

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive

1.0 Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the committee of the preparation of the Green Infrastructure Strategy Framework.
- 1.2 The committee's comments will be reported to Cabinet at its meeting on 9th March 2011, where approval will be sought to endorse the Green Infrastructure Strategy Framework as the basis for the production of a Green Infrastructure Strategy for Sunderland.

2.0 Background and current position

- 2.1 Green infrastructure, or "GI", is the network of open spaces and countryside that surrounds towns and villages and permeates through built areas. It is largely comprised of countryside, parks, natural habitats and green links such as river and stream corridors, pedestrian, cycling or other transport links.
- 2.2 Strategies for GI are encouraged and supported at national, regional and local level. National planning policy statement PPS12 identifies green infrastructure as a necessary element in ensuring the delivery of sustainable communities. Should the City Council decide to introduce a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) under the provisions of the Planning Act 2008, an up-to-date green infrastructure strategy will help inform the CIL funding calculations and GI proposals in the city could then take advantage of the subsequent fund.
- 2.3 Local drivers for developing a Sunderland GI Strategy have been the Sunderland Strategy 2008 – 2025, the Economic Masterplan (2010) and, as requested by the Homes and Communities Agency, commitment to a GI strategy in support of the emerging "Sunderland's Housing Priorities Plan".
- 2.4 In July 2009, the Attractive and Inclusive City Partnership (A&ICP), one of the five sub-groups coming under the umbrella of the Sunderland Partnership, considered the report "A Proposal for Developing a Network of Green Infrastructure" produced by the Planning and Environment Service. This report set out initial proposals for developing the concept of a GI network in Sunderland from its initial stage to achieving action on the ground. The meeting agreed that a steering group would be established and that production of a green infrastructure strategy for the city would be included in the Sunderland Partnership's delivery plan.
- 2.5 The attached GI Strategy Framework, produced by the GI Steering Group, was considered by the A&ICP at its meeting on 17th November 2010 where it was endorsed as the basis for the production of a GI Strategy for Sunderland and recommended to the City Council for its approval.

3.0 The GI Strategy Framework in outline

- 3.1 The strategy for improving, developing, securing and maintaining a network of green infrastructure in the city will need to successfully incorporate several main strands of work. This is the 'Framework' and it encompasses:
1. Completion and evaluation of a city-wide GI audit
 2. Early on-the-ground actions
 3. Mapping of Green Infrastructure
 4. An audit of GI-related activities and programmes, for example Limestone Landscapes
 5. Production of a GI Strategy document
 6. A rolling programme of sustainable actions
 7. The development plan – the Local Development Framework (LDF)
 8. An annual monitor and review
 9. Publicising the Green Infrastructure Strategy
- 3.2 Each of the main strands is described in the Strategy Framework along with individual tables that set out key actions and dates as well as main responsibilities and cost implications. The inter-relationship between these main strands is illustrated in a figure in the document, reproduced in Appendix 1 of this report. The timeframe for production of all the strands, hence the complete strategy, extends largely over the next 12 months and can be seen in the Timeframe Matrix, reproduced in Appendix 2 to this report.
- 3.3 Some of the strands are already progressing:
- A Green Space Audit and mapping of green infrastructure is being completed by the council's Planning Policy Section, whilst the Area Regeneration Officers through the Area Committees are leading a process of public engagement in evaluating some 1,800 green space sites across the city. This work will be completed in February 2011 and a final audit report produced by June. The GI audit will be further enhanced by the addition of the results of a city-wide biodiversity habitat survey that was commissioned by the Planning and Environment Service in April 2010.
 - The GI Steering Group in October considered an initial list of potential GI 'early action' schemes. Further investigations to produce a GI checklist, methodology and a shortlist of schemes for submission to the A&ICP is underway.
 - The draft Sunderland Core Strategy (approved by Cabinet for consultation March 2010) includes GI policies and a GI corridor map that resulted from earlier discussions of the GI Steering Group and the A&ICP. The Core Strategy is being revised as a result of the new Government's evolving views on the development plan system with a view to reporting to Cabinet in April 2011. It is expected to retain the GI work that was included in the March 2010 version. The emerging GI Strategy will subsequently help to inform the next main LDF plan, the Allocations DPD.
- 3.4 Whilst the GI Strategy Framework sets out how an overall strategy for the city will come about, in Section 1 a proposal for a provisional 'Vision' is outlined and Section 2 includes provisional 'Principles' for GI in the city.
- 3.5 The provisional 'vision' for green infrastructure is as follows:

