produced and how this can be reduced by electrification or energy efficient vehicles. Five electric vehicles have been purchased and Vehicle to Grid (V2G) charging stations had been installed at Resolution House. Any spare charge left in the vehicle batteries at the end of the day goes back into the grid and this provides an income to the Council.

- An education and awareness programme has been introduced and the Waste Education Officer is working with schools to boost recycling rates. In addition to encouraging children to recycle, the programme encourages them to pass good practice on to their parents. Four of the Council's refuse wagons have been wrapped with nature themes that promote recycling and sustainability.

20. Areas of focus for the next phase of progressing the Green Strategy include:

- Developing a Smart Carbon Tool to measure the Council's baseline carbon level, where it currently stands, where it needs to be and the steps needed to make that change in terms of addressing the 2029 target.

- Launching a staff training module on climate change and carbon reduction in-house, and appoint Green Champions within the Council. Also, as an organisation, to consider measures to effect energy reduction, water saving and recycling.

- Engaging with partners, public, businesses and stakeholders across Middlesbrough to establish how the Council can support their carbon reduction journeys.

- Consider establishing a dedicated ranger or countryside team in Middlesbrough, to try to ensure that as individual projects come to an end, the momentum on bio-diversity is maintained.

- Bio-diversity net gain will be a new focus for the planning system from 2023. Net gain is an approach that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was prior to a new development being built. This could be a key tool in planning

developments and potentially something the Council can benefit from to strive for higher standards and better quality developments.

TERM OF REFERENCE B

21. **To investigate in detail the following elements of Middlesbrough Council's Green Strategy Action Plan:**

    • Land Use and Wildlife
    • Culture and Communities
    • Sustainable Transport

22. Land Use and Wildlife

    The key areas for action identified by the Land Use and Wildlife/Sustainable Water Action Group for Middlesbrough's Green Strategy are:

    - Improve the quality of green space and increase coverage.
    - Increase tree cover.
    - Plant trees along road corridors to increase pollution absorption.
    - Provide greater levels of carbon capture through increased tree cover.
    - Increase the amount of land given over to wildflowers.
    - Become a more bee-friendly town.

23. *Expanding the urban tree network*

    Middlesbrough has quite a low coverage of trees, reflecting in part the fact that it is the most urbanised of the Tees Valley Authority areas. The Council is on track with the Mayor's ambition to plant 10,000 trees per annum, increasing tree cover in the town from 11.8% to reach the national average of 16% by 2025. In May 2021, Middlesbrough Council achieved 'Tree City of the World Status'. This is a global initiative founded by the Arbor Day Foundation and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, which recognises cities that commit to growing and maintaining their urban forest. Successful bids to the Urban Tree Challenge Fund had also provided funding for approximately 2,340 trees since 2019. Planting through development schemes is strongly encouraged and a programme for implementing micro forests is under development.

24. It is considered vital to ensure that the correct species of trees are planted in suitable locations and also that appropriate arrangements for managing those trees are in place. Middlesbrough Council's Tree Policy was refreshed in February 2021 and adopted in May 2021.

25. *Laying the foundations for the nature recovery network.*

    The Tees Valley Nature Partnership represents nature forums across the Tees Valley and identifies and recommends wildlife sites. Three sites already identified in Middlesbrough are Middle Marsh, St Joseph's Cemetery and Stainton Way. The Council continues to seek options for new nature reserves in Middlesbrough, working with the Tees Valley Nature Partnership. Wildlife sites are designated through the planning process and the

Local Plan and management plans for wildlife sites are put in place as appropriate. The Council is considering developing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy which includes all local wildlife sites, so that document is available until the current Local Plan review is completed.

26. The Green Shoots Project is a one year programme which seeks to restore and manage existing local wildlife sites. Sites at Middlebeck, Ormesby, and Marton West Becks have been selected. A long term project is the development of a Country Park at Stainsby.

