

## **BRIEFING REPORT**

### **Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Board**

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**Date of Meeting:** 24 July 2018

**Report Title:** Green Infrastructure

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Don Stockton, Portfolio Holder-Environment

**Author:** Brendan Flanagan, Head of Service Rural & Cultural Economy

**Senior Officer:** Frank Jordan-Executive Director-Place

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#### **1. Introduction and Policy Context**

- 1.1.** The purpose of this briefing report is to outline how the Council intends to develop and deliver a Green Infrastructure (GI) plan for the Borough as part of its policy development on the Environment, which will include development of an Environment strategy that includes the approach to Green Infrastructure and Natural Capital. The plan will provide a strategic overview, mapping out the opportunities to gain green infrastructure benefits related to Connectivity, life chances, environment and economy. A Green infrastructure Plan will contribute to protecting and enhancing the environment that makes Cheshire East special, which is an important contributor to our Quality of Place and the economy it supports.
- 1.2.** The Local Plan already has a number of policies that specifically deal with Green infrastructure. The Government recently published 'A Green Future', its 25 year plan to improve the environment. The development of a Green Infrastructure plan is therefore timely, both in the context of the Cheshire East Local Plan and emerging Government policy.
- 1.3.** This approach to green infrastructure also links to Priority 1 of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-21 for Place based action to improve and support Health and Wellbeing, which was approved at the Health and Wellbeing Board on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1.** Green infrastructure encompasses all the 'green' (such as green spaces and green ways) and 'blue' (such as waterways) elements that contribute to the

wellbeing of people and environment, quality of place and the economy. Cheshire East already has a distinct natural environment that contributes to the creation of an attractive and successful place.

- 2.2.** The Council published its Green Space Strategy in 2013 and Local Plan strategic priorities focus on promoting economic prosperity, while protecting and enhancing environmental quality and creating sustainable communities by ‘...securing improvements to the built and natural environment’, ‘improving links between existing and new neighbourhoods by giving priority to walking, cycling...’ and ‘providing new and maintaining existing high quality and accessible green infrastructure to create networks of greenspace for people, flora and fauna and allow species adaptation and migration’.
- 2.3.** Green infrastructure provides an approach that promotes the value of the natural environment (which can be defined through ‘Natural Capital’) to Quality of Place, wellbeing of communities and the wider economy.
- 2.4.** A Green Infrastructure Plan will be delivered as a contribution to a wider Environment Strategy. As an important contributor to Cheshire East’s ‘Quality of place’, the environment has a direct value to the Cheshire East economy. A strategic approach to the natural and urban environment must therefore be part of delivering on the Councils approach to ‘quality of place’. Green Infrastructure helps to deliver positive outcomes helping to sustain Cheshire East’s environment and benefit its communities.

### **3. Briefing Information**

- 3.1.** Green infrastructure relates to multi-functional spaces, both urban and rural, which are capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.
- 3.2.** The Local Plan has a number of policies that specifically deal with Green infrastructure.. Further work is now on-going as part of the second stage of the Local Plan to develop a Landscape Strategy and to refresh the Greenspace strategy. The Green Infrastructure Plan will be part of the evidence base underpinning policy within stage two of the Plan, the Site Allocations Development Plan Document.
- 3.3.** A Green Infrastructure Plan will also be linked to existing Council plans and strategies, particularly in the context of economic strategy, Health and Wellbeing and Regeneration plans. It will form part of the delivery of an Environment Strategy that will be developed alongside. In developing a plan for Cheshire East that takes account of opportunities for collaboration and partnerships, a GI plan can provide a strategic context for other organisations that have influence over or are providers of Green Infrastructure. The council clearly has a direct role in delivering and influencing Green Infrastructure in the borough, not only through planning policy and strategy implementation, but through responsibility for and management of its own estate.
- 3.4.** The Green Infrastructure plan would therefore serve to integrate existing strategies and plans while providing a strategic context for partners. Priorities

for action would be addressed across a number of themes with their perceived benefits (fig 1). These are likely to include:

- Connectivity: Green corridors to connect areas of habitat that provide multifunctional benefits including biodiversity, access, informal recreation, health & wellbeing, landscape value, risk mitigation and economic.
- Life Chances and Choices: Linking people to places closer to nature through walking and cycling, perceived access and interpretation. Improved contribution of to air, water, soils and personal wellbeing. Securing opportunities for outdoor recreation and getting closer to nature with associated health and wellbeing benefits.
- Environment: Bridging any distinction between ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ in the quality and benefits available to residents, wildlife and landscape. Raising awareness of the value of the landscape, increasing people’s interest in its future. Supporting improved ‘carrying capacity’ for existing ‘honeypot’ sites. Securing landscape improvement or improved design quality for new developments.
- Economy: Securing and enhancing investments by connecting them into a wider environmental benefits network. Maintaining and enhancing perception of place as a reason to live, work, visit or invest. Valuing ‘Natural capital’ as part of economic strategy or investment decisions.

