

Report of:	Executive Member for Regeneration - Councillor Eric Polano Director of Regeneration - Richard Horniman
-------------------	---

Submitted to:	Executive - 13 July 2021
----------------------	--------------------------

Subject:	Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2021 - 2037
-----------------	--

Summary

Proposed decision(s)
That Executive adopts the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2021 – 2037.

Report for:	Key decision:	Confidential:	Is the report urgent?
Decision	Yes	No	No

Contribution to delivery of the 2020-23 Strategic Plan		
People	Place	Business
The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy assists with the delivery of the Mayor’s Priority of ‘Ensuring our town is an absolute leader on environmental issues’.	The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy assists with the delivery of the Mayor’s Priorities of ‘Protecting our Green Spaces’ and ‘Making Middlesbrough look and feel amazing’.	The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy assists with the delivery of the Mayor’s Priority of ‘ <i>Creating positive perceptions of our town on a national basis</i> ’.

Ward(s) affected
All Wards

What is the purpose of this report?

- To adopt the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2021 – 2037 (GBIS).

Why does this report require a Member decision?

- The GBIS will support the delivery of the Council’s Green Strategy. It is designed to identify and prioritise the actions required to strengthen Middlesbrough’s network of green and blue infrastructure up until 2037, and will be a key evidence document in

the preparation of the Local Plan. The GBIS will become a material planning consideration in the determination of future planning applications. Adopting the GBIS will affect more than two wards, meaning it is a key decision. As such, it falls within the remit of the Executive.

Report Background

3. In March 2020, the Council appointed Land Use Consultants to prepare a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy covering the period 2021 – 2037 in support of the Local Plan review. Its purpose is to inform the development of policy and to help shape development opportunities, whilst respecting environmental designations and protection areas. It will provide a robust and credible evidence base upon which the Local Plan can be prepared, in line with national planning policy and guidance.
4. Middlesbrough is a geographically constrained borough, with a significant proportion of its area having already been urbanised through development. As the Council continues to deliver development to meet its economic and housing needs and ambitions, the supply of greenfield land around the periphery of the urban area will inevitably continue to diminish. Within this context, it is becoming increasingly important that green infrastructure within the urban core (including provision as part of new housing developments) is of a sufficiently quantity, quality and accessibility to meet the needs of our growing population.
5. The GBIS will be used by the Council to help shape the future of the borough, to ensure that new and existing communities live in quality places, accessible to green and blue infrastructure. It will help us frame our response to emerging issues, including achieving biodiversity net gain and climate change prevention/mitigation.
6. The GBIS takes into consideration, and builds upon, existing strategies and studies, including:
 - Strategic Plan for Middlesbrough
 - Open Space Needs Assessment
 - Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
 - Landscape Assessment
 - Green Wedges Study
 - Playing Pitch Strategy
 - Tees Valley Wildlife Trust Assessment of Sites
 - New ecology designations (SPA/SSSI)
 - Masterplans and other relevant briefs
 - Rights of Way Improvement Plan
 - Public Rights of Way and Sustainable Drainage Systems standards documents
 - Middlesbrough Council's One Planet Living agenda
7. In preparing the GBIS, statutory consultees and other key stakeholders, including Councillors, were consulted and invited to take part in stakeholder workshops. Due to the lockdown associated with the COVID pandemic, it was necessary to undertake these consultation activities virtually, using a new and innovative online consultation portal. Whilst this was not our original intention, it worked extremely well and we received a significant amount of positive feedback. The outcomes of the engagement have been taken into consideration in finalising the GBIS.

8. The key aspects of the Strategy are set out below:

- A Vision to 2037 - Middlesbrough will be the greenest town in Tees Valley, and one where regeneration is firmly led by the 'green and blue' rather than the 'grey'; and
- A series of six GBI Themes (that formed the basis for the earlier consultation with key stakeholder) with key issues and emerging opportunities for each:
 - Theme 1: Regeneration, heritage and 'sense of place'
 - Theme 2: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
 - Theme 3: Reconnecting Communities with Nature
 - Theme 4: A Resilient Landscape
 - Theme 5: The Blue Network and Waterfronts
 - Theme 6: Walking and Cycling

