

Local Development Framework Working Group

7th September 2009

Report of the Director of City Strategy

Green Infrastructure Update

Summary

1. At an LDF Working Group meeting on 4th March 2008, Members agreed a report setting out the proposed approach to the Natural Environment and Green Infrastructure through the LDF. The purpose of this report is to update Members on our progress and request that they approve the work undertaken to date.
2. This report sets out the current local position in terms of the national, regional and sub-regional context including the work that we have been doing with Natural England, relevant local evidence base, and how Green Infrastructure is addressed through the LDF.

Background

3. Green Infrastructure is the term used for the overarching framework related to all green assets. Green Infrastructure is the physical environment within and between our cities, towns and villages. It is a network of multifunctional open spaces, including formal parks, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, waterways, street trees, nature reserves and open countryside. Well designed and integrated Green Infrastructure can deliver a range of benefits, often in combination, these could include:
 - opportunities for sport and recreation;
 - improvement in environmental quality e.g. better air and water quality;
 - improved access to the local environment promoting health and well-being;
 - mitigation and adaptation of climate change;
 - contribution to sustainable drainage and flood mitigation;
 - enhanced environmental backdrop and landscape that will assist in attracting business and inward investment;
 - maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity; and
 - help in the establishment of local identity or sense of place.

4. The Green Infrastructure of York is a key priority for the LDF process and work has continued towards ensuring that it is embedded within the Core Strategy in an appropriate way along with the production of a Green Infrastructure Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). This SPD will provide the detail to supplement the strategic objectives, targets and policy in section 14 of the Core Strategy (attached at Annex C). This has included officer and interest groups' workshops, meetings and mapping work with organisations including Natural England and the Forestry Commission, and discussions at the regional level with other local authorities and Local Government Yorkshire and Humber (formerly the Regional Assembly). Through the LDF, we aim to raise its profile and increase the level and quality of open space, nature conservation sites, foot and cycle paths and the wider green infrastructure network.

Work undertaken to date

5. As reported at the LDF working group meeting on 4th March 2008, there are several key evidence base documents that will feed into the green infrastructure work. Below is an update of those recently completed and those still emerging.

Open Space

6. *The Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study (PPG17 Study)* was adopted in December 2008 and provides a register of all the open space sites that fit into the PPG17 typologies, and identifies local standards based on quantity, quality and accessibility of open space provision in York.
7. The standards have been used to inform the Core Strategy Preferred Options document and are referred to as a material consideration in development control decisions.

Biodiversity

8. The emerging *Biodiversity Audit* will identify potential new Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and assess these alongside existing ones to see if they have sufficient value to be designated as a SINC. Early indications show that a number of new sites will be designated. These sites will be considered by the North Yorkshire SINC Panel ahead of them being formally designated. The Biodiversity Audit and associated maps are also considered on this meeting's agenda.
9. The Biodiversity Audit will provide the baseline information on which to prioritise further action through the *Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)*. Work on the BAP is underway and completion is anticipated by the end of 2009.

Green Belt Character Areas

10. The *Green Belt Appraisal* (2003) identifies those areas of open land outside York's built up areas that are most valuable in terms of the historic character and setting of the city. These are:
 - areas which retain, reinforce and extend the pattern of historic green wedges;
 - areas which provide an impression of a historic city situated within a rural setting;
 - the setting of villages whose traditional form, character and relationship with the surrounding agricultural landscape of which is substantially unchanged; and
 - areas which prevent the coalescence of settlements to retain their individual identity.
11. These areas have helped shape the Core Strategy's spatial strategy and will play a key role in terms of the green infrastructure work.

Cycle Network

12. A review of the *Proposed Cycle Network* is underway. This ties in well with the aims of the Cycling City bid and will be done in parallel with the delivery of the Cycling City Programme. This should be completed by the end of 2009 when it will be presented to Members of the LDF Working Group.
13. In addition to the local routes within York, two national cycle routes, namely Route 65 and Route 66 run through York and provide connections to the wider *Sustrans National Cycle Network (NCN)*. Currently proposals are at an advanced stage to develop a new coast to coast route which will run from Morecambe, through Lancaster and York to finish at Bridlington. Whilst this route will be mostly on quiet roads some sections will use green corridors. The Council will continue to investigate opportunities in the future to provide further linkages to the NCN and to surrounding districts.

Rights of Way

14. Work on the *Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)* is expected to be complete by November 2009. This document is intended to be a management tool for improving York's network of PROW and other non-motorised routes, whilst taking into consideration the needs of all types of users.
15. Work is currently ongoing to bring York's definitive map and statement up to date. Both the former North and East Riding maps need to be revised and there is currently no definitive map for the former County Borough area of York (FCB) as it was excluded from the Definitive Mapping process under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act

2000 set a cut off date to have all historic routes added to the Definitive Map by 2026. Failure to do so will result in the loss of public rights over these ways. This cut off date is currently under review.