“The economic and social development of the city will be enhanced through its setting in surroundings of high quality green infrastructure that will be provided through a network of green spaces and links, including coastal, river and other water features, designed and managed to maximise their multi-functional potential.

- 3.6 Five main principles are proposed, summarised below (they can be read in full in Appendix 3 to this report):

Connectivity: seeking to physically connect areas of open space through corridors that incorporate the city’s most important parks, habitats, other open space features, main rivers and the coast, and linking to the countryside and adjoining districts.

Functionality: maximising the range of environmental, social and cultural functions and features within corridors and sites, such as

- Adaptation to and mitigation of effects of climate change
- Adapting open spaces to help reduce flood and drainage problems
- Improving and protecting woodland and tree coverage
- Preserving and enhancing related local heritage
- Increasing biodiversity through habitat and corridor development
- Enabling better rights of way for walking, cycling and horse riding
- Maintaining or enhancing local landscape and townscape character
- Maximizing the potential contribution to life-long learning
- Considering the potential for small scale community food production

Enhancing residential and economic communities: Seek to permeate, connect and enhance green space in residential and employment areas, the City Centre and other main functions, connecting physically, emotionally and intellectually with communities, especially to benefit areas of poor health and deprivation

High standards: set standards for high quality enhancement of the image of the city, for development of new and rejuvenated green space and water features and standards for accessibility to green infrastructure

Sustainable green infrastructure: design schemes to optimise low maintenance consistent with achieving the desired functions and quality of the site or corridor.

- 3.7 These provisional elements will be used to help develop on-the-ground GI schemes and any revisions to maintenance regimes in the interim period prior to completion of the GI Strategy document in late 2011. The GI Strategy document, which it is proposed will be produced with an element of public consultation, will include final versions of the ‘vision’ and ‘principles’.

- 3.8 Section 4 of the Framework sets out working procedures and governance of the preparation of the strategy. This will be through the Sunderland Partnership and City Council, with the A&ICP overseeing production and the Steering Group undertaking details of preparation.

4.0 Next Steps

- 4.1 The Green Infrastructure Strategy Framework will be reported to Cabinet in March and thence the Area Committees for information. It will also be put on the

Sunderland Partnership's and City Council's web sites for information and informal comment, as well as being made available for other media publicity.

4.2 The Steering Group and A&ICP, assisted by the Planning Policy Section and others, will then continue to progress the strategic strands to completion.

5.0 Relevant consultations/ considerations

- a) **Financial Implications** – The report is resource neutral. Preparation of the strategy will involve staff resources but no financial implications other than costs of consultation and printing which can be found from existing budgets. Actions arising from the strategy will be subject of other individual financial decisions taken by the agencies proposing the schemes.
- b) **Legal Implications** – there are no direct legal implications of agreeing to the preparation of the GI Strategy or its provisional principles.
- c) **Policy Implications** – The provisional principles will be taken into consideration in preparing the LDF and other plans and actions.
- d) **Implications for other Services** – preparation of the GI Strategy will involve other services' representatives on the GI Steering Group, whilst the provisional principles and final strategy will have implications to some extent for all services, notably those delivering green space related schemes and improvements.
- e) **The Public** – the GI Strategy Framework document will be put on the council's web site for information, to gauge interest and to gain informal comment of the public. The GI Strategy document itself will be subject of a public consultation exercise before it is finalised, whilst the main schemes in the proposed rolling programme of actions will be subject of public engagement and consultation commensurate with the scale and type of scheme.