9. The GBIS is accompanied with an action plan, which identifies a series of 15 Objectives from the baseline review and key stakeholder consultation:

- **Objective 1.1:** To enable the GBI network to underpin Middlesbrough's ambitious regeneration schemes, 'urban living' agenda and the revival of the Borough's high streets and local centres.
- **Objective 1.2:** To ensure that an enhanced GBI network both 'frames' and connects Middlesbrough's historic environment, and helps to boost the local visitor economy.
- **Objective 2.1:** To provide a diverse, expansive and well-connected ecological network as a foundation for the Borough's Nature Recovery Network and to enable greater resilience to the effects of climate change.
- **Objective 2.2:** To provide clear context for the delivery of locally appropriate Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in new development.
- **Objective 3.1:** To help narrow the gap between the health and wellbeing of Middlesbrough residents and the rest of the UK through the provision and maintenance of a strong, connected and truly accessible green and open space network.
- **Objective 3.2:** To support and enhance the efforts of numerous local community groups working on GBI initiatives.
- **Objective 3.3:** To unlock land for community scale food-growing initiatives, in order to support community cohesion, tackle physical and mental health challenges and to nurture 'locally grown' approaches to food provision.
- **Objective 4.1:** To boost the resilience of Middlesbrough's landscape to the impacts of climate change, including flood risk and increasing temperatures.
- **Objective 4.2:** To enable Middlesbrough's landscape to play a key part in mitigating against the effects of climate change by expanding the Borough's 'carbon sink'.
- **Objective 4.3:** To increase tree canopy cover across the Borough in line with national targets.
- **Objective 5.1:** To improve the relationship between the town and the River Tees by mending links between urban areas waterfronts, while respecting the integrity of sensitive habitats.
- **Objective 5.2:** To maximise the potential of Middlesbrough's Beck Valleys as green corridors and high quality multifunctional GBI assets.
- **Objective 5.3:** To shift perceptions of the role that sitting water can play in Middlesbrough's landscape when pursuing nature-based and Sustainable

Drainage System (SuDS) solutions to long-term flood risk management across a variety of green and blue spaces.

- **Objective 6.1:** To support the Borough's 'modal shift' ambitions toward active travel by creating attractive walking and cycling routes, and better connecting the town's network of greenways.
- **Objective 6.2:** To integrate 'urban greening' features fully into active travel infrastructure schemes and the design of future streets.

10. In addition, the Action Plan identifies 12 Priority Opportunities:

- **Laying the foundations for a Nature Recovery Network**
 - Filling the strategic 'gaps' in the Borough's biodiversity network through habitat creation and restoration, with an emphasis on key focus areas and corridors.
- **A Green-Blue grid for Middlehaven**
 - A 'framework' of green and blue infrastructure that guides the development of the Greater Middlehaven area, based on key assets, opportunities and heritage assets.
- **Station Gateway and Middlesbrough 'low line'**
 - Creating a 'green corridor' through the regenerated station quarter to help combat existing 'severance' between Middlehaven and the town centre, boosting walking and cycling as well as local business resilience.
- **Supporting a re-imagined Town Centre**
 - Providing urban greening features in the town centre which support a 'place-based' approach to high street revival, by reshaping spaces to encourage people to linger rather than simply pass through.
- **The 15-minute town: enabling walking and cycling**
 - The creation of greenways and 'linear parks' to link key green spaces + the 'greening' of key walking and cycling routes to support a modal shift away from the private car.
- **Blue corridors: enhancing the Beck Valleys**
 - Restoration of the Beck Valleys as multi-functional recreational, educational and biodiversity assets.
- **Expanding the urban tree network**
 - Expansion of woodland cover in order to meet local and national targets, and to provide multiple GBI benefits and combat climate change.
- **Edible townscapes**
 - Identifying and transforming under-used areas of land for urban growing and requiring integration of food growing space into new development.
- **Rethinking urban grassland**
 - Rethinking of mowing regimes to encourage 'rewilding' of road verges and areas of amenity grassland to create pollinator trails.
- **Network of multi-functional SuDS**
 - Setting higher benchmarks for SuDS to combat flood risk while serving as multi-functional GBI assets.
- **Low-traffic neighbourhoods**
 - Reclaiming and 'greening' the streetscape in urban neighbourhoods using modal filters.

