

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY UPDATE1. Purpose of Report

To update Members on the mid-term progress of the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

2. Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to NOTE the progress made with the Green Infrastructure Strategy and, in line with the recommendation from the Policy and Overview Working Group, RESOLVE that option three be approved. A one-off revenue development budget of £50,000 is required for the appointment of a Consultant to undertake the Green Infrastructure Strategy Review to be funded from General Fund Reserves in 2024/25.

3. Detail

The creation of the Council's first Green Infrastructure Strategy 2015-2030 was to provide a clear strategic pathway for the management and enhancement of the Borough's Green Infrastructure. It was also to be used to inform planning decisions, identify opportunities to improve the green corridors and to provide information on how the Borough's network contributed to the local, regional and national picture. This Strategy also aligned well with the Council's Corporate Plan Environmental Objective which is to 'Protect the environment for the future'.

Green Infrastructure in Broxtowe is defined as: -

"a network of living multi-functional natural and semi natural features, green spaces, rivers, canals and lakes that link and connect villages, towns and cities. It provides a holistic and sustainable approach to viewing the natural environment and landscape and provides multiple benefits for people, wildlife and local communities." (Source: Broxtowe Borough Council, Groundwork Greater Nottingham and Broxtowe Borough Council, 2015).

Working closely with stakeholders including Natural England, Nottinghamshire County Council and the Council's Planning Service the comprehensive strategy was completed in 2015.

The strategy identified green assets within the Borough such as amenity, wildlife sites, access routes and heritage assets. It also identified blue infrastructure assets such as canals, rivers, ponds and wetland area. Maps were then produced to show how these assets fall into corridors forming the Green Infrastructure network throughout the Borough (**APPENDIX 2**).

The mapping of these corridors also helped to identify gaps within the network providing opportunities for improvement, around amenity sites, blue infrastructure, wildlife and biodiversity.

The strategic timeline spans a 15-year period from 2015 to 2030. As the strategy is now midway through its intended life span, a review has been conducted and included in **APPENDIX 3**. A comprehensive list of opportunities identified within the Green Infrastructure Strategy, along with references to specific corridors affected have been included in tables along with information of the actions undertaken and the identification of any next steps.

The review has emphasised that there have been several changes in strategic direction since the adoption of the strategy in 2015. These changes are evident, particularly in the mapped sites that have been identified to support planning opportunities, aligning with the Council's evolving Local Plan.

It is anticipated that a rewritten strategy will be presented back to the Policy and Overview Working Group for scrutiny in late 2024.

4. Key Decision

This report is not a key decision as defined under Regulation 8 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

5. Updates from Scrutiny

On the 8 February 2023 an initial report underwent scrutiny from the Policy and Overview Working Group. The group proposed option three as a recommendation but requested that an amendment be made to include the possible use of a consultant to undertake the rewrite of the Strategy. This has now been detailed in the report, along with an estimated cost.

6. Financial Implications

The comments from the Head of Finance Services were as follows:

There is no budget provision for the cost of appointing a Consultant to undertake the Green Infrastructure Strategy Review. If Members were minded to approve the proposal, the one-off cost of up to £50,000 would be funded directly from General Fund Reserve balances in 2024/25.

7. Legal Implications

The comments from the Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal Services were as follows:

Whilst there are no direct legal implications that arise from this report the Council has enabling powers to propose and advocate for Green Infrastructure Improvements and work across its own estate and on wider sties. It forms part of the Council's Local Plan evidence base and together with other evidence will help to ensure revised policies accord with the National Planning Policy Framework's tests of soundness.

8. Human Resources Implications

The comments from the Human Resources Manager were as follows:

Not applicable.

9. Union Comments

The Union comments were as follows:

Not applicable.

10. Climate Change Implications

Having an up-to-date and comprehensive Blue/Green Infrastructure strategy is important as it serves as a key foundation in supporting the Council's Climate Change ambitions. The strategy not only recognises the critical role of nature and green spaces in mitigating climate change, but also establishes a framework for integrating sustainable practices into all aspects of planning and development.

11. Data Protection Compliance Implications

This report does not contain any OFFICIAL(SENSITIVE) information and there are no Data Protection issues in relation to this report.

12. Equality Impact Assessment

Not applicable.

13. Background Papers

Not applicable.