27. Biodiversity Net Gain – a requirement of the Environment Act is that all new developments and infrastructure projects must deliver a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain. The Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has produced a number of tools for measuring biodiversity levels. The proposal for Middlesbrough is to deliver biodiversity gain on site in the first instance, or if that is not possible, on other sites in Middlesbrough. If delivering that net gain is not possible in the Middlesbrough area, then it will be delivered within the Tees Valley or further afield. Middlesbrough Council is working with the other Tees Valley Authorities to achieve a strategic and consistent approach across the area on delivering this aim. It is potentially a mechanism for taking money from development and putting it into local wildlife sites to enhance them, manage them better, and increase biodiversity.

28**.** *Blue corridors: enhancing the beck valleys*

Middlesbrough has a series of beck valleys running north and south that create green corridors feeding into the River Tees. These becks are important resources not only for biodiversity, but also for recreational facilities, and also provide key links. At the time of this investigation, tasks have not yet been set for this element, however it was likely that initiatives would aim to improve the quality of water courses and seek opportunities to develop greater access and interpretation.

29. *Development of a network of multifunctional Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)*

Middlesbrough Council will adopt a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SuDS) Guide to ensure that SuDs are incorporated as integral elements in development proposals as natural-looking features.

30. *Rethinking urban grasslands*

One of the objectives in the Green Strategy is to make Middlesbrough more bee friendly. Cutting back on the mowing regimes and allowing more wildflower meadows will increase pollinator trails for bees. The Council has adopted a regime that includes cutting less often and seeding more wildflower meadows, grasslands and highway verges.

31. *Embedding the principles of the Green Strategy/GBIS into policy and new developments*

A Green Blue Infrastructure Strategy (GBIS) has been adopted by the Council to provide a better understanding of the green and blue elements of the town and assist in the development of the Local Plan and is considered critical in delivering the key elements of Middlesbrough's Green Strategy. The six themes in the GBIS include:

Regeneration, Heritage and Sense of Place, Biodiversity and Geodiversity, Reconnecting Communities with Nature, A Resilient Landscape, The Blue Network and Waterfronts and Walking and Cycling. A Green Blue Infrastructure checklist is being developed to ensure that green and blue infrastructure and the Green Strategy are at the forefront of any new developments. The Urban Design Framework has also been updated.

32. Culture and Communities

The Culture and Communities Action Group's current objectives are ambitious, high level and form a long term strategy:

- Develop an ambitious town wide approach to environmentalism with arts organisations in Middlesbrough. The 20 year vision is that all arts organisations are carbon neutral by 2040.

- Increase public awareness and engagement in green issues. The 20 year vision is that Middlesbrough is recognised for relevant cultural programming that is focussed on the environment.

- Increase public engagement with Middlesbrough's open spaces. The 20 year vision is to increase footfall and engagement from diverse range of communities.

- Create the most radical parks in the UK. The 20 year vision is that Middlesbrough is recognised as the place with the most innovative parks in 2040.

- Develop a cultural capital plan for Middlesbrough.

- Increase access to culture for communities in Middlesbrough.

33. Successes in the first year of the strategy include:

- New events at Newham Grange Farm encouraging the use of green spaces. The creation of a new covered space dedicated to environmentalism as a whole and the story of the farm and food, as well as a live beehive.

- Implementation of new events in Middlesbrough parks including "Nightfall" which encouraged 20,000 visitors to Stewart Park over four days. This was a partnership event with Stellar Projects.

- Developed a new investment prospectus for cultural capital investment outlining plans as for the whole town and heritage sector.

- Successfully secured a £5 million pound bid for developing cultural buildings in the town centre. The bid includes £2.5 million for the Central Library.

- Developed an outdoor Holiday Action Fund programme for young people in Middlesbrough's parks. Parks and Museums work collaboratively to engage young people and encourage them to think of parks as cultural venues and visit with their families.

- Secured funding to host an Eco–festival.

- Parks investment including £100K for Albert Park capital investment, £45K for Stewart Park from Section 106 Funding, potential investment from the Lawn Tennis Association for resurfacing tennis courts in Albert Park, Holiday Action Funding and Arts Council funding for park events including a circus, fairy tales on ice, party in the park, the MELA and sports activities.

34. There are no additional resources or capacity for the Green Strategy and initiatives are being delivered from within the current Culture and Communities budget. The aim was to embed the ethos of the Green Strategy into everything that the service does.

