

**Endorsement of the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy as Evidence for
Planning Services
(Report by Head of Planning Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy and seek Cabinet endorsement of the strategy as supporting evidence for planning purposes.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The first Green Infrastructure Strategy (GI Strategy) for the Cambridge Sub-region was developed in 2006 by The Landscape Partnership, on behalf of Cambridgeshire Horizons and partners, including Huntingdonshire District Council. It was one of the first in the region and was particularly beneficial in helping to secure Growth Area funding and delivery of the projects it identified has contributed to the acceptability of growth to residents across the county.

2.2 A review of the GI Strategy has now been completed, in order to:

- Give coverage to the whole of Cambridgeshire
- Be a stronger part of the evidence base for future policy decisions (including taking the GI Strategy through a comprehensive public consultation)
- Provide a robust evidence base for funding of Green Infrastructure through a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and other sources of funding.

2.2 Cambridgeshire Horizons has developed a new GI Strategy for Cambridgeshire in partnership with all the key delivery bodies. The strategy's vision is for high quality green spaces that enhance the quality of new and existing communities, provide health and leisure benefits for residents and improve the Cambridgeshire environmental quality 'offer' to attract businesses and individuals considering locating in the county and help retain them within the area. Appendix 12 of the revised strategy details the economic value of green spaces, drawing on the work of Forest Research, Natural England and others to show how environmental improvements can help improve inward investment and job creation, increase land and property values and help stimulate local economic regeneration.

2.3 The reviewed GI Strategy includes a 'Strategic Network' of Green Infrastructure for Cambridgeshire which provides the context for the planning and delivery of local Green Infrastructure plans and strategic and local projects. It identifies benefits that can be achieved through co-ordinated planning and investment in Green Infrastructure at a community, local and sub-regional scale, and identifies Green Infrastructure investment opportunities that can provide benefits to a broader set of issues including health, biodiversity, climate change and economic development.

2.4 The four objectives for the reviewed GI Strategy are to:

- Reverse the Decline in Biodiversity in Cambridgeshire
- Mitigate and Adapt to Climate Change
- Promote Sustainable Growth and Economic Development
- Support Healthy Living and Wellbeing

2.5 The Strategy establishes a 'Strategic Network' where green infrastructure can provide the greatest benefit to:

- Enhance quality of life by providing an attractive living, working and recreational environment
- Attract and retain high value businesses
- Offer economic opportunities for rural industries and land management
- Encourage exercise and activities to improve health and well-being
- Play a major role in tourism by creating visitor attractions, preserving attractive landscapes and conserving biodiversity.

2.6 For each of the areas, opportunities are identified for improving Green Infrastructure through projects. Partnership working across Cambridgeshire Horizons, local authorities and the other stakeholders has allowed a comprehensive and robust set of projects to be brought together. The final sections of the Strategy show how existing local planning authority priorities for Green Infrastructure can be supported and influenced by the Strategy, and how the projects within the Strategy might be delivered.

2.7 The reviewed strategy has gone through comprehensive public consultation. From January to March 2010, a public consultation on the first draft was undertaken. Responses to the consultation supported the objectives, but made a range of points about how the Strategy might be improved. The strategy was restructured so that it placed more emphasis on the Strategic Network, the projects that form part of the network, and how projects might be delivered. A second round of public consultation on the updated draft took place in March 2011. Cambridgeshire Horizons board signed it off for publication on 27th June 2011.

2.8 The Strategic Network is divided into different geographical areas. The areas in Huntingdonshire are:

- Huntingdonshire Fens and Woods (which includes the Great Fen)
- Great Ouse

2.9 For each area, opportunities are identified for improving Green Infrastructure through a number of projects. Partnership working across Horizons, local authorities and other stakeholders has allowed a comprehensive and robust set of projects to be brought together.

2.10 The GI Strategy can be viewed on the Cambridgeshire Horizons archived website at: http://www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/our_challenge/GIS.aspx. Please note that the strategy is a large document, and that the key diagrams will be presented to members in a series of slides.

3. DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

3.1 The strategy allows Green Infrastructure to be delivered flexibly in a variety of ways, at different scales and by a number of organisations as and when resources and

opportunities permit. The Council, along with the other Cambridgeshire districts, Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and major environmental organisations will be the main delivery bodies.

- 3.2 As a Local Planning Authority the Council will have an important role to play through the development process. The strategy will be used as part of the evidence base for planning policy development and to inform possible Green Infrastructure projects in relation to the emerging Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).
- 3.3 Local communities will also have an important role in achieving the vision set out in the strategy and ensuring its long-term success. With proposed changes to the planning system being brought in through the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), local communities will have the opportunity to designate important green areas as 'Local Green Spaces'. These spaces will be given increased protection from development, particularly where they are close to a centre of population or have special value to a town or village. Neighbourhood Plans, brought in by the recently enacted Localism Act will enable local communities to set out their priorities for development at the local level, including green infrastructure. The strategy will form an important piece of evidence that could be used to help local communities identify Local Green Spaces and to set realistic and meaningful objectives in neighbourhood plans.
- 3.4 The strategy also highlights the importance of considering long-term management and maintenance of routes and spaces from the beginning. A range of options are explored, including the involvement of voluntary organisations, 'friends' groups, charitable management trusts, community development trusts and co-operatives and partnerships, and case studies are set out in the document.
- 3.5 The strategy is supported by the Green Infrastructure Forum, members of which are adopting or endorsing the Strategy through their appropriate cabinets and/or management boards. With the demise of Cambridgeshire Horizons the Forum will continue to act as a central hub to work on Green Infrastructure across the county. It is recognised that in the current climate of reduced public sector funding delivery will need to be achieved through partnership working. There are no funding implications for the Council.

4. UPDATING THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- 4.1 The GI Strategy will be part of the evidence base that informs the Council's future work on updating its development strategy for the period up to 2036. That updated strategy for future growth would need to be based on sound evidence of the local need for additional economic growth, associated housing development and related infrastructure delivery and require the development of an associated local infrastructure strategy which could demonstrate how that growth could be satisfactorily accommodated. The new Cambridgeshire GI Strategy would form part of that local evidence base.

5. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 Cabinet is recommended to endorse the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy as supporting evidence for planning purposes.

Background Papers:

Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy – see note at 2.10 above

CONTACT OFFICER - enquiries about this report to James Campbell, Senior Planning Policy Officer, on 01480 388432.