

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

---

**REPORT TO:** New Communities Portfolio Holder 25 January 2011

**AUTHOR/S:** Executive Director (Operational Services) / Corporate Manager (Planning and New Communities)

---

### CAMBRIDGESHIRE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

#### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this report is to:
  - (a) Provide an update on progress with the Green Infrastructure Strategy review being prepared by Cambridgeshire Horizons in partnership with local authorities and other key stakeholders.
  - (b) Seek support for the actions needed to help Cambridgeshire Horizons complete the consultation draft.
  - (c) Seek support for the endorsement of the Strategy for public consultation.
2. This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area of the District comprising all wards.

#### **Recommendations**

3. That the Portfolio Holder agrees:
  - (a) To support the broad approach of the Strategy which is contained in Appendices A and B and agree that further changes be made to the Strategy so that it can be published for public consultation.
  - (b) That the Corporate Manager (Planning and New Communities) be given delegated authority to endorse an acceptable revised version of the Strategy for public consultation, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

#### **Reasons for Recommendations**

4. The Strategy is not considered to be acceptable without further changes that cannot be made before this report is published and are unlikely to be completed until the end of January.
5. A delay in publishing the consultation version of the Strategy would threaten the ability of Cambridgeshire Horizons to carry out a public consultation and produce and publish the final version.

#### **Background**

##### **The first public consultation on the new Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy**

6. Public consultation on a draft new Green Infrastructure Strategy was carried out in early 2010. A report on the draft Strategy was taken to the New Communities Portfolio Holder meeting on 2 March 2010. The report gave background on Green Infrastructure, its benefits and policy context, and the existing (2006) Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Cambridge sub-region, and its strengths and weaknesses.

7. The report gave information on the public consultation on the new Strategy that was taking place. It described the structure and intention of the Strategy, and how it had been developed, including officers' inputs and the improvements made. Further improvements that should be made were highlighted and these included the need for the Strategy to:
  - (a) Provide an adequate evidence base, analysis and rationale.
  - (b) More fully reflect planned growth.
  - (c) Create an understandable and successful green infrastructure network.
  - (d) Include existing green infrastructure and green infrastructure aspirations.
  - (e) Better relate green infrastructure to features on the ground.
  - (f) Provide a context to support green infrastructure planning and action at district and local levels.
  - (g) Give more information on delivery and funding.
  - (h) Be a robust and applicable tool for planners and those involved with development.
  
8. The New Communities Portfolio Holder agreed that the Council's reply to the Green Infrastructure Strategy consultation should be:
  - (a) The Council supports the role that an effective strategy will have in the protection, creation and management of green infrastructure.
  - (b) The Council supports the development of a strategy which will provide a robust and defensible basis for green infrastructure planning and delivery, for both existing communities and the growth areas.
  - (c) The Council has significant concerns about the approach and content of the draft Green Infrastructure Strategy as set out in this report and previous officer comments to Cambridgeshire Horizons.
  - (d) The Council will require major changes to the strategy addressing its concerns before it will be able to endorse it.
  - (e) Council officers will work with Cambridgeshire Horizons and other partners to achieve the changes required.
  
9. Following the public consultation, Cambridgeshire Horizons, local authorities and other partners on the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Forum agreed that:
  - (a) Significant changes needed to be made to the Strategy and partners would work together to achieve them.
  - (b) A second public consultation would be required on a revised version of the Strategy.
  - (c) Local authorities should be able to fully endorse that version prior to the consultation, which would give it more credibility and mean that they should not need to raise significant issues during the consultation.

### **The scope and structure of current versions of the Strategy**

10. Cambridgeshire Horizons and partners have done substantial work on the Strategy since the first consultation, which has led to major changes to it. The latest version of the Strategy has the following features and basis.
  
11. The four objectives for the Strategy were supported by the first public consultation and remain the same:
  - (a) Reverse the Decline in Biodiversity
  - (b) Mitigate and Adapt to Climate Change
  - (c) Promote Sustainable Growth and Economic Development
  - (d) Support Healthy Living and Wellbeing