35. Sustainable Transport

Middlesbrough Council aims to set the example and provide information and infrastructure to allow businesses and residents, as well as itself, to adopt sustainable behaviours and strategies. To do that, the Council needs to provide credible and affordable alternatives for public transport, in particular for people to navigate around the town, and ensure positive behaviours are instinctive rather than a personal burden or a compromise for individuals or businesses.

36. The Council's Sustainable Transport Action Group is developing and expanding the walking and cycling network to encourage a modal shift for Middlesbrough residents, businesses and workers who commute in and out of Middlesbrough each day. Within the Local Implementation Plan (LIP) the Council has followed Department for Transport (DFT) guidance, and national policy, and flipped the road user hierarchy to ensure that pedestrians and cyclists have priority on the road. Whilst it will be a slow process to embed this aim across Middlesbrough, it will ultimately provide gains across the town.

37. During 2021 new cycle lanes have been installed along Low Lane to ensure new housing developments are connected with existing network and to improve east/west connectivity. The cycle networks are intended to be used by both commuters and families. Not all cycle paths are designed to be the most direct route and this can lead to people cycling on the roads to reach their destination. The Council has a publically available map of all the cycle routes and a new cycle signage strategy is also being developed for the town.

38. A travel planning service, is being introduced which will be embedded in the Planning process. This service will provide information, advice and guidance to residents as to how they can access their neighbourhood and travel networks. Moving house is an opportunity for people to change their travel habits and the Council is keen to seize that opportunity. The Council also works with Housing Developers to secure Section 106 funding for new sustainable travel routes across the town.

39. Working with the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), the Council is in regular contact with transport operators and providers. Operators are keen to expand their networks and grow their services but plans have been severely impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic. Public transport usage has declined during the past eighteen months and the future of the public transport network is uncertain in terms of what the new normal will become.

40. The TVCA is the Strategic Transport Authority for the Tees Valley area. The five Tees Valley Local Authorities and the TVCA have been working collaboratively with bus operators to establish a Bus Service Improvement Partnership (BSIP). At the time writing this report, draft documentation for the partnership is out to consultation. The Partnership will help re-route services from different parts of the town to provide better coverage. Bus services need to be financially viable since no subsidies are available, as has been the case in previous years. The BSIP will give the Local Authorities more power to work with local operators and encourage the introduction of smart cards, easy payments options, marketing to encourage young people onto buses, and persuade people to leave their cars at home and use public transport. Whilst it is a voluntary partnership, there will be a signed agreement between operators, Local Authorities and the TVCA. The BSIP should be in place by April 2022.

41. The main constraints on the road network are generally experienced at two peak times during the day: coinciding with the school day and work commutes. During school holidays there is a 20% reduction of traffic at those times. If the town can continue to grow with housing and commercial developments, but live with the school holiday level of traffic, traffic congestion will not be an issue. The fact that more people are working from home since the Covid 19 pandemic, should also have a positive impact.

42. Work is also ongoing in respect of the rail network and the various franchises to increase more sustainable transport options at each station.

43. Another key aim is to continue to improve the air quality in Middlesbrough. Monitoring at various junctions in and out of Middlesbrough has shown that there has been improvement in the air quality. One proven measure is to introduce 20 mph speed limits. Low speed vehicles in urban areas naturally improves the air quality. Most residential areas in Middlesbrough have 20 mph speed limits but there are still a couple of areas where they need to be implemented. The Council is collaborating with the TVCA to secure additional funding to put more schemes in.

44. An Infrastructure Plan is currently being developed which will identify the location of new housing developments, pressures on the network, and measures that can be introduced to relieve those pressures. The Infrastructure Plan will highlight the key travel corridors across the town, be colour coded, and easy to understand. The Plan will also include details of how the travel corridors will be funded and where Section 106 funding is be available.

45. As of July 2021, there are approximately 1500 electric vehicles owned by Tees Valley residents. The Tees Valley Combined Authority has £2 million funding available to invest to fund the supply, installation, maintenance and back office system for a network of EVCPs across Tees Valley over a five year period.