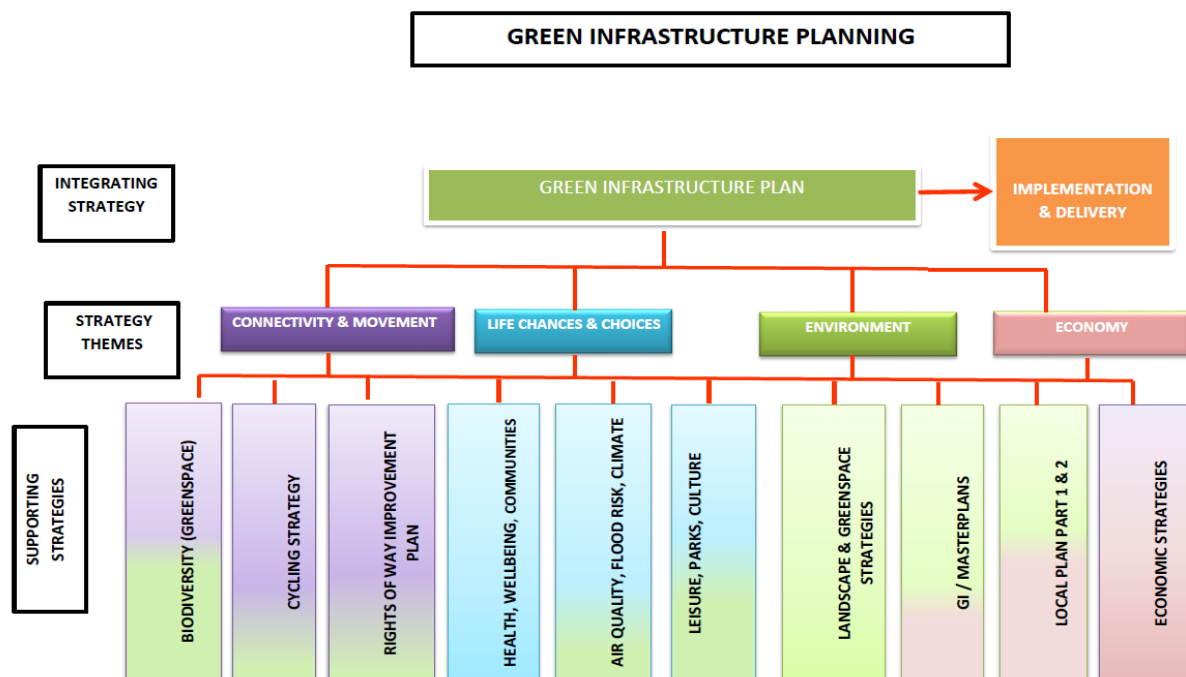


Figure 1: Green Infrastructure planning

- 3.5.** Some of the contributing strategies and plans are already in place, including the Cycling Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Parks Strategy and Rights of Way Improvement Plan and stage 1 of the Local Plan. There are a number of other work streams currently in hand, which will help to inform the Green Infrastructure plan including the emerging Crewe Masterplan.
- 3.6.** To ascertain how the Council can work with others to integrate strategies and projects, work has commenced on identification of potential 'partner' or cross-boundary projects that could contribute to or be linked through a Green Infrastructure Plan. This will assist implementation, mapping the potential to achieve improvements in Green Infrastructure and identifying priority areas of focus. This plan would be consulted on prior to seeking Council approval.
- 3.7.** There is a growing evidence base supporting the role that green space plays in helping to improve wellbeing and also reducing health inequalities and the government's 25 Year Plan for the Environment emphasises the value of green spaces for health and wellbeing. A Green Infrastructure Plan would map the distribution and contribution of green space. Work has already started on a high level assessment of our Green infrastructure and its value using the GI-Val tool adopted by Mersey forest. The typology for this work is shown at appendix 1. Natural capital valuation will be of benefit at a both a strategic borough level and to assess at a site or project level, to add a further assessment of value to business cases. For example, that assessment will provide a baseline mapping of green infrastructure and valuation on the benefits derived from Green Infrastructure. By mapping a series of health issues for which there is evidence that access to green spaces has a potentially positive effect, we can assess the value of Cheshire East green spaces for wellbeing. Green spaces in Cheshire East already play a role in keeping people active and supporting good mental health as well as addressing areas such as air quality and amelioration of high temperatures in heatwaves. This information will also be used to inform development of the Environment Strategy.
- 3.9** This high level assessment will inform a more detailed stage of work that would help to develop defined proposals and priorities for areas of intervention, retention or enhancement that can be addressed as and when resources become available. It will also strengthen the case for high quality design, mitigation and public benefit related to development proposals to ensure that the borough's Quality of Place aspirations are met.
- 3.10** The impacts on health and wellbeing and on the costs of prevention or health improvement are part and parcel of a natural capital approach. The Government's three-year 'Natural Environment for Health and Wellbeing' programme offers opportunities to develop promotional campaigns and programmes that complement existing work. There is potential to take account of the new focus on natural capital linked to the priority outcomes 'Creating a place that supports health and wellbeing in Cheshire; people have access to good cultural, leisure and recreational facilities' & 'Living well for