6.0 Recommendation

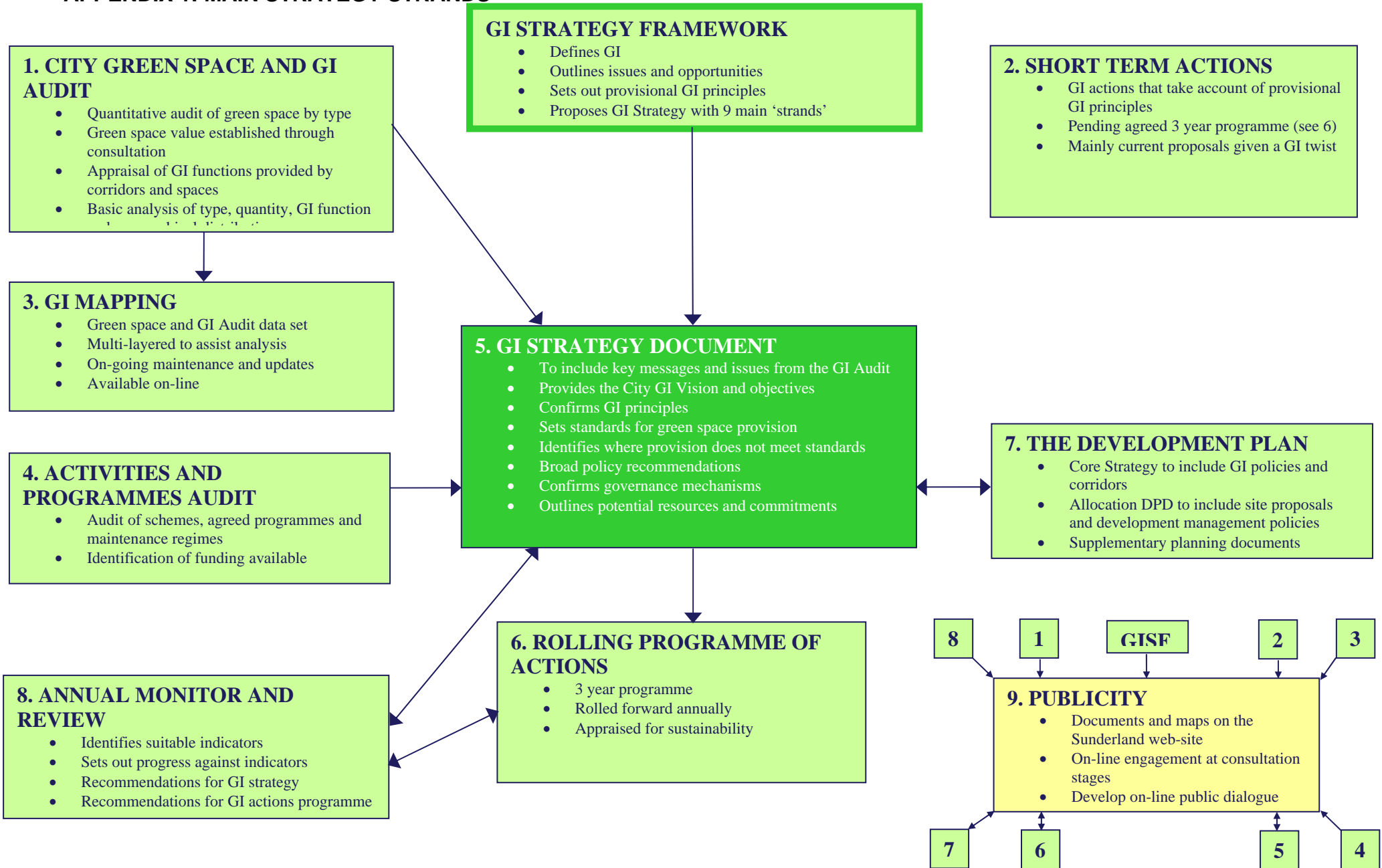
Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

- i. Endorse the Green Infrastructure Strategy Framework as the basis for the production of a GI Strategy for Sunderland; and
- ii. Forward any other comments for consideration of Cabinet.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Report to the Attractive and Inclusive City Partnership 17 November 2010
- Draft Green Infrastructure Strategy Framework document

APPENDIX 1: MAIN STRATEGY STRANDS



APPENDIX 2: GI STRANDS TIMEFRAME MATRIX

DATE	1 GI AUDIT	2 EARLY ACTIONS	3 MAPPING	4 ACTIVITY AUDIT	5 GI DOCUMENT	6 ACTIONS PROG	7 LDF	8 ANNUAL MONITOR	PUBLICITY
12.10	Site audit complete								
1.11				Complete research and document of information					
2.11	Complete workshops	Agree draft actions with Steering Group							Develop web page.
3.11		Report to A&ICP			Agree format and scope of document with SG		Corridors and policies in Core Strategy to Cabinet		
4.11	Audit analysis + GI data		Map all sites + GI functions						
5.11									
6.11	Final report to committee				Draft GI Strategy document	Scope AP programme document			
7.11									
8.11									
9.11					Publicity and consultation				
10.11								Agree indicators	
11.11					Final	Programme			

					strategy document	with input of community			
12.11									
1.12									
2.12									
3.12									
4.12									
5.12									
6.12								Produce 2011 -12 report	

APPENDIX 3: PROVISIONAL PRINCIPLES

Provisional Green Infrastructure Principles for Sunderland

1 *Connectivity*: seek to physically connect areas of open space; aim to have, as a minimum connecting feature, a green corridor with the capacity to incorporate a pedestrian and cycle route. Include the city's most important parks, habitats, other open space features, main rivers and the coast in the interlinked network of GI corridors. Link the main urban areas with the urban fringes and countryside and with adjoining districts.

2 *Functionality*: maximise the range of environmental, social and cultural functions and features within corridors and sites appropriate to their scale and location, i.e. optimizing potential functions but not making spaces more multifunctional for the sake of it, where resources would not last. An outline of the main functional considerations to be taken into account is given in Table 1A, whilst some matters particular to the city include:

- assisting adaptation to and mitigation of local effects of climate change
- adapting open space use so that flood risk and drainage problems can be minimised, particularly in support of critical drainage areas
- improving and protecting woodland and tree coverage, including the Great North Forest, to improve carbon sequestration and air quality, create shade and recreation value
- preserving and enhancing related local heritage
- increasing biodiversity through habitat and corridor development, looking to remove barriers to key corridors so that wildlife (and people) can move from one area to another freely and safely. In this respect particular attention should be given to the magnesian limestone grassland (of which Sunderland holds a very significant proportion of the global resource)
- adapting relevant sections of the RoW network to enable walking, cycling and horse riding for all, for recreational and utility purposes
- maintaining or enhancing local landscape and townscape character
- maximizing the potential contribution to life-long learning
- considering the potential for small scale community food production through new and improved allotments

3 *Enhancing residential and economic communities*: Seek to permeate, connect and enhance residential and employment areas, the City Centre and other main functions (such as schools), connecting physically, emotionally and intellectually with communities. Especially look at green infrastructure improvements where they can benefit areas with severe health inequalities and aspects of multiple-deprivation. Give consideration to encouraging active lifestyles and community interaction in the design of schemes and accessibility.

4 *High standards*: set standards for high quality enhancement of the image of the city, for development of new and rejuvenated green space and water features and standards for accessibility to a full range of GI across the city (including access to Accessible Natural Green Space – ANGSt) as well as for maintenance, in relation to the features and functions.

5 *Sustainable GI*: design schemes to optimise low maintenance consistent with achieving the desired function(s) and quality of the site or corridor.