Green Corridors

16. Natural England are carrying out an exercise to map all Green Infrastructure in the region (this is being done for all regions in Britain but Yorkshire and Humber are one of the furthest ahead). Given York's work to date on this subject we have been a key contributor and player in this work which took place in three main stages.

Identification of Green Infrastructure Assets

17. Each authority had sent Natural England green asset maps that officers had drawn at local workshops in March 2009 (planners, ecologists, PROW officer, cycle officer etc). Natural England used these to map a standard set of assets to ensure that the map coverage was comprehensive across the region. Officers validated the Natural England maps and began to identify those assets that are Strategic Green Infrastructure using the regional evidence base e.g. SSSI, main rivers and their flood plains.

Initial mapping of Green Corridors

18. Officers began to map green infrastructure corridors. This was done initially at a local level through the officer workshops in March 2009, at the Environment Forum and taking on board Members comments following previous LDF Working Group meetings. Maps showing the existing green assets in York were used as a base to draw the corridors. These consist of existing green corridors such as rivers and green wedges as well as "stepping stones" of sites that provide linkages for wildlife and/or humans.

Establishment of a hierarchy of Green Corridors

19. Officers identified a hierarchy (regional, sub-regional, district and local) using Natural England's function matrix which set out all functions of Green Infrastructure identified in the regional evidence base. The corridors were named and graded – the more functions they have, the higher up the hierarchy they are placed. Based on this approach, the regionally significant corridors in York are the Ouse, Foss and Derwent rivers corridors (this includes the flood plains and the footpaths/ cycleways alongside them). The draft corridors maps and function matrix and results for York are include at Annex A and B. Large scale copies of the map are also available in the Members' library and will be available at the meeting for discussion and comment.

20. The next step involved identifying priority and opportunity areas for intervention. This included maps showing areas with a high Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score, low Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt) score etc. These were viewed alongside the green corridors maps to see where the network could be extended or enhanced to tackle issues of poor health, poor access to green space, low levels of sport participation etc. In addition, we also looked at major development areas and allocated sites where the open space requirements could contribute to the wider Green infrastructure network.
21. All of the emerging evidence base will feed into the ongoing green corridor work, for example new national cycle routes that go beyond York's boundaries may be identified as strategic corridors and SINC sites that form natural 'stepping stones' for wildlife may be recognised as corridors with a specific biodiversity function.
22. In addition to the locally produced evidence base work and the work we have been undertaking with Natural England, the profile of green infrastructure has been raised at the regional and sub-regional level as well.
23. The inclusion of a specific Green Infrastructure policy (YH8) in the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) has acted as a catalyst for further work to be undertaken at the regional, sub-regional and local level. Local Government Yorkshire and Humber (LGYH) commissioned consultants to undertake a regional evidence base to support the RSS policy and emerging RSS review (now the Integrated Regional Strategy - IRS); York has been included as a good practice case study in this Study. The study was published in June 2008 and establishes the evidence base requirements for the Region and identifies those components of the overall Green Infrastructure asset base that should be regarded as being of strategic importance to the future growth and prosperity of the Region and its sub Regions.
24. In May 2009 , the Leeds City Region (LCR) chief executives approved the production of a LCR Green Infrastructure Strategy. The Strategy will set the strategic framework for green infrastructure across the city region, building on the work that has been undertaken over the last year with Natural England, and taking into consideration current plans and aspirations for GI in the LCR Authorities. The Strategy will support sustainable growth by establishing a network of strategic cross boundary, green infrastructure corridors that link existing green infrastructure assets with major regeneration and growth areas, and transport nodes. A LCR Green Infrastructure steering group has been set up to lead on the Strategy; a representative from York is on this group.

Consultation

25. Consultation exercises with officers and local groups played a key role in the preparation of the green corridors maps. Member feedback on the March 2008 green infrastructure report and at subsequent meetings regarding the Core

Strategy and evidence base documents has influenced the green infrastructure work undertaken to date.

26. The ongoing work with Natural England involves consultation with other authorities in the Yorkshire and Humber Region as well as Natural England themselves. This has ensured that our approach is consistent with the RSS and the approach taken by other authorities across England.
27. In addition, the inclusion of a Green Infrastructure section and policy (CS13) in the Core Strategy Preferred Options has meant that the approach to green infrastructure has been consulted on as part of the LDF consultation over the summer 2009.