46. Early in 2021, a market engagement exercise was undertaken to inform the procurement specification and process for the Tees Valley Combined Authority's Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Project. An open procurement process was undertaken in March 2021 to appoint to a single supplier framework, which was awarded to EB Charging in June 2021. The framework is available for use by all public bodies across Tees Valley for the next five years, giving them the option to avoid carrying out a full procurement exercise if required.

47. A phased approach to Electric Vehicle Charging Point (EVCP) site construction has been adopted as follows:

- Phase 1 – Local Authority controlled sites – such as public car parks. This phase will be implemented over a two year period.

- Phase 2 –Other public sites - including Further Education, NHS, Network Rail, Highways England - subject to future funding / bidding opportunities.

Over 50% of the sites put forward for Phase 1 have to support surrounding residential areas that do not have access to off-street parking. The development/feasibility work for Phase 2 will run simultaneously with Phase 1.

48. The TVCA worked closely with the five Tees Valley Councils to establish a list of prioritised sites for Phase 1 that are either owned by the local authorities, or the TVCA, as per the procurement specification. In January 2022, installation of EVCPs was approved by the Executive Member for Regeneration in the following Middlesbrough Council operated car parks: Zetland, Captain Cook, France Street, MIMA and Stewart Park. The car parks selected need to be accessible 24/7 and EVCPs will be installed in prominent areas, both to minimise the risk of vandalism and hopefully encourage electric vehicle ownership through their visibility. Phase 1 of the Tees Valley EVCP network should be operational by Summer 2023.

49. The EVCPs are compatible with all electric vehicles with the exception of Tesla vehicles, which can currently only use their own charging points. Users can set up an online account, and pay with a mobile phone or debit card.

50. The TVCA will fund all costs including equipment, installation, maintenance and back office system. The TVCA will retain ownership of the infrastructure and the revenue generated by the network to pay for electricity costs. Any remaining revenue will be re-invested into the network. The energy supplied is 100% renewable.

TERM OF REFERENCE C

To identify and investigate examples of best practice that can be adopted in Middlesbrough.

51. <u>West Bromwich Outdoor Market</u>

Sandwell Council is situated to the west of Birmingham in what is traditionally called the Black Country: comprising Sandwell, Walsall, Dudley and West Bromwich, with a population of approximately 300,000. There are quite high levels of deprivation compared to English averages. The Borough of Sandwell has six towns, with West Bromwich being the main one and it has been designated as a regional centre.

52. The West Bromwich market has been operating since 1984 and was originally set up in the pedestrianised high street and run on demountable stalls. In 2004 the stalls were replaced with permanent steel structures with a tin roof that was very functional and worked well. However, over time a high level of anti-social behaviour occurred within the market area.

53. Planners consider that street markets are a significant contributor to retail diversification and similar to most Councils currently, Sandwell was looking at how to diversify the high street. Street markets are seen as a contributor to that process, especially in Sandwell where many residents have a low income. Markets are used by quite a lot of the population who tend to shop often, and spend small amounts of money, rather than stocking up every two weeks at the larger supermarkets. Irrespective of commercial and regeneration benefits, the market also engenders a social element in town centres that otherwise might not be there.

54. Sandwell Council worked with the Police to find a solution to design out some of anti-social behaviour issues, and also considered how to improve the aesthetics of the market and contribute to environmental improvements. Various 'off the shelf solutions' were considered and one major issue was the roof structure. Demountable roofs or those that can be rolled off are operational problematic and expensive. The prospect of a glass roof on a high street on a market was proposed.

55. The Council approached a leisure operator that provides glass roof structures for amenity buildings. The roofs are solar panels, with filaments within the glass that are photocells which allow the structure to generate electricity. PolySolar is the only company in the UK to sell this unique transparent solar PV glass roof that generates renewable energy from sunlight. They have previously been used for amenity buildings and bus shelters but not for a market. The company worked with the Sandwell conceptually, and the product was procured through the Council's regular procurement process.

56. The final product is a self-supporting structure with a transparent apex roof. LED lighting is installed in the apex of the roof so that the stalls can be used during the evenings as they have their own integral lighting.

