

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Environment
2.	Date:	21 March 2011
3.	Title:	South Yorkshire Green Infrastructure Strategy
4.	Directorate:	Environment & Development Services

5. Summary

A South Yorkshire Green Infrastructure Strategy has been produced by South Yorkshire Forest Partnership (on behalf of Transform South Yorkshire) which proposes a 20 year vision for improving the sub-region's network of key green infrastructure, and sets out proposals for preparing a detailed delivery plan for the coming period up to 2015. It is intended to use the document as part of the evidence base for Rotherham's Local Development Framework (LDF), pending future consideration to its adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document.

6. Recommendations

That the Cabinet Member approves the content of the South Yorkshire Green Infrastructure Strategy to enable its formal signing-off at the 25 March 2011 Transform South Yorkshire Board meeting.

7. Proposals and Details

Green infrastructure (GI) can be defined as *the network of multi-functional green space, both new and existing, both rural and urban, which supports the natural and ecological processes and is integral to the health and quality of life of sustainable communities.*'

In 2009, Transform South Yorkshire commissioned South Yorkshire Forest Partnership (SYFP) to produce a green infrastructure¹ strategy covering the sub-region, to be developed in partnership with the local authorities for Rotherham, Barnsley, Doncaster, and Sheffield, and with Sheffield City Region. This commission was a requirement of the Growth Point funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The project is being taken forward in two parts. The South Yorkshire Green Infrastructure Strategy marks the end of Part 1 of this work, as follows:

January - May 2010: Establishment of the project steering group. Scoping exercise undertaken including baseline report by consultants TEP and launch event with SYFP stakeholders. Officer appointed to manage the strategy development and consultation process.

June - December 2010: Communications and engagement plan written and targeted stakeholder engagement undertaken. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis and refinement of the programme. Consultation with an established key stakeholder group via a prioritisation workshop. Masterplanning of priorities for future development. Drafting the strategy.

January 2010 – March 2011: Consultation on the draft strategy, development of a methodology for Part 2, and publication.

This initial stage puts forward a series of ambitious, high-level goals. The four goals underpinning the strategy are to harness the power of South Yorkshire's green infrastructure network by:

- Stimulating economic growth, jobs and investment
- Building improved resilience to future changes, including adapting to and mitigating climate change
- Engaging communities to use, improve and manage their own local greenspaces and the wider environment
- Enhancing natural habitats, conserving ecological diversity and managing valuable natural resources wisely

These are supported by proposals for the kind of actions that can deliver these goals. It includes a masterplan, highlighting priority areas for improvements in specific locations both within Rotherham and the partner authorities. The strategy goes on to describe the kinds of potential actions that can be taken forward in

partnership, to address the main strategic challenges faced by South Yorkshire. Overall the vision being that “by 2030 we will create a vital, productive and attractive green infrastructure network, joining up South Yorkshire’s communities, supporting sustainable growth and helping to deliver social cohesion”.

This document also sets out how Part 2 will develop a five-year delivery programme which will be refreshed on a rolling basis. The proposed approach is to focus on improvements that will deliver benefits across the four local authority areas, rather than solely local impacts.

The strategy Parts 1 and 2 offer support and advocacy for the multifunctional benefits of an integrated green infrastructure network, and suggest how these actions could be resourced and embedded into routine spatial planning processes. It asserts that working at a sub-regional scale is necessary to provide the adequate resources and support to neighbourhoods and boroughs. Ten recommendations are made relating to the governance, delivery, funding and communication of the measures put forward in the strategy.

This strategy represents an important step towards co-ordinated action across South Yorkshire, strengthening the case for investment, and creating real savings by avoiding duplication. The document also offers other practical and immediate outcomes, including important background on green infrastructure and a framework for embedding this information into local policy documents and plans at the level of each local authority.

In particular, the planning system provides an important basis against which the different components of green infrastructure can be safeguarded and enhanced as well as providing mechanisms for new infrastructure to be created. Rotherham’s Local Development Framework will look to set a clear and robust planning framework for the creation, management and maintenance of green infrastructure, including any new sites that are created. The South Yorkshire Green Infrastructure Strategy will form an integral component of the evidence base in achieving this aim, pending future consideration to its adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document.

8. Finance

A proportion of the costs incurred in the preparation of the documentation were funded externally by Transform South Yorkshire. To augment this, South Yorkshire Forest Partnership secured funding from the Interreg IVB North West Europe programme, and the South Yorkshire ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) Technical Assistance programme.

For Green Infrastructure projects, there are several different potential funding sources, which reflect the number of benefits green infrastructure can provide for social, economic and environmental wellbeing. These can be explored in the future when local implementation of the Sub Regional Green Infrastructure Study is considered. At present, they include:

- EU funding such as EU Life+
- UK Government budget allocations and the Regional Growth Fund

- developer contributions and the emerging Community Infrastructure Levy
- private sector funding through property and financial endowments
- environmental stewardship schemes
- small scale funding grants for community projects
- private sector sponsorship
- community land, development & conservation trusts
- utilising non-government organisations, charities and membership organisations to generate in-kind resources to invest in and maintain local green infrastructure projects

9. Risks and Uncertainties

Cross-boundary, sub-regional planning is needed to deliver improvements to green infrastructure. This gap can be filled with partnership working. A significant challenge to sub-regional working at present is that the entirety of South Yorkshire's green infrastructure is not the sole responsibility of any single organisation.

The South Yorkshire green infrastructure strategy should complement work in other areas. This strategy should work alongside documents working at a comparable scale, such as the Leeds City Region Green Infrastructure Strategy, as well as seeking to build links with plans covering the East Midlands components of the Sheffield City Region. It must also support and complement a broad range of local documents such as Rotherham's Green Space Strategy.

Green infrastructure planning at the sub-region scale provides a useful framework and context for action at neighbourhood and borough scales. It does not obviate the need for local planning and action, but must seek to support and complement this work. Issues such as flood risk, markets for agriculture and recreation act across boundaries and require coordinated action.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The South Yorkshire Green Infrastructure Strategy will:

- Further the objectives of the Corporate Plan
- Contribute to the Community Strategy themes of Rotherham Achieving, Alive and Safe as well as the overarching theme of Sustainable Development.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

The South Yorkshire Green Infrastructure Strategy is available to view in the Members Room.

The initial stages of strategy development involved the creation of a Communication and Engagement Plan to identify stakeholders and target their engagement within the strategy.

Many organisations were consulted to canvass their opinions and set the priorities for action, including:

- local authority representatives in strategic planning, development control, parks and countryside
- private landowners and developers
- environmental organisations working in South Yorkshire
- the general public and specific interest groups, including membership-led organisations
- government organisations dealing with health and recreation, and the natural and built environment

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