APPENDIX 1Background

There are 25 green corridors across the Borough, consisting of two primary and 23 secondary corridors (**APPENDIX 2**). A green corridor is an area or pathway designed to connect natural habitats to support the movement of animal and plant species.

These corridors are closely associated with existing infrastructure such as rivers, canals and railways. These corridors have preserved many green infrastructure assets partly due to the challenges in developing the land for industrial purposes.

The strategy contains 390 recommended opportunities for enhancement across environmental and planning themes. To date, 38% or 150 opportunities for enhancement have been successfully actioned.

Progress to date

Progress against the opportunities for enhancement since the Strategy was adopted in 2015 have been summarised in **APPENDIX 3**. Highlights include:

- Incorporating native species, creating habitats for pollinators and implementing sustainable grounds maintenance regimes across a number of amenity sites, including Archers Field, Stapleford, Jubilee Park, Eastwood and Colliers Wood, Moorgreen.
- Heathland enhancement undertaken at Crow Hill in Bramcote Hills Park.
- Enhancement of woodlands by removing invasive species, planting native woodland flowers and planting additional trees to increase canopy cover.

Strategic Drivers

While a number of opportunities for development are out of the Council's ability to deliver on their own, the Council is actively collaborating with key stakeholders and has already achieved influential advancements in collaboration with partners such as Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust and Canopy 2050. By coming together, these partnerships aim to deliver aligned strategic outcomes across the Borough.

The inclusion of an environmental theme within the current Devolution Deal offers an opportunity to develop local nature recovery and biodiversity strategies across the D2N2 area. Whilst the Council's current Green Infrastructure Strategy aligns with the environmental theme, the Devolution Deal provides a platform to further strengthen and enhance this key document.

Since the adoption of the Green Infrastructure Strategy, several key supporting documents such as the Local Plan and other key environmental strategic documents have been updated. These documents should complement and align with one another, in order to achieve effective outcomes.

The following documents link with and have a strategic impact on the Green Infrastructure Strategy Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan

In late-2017, Greater Nottingham stakeholders made the decision to jointly develop a strategic plan that would replace the existing three Aligned Core Strategies. The Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan (GNSP) is currently in the process of being prepared and will help to guide future development, including new housing and strategic green and blue infrastructure provision across all areas (including the Borough of Broxtowe) up until 2041.

The Local Plan

This document outlines the planning policies and proposals that guides and regulates development across the Borough. The Local Plan can include specific provision to ensure the promotion and integration of green infrastructure within development proposals. These provisions may include the inclusion of green spaces, such as parks, gardens and green corridors. The Local Plan also outlines policies to protect existing green spaces from development or provide incentives for the enhancement of green infrastructure elements such as trees, or wildlife habitats.

The Green Infrastructure Strategy and the Local Plan are aligned documents helping to ensure that green spaces are accessible and enhanced.

The Climate Change and Green Futures Strategy

The strategic aims of the strategy are as follows:

- To become carbon neutral by 2027 for the Council's own operations.
- To establish a baseline for all carbon scopes and then to propose a date for net zero using science based targets for the Council's own operations.
- To align to the UK's net zero Commitment of 2050 for the Borough and establish the actions and potential budget required to achieve this (working to an earlier date if possible).

Both the Green Infrastructure Strategy and the Climate Change and Green Futures strategy provide guidance and direction in addressing climate change challenges. The Climate Change and Green Futures Strategy outlines proactive measures to reduce carbon emissions, enhance resilience and adapt to climate change, whilst the Green Infrastructure Strategy focuses on the development and management of green space. Together these strategies help to support sustainable development, reduce environmental impact and protect and enhance natural resources.

The Tree Management Strategy for Trees in Council Ownership

This strategy is a framework for the management of trees owned and managed by Broxtowe Borough Council. It provides detail by which arboriculture decisions are influenced. This strategy forms part of the broader Climate Change and Green Futures Strategy, specifically supporting the Natural Environment programme theme.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) originated from the Environment Act 2021 and became a legal requirement from January 2024. The legislation requires developers to ensure that any loss from biodiversity is compensated through a measurable net gain in biodiversity. This new piece of legislation is currently not considered within the current Green Infrastructure Strategy and its incorporation would help to play a vital role in guiding the Council, developers and other stakeholders in implementing actions that contribute to achieving biodiversity net gain targets.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is intended to align with other measures mandated as an outcome of the Environment Act 2021, including delivery support of BNG, establishing priorities for nature recovery and helping to guide planning policy.