57. *"The 50 percent light transmission glass roof canopy generates 20,000 kWh of carbon free electricity annually, while allowing light to flood through to the stalls below. The solar PV glass further reduces the heat gain below, provides a safe and aesthetic environment, while delivering clear free renewable energy that is used locally or fed back to the grid."*[2]

[2] Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council: Urban greening - West Bromwich outdoor market | Local Government Association https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/sandwell-metropolitan-borough-council-urban-greening-west-bromwich-outdoor-market

59. Consideration is being given to retro-fitting some battery storage, although this is quite expensive.

60. The project cost was £467,000 which included the installation of 36 market stalls which contribute to wider climate action in Sandwell. Funding for the project came from the Towns Fund.

61. Grey to Green

"Grey to Green is an award-winning scheme bringing colour and sustainability to inner-city Sheffield. It offers a calm refuge in an urban environment and has transformed a tarmacked area into a green public space that encourages cycling and walking. Designed with climate change, wellbeing and economic investment in mind, Grey to Green is helping to lay foundations for a healthy, sustainable future for this part of Sheffield."[3]

62. Grey to Green is a strategy rather than a project. Phase One was completed in 2016, Phase 2 is due to complete in 2022 and Phase 3 is in the planning stage.

63. The project area was badly flooded in 2007, it was not connected properly to the rest of the city centre, and there was no reason for people to go into that area. Sites had been dormant for a number of years, including an unoccupied Grade A office block. The riverside was nearby and there were businesses, the Home Office, and some residential flats in the area but little investment interest. Since 2014, the climate emergency has

[3] Grey to Green – Sheffield https://www.greytogreen.org.uk/

become more prominent and the covid-19 pandemic encouraged people to utilise open and green spaces more. Although the greening of the area is the biggest single success for people, it is in fact an unintended consequence of the Grey to Green strategy as it was originally conceived to provide economic value.

64. The big challenges for the strategy were:

- Flooding and water management generally.
- Infrastructure and Maintenance.
- Connectivity and the wider city.
- Realising the area's economic potential.
- Safe and attractive settings that would draw people, uses and investment.
- Re-establishing the Riverside Business District.

65. The scheme is mainly a highways scheme and the project area was disconnected from the wider city centre. Four of the city's major hotels were on the wrong side of the former ring road as well as the Victoria Quays canal. The one and a half kilometre route coincided with the ring road. Phase 1 cost around £3.5 million, with £1 million contribution from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the rest from the Sheffield City Region Fund (SCRIF) and the Sheffield Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF). Phase 2 has also been funded from European money but on the basis of environmental benefits such as increased biodiversity, reduction in CO2 and flooding, rather than economic activity.

66. Large scale retrofitted Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDs) have been implemented to manage surface flooding. Whilst SuDs do not prevent flooding they manage excess water by slowing its journey to the river or sewers. It is the longest retrofit SuDs project in the country.

67. The key concepts of the project are to use limited spaces – mainly a road – to provide multiple uses and functions and a strong sense of place. The role of city centres is changing, becoming more about residential areas and less about shops and retail. The strategy aims to:

- Create a setting for investment.
- Manage rainwater discharge to the river through SuDs.
- Provide opportunities for sustainable transport and connectivity.
- Introduce innovative meadow planting and develop the green linear route theme.
- Reclaim the highways and activate urban spaces that better reflect the surrounding area's opportunities.

68. Traffic modelling was undertaken to prove that the road could be re-purposed and used for cycle lanes and SuDs. As the roads were going to be narrowed and active travel routes created, it was important to make sure areas were connected appropriately. The Council team designed the narrowing of the road and there was work was undertaken on the contamination below the tarmac surfaces. The landscape architects did not want to line the SuDs beds as there was a risk of plants dying. It was proved that plants actually cleaned some of the contaminant substances so that cleaner water went into the river and sewers. The Council also drew on evidence from other similar schemes such as High Line Park in New York.

