

**LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR WIRRAL – EVIDENCE BASE –
APPOINTMENT OF CONSULTANTS TO CARRY OUT A GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE
STRATEGY**

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval to commission external consultants to carry out a Green Infrastructure Strategy for Wirral, funded to a maximum cost of £50,000.
- 1.2 The Strategy is necessary to comply with the conditions of the designation of the Mersey Heartlands New Growth Point; to provide robust evidence base for the preparation of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document; and to inform future site-specific land allocations. External consultants are required because of the specialist nature of the commission.
- 1.3 The Strategy will assess the existing range and function of green infrastructure within the Borough. It will advise on the protection and enhancement of key environmental assets and identify where new Green Infrastructure is needed to deliver a wide range of environmental, economic and social benefits including climate change adaptation and mitigation; drainage and flood management; quality of place; health and wellbeing; biodiversity; recreation, tourism and leisure; walking and cycling; and attractiveness for future investment.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In July 2008, Liverpool City Council and Wirral Council were successful in achieving New Growth Point Status, securing £200,000 grant funding for 2008/09, £2,466,176 for 2009/10 and £2,300,609 for 2010/11. This funding has been used to support housing delivery and to restructure failing housing markets in the Housing Market Renewal Area, in accordance with a Joint Programme of Development agreed with Government in December 2008 (Cabinet 14th October 2010, minute 174 refers).
- 2.2 When designating Mersey Heartlands as a Growth Point, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) attached a number of conditions that the partnership must fulfil. These are aimed at ensuring that the additional development would be brought forward sustainably and would be realistic in terms of any wider infrastructure requirements.
- 2.3 The following Growth Point conditions set out the requirement for a Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy to be prepared:

“Every Growth Point must prepare and implement a Green Infrastructure Strategy to protect and enhance existing key environmental assets and to provide new green spaces designed to deliver a wide range of environmental and social benefits. Where appropriate, individual conditions of Growth Point status will identify locally specific issues for the strategy to address. Growth Points will consult Natural England to ensure that their GI Strategies are acceptable.”

2.4 A second condition requires that:

“.....the Green Infrastructure Strategy contributes to the Merseyside Green Infrastructure Strategy and delivery of the Mersey Forest Plan and Mersey Waterfront Regional Park, and supports mitigation measures to prevent harm to the Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore pSPA, Mersey Estuary SPA/Ramsar and Dee Estuary SPA/Ramsar sites. Appropriate links should be made between the Water Cycle Study and the Green Infrastructure Strategy.”

2.5 A third condition requires that:

“Studies must consider cumulative effects with other planned growth such as existing and planned growth points. Where NGPs adjoin each other, Local Authorities should collaborate over the studies such as Water Cycle and GI strategies and their implementation.”

2.6 The Habitats Regulations Assessment, carried out as part of the preparation of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document has already underlined the importance in Wirral of minimising the impact on designated European Sites.

2.7 The Green Infrastructure strategy will be used to support of the Growth Point Programme and also to support the Council’s Local Development Framework Core Strategy. A robust evidence base is essential to demonstrate that the Council has determined the capacity of the area to accommodate new development and that all the strategy and development options available to the Council have been fully assessed. This is a key part of the test of soundness that will be considered by an Independent Planning inspector appointed by the Secretary of State before the Core Strategy for Wirral can be adopted.

2.8 Specialist expertise is required to address issues including responding to climate change, carbon impact, drainage and health impacts. The Green Infrastructure Strategy will need to be completed before the Core Strategy is submitted to the Secretary of State for public examination.

2.9 The Green Infrastructure Strategy will be used to inform and guide the Council’s delivery of the Investment Strategy, the Growth Point Programme of Development and the consideration of major planning applications, including future reserved matters applications at Wirral Waters. Discussions have already been held between Peel Holdings, Mersey Forest and the Forestry Commission about how Wirral Waters can be integrated with surrounding communities and links provided to existing green infrastructure at Birkenhead Park and Bidston Moss. The proposed Green Infrastructure Strategy will also form an essential part of the evidence base for future site-specific land allocations and any Area Action Plans that will be prepared.

3.0 **GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY**

3.1 Green Infrastructure is as important to place-making and the promotion of economic development as the provision of new roads, drainage and utility supplies. A Green Infrastructure Strategy will provide a strategic approach to the future provision, management and maintenance of green infrastructure. A Green Infrastructure Strategy will, for example, consider when and where new Green Infrastructure would be required to facilitate new development; and mitigate the likely environmental and ecological impacts of future growth.

- 3.2 In producing the Strategy, the consultant will be required to scope out the nature and content of the work involved in producing a strategy, including any additional research that will be necessary to complete the document. Evidence produced within existing reports will be used to develop a comprehensive strategic picture of all green infrastructure assets in the Borough including the Council's earlier Open Space Assessment; Landscape Character Assessment; Biodiversity Audit; Flood Risk Assessment; Habitat Regulations Assessment; Employment Land Study; Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment; Birkenhead Integrated Regeneration Study; and the emerging Water Cycle Study.
- 3.3 The consultants will then be required to undertake an assessment of the Borough's existing green infrastructure assets to identify strategic priorities and principles and develop the final Green Infrastructure Strategy, having regard to the North West Green Infrastructure Guide, prepared by the North West Green Infrastructure Think Tank and using guidance outlined in a 5 stage process consisting of:
- (i) Stakeholder Consultation – to provide a clear understanding of the partnerships that will be needed to plan for and deliver green infrastructure and the local social, economic and environmental priorities that will apply
 - (ii) Data Audit and Resource Mapping – to collate existing data, identify any data shortfalls and present the Strategy in a visual format.
 - (iii) Functionality Assessment – to identify the existing and potential future role of individual sites and features and any shortfalls that may need to be addressed
 - (iv) Needs Assessment - including an analysis of any more specific local community needs; and
 - (v) An Intervention Plan - outlining the recommended means of delivering the Green Infrastructure Strategy..
- 3.4 The final strategy will, therefore, set out the requirements for new infrastructure, including where and when it is needed and how much it will cost to provide; provide guidance on funding and developer contributions (through Section 106 and emerging Community Infrastructure Levy requirements) and provide evidence for any additional Green Infrastructure-related policy requirements.

4.0 **TIMETABLE**

- 4.1 Subject to commencing the study in early February 2011, it is expected that the study will be completed by the middle of 2011.

5.0 **PROCUREMENT**

- 5.2 Following discussions with the Council's Corporate Procurement Unit, the recommended procurement route is via a 'Request for Quotation'. The Corporate Procurement Unit will provide support throughout the process, with advice and guidance.

6.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Specialist knowledge is required to undertake a comprehensive and effective Green Infrastructure Strategy. Procuring external consultancy support to produce a Green Infrastructure Strategy for Wirral is estimated to cost up to £50,000. Investment Strategy

revenue funding has been identified to resource the Green Infrastructure Strategy in line with the Cabinet Report of 14th October 2010 (Minute 174 refers).

7.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The management of the commission will be supported by a steering group of officers from the Corporate Services and Technical Services Departments.

8.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Green Infrastructure Strategy will include the consideration of wider socio economic issues and disability issues with regard to the access to and use of green infrastructure.

9.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Green Infrastructure Strategy will include recommendations on securing public safety in green infrastructure..

10.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Green Infrastructure Strategy will provide the evidence base for setting policy and encouraging more sustainable forms of development which respond to the character of their surroundings. The Strategy will also seek to provide a better response to climate change in terms of ensuring that green infrastructure plays a strong role as an adaptation response in the design of urban landscapes to help manage surface water drainage sustainably and cope with rising temperatures and improve cooling.

11.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The Green Infrastructure Strategy will be part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Development Framework, including the Core Strategy Development Plan Document. The Green Infrastructure Strategy will also have implications for the determination of individual planning applications.

12.0 ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no anti-poverty implications arising directly from this report.

13.0 SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The Green Infrastructure Strategy will include the consideration of wider socio economic conditions across the Borough.

14.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are no specific Ward Member implications arising from this report.

15.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

15.1 The North West Green Infrastructure Guide (North West Green Infrastructure Think Tank - 2008) can be viewed at: www.greeninfrastructurenw.co.uk/resources/GIguide.pdf

15.2 The Core Strategy Preferred Options Report and supporting consultation documents can be viewed at: <http://wirral-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal>

15.3 Mersey Heartlands Growth Fund (Cabinet 14 October 2010 - Minute 174 refers) can be viewed at:

15.4 CLG Growth Fund – Allocations for 2009/10 - 2010/11', Letter from Henry Cleary, 10th December 2008

16.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

16.1 That Cabinet agrees to commission a Green Infrastructure Strategy for Wirral, on the terms set out in this report.

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This report has been prepared by the Forward Planning Section who can be contacted on 0151 691 8218.