longer: people are fitter and healthier – participating in physical activity and eating more healthily’.

**3.11** In developing this plan, the Council is keen to ensure that it is relevant to and used by other partners: a plan for Cheshire East rather than a plan for Cheshire East Council. Therefore to do this effectively and to increase the resource available, opportunities must also be sought as part of such a plan to identify potential partners with whom the Council can collaborate or complementary projects that support resource availability or delivery. This will include environmental bodies such as Natural England or the Local Nature Partnership. However it should also include organisations in Health and Wellbeing where there will be opportunities such as:

- Consideration to the opportunities of using green space in commissioning services, e.g. mental wellbeing, encouraging people to be physically active in using green space.
- Role of the public estate eg owners further developing accessible green space, improving design (e.g. green roofs) etc.

**3.12** The Government has promised to launch a year-long youth-focused promotional campaign to engage people with environmental issues in 2019. Using the #iwill hashtag the campaign will aim to increase action and engagement on the environment among 10 to 20 year olds.

**3.13** As part of developing its Environment Strategy the Council will consider the principle of embedding ‘environmental net gain’ for housing and infrastructure which is currently being consulted on by Government in response to its 25 year plan. This would have implications that need to be considered as part of developing policy related to the detailed second stage of the Local Plan as it represents a stronger measure for planning than at present. In addition, the Government’s proposals related to Green Belt for ‘breathing space’ could be supplemented by further policies with the Part 2 Local Plan that would align with Green Infrastructure proposals. These principles would need to be reflected when addressing the nascent green Infrastructure plan. The Environment Strategy will also address issues such as waste management, climate change, biodiversity, access to the environment and air quality, all of which can have implications for health and wellbeing and the role of Green Infrastructure in delivering these benefits.

**3.14** In order to complete a Green Infrastructure Plan, a number of pieces of existing work must be completed. This includes completion of a refreshed Greenspace strategy and the Landscape Character Assessment together with the related Landscape Strategy and Local Landscape Designation review. It is hoped therefore to complete the Plan once the first draft of the Local Plan stage 2 has been completed for consultation. The current timescale therefore assumes that a Green Infrastructure Plan is completed by the end of 2018.