69. The benefits and economic impact to date include:

- Integration of the Riverside Business District into the core of the city centre.
- Creation of a network of high quality public spaces and infrastructure which will establish the area as a distinctive location for new businesses.
- Positive impact on a high number of development sites.
- West Bar – the only quality location in the city for a large scale office development.
- High Speed 2 City Centre Station.
- Phase 1 provides a 0.492km green corridor (overall project 1.2 km).
- Improved signage to the Riverside Business District.

70. The planted areas consist of large number perennials, bulbs and trees are cut once a year at the end of January. A three year maintenance scheme was procured at the start of Phase 1 with the contractor who had done the planting. So if some plants failed they had to be replaced. The types of plants and trees used were carefully selected to be low maintenance. Although the trees are deciduous they do not drop a lot of leaves and do not need to be crowned. Plants grow at different heights throughout the year to a maximum of around one metre at their peak between April and September. The schemes are designed to provide colour and cover all year round. Additional litter bins have been installed and litter picking regimes are in place.

71. Whilst there had been some strong resistance to the scheme initially, these challenges have been overcome and generally people welcomed and enjoyed the new surroundings.

72. Before and After Photos [4]

[4] Grey to Green Phase 1 - Sheffield Riverside Business District – Sheffield City Council 2016 – Before & After Photos

CONCLUSIONS

73. The scrutiny panel reached the following conclusions in respect of its investigation:

74. **TERM OF REFERENCE A**

To examine the Council's proposals to meet Government targets for greenhouse gas emissions, make Middlesbrough more climate resilient, and minimise the environmental impact of services.

Since declaring a climate crisis in 2019, Middlesbrough Council set out a ten year plan to take the lead on environmental issues, become net carbon neutral by 2029 and ensure the town is net carbon neutral by 2029.

The Council's Green Strategy, based on the ten One Planet Living principles, will help the Council achieve its aims, along with Government targets, by taking sustained action on environmental improvements, standards and awareness, community cohesion, culture, wildlife, landscape, travel, materials, consumables, waste and carbon energy.

During the first year of the Green Strategy Action Plan, amongst other achievements, there have been many biodiversity improvements throughout the town, a Big Green

Week of action in September 2021, a carbon audit of the Council's vehicle fleet, and an awareness and education programme introduced to boost recycling rates.

75. **TERM OF REFERENCE B**

To investigate in detail the following elements of Middlesbrough Council's Green Strategy Action Plan:

- **Land Use and Wildlife**
- **Culture and Communities**
- **Sustainable Transport**

All three Action Groups have identified key areas for action and are developing initiatives that contribute to Middlesbrough becoming a greener and more sustainable place to live.

From the evidence presented, it is acknowledged that for the Council to achieve many of its green ambitions, community awareness and engagement must be encouraged and improved. Middlesbrough Council needs to lead by example and ensure that the Green Strategy is embedded in, and promoted by, everything that it does. There are several long-established community groups working hard on environmental issues in the town that could benefit from additional volunteers and publicity.

The introduction of measures such as the Local Implementation Plan (LIP), additional Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCPs), Travel Planning Service, Bus Service Improvement Partnership (BSIP) and the Council's new Infrastructure Plan, will aid the move to more sustainable travel around Middlesbrough and the Tees Valley. It was however recognised that there was still more action that needed to be taken in respect of improving public transport and encouraging modal shift and that there were no easy solutions. Similarly it was noted that the technologies associated with electric vehicles were still evolving and the TVCA's Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Project would not necessarily meet the demand for EVCPs within the Tees Valley.

76. TERM OF REFERENCE C

To identify and investigate examples of best practice that can be adopted in Middlesbrough.

Sheffield City Council's Grey to Green Strategy and Sandwell Metropolitan Council's West Bromwich Market Outdoor Market project provided the Panel with ideas that could be potentially be adopted in Middlesbrough. As well as the positive environmental impacts of both projects there are also tangible social and economic benefits.

Sheffield's Grey to Green Strategy incorporates many of the key areas for action identified by the Land Use and Wildlife/Sustainable Water Action Group for Middlesbrough's Green Strategy. There are also ideas in both projects that could perhaps contribute to Middlesbrough's town centre regeneration - a topic explored in the Panel's scrutiny review of Middlesbrough Regeneration Post-Covid 19, which was undertaken in 2020/2021. In particular the Panel thought that the introduction of a regular street market could greatly

benefit the town, although further detailed investigation would need to be undertaken as to the viability of this suggestion.