Next Steps

28. The work that has been undertaken with Natural England along with all the work done to date and the emerging Leeds City Region Green Infrastructure Strategy will feed into the LDF process and will form the basis for a York Green Infrastructure Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that will link to a strategic Core Strategy policy.
29. At this stage the Core Strategy Preferred Options document identifies the proposed regional level green corridors. These have formed constraints that have helped to shape the Spatial Strategy. The district and local corridors identified on the map in Annex A are still in a draft form and have not been subject to consultation or Member approval. The intention is that the district and local corridors will not form absolute constraints in the way that the regional corridors do, instead they will be designed into and enhanced by new development. It is important to recognise that the corridor work and the wider green infrastructure work is not about applying restrictions to new development but about enhancing York's green assets in a variety of ways. Existing green assets such as open space defined in the PPG 17 Study and Nature Conservation sites identified in the Biodiversity Audit will remain protected.
30. It is anticipated that the York-specific work will build on the strategic green infrastructure network to be identified in the LCR strategy, to identify district and local corridors. This stage of the process will involve representatives from key local interest groups and local neighbourhood groups. The intention is that the identification of local corridors will be very much a "grassroots" approach to ensure that sites and corridors that are important to local residents and communities are recognised and enhanced.
31. The completion of the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and the other outstanding pieces of work will provide a key evidence base for the future green infrastructure work.

32. The intention is that a Green Infrastructure SPD, linked to the Core Strategy will:
- Include a range of maps and will give a full background of the process that has resulted in the green assets and corridors being drawn. This will reflect the regional/LCR approach as well as the local consultation exercises that we intend to carry out.
 - It will also set out the priority/opportunity areas which will be based on a range of factors including the Natural England work as well as LDF evidence base documents e.g. the PPG17 study and Biodiversity Audit and Action Plan.
 - The SPD will include a Green Infrastructure Action Plan that will bring together the Council's aims and objectives for the natural environment, it will identify targets and a set of standards and policies that will build upon those set out in the Core Strategy. It will also identify projects and programmes for enhancing York's green infrastructure network.
 - It might be appropriate at this stage to include case studies and examples in York where green infrastructure can be "built in" to a scheme from the start as well as small scale local examples of where green infrastructure plays a key role in the community's everyday lives

Options

33. Members have the following options to consider in relation to Green Infrastructure:

Option 1: To endorse the approach taken for the emerging Green Infrastructure SPD to allow for further discussion with local groups; or

Option 2: To request further work from officers.

Analysis

34. An up to date, robust evidence base for the natural environment is important for the LDF process in order to ensure that York's green infrastructure is treated with an equal level of consideration as the existing and emerging built environment.
35. This report outlines the key pieces of work that the Council is currently undertaking and as mentioned previously, these will be brought together as part of the emerging Green Infrastructure work.
36. It is envisaged that the Green Infrastructure work will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which will link to the Core Strategy policy. This approach will allow for the flexibility that is needed for this ever-changing area of work.
37. Habitats and species identified through the Biodiversity Audit which would be listed within the initial section of the Strategy could be updated when required

and the SPD revised within a short period of time. Similarly, the actions derived from the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) would sit within the overall Green Infrastructure action plan and again, as the BAP is monitored and reviewed and as targets are achieved, the Green Infrastructure action plan can be reviewed accordingly.

Corporate Priorities

38. The approach to Green Infrastructure accords with the following Corporate Priorities:

Sustainable City – The approach to Green Infrastructure will have benefits for the social, economic and environmental future of York.

Healthy City – One of the key benefits of green infrastructure is the opportunities it has for the health and well-being of York residents.

Learning City – Access to green spaces, especially nature conservation sites can provide an educational asset for the residents of York.

Inclusive City – The creation of a green infrastructure network should improve access to green spaces for the public. There may be scope to improve accessibility to ensure that some of these assets provide an inclusive resource for all citizens, including those with disabilities.

Thriving City – Enhancement of York's green infrastructure will provide an attractive environmental backdrop and landscape that will assist in attracting business and inward investment.

Implications

39. The following implications have been assessed.

- **Financial** – *None*.
- **Human Resources (HR)** – *None*.
- **Equalities** - *None*
- **Legal** - *None*
- **Crime and Disorder** - *None*
- **Information Technology (IT)** - *None*
- **Property** - *None*
- **Other** – *None*

Risk Management

40. There are no identified risks in this proposal

Recommendations

41. It is requested that Members:

i) Endorse the approach to green infrastructure in York to allow the work to date to be used for discussion with local groups.

Reason: So that further work can be progressed to support the emerging Core Strategy and wider LDF.

Contact Details

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**Report
Approved**



Date 27/08/09

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

N/A

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study (CYC, 2008)

Annexes:

Annex A: Draft green corridor map

Annex B: Natural England Green Corridor function matrix

Annex C: Core Strategy Preferred Options Strategic Objectives, Targets and Policy