



## Policy