Anecdotally, the outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic in the UK in early 2020, has increased the importance of attractive and well maintained outdoor public spaces for some businesses such as cafes, bars, restaurants and markets, as well as for exercise and other leisure activities and entertainment or performance venues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

77. Following the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel's recommendations for consideration by the Executive are as follows:

A) Explore the potential for a permanent structure modelled on the West Bromwich Outdoor Market project that could provide a covered performance area in Captain Cook Square, or stalls for street markets or community events, that would also generate renewable electricity and contribute to Middlesbrough's net carbon neutral targets.

B) Middlesbrough Council should liaise with Sheffield City Council regarding their Grey to Green Strategy, ensure that the Council's Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SuDS) Guide identifies appropriate plant species that are attractive, low maintenance, improve biodiversity net gain and provide all season coverage for use in SuDs planting schemes and more generally throughout the town.

C) Review and replace signage and information boards as necessary on dedicated cycle routes throughout the Town to help cyclists plan their leisure or commute journeys and use the available network efficiently.

D) Produce a map or guide to the cycle network either in paper format, or that could be downloaded onto a digital device from the Council's website or made available from the Middlesbrough's Town Hall, Libraries and/or Community Hubs.

E) Through the planning process, encourage Developers to include Electric Vehicle Charging Point (EVCPs) in new houses, housing or commercial developments.

F) Middlesbrough Council should continue to press the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) to seek further funding to at least maintain the current number of bus services, and increase them wherever possible.

G) Middlesbrough Council should ask the TVCA to work with Local Authorities to ensure that new bus routes are provided in all new housing developments at the point of delivery, so that greater patronage of services can be encouraged as soon as houses are occupied.

H) Introduce a Wash, Squash and Recycle Campaign to reduce the level and volume of contaminated items currently collected from domestic recycling bins, and improve current recycling rates.

I) Trial a pilot scheme in one or two wards, for sowing more wildflower areas and moving to a monthly grass cutting regime, with more frequent litter picking, and grass cleared from the footpaths immediately after mowing.

J) Continue to build on initiatives such as the Green Month Takeover and Green Action Days to promote and improve membership of established local volunteer groups and encourage greater participation by Elected Members, Council Employees and Middlesbrough Residents to make Middlesbrough greener.

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Charlotte Nicol, Head of Culture, Middlesbrough Council
Chris Orr, Infrastructure Programme Manager, Middlesbrough Council
Gerry Ritchie, Markets Manager, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

79. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The following sources were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- Middlesbrough Council's Strategic Plan 2021-2024
- Green Strategy – A Greener Future for Middlesbrough
- Grey to Green Sheffield - https://www.greytogreen.org.uk/
- Grey to Green Phase 1 - Sheffield Riverside Business District – Sheffield City Council 2016 – Before & After Photos
- Minutes of the meetings of the EDEI Scrutiny Panel held on 8 September, 6 October, 1 December 2021, 12 January 2022, 9 February and 9 March 2022.
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council: Urban greening - West Bromwich outdoor market | Local Government Association https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/sandwell-metropolitan-borough-council-urban-greening-west-bromwich-outdoor-market

80. **ACRONYMS**

A-Z listing of common acronyms used in the report:

BSIP – Bus Services Improvement Plan
DFT – Department for Transport
EVCP - Electric Vehicle Charging Point

GBIS - Green Blue Infrastructure Strategy
LIP – Local Implementation Plan
SuDS – Sustainable Drainage Systems
TVCA – Tees Valley Combined Authority
V2G – Vehicle to Grid

COUNCILLOR S WALKER
- CHAIR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL

The membership of the scrutiny panel is as follows:

Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel 2021-2022
Councillors S Walker (Chair), R Arundale (Vice Chair), D Branson, D Coupe, T Furness, J Hobson, B Hubbard, T Mawston, M Saunders, M Storey

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