12. A Strategic Network has been developed from a spatial and other analysis of themes and additional factors. The themes, or aspects, of green infrastructure are:
  - (a) Biodiversity
  - (b) Climate Change
  - (c) Green Infrastructure Gateways
  - (d) Heritage
  - (e) Landscape Character
  - (f) Publicly Accessible Open Space
  - (g) Sustainable Movement
13. These themes were looked at individually and together in terms of what existed and where the gaps and opportunities were. The influence of economic development, health, and water and land management were also considered at this stage. Overlaps of themes and factors, and where individual aspects were important, helped shape the Network and make it multi-functional.
14. The Strategic Network which resulted covers and connects areas which contain existing green infrastructure and where new is desirable at a county level. It responds to the needs and opportunities provided by major new developments. The Network indicates broad areas within which action will take place rather than delineating the position of new green infrastructure.
15. The Strategic Network has been divided into six 'landscape-scale' Strategic Areas. These in turn contain Target Areas and Projects. The six Strategic Areas are:
  - (a) River Nene
  - (b) Huntingdonshire Fens and Woods
  - (c) Great Ouse
  - (d) Eastern Fens and Towns
  - (e) Chippenham Fen
  - (f) Cambridge and Surrounding Areas
16. The Great Ouse Strategic Area runs along part of the District boundary and contains Fen Drayton (Lakes) as a Target Area. A large part of the District is covered by the Cambridge and Surrounding Areas Strategic Area.
17. This Strategic Area includes Cambridge, the new settlement of Northstowe, Cambourne, Wimpole and Wicken Fen. To the west the area includes the ancient woodlands around Gamlingay and neighbouring villages. The River Cam forms a key corridor through Cambridge and northwards to the Ely Ouse. In the area to the south and west of Cambridge are the chalk rivers that extend into the wider countryside, and the linear access and habitat features of the Roman Road, and Fleam and Devil's Dykes.
18. The Strategic Area offers significant opportunities for:
  - (a) Enhancing, linking and protecting wildlife habitats and species of local, national and international importance, including the River Cam and its tributaries, and Wicken Fen and Wimpole.
  - (b) Implementing climate change adaptation measures such as carbon sequestration, and flood storage and alleviation including through flood meadows.
  - (c) Developing existing gateways into the countryside and exploiting those that will result from habitat restoration and creation, and significant housing growth.

- (d) Increasing access to and the interpretation of heritage, including sites and linear features such as Roman roads and dykes, which also have high biodiversity value.
  - (e) Contributing to landscape character, such as through the planning of new growth sites and the conservation and reinforcement of traditional landscape patterns of hedgerows, fields and woodland.
  - (f) Increasing sustainable and safe movement by improving the Rights of Way network to allow access to Green Infrastructure sites, villages and the wider countryside.
19. There are six Target Areas within the Cambridge and Surrounding Area Strategic Area:
- (a) Northstowe
  - (b) Wicken Fen and Anglesey Abbey
  - (c) Cambridge
  - (d) Cambourne
  - (e) Wimpole
  - (f) West Cambridgeshire Woodlands
20. The Target Areas contain projects and there are three Strategic Area Projects. These largely comprise existing projects and future ones identified in planning policies.
21. The Strategy has a chapter on local authority issues and opportunities and Green Infrastructure priorities, with a section on each District. The Delivery of the Strategic Network chapter describes the contribution of planning, developer contributions and other funding, the people skills and capacity required, and the actions needed to take forward and implement the Strategy.

### **An assessment of current versions of the Strategy**

22. Significant progress has been made in developing the Strategy in order to meet the concerns raised at the first public consultation. Improvements include:
- (a) A briefer main document with more evidence and supporting information in appendices
  - (b) A general reduction in complexity and greater clarity
  - (c) A more self-contained document with fewer references to further work
  - (d) A more robust and comprehensive evidence base
  - (e) The consideration of a fuller range of green infrastructure themes
  - (f) A more robust and appropriate methodology and a stronger rationale and evidence trail leading to the Strategic Networks
  - (g) A clearly defined Strategic Network with its constituent elements
  - (h) More information on District issues and opportunities
23. Outstanding concerns include:
- (a) The need to complete the document
  - (b) The order and flow of the document including whether some parts should be in the appendices
  - (c) The attractiveness and readability of the presentation
  - (d) The helpfulness, clarity and accuracy of some of the maps and diagrams
  - (e) The way in which the methodology is described
  - (f) The need for fuller accounts of the Target Areas
  - (g) The need to identify new and developing projects in response to the analysis of Green Infrastructure gaps and opportunities