- **Green schools**

- Making use of school grounds for SuDS, urban growing, tree planting and urban meadows, enabling the GBI network to be used as an educational resource.

11. Since the GBIS was commissioned, the Council has progressed with its Green Strategy. The GBIS will be used to inform the land-use and spatial aspects of the Green Strategy.

Next Steps

12. The GBIS has been finalised, taking into account all of the comments received during the stakeholder consultations and workshops. The final version of the GBIS has two parts, which are attached at Appendices 1 and 2.

13. Following its adoption, the GBIS will be used: as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan; as a material consideration in the determination of any future planning applications; to inform the Green Strategy; and to support relevant projects.

What decision(s) are being asked for?

14. That Executive adopts the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2021 – 2037.

Why is this being recommended?

15. The GBIS sets out the key land-use and spatial priorities and opportunities to help deliver the Council's Green Strategy, and ensure that there is sufficient green and blue infrastructure, of the right types, to support the needs of existing and future residents. It will provide the evidence base to support the emerging Local Plan and will become a material consideration in future planning applications.

Other potential decisions and why these have not been recommended

16. **Not to adopt the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2021 – 2037.** This will mean that the Council will not have a clear strategy for delivering the land-use and spatial aspects of its Green Strategy. It will be more challenging to deliver green and blue infrastructure, of the right quality, to support future needs.

Impact(s) of recommended decision(s)

Legal

17. There are no statutory requirements relating to the preparation of documents such as the GBIS.

18. Consultation has been undertaken in accordance with the legislation and latest Government guidance on undertaking public consultations in view of Covid-19.

19. Once adopted, the GBIS will become part of the evidence base for the Local Plan, and a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Financial

20. The costs associated with the preparation of the GBIS have been met from established departmental budgets.

Policy Framework

21. The GBIS will support preparation and delivery of the Local Plan, which is part of the Council's Policy Framework.
22. The adoption of the GBIS will not alter the Policy Framework.

Equality and Diversity

23. The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2021 – 2037 has been subject to an initial Impact Assessment (IA), which accompanies this report (see Appendix 2). This identifies that a full IA is not necessary.

Risk

24. The following risks are considered to be affected by this report:

Risk No	Risk Description	Impact of Report
O1-005	If poor economic growth occurs, then this will reduce public and private sector investment in the town, including town centre retail, housing development and business.	The GBI network will underpin the Council's ambitious regenerations schemes in relation to urban living and the revival of the high street. The GBIS is a key evidence document in the preparation for the new Local Plan. It looks to provide urban green features in the town centre which will support high street revival by encouraging people to linger rather than pass through. The proposal will have a positive impact on this risk.
O1-052	Substantial areas of the town have high residential voids/low sales values and high population churn, effectively creating market failure resulting in significant social consequences which in turn have implications for Council resources and service delivery. Such an approach is unsustainable and will result in the need for significant market invention at great cost to the Council.	The GBIS will become part of the evidence base for the Local Plan, will be considered in any future planning applications, and will inform the Green Strategy and relevant projects. The review of the Local Plan will create a positive planning framework for areas so this will have a positive impact on this risk.
O1-048	That the capacity of the rail station isn't increased to allow for all current and future services arriving and departing	The GBI will promote a green corridor through the regenerated station quarter. It will also enhance and connect Middlesbrough's historic environment which

	from Middlesbrough including the new direct London service from 2021.	should help to boost the local visitor economy and therefore it will have a positive impact on this risk.
O8-055	If the Council doesn't respond effectively and efficiently to legislative changes it could be in breach of statutory duties in relation to service delivery and fail to make the most of opportunities.	Consultation on the GBIS has been undertaken in accordance with the legislation and latest Government guidance on undertaking public consultations so this will have a positive impact on this risk.

Actions to be taken to implement the decision(s)

25. Once adopted, the GBIS will become part of the evidence base for the Local Plan, and be a material planning considerations in the determination of any future planning applications.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2021 – 2037 Part 1: Setting the Scene.
- Appendix 2 – Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2021 – 2037 Part 2: Action Plan.
- Appendix 3 – Initial Impact Assessment of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2021 – 2037.