Nottinghamshire County Council has been appointed by Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to be the Responsible Authority to lead on the development of the LNRS for Nottinghamshire and the City of Nottingham.

Whilst the LNRS is an emerging document, its inclusion and alignment to the Council's own Green Infrastructure Strategy needs to be considered. Together they will contain a direction by which to support the recovery of local ecosystems, protect endangered species and create positive natural environments. This will help to ensure that both strategies are mutually reinforced. Leading to more effective and cohesive efforts in conserving and promoting green spaces and biodiversity within the Borough.

25-year Environment Plan

The Governments 25-year Environment Plan provides a national framework and set of goals to improve the natural environment, address climate change and protect biodiversity. The Councils Green Infrastructure Strategy focuses on local context, outlining opportunities to enhance green spaces and biodiversity across the Borough.

By aligning with the Governments long term vision, the Council's Green Infrastructure Strategy can help to contribute to national objectives and help to support the collaboration of stakeholders at a regional and national level. It would also help to access funding opportunities should they become available.

The need for a review

It has become necessary to review the current Green Infrastructure Strategy due to a number of factors. Firstly, there has been changes in development across the Borough since the strategy was adopted in 2015 and these have implications on its current effectiveness and relevance.

Additionally, the Green Infrastructure Strategy is at a midpoint in its lifespan and it is important to ensure its continued alignment with the current needs and objectives of the Council. Reviewing and updating the strategy will allow the Council to address any changing circumstances.

Furthermore, there have been significant changes in legislation that have an impact on the Green Infrastructure Strategy. It is important that any update takes advantage of any opportunities presented by these changes.

By conducting a thorough review of the Green Infrastructure Strategy, the Council can identify areas for improvement, incorporate legislative changes and ensure that the strategy remains effective, robust and fit for purpose.

Proposals for a way forward

1. Maintain the current strategy

As the current Green Infrastructure Strategy still sits within its current timeframe, the Council could look to continue implementing the existing strategy without major revisions. However, it is important to acknowledge that there are significant risks associated with this approach, as highlighted in the ‘Need for Review’. These risks highlight the limitations and shortcomings of the current strategy in adequately responding to changes in circumstances, emerging challenges and evolving legislative requirements.

The benefits and risks of not undertaking a review on the strategy and maintaining it as it currently stands have been captured in table 1.

Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost effective as the document still sits within its current timeframe. • Comprehensive document detailing many features within the Green Infrastructure. • Has been used to guide a number of improvement opportunities within green spaces.
Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many site specific features around the corridors have changed or status has been reallocated with regards to development opportunities. • Council has no scope or influence over some of the opportunities identified making it difficult to record successes or update. • Does not align with other strategic influencing documents or current changes to legislation.

Table 1: Benefits and Risks of maintaining the current strategy.

2. Refresh the Strategy

2.1 Use of a Consultant to undertake the Green Infrastructure Strategy Review

Utilising a consultant to undertake the review would have a number of benefits. The Council could consider working with Groundwork Greater Nottingham again as they were initially involved in the production of the original document. Engaging this consultant would have a number of benefits as they are already familiar with the document and could help to facilitate greater collaboration with other key stakeholders.

Their involvement will help to streamline the review process and help to minimise the impact on internal resources, however there would be a cost for this to be undertaken.

2.2 Using The Parks and Open Spaces and Planning teams to update the Green Infrastructure Strategy

The benefits of using the Council’s own teams to undertake this review, including:

- Knowledge of the current Strategy and its overall aims and objectives.
- Potential cost effectiveness. Using internal teams eliminates the need for expenditure on external consultants.
- Internal Stakeholder engagement and involvement, as the teams will have already created these relationships across the Council.
- The teams will be-able to ensure that the refreshed strategy identifies internal areas that may require improvement.

The benefits and risks of undertaking a review on the strategy, using either a consultant or internal teams have been captured in table 2.

Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most efficient way of revising the current strategy. Utilising sections that are still relevant. • Ensures that recent legislative and policy changes have been considered and incorporated. Creating a document that is effective and robust. • Using a consultant led approach will lessen the impact on internal resources. • Using internal resources for the review will not have the cost implications the consultant led approach will.
Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associated cost (Consultant led approach). • Impact on internal resource (Internal approach).

Table 2: Benefits and Risks of refreshing the Green Infrastructure Strategy using either a consultant or internal team approach.

3. Rewrite the Strategy - Enhancing usability and including a comprehensive approach to Blue Infrastructure.

The current Green Infrastructure Strategy only lightly touches upon the importance of the Blue Infrastructure. Blue infrastructure refers to a network of natural and built systems such as streams, ponds, canals and other water bodies. (Source: Natural Environment. GOV.UK) To ensure a more balanced approach to infrastructure planning, it is necessary to address this gap and incorporate a more comprehensive approach to blue infrastructure management. Doing this will acknowledge the importance of water bodies and their associated ecosystems. This can lead to improved water quality, enhanced biodiversity and increased amenity opportunities.

Whilst the Green Infrastructure Strategy has been used to inform planning policies including those within Part 2 of the Local Plan and the Greater Nottingham Blue and Green Infrastructure Strategy: <https://www.gnplan.org.uk/media/1xyd102k/blue-green-infrastructure-strategy-final.pdf>. It is a document that internally, is not being utilised to its full potential. After discussions with the Planning team, it has been suggested that a more focused strategic document is created, to help support the decisions of the Development Control planners. This will help the team in their determination of planning applications, but will also help to guide where best to utilise Section 106 contributions to enhance blue/green infrastructure across the Borough.

Rewriting the strategy would take a partnership approach, creating a useable document for both the Planners and the Environment teams. This document could be produced either by utilising a consultant or internally.

Following scrutiny from the Policy and Overview Working Group on the 8 February 2024, their recommendation was in favour of Option three (as outlined in the initial report). Although the possibility of producing the document internally was considered, it was recognised that a lack of necessary internal resources to undertake this task was acknowledged. The Policy and Overview Working Group suggested the inclusion of a consultancy lead approach as an option.

It is estimated that the cost for a consultant would be approximately **£50,000**, although a formal procurement exercise would need to be undertaken to determine the most suitable candidate.

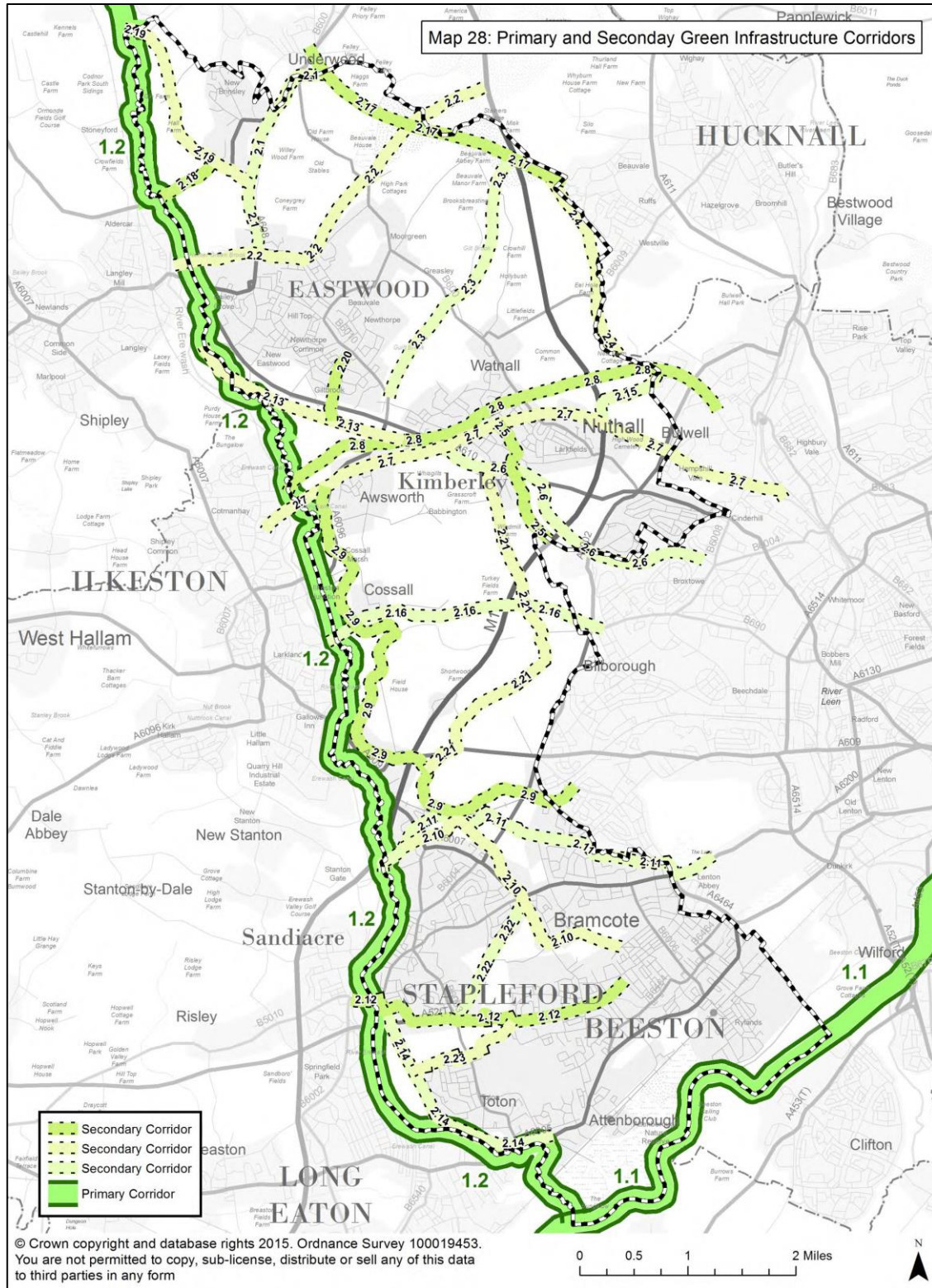
The benefits and risks of producing a focused Blue/Green Infrastructure Strategy, which would help to support the decisions of the Development Control Planners has been captured in table 3.

Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concise document with relevant internal targets and outcomes. • Ensures that recent legislative and policy changes have been considered and incorporated. Creating a document that is effective and robust. • Useful document for Development Control which would help provide direction for Section 106 contributions. • Promoting a more balanced approach to planning by incorporating Blue Infrastructure. • Enhanced approach to biodiversity. • Support for climate change adaptation. • Using internal resources for the review will not have the cost implications the consultant led approach will. • Using a consultant led approach will lessen the impact on internal resources.
Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associated cost (Consultant led approach). • Impact on internal resource (Internal approach). • Costs associated with any potential implementation.

Table 3: Benefits and Risks of producing a Blue/Green Infrastructure Strategy

APPENDIX 2

Map of the Borough showing the location of the Green Corridors.



<u>PRIMARY CORRIDORS</u>	1.1 Trent Valley Corridor
	1.2 Erewash Valley Corridor
<u>SECONDARY CORRIDORS</u>	2.1 Brinsley Brook Corridor
	2.2 Nether Green, Beauvale Brook and Colliers Wood Corridor
	2.3 Giltbrook Corridor
	2.4 Watnall Coppice to Kimberley Cutting Corridor
	2.5 Kimberley Central Corridor
	2.6 A610 Swingate Corridor
	2.7 Nuthall Cutting and Kimberley Railway Corridor
	2.8 Kimberley Cutting Corridor
	2.9 Nottingham Canal Corridor
	2.10 Bramcote Corridor and Boundary Brook Corridor
	2.11 Erewash to Wollaton Corridor
	2.12 Stapleford to Chilwell Urban Corridor
	2.13 Langley Mill to Kimberley Corridor
	2.14 Toton Sidings Corridor
	2.15 Sellers Wood and New Farm Wood Corridor
	2.16 Central Cossall to Strelley Corridor
	2.17 Underwood to Beauvale Priory Corridor
	2.18 Stoney Lane to Aldercar
	2.19 Hall Lane to Brinsley Hill
	2.20 Smithurst Road and Daisy Farm, Giltbrook
	2.21 Trowell to Kimberley
	2.22 A52 corridor south east of Stapleford
	2.23 Toton Sidings to Chilwell

Table 4: Green Corridors across the Borough of Broxtowe