## **4. Implications**

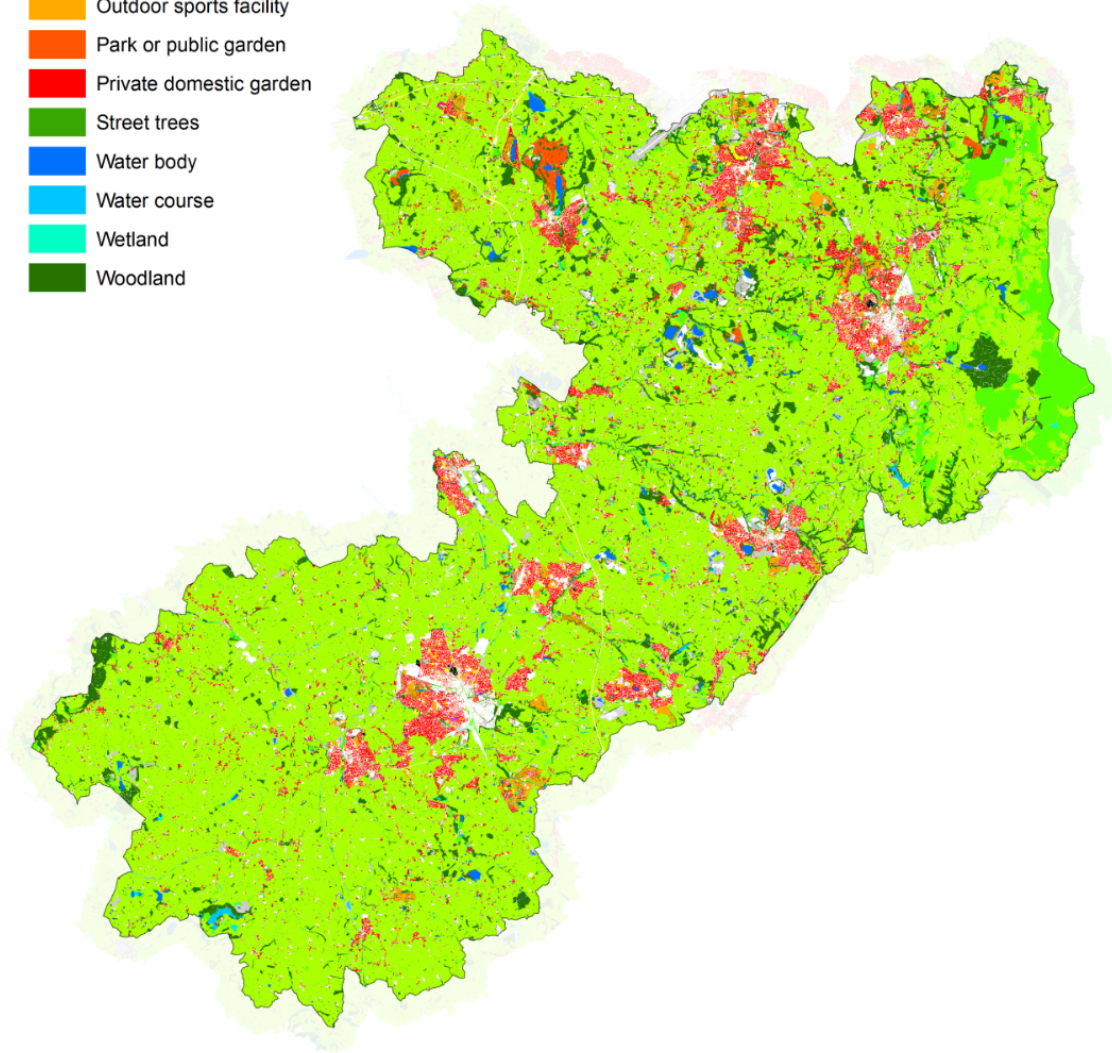
**4.1.** Legal, financial and human resources implications will need to be considered once the scope of any work is defined.



## Appendix 1

### Green infrastructure typology

- Agricultural land
- Allotment, community garden or urban farm
- Cemetery, churchyard or burial ground
- General amenity space
- Grassland, heathland, moorland or scrubland
- Institutional grounds
- Orchard
- Outdoor sports facility
- Park or public garden
- Private domestic garden
- Street trees
- Water body
- Water course
- Wetland
- Woodland



The following is the breakdown of green infrastructure types in Cheshire East according to the mapping.

<b>Green Infrastructure Type</b>	<b>Area (ha)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Percentage of GI</b>
<b>Agricultural land</b>	79618	68.26%	73.49%
<b>Allotment, community garden or urban farm</b>	39	0.03%	0.04%
<b>Cemetery, churchyard or burial ground</b>	41	0.04%	0.04%
<b>General amenity space</b>	1122	0.96%	1.04%
<b>Grassland, heathland, moorland or scrubland</b>	4830	4.14%	4.46%
<b>Institutional grounds</b>	3304	2.83%	3.05%
<b>Not GI</b>	8302	7.12%	
<b>Orchard</b>	24	0.02%	0.02%
<b>Outdoor sports facility</b>	1479	1.27%	1.37%
<b>Park or public garden</b>	455	0.39%	0.42%
<b>Private domestic garden</b>	6329	5.43%	5.84%
<b>Street trees</b>	901	0.77%	0.83%
<b>Water body</b>	1196	1.03%	1.10%
<b>Water course</b>	639	0.55%	0.59%
<b>Wetland</b>	252	0.22%	0.23%
<b>Woodland</b>	8117	6.96%	7.49%