



Subject:	Proposed adoption of the Green & Blue Infrastructure Plan (GBIP)
Date:	10 December 2019
Reporting Officer:	Keith Sutherland, Development Planning and Policy Manager
Contact Officer:	Mark Whittaker, Senior Planning Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues The Council's draft Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan (GBIP) was subject to public consultation from June to September 2019. This consultation was in tandem with the draft Belfast Open Spaces Strategy (BOSS), which is being led by City and Neighbourhood Services Department. It is proposed to make some minor revisions to the draft GBIP to take account of consultation feedback prior to the adoption and publication of the GBIP. Proposed responses, actions and changes are set out at Appendix 1 . This matter will be reported to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 17 December 2019 for approval to revise the GBIP in accordance with Appendix 1. It is anticipated that the BOSS will be considered for adoption early in 2020.
2.0	Recommendations The Committee is asked to note the update on the draft GBIP consultation process and the proposed actions and changes set out at Appendix 1 .

3.0	Main report
	Background
3.1	The Council agreed to the draft GBIP for consultation purposes in June 2018. The GBIP is a high level plan that recognises the many functions, including for health, biodiversity and environmental resilience, of our green areas and water features. It represents an over-arching strategy that will guide more detailed strategies and action plans over time. These include the new BOSS, which was prepared in tandem with it. A draft BOSS was agreed for public consultation purposes by the Council in April 2019.
3.2	The BOSS, including the data collected during its preparation, forms part of the evidence base for the Local Development Plan (LDP). The GBIP also supports the LDP and represents supplementary planning guidance to it once the LDP is adopted.
3.3	<p>Consultation Process</p> <p>Given the linkages between the GBIP and BOSS, it was agreed to undertake a joint public consultation exercise and the consultation questionnaire allowed respondents to comment on either document or both. Analysis of the responses to the draft BOSS is being undertaken by the City and Neighbourhood Services Department. Analysis of the draft GBIP has been undertaken by the Development Planning and Policy team. The consultation period was from 17th June to 20th September 2019, during which officers attended 6 events across the city to raise awareness and get feedback from a wide range of interests.</p>
3.4	<p>The events were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer Rose Fair - Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park • Sounds from Bank Square • Summer Fun Day - Mount Eagles • A World Of Rhythms - CS Lewis Square • Summer Fun Day - Waterworks • Pride - Village at Custom House Square
3.5	Consultation was also undertaken with the Youth Forum and a group from Age Friendly Belfast. At all events people were asked to fill in a brief postcard questionnaire on what comes to mind when thinking of green and blue infrastructure in Belfast how can we make these spaces better. A total of 337 postcards were completed.
3.6	<p>During the consultation period we received a total of 96 detailed responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 67 responses via Citizen Space • 16 hard copy questionnaire responses • 13 general written submissions <p>68 responses were from individuals, with 28 from groups/organisation.</p>
3.7	<p>Consultation findings</p> <p>High-level findings are outlined below and further details and proposed responses and actions are attached at Appendix 1.</p>

3.8	<p><u>The Vision</u></p> <p>86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the draft vision that “<i>By 2035 green and blue infrastructure will be strategically planned to enhance ecosystem services that benefit all living, working in and visiting Belfast.</i>” However, a significant number of respondents were concerned with the 2035 timeframe for the vision, particularly given the declared climate emergency. In this regard, the vision date aligns with the vision dates for the Belfast Agenda and new Belfast Local Development Plan and is considered appropriate. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the principles set out in the GBIP will not be realised until 2035. Rather, these principles will immediately start to inform council operations and decision-making.</p>
3.9	<p><u>The Strategic Principles</u></p> <p>The draft GBIP has five strategic principles to provide the framework for achieving the vision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SP1: Biodiverse ○ SP2: Planned, interconnected networks ○ SP3: Integrated into the urban environment ○ SP4: Well designed and managed ○ SP5: Appropriately funded
3.10	<p>87% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the draft Strategic Principles are the correct ones to achieve the vision. However, many respondents were concerned at the apparent lack of actions or clear commitments and targets arising from the Plan. In this regard, the GBIP is not intended as an action plan. Rather, it is an over-arching strategy recognising the many benefits of green and blue infrastructure (GBI) and how these can be incorporated into projects across the city. Its implementation will be through its influence on other plans, strategies, programmes and projects, including through the new Local Development Plan and decision-making and council investment in projects.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Other Feedback</u></p> <p>In line with the strong level of agreement for the vision and principles, many respondents commended and supported the council for developing the plan, particularly its clear recognition of the critical role of green and blue infrastructure (GBI) in addressing climate change and enhancing biodiversity and ecosystems services. The linkages to the BOSS were welcomed as it can play a major role in integrating and protecting vital city assets. In addition, respondents recognised the importance of certain areas for biodiversity and the need for special protection/management measures. There was also support for sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), opportunities for de-culverting and the use of green roofs to benefit the city and help address climate change.</p>
3.12	<p>A number of respondents thought that the GBIP should include more detail or further emphasis on certain issues, such as the duty to further biodiversity and need to urgently address climate change. Many suggested additional wording. Others sought greater clarification of some of the main terminology or concepts, including ‘ecosystem services’. Many of such comments have merit and it is proposed to amend the wording of some sections accordingly. Nevertheless, such changes are minor in nature and do not represent any change to the overall direction of the Plan.</p>

3.13	The responses received through the public events postcards raised a number of issues, including the need to provide more open space and improve biodiversity. Other issues raised generally related to operational matters, such as maintenance and provision of facilities.
3.14	<p>Overall, some of the other key messages in responses included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Need to protect existing green and open spaces from development. ○ Need to create new open spaces, especially city centre green spaces. ○ Council should include commitment to lead by example throughout its own estate. ○ Importance of green active travel and interconnecting of assets. ○ Suggestion that a natural capital accounting approach should be adopted.
3.15	Many of the above matters are included the GBIP and are being addressed by the Council, including through other plans and strategies, including the new LDP and the BOSS. As regards the Council leading by example, the final BOSS will address operational matters and there are ongoing inter-departmental discussion around a co-ordinated approach to maximise GBI benefits to the city, including through its emerging Resilience Strategy and Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Plan.
3.16	In summary, the wide support for the GBIP is welcomed, including the very strong support for its vision and strategic principles. A number of the comments received suggested some additional or revised wording of parts of the draft GBIP, either by way of emphasis or clarification. Following analysis, and having regard to the high-level nature of the GBIP and its influence on other emerging plans and strategies, the overall approach in the draft GBIP remains appropriate. Nevertheless, some revisions are proposed to improve or clarify draft wording and some of the accompanying maps and diagrams. These are summarised at Appendix 1 of this report and do not change the direction of the GBIP or its strategic principles.
3.17	It is understood that any proposed revisions to the draft BOSS will be brought to the Council in the new year. In this regard, as the GBIP is an over-arching framework its principles help to inform the BOSS. The BOSS will include more detail and actions that will help deliver the GBIP principles.
3.18	<p><u>Equality screening and rural need assessment</u></p> <p>A draft equality screening and a rural needs analysis were completed and were included in the public consultation. There were 10 responses on the equality screening and rural needs assessment. The issues raised generally related to the protection of open space, health & wellbeing and addressing disadvantaged communities. As with the general responses to the draft GBIP, some specifically related to the loss of green space at Glassmullin (Andersonstown). One respondent said a full equality impact assessment should have been undertaken. The feedback provided will be summarised and the final screening and assessment will be updated for publication with the final GBIP.</p>
3.19	<p>Financial & Resource Implications</p> <p>There are no resource implications directly associated with the GBIP. Its principles will help inform other council plans, strategies and projects and should be taken into account in the relevant budgetary considerations at that time.</p>

3.20	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment The final GBIP will be subject to an equality screening and rural needs assessment in line with the Council's process.
4.0	Appendices
	Appendix 1 - Summary of Key Issues and Recommended Response and Action.

Appendix 1

Key Issue Raised	Council Response and Action
<p>Commend and support BCC for developing the plan which provides clear recognition of the critical role and benefits of GBI, including for ecosystems services, health and wellbeing and biodiversity.</p>	<p>We welcome the support given to our vision, together with the constructive comments and suggestions put forward in the responses we received.</p> <p>No action required.</p>
<p>Concerns were raised regarding target date being too long in the future. Some respondents suggested 2031 or sooner to reflect the climate emergency.</p>	<p>Comments noted. The vision date aligns with the Belfast Agenda (BA) and new Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP) timeframe and is considered appropriate. The principles set out in the Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan (GBIP) will immediately start to inform council operations and decision-making.</p> <p>No action required.</p>
<p>Concern raised over the implementation and delivery of the GBIP and its lack of actions and targets.</p>	<p>Comments noted The GBIP is not intended as an action plan. It is an overarching strategy recognising the many benefits of green and blue infrastructure (GBI) and how these can be incorporated into projects and plans across the city. The effective delivery of the vision and principles will be implemented through its influence on other plans, strategies, programmes and projects, including through the new LDP, Belfast Open Space Strategy (BOSS) and Local Biodiversity Strategy and council investment in projects. Also through engagement with other Government departments and bordering local Councils who have similar responsibility and functions.</p> <p>No action required.</p>
<p>Greater emphasis should be given to benefits of biodiversity and the council's duties in furthering biodiversity.</p>	<p>Comments noted and agreed.</p> <p>Proposed action: Add reference to the WANE Act 2011 and the council statutory duty to further biodiversity, along with minor consequential wording edits in relevant sections of document.</p>
<p>Clarification required on definitions of ecosystems and their services.</p>	<p>Comments noted and agreed.</p> <p>Proposed action: Definitions of ecosystems and ecosystem services to be included in final GBIP.</p>

<p>Suggestion made for specific recognition of ancient woodland and long established woodlands and the multi-benefits associated from trees and hedges relating to biodiversity, air quality and flooding.</p>	<p>Comments noted and agreed. Trees are mentioned throughout the GBIP. It is accepted that ancient trees and hedges are not specifically referred to and it is agreed that mention should be made. However, the GBIP is a strategic framework document and is unable to include every possible natural asset for detailed discussion in the Plan.</p> <p>Proposed action: Add references to ancient trees/hedges in introductory text.</p>
<p>Various suggestions for minor rewording to help clarify or emphasise key points throughout draft document.</p>	<p>Comments noted and agreed.</p> <p>Proposed action: Minor wording amendments throughout document to aid clarity or emphasis that do not alter the overall direction or strategic principles set out in the draft document.</p>
<p>Suggestion that some of the mapping could be improved.</p>	<p>Comment noted and agreed The GBIP is a strategic framework and the mapping is illustrative and not site-specific. Nevertheless, it is accepted that the environmental designations map may be confusing and could be simplified.</p> <p>Proposed action: Simplification of the environmental designations map.</p>
<p>Suggestion that the diagram showing LDP and Belfast Agenda (BA) linkages could be improved.</p>	<p>Comment noted. This diagram illustrates the potential linkages between GBI and the priorities of the BA and LDP. It is illustrative only. Nevertheless, it is agreed that a clearer description should be added, along with footnotes for data sources.</p> <p>Proposed action: Revise the diagram description/heading and add footnotes.</p>
<p>Suggested that council should lead by example in GBIP.</p>	<p>Comment Noted. The effective delivery of the vision and principles will be implemented through its influence on other plans, strategies, programmes and projects, including through the new LDP, the BOSS, Local Biodiversity Action Plan and council investment in projects.</p> <p>No further action required</p>
<p>Suggestions to revise the wording of the vision to simplify it and make it more explicit in relation to Biodiversity.</p>	<p>Comments noted. The vision statement is concise and considered appropriate, given the nature of the document. It should be read in the context of the entire GBIP. Nevertheless, the proposed changes to clarify definitions and emphasise biodiversity outlined above will also help address suggestions made.</p> <p>No further action required</p>

<p>Comments stress the need to protect, enhance and preserve existing open spaces and create new open spaces, especially a city centre green space.</p>	<p>Comments noted. This is addressed in the GBIP, which includes specific reference to opportunities to green the city centre. This will be delivered through other plans, strategies and projects by the council and its partners.</p> <p>No action required</p>
<p>Suggestion regarding management principles for a healthy public realm and natural environment.</p>	<p>Comments Noted. The LDP includes planning policies in relation to the natural environment and public realm, which will address the concerns highlighted.</p> <p>No action required.</p>
<p>Comment that the rural portion of the area deserves a much more prominent and detailed emphasis.</p>	<p>Comment noted. It is considered that this strategic framework document, including associated illustrative mapping, clearly shows how the urban area sits with its countryside setting and that all areas have a part to play.</p> <p>No action required.</p>
<p>Comment that sustainable transport should have greater emphasis and the importance of connectivity and to include wildlife corridors between green spaces.</p>	<p>Comment noted. It is considered that this strategic framework document, including associated illustrative mapping, clearly recognises the opportunities for, and importance of, sustainable and active travel, including greenways. The GBIP aims to improve sustainable transport means and connectivity between greenspaces where possible and this will be implemented through the existing planning policies and the new LDP.</p> <p>No action required.</p>
<p>A number of respondents raised concern over the loss of green open space to development of 3G pitches - in particular Glassmullin Green.</p>	<p>Comments noted. This is a site specific matter that is not directly relevant to the GBIP, which is a strategic framework document. This specific matter was subject to due planning process.</p> <p>No action required</p>