## Completion and endorsement of the Strategy

24. The aim is for all local authorities to endorse the Strategy before it is taken for public consultation. That consultation is planned for 3 March to 3 April. A final version of the Strategy will then be produced for endorsement in the spring/summer.
25. Four of the six local authorities have taken a version of the draft Strategy produced in October through their Member processes, to give an update on progress and gain Member endorsement for the Strategy to be taken to public consultation. Cambridge City Council officers will be seeking the endorsement of their Members in the middle of February.
26. Since the October version of the Strategy, major changes and additions have continued to be made. A further, though incomplete, version of the Strategy was sent to us by Cambridgeshire Horizons on 23 December, with the appendices following on 11 January. Officers are providing comments on these.
27. While some limited changes have been made to these versions, a range of further changes will be needed and we have offered to work with Cambridgeshire Horizons, Cambridge City and other partners so that a public consultation draft can be completed by the end of January.
28. A copy of the current Working Draft of the Strategy is contained as Appendix A with the Working Draft of the Technical Appendices to the Strategy as Appendix B. Whilst changes will be required throughout the document, the draft Strategy identifies key areas for significant change.
29. This report proposes that the broad approach to the Strategy be endorsed and that delegated authority be given to the Corporate Manager (Planning and New Communities) to endorse an acceptable, revised consultation draft of the Strategy for public consultation, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder. The Council will be formally consulted during the public consultation, but at that stage it is hoped that it will not need to raise major concerns.

## Options

30. Options available are to:
  - (a) Accept the recommendations of this report
  - (b) Require that a revised version of the Strategy be brought to a future Portfolio Holder meeting for endorsement, which would delay or weaken the public consultation
  - (c) Decide not to continue to support the further development and completion of the Strategy

## Implications

31. 

Financial	Within existing budgets.
Legal	None.
Staffing	Staff will need to input changes to the Strategy.

Risk Management	<p>There is no general risk in producing a Green Infrastructure Strategy on the basis that national policy and guidance and due process are followed.</p> <p>There is some risk that the Strategy will not be acceptable after the changes that can be made by the end of January, so that it cannot be endorsed in time to meet the public consultation programme.</p> <p>Delays in completing the consultation draft could threaten the consultation exercise and final publication of the Strategy, and could result in the requirement for extra resources from the Council.</p>
Equality and Diversity	<p>Green Infrastructure includes sustainable movement and other themes, which improve access, recreation and exercise for disabled people, and encourage wider involvement in and enjoyment of the heritage and the natural environment.</p>
Climate Change	<p>One of the four objectives of the Strategy is to Mitigate and Adapt to Climate Change, and climate change is a key theme of the Strategy and part of its multi-functional approach.</p>

### Consultations

32. Public consultation on an earlier draft of the Strategy was carried out in February and March and the results have informed current versions. The Strategy is being developed for a second public consultation in March and April.

### Effect on Strategic Aims

33. **Commitment to being a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all.** The public consultations on the Strategy involve Cambridgeshire Horizons, in partnership with Council officers, giving information to and engaging with the public and a range of stakeholders through different events and media.
34. **Commitment to ensuring that South Cambridgeshire continues to be a safe and healthy place for all.** Green Infrastructure provides a range of health benefits and increases wellbeing. It improves safety by encouraging wider use of the countryside.
35. **Commitment to making South Cambridgeshire a place in which residents can feel proud to live.** The Strategy will help conserve and enhance the countryside and villages that make the District special and are highly valued by residents, and help create attractive and distinctive new places.
36. **Commitment to assisting provision for local jobs for all.** The Strategy will encourage activity that will support local jobs and suppliers, and increase traditional and other skills. It will encourage visitors and tourism.
37. **Commitment to providing a voice for rural life.** The Strategy will help conserve and enhance our heritage and natural environment. It provides a framework for local Green Infrastructure planning and action.

### Conclusions

38. The Strategy has been substantially improved since the draft that was the subject of the first public consultation. However, further changes are needed before it can be endorsed for the second public consultation in March and April. We expect that those changes can be made before the end of January so that the public consultation will

not be delayed. It is important not to weaken or delay the consultation because that could threaten the publication of the final Strategy and potentially require extra resources in the future. This report proposes a way forward in which the Portfolio Holder gives a broad endorsement to the approach set out in the Strategy and delegates authority so that a modified version can be endorsed for public consultation when changes have made it acceptable.

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Report to the New Communities Portfolio Holder, 2 March 2010, on Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy: Public and Stakeholder Consultation.

**Contact Officer:** David Bevan – Conservation & Design Manager  
Telephone: (01954) 713177