



ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 25TH OCTOBER 2022

**SUBJECT: IMPLEMENTATION OF GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE
STRATEGY – PROGRESS REPORT**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMY AND
ENVIRONMENT**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update members on the implementation of the Green Infrastructure Strategy following its adoption in November 2020.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Significant progress has been made in the delivery and implementation of the Green Infrastructure Strategy adopted some two years ago. However further work is required in order to integrate this important strategy into other services of the organisation over and above that of the Green Space Strategy Team. Further work is therefore required to develop, prepare and implement a 5-year integrated action plan originally outlined in the initial Cabinet report in 2020 whereby local priorities and projects are identified.
- 2.2 The importance of the implementation of the Green Infrastructure Strategy at this strategic level will continue throughout the plan period for the 2nd Replacement County Borough Local Development Plan (2RLDP) and this presents an opportunity to protect and enhance the environment throughout the County Borough up to 2035.
- 2.3 The Green Infrastructure Strategy has been utilised in securing strategic grant funding and will continue to do so for a number of years. Green Infrastructure funding at both the local level as well as for collaborative regional projects is an important output of this long-term natural resource management strategy.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To provide members with a detailed update since the formal adoption of the Green Infrastructure Strategy in November 2020.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 TACP Environmental Consultants were appointed by Caerphilly County Borough Council to prepare a Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy for its administrative area, which was presented and subsequently adopted by Cabinet on the 25th of November 2020 as the core Green Space Development and Management tool for the Authority.

- 5.2 The Vision for the Green Infrastructure Strategy reflects the success over the last 20 years of the implementation and development of the Countryside Strategy which is reflected in the vision for the Strategy as follows:

'Caerphilly will be a green and healthy place to live with an established, multi-functional green infrastructure of high-quality spaces interlinked by a network of corridors that benefit both people and nature.'

The strategy aims to deliver the following in order to achieve its vision:

The planning and management of the green infrastructure network is based upon sustainable principles that reflect the diversity of the County Borough's landscape, heritage and biodiversity resource, all working within a thriving economy. These will ensure resilience is built into the strategy which will assist in tackling climate change.

Caerphilly's green infrastructure provides enjoyment, relaxation, inspiration and wellbeing for local people and visitors. This enhances a distinct local identity and resulting sense of place and an expression of the cultural heritage of the area.

- 5.3 The extent and component elements of GI are wide ranging and often include water features, sometimes referred to as Blue Infrastructure, and for the purposes of the Caerphilly Strategy are included within the GI definition. Planning Policy Wales (PPW) Edition 11 broadly explain the network of natural and semi-natural features, green spaces, rivers and lakes that intersperse and connect places. The component elements of GI can function at different scales. For instance, at a landscape scale GI can comprise entire ecosystems such as wetlands, waterways and forests. At a more local scale, it might comprise parks, fields, public rights of way, allotments and cemeteries. Small scale individual elements such as street trees, hedgerows, roadside verges, and green roofs all contribute to GI networks.
- 5.4 A key feature of GI is its multi-functional character and the capacity to provide several functions at the same time, thus offering multiple benefits for social, economic as well as environmental resilience. It touches most elements of daily life and is essential to the functioning of society. These results give benefits to wellbeing, including flood management, water purification, improved air quality, reduced noise pollution, local climate moderation, climate changes and food production.
- 5.5 Three data sets have been utilised to map the Green Infrastructure throughout the County borough and this in turn has been broken down into five Primary landscape types, these being Parks and Gardens (1.6%), Amenity Space (8.7%), Natural and Semi Natural Green Spaces (39%), Green Corridors (1.5%) and Other (38%), this latter typology including farms. Each of these primary landscapes includes a range of secondary typologies relating to the landscape types and covers some 89% of the area of the County Borough. There are some 38 of these secondary typologies each

allocated to within one of the primary landscape types. Only 3 of these 38 secondary typologies cover more than 10% of the County Borough, woodland and scrub 18%, grassland 15% and farms 34%. The identification of these secondary typologies concludes the first stage of the Strategy. Having identified the above typologies, the GI Strategy moves on to consider four further stages, outlined below, which are the dynamic components of the Strategy.

Stage 2 - score functions for importance: This is the relative importance of each function to CCBC. These numerical scores, ranging 1 - 5 reflect the policy context with those delivering national policy scoring highest, a score of 5 and those of little importance a score of 1.

Stage 3 - score secondary typologies for their performance of function: This scores each secondary typology according to the extent to which it provides each function.

Stage 4 - review of value scores: The value of each secondary typology considering the importance of provision and function.

Stage 5 - review need for enhancement scores: The need for enhancement of each secondary typology considering the importance of function.

- 5.6 The Datasets utilised as part of the GI Strategy have been transferred to a base map and show the relative importance of each parcel of land and demonstrate and/or present the best opportunities for enhancement. The mapping is used as the planning basis allowing for specific prioritisation of resources and targeting areas where the restoration, maintenance, creation, enhancement or connection of green space(s) and/or habitats will deliver the most benefits. This in particular is applicable to new developments and the place making process.
- 5.7 The importance of and inter relatedness of GI has become increasingly recognised and this is reflected in various recent legislative requirements including the Environment Act 2016, which provides a strong driver for the delivery of Multi-Functional GI. Its provision can make a significant contribution to the sustainable management of natural resources, in particular to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems. Thus, GI is an important tool for local authorities to deliver their Section 6 Biodiversity duty under the Environment Act 2016. PPW 11 sets out the need to address GI functions within the planning process and the Future Wales 2040 Development Framework again identifies GI as a core policy consideration. The legislation aims to fully integrate GI and its functions into decision making processes with the objective of protecting the environment.
- 5.8 The Strategy was not developed in isolation and provides a good fit with other developing environmental strategies of neighbouring authorities and other public sector bodies, most notably Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Area Statements. Additional work has been completed by working in collaboration at a regional level with Torfaen County Borough Council, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, Newport City Council and Monmouthshire County Council as well as NRW in the delivery of the Gwent Green Grid Partnership, the Area Statement process and the emerging Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy.
- 5.9 The Green Infrastructure Strategy and its respective data sets and mapping have proved to be an invaluable resource for officers within the Green Space Strategy Team during the initial stages of the 2RLDP plan preparation process, in particular the assessment of Candidate Sites put forward for Development, which has allowed

officers to assess the environmental impact of potential new developments on a site-by-site basis. The importance of the implementation of the GI Strategy at this strategic level will continue throughout the plan preparation process and presents an opportunity to protect and enhance the environment throughout the County Borough for the plan period which is some 15 years. The creation of new GI, particularly on the urban fringe where there is considerable pressure on existing GI resources and where its benefits could be extended to a wider section of the community are identifiable through the Strategy in terms of location and type of desired improvement.

- 5.10 As part of the original Scrutiny and Cabinet Reporting process it was identified that officers would prepare a 5-year Integrated Action Plan (IAP) which would identify local priorities and implementation projects. Progress has been made through the delivery of the Gwent Green Grid Partnership (GGGP) and the emerging Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy. Further work is required to complete action plan and integrate it with other services across the organisation. Such works include analysing the relevant identified datasets that accompany NRW's South East Area Statement, the emerging Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy and the adopted GI Strategy for the County Borough and setting priorities for the next 5 years. The development of the IAP will be completed during this financial year.
- 5.11 The GI Strategy has been put to good use in the preparation and delivery of Collaborative Strategic Grant applications, namely Welsh Government's Enabling Natural Resources and Well-Being Grant scheme, and the delivery of both the Resilient Greater Gwent scheme and the GGGP. These schemes combined have allowed Caerphilly CBC to collaboratively deliver at a regional scale: Green Infrastructure Enhancement Projects including contributing to the Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy, Access Projects including Regional Access Strategy, Biodiversity Enhancement Projects such as 'Nature isn't Neat' and Urban Biodiversity, Invasive Non-Native Species Management, the preparation of the Gwent Nature Recovery Action Plan, Strategic Tree Planting and River Corridor and Riparian Habitat Enhancement along the Ebbw, Rhymney and Sirhowy rivers. CCBC's involvement in projects such as these demonstrates the value to enhancing GI at local level whilst also contributing to regional multiple benefits.
- 5.12 The datasets and GI Strategy have been an important tool in targeting areas whereby GI enhancements will link high quality green spaces and assets and subsequently provide the most significant multiple GI benefits. It has been important in the identification of green corridors and linkages, which benefit both wildlife and people.

Examples of Green Infrastructure Projects Implemented:

- 5.13 As mentioned previously in this report, Green Infrastructure is multi-functional in character and has the capacity to provide several functions at the same time thus offering multiple benefits whilst undertaking enhancement projects. There are nine functions identified, and it is these functions that form the basis of the development of the Strategy and are illustrated pictorially within the scoring tables throughout. These functions are: Biodiversity, Access, Water Management, Tourism, Community, Regeneration, Health and Wellbeing, Education and Landscape Amenity.
- 5.14 The table below outlines several examples of Green Infrastructure enhancement projects undertaken since November 2020, and identifies the multiple Green Infrastructure Functions and Multiple Benefits they have delivered or have the potential to deliver against in the medium and long term.

Project	Description	GI Function/Multiple Benefits
Community Tree Planting	<p>Strategic tree planting undertaken at Ynys Hywel Farm adjacent that to links to Sirhowy Valley Country Park delivering a significant wildlife corridor between the Graig Goch Local Nature Reserve (LNR), NRW woodland and the River Sirhowy.</p> <p>A dedicated volunteer field was planted with some 4,500 trees by a range of volunteers throughout a week in March. Working in partnership with GAVO, Groundwork Wales, Keep Wales Tidy and NRW. The strategic tree planting scheme has provided benefits to mental and physical health and wellbeing during the implementation with future benefits occurring in the medium and long term by providing a space for volunteers, residents and visitors to visit in the future and relax and enjoy the future woodland.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity • Water Management • Community • Health and Wellbeing • Education • Landscape Amenity
River Corridor and Riparian Habitat Enhancement	<p>Working with partners as part of the Resilient Greater Gwent Grant scheme and undertaking Nature Recovery Projects along our three key rivers, the Rhymney, Sirhowy and Ebbw. Organising contractors to undertake river clean ups at problematic areas and installing wagtail, dipper and otter boxes along our river corridors and thereby enhancing existing strategic wildlife corridors that run through the county borough.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity • Water Management • Health and Wellbeing • Education • Landscape Amenity
Linear Management	<p>Trialled changing the management of cycleway verges along the Upper Sirhowy Valley Cycleway in 2020-21, which continued in 2022-23. This included increasing the width of the verge through flail cutting of persistent vegetation and scrub, to allow sowing of native seed mix in the future. With the scrub removed it allows the ability to cut and collect the arisings in future years to establish healthy wildflower habitat along the edges of the cycle way and expand to all cycleways that run through our Country Parks and the County Borough. This will allow access routes which link communities to also link pockets of habitat and create new wildlife corridors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity • Access • Tourism • Community • Regeneration • Health and Wellbeing • Landscape Amenity
Maesycwmmmer Strategic	<p>Officers within the Green Space Strategy team have worked closely with the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity • Access

Candidate Site (Replacement LDP)	<p>Planning Policy officers in the potential allocation of a strategic site as part of the 2RLDP process at Maesycwmmer. The use of the Green Infrastructure Strategy has allowed officers to analyse the Green Infrastructure Map produced by the developers that promoted the Strategic Candidate site and identify existing GI assets worthy of protection and areas whereby enhancements would provide the most benefits in the short, medium and long term. This example demonstrates the strategic nature of the GI strategy and the potential it has for the preparation of land management and/or land use policy throughout the County Borough, particularly as part of the 2RLDP plan preparation process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Management • Tourism • Community • Regeneration • Health and Wellbeing • Education • Landscape Amenity
Plant a Patch for Pollinators	<p>The Countryside team launched a promotional campaign during Mental Health Awareness week in 2021 to reconnect residents, businesses, and schools to nature by growing a wildflower patch and creating small patches of meadows to provide patches of nectar and pollen rich native wildflowers for pollinators. The packs included native wildflower seeds, a sowing and aftercare guidance sheet, pollinator identification sheets and a local record centre recording sheet. Participants were asked to provide photos of before, during and after, as well as updates on what their patch has attracted, how it is growing and to record the species found and to share their encounters with us. This project was suitable for everyone as participants could create a patch in their garden or even a small pot on a patio with 429 Plant a Patch packs being issued.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity • Community • Regeneration • Health and Wellbeing • Education • Landscape Amenity
Hedgehog Highway	<p>The Countryside team launched a hedgehog highway campaign in the Summer of 2022 with the aim to create accessible highways within the borough for hedgehogs. 150 packs were available with significant interest and take up from residents of the Borough. Each pack included a hedgehog fence plaque to surround the hole in fences for hedgehogs to access, a hedgehog survey tunnel and an identification guide for footprints. This created new wildlife corridors and created new links to existing wildlife corridors. This project will also benefit other species as a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity • Community • Health and Wellbeing • Education

	consequence of wildlife corridor enhancement and creation.	
Community Hedgerow Creation and Restoration	The Countryside Ranger Service worked with local schools (St Cenydd School, Heol Ddu, Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni – Caerphilly Site, Lewis School Pengam) to create 430m of new hedgerows within their own grounds, which targeted areas that connected isolated pockets of habitat that created extra green corridors for wildlife. It also provided new opportunities for schools and pupils to enhance their local environment by planting circa 3,500 hedgerow plants and community benefit as well as benefits physical and mental health and well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity • Water Management • Community • Health and Wellbeing • Education • Landscape Amenity
Nature Isn't Neat	Nature Isn't Neat is working towards establishing a joined-up approach to the management of green spaces, to create wildflower-rich pollinator habitats across 5 local authority areas through the Gwent Green Grid Partnership. Officers have engaged with local communities across South-East Wales, however Bargoed has been a focus for the Caerphilly area, raising awareness of pollinator decline and encouraging community ownership and empowerment to deliver actions that will help them recover. Changes to help keep flowering species alive for longer, not only provide food and habitats for the pollinators and other species, but also increases water absorption, provides Carbon sequestration, and improves the health of the soil. Research suggests that creating environments which support a wider range of wildlife, benefits people's health and mental wellbeing, while encouraging them to slow down and enjoy watching flowers, insects and other wildlife.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity • Community • Health and Wellbeing • Education • Landscape Amenity

5.15 The list of projects provides an example of GI enhancement projects but does not form an exhaustive list of all projects which have delivered Multiple GI Functions throughout the 2 years since adoption. The identified projects also demonstrate that however strategic, large or small projects can deliver significant multiple benefits in the short, medium and long term.

5.16 **Conclusion**

Significant progress has been made in the delivery and implementation of the Green Infrastructure strategy adopted some two years ago. However further work is required in order to integrate this important strategy into other services of the organisation over and above that of the Green Space Strategy Team. Officers will

continue to work towards the development of an Integrated Action Plan which will identify local priorities and cover a period of 5 years from its preparation and adoption.

- 5.17 The importance of the implementation of the GI Strategy at this strategic level will continue throughout the 2RLDP plan preparation process and presents an opportunity to protect and enhance the environment throughout the County Borough for the plan period which is some 15 years.
- 5.18 The GI Strategy has been utilised in securing strategic grant funding and will continue to do so for a number of years. GI funding at both the local level as well as for collaborative regional projects is an important output of this long-term natural resource management strategy.
- 5.19 In the two years since adoption, the GI Strategy has operated and demonstrated its importance at a variety of levels from the strategic level in the contribution it has made to the 2RLDP and the emerging Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy and contribution to NRW's Area Statement process down to the implementation of projects at a local level.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 No assumptions have been made in this report.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment has not been carried out as this report is for information only.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising as a result of this report. There are however potential implications regarding implementation of some land management elements which would vary from individual action, some possibly incurring costs whilst others save.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no personnel implications arising as a result of this report.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 All comments received from consultees have been incorporated into the report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 None

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Consultees: Cllr Chris Morgan, Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces
Cllr Tudor Davies, Chair of Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Adrian Hussey, Vice Chair of Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee
Mark S Williams, Corporate Director for Economy and Environment
Rob Hartshorn, Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services
Christina Harrhy, Chief Executive
Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
Stephen Harris, Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer
Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services
Philip Griffiths, Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager
Rhian Kyte, Head of Regeneration and Planning
Margaret Iles, Ecologist
Mike Headington, Green Spaces and Transport Services Manager
Jonathan Davies, Parks and Countryside Operations
Anwen Cullinane, Senior Policy Officer

Background Papers:

[Link to Cabinet Report 25th November 2020 “Caerphilly Green Infrastructure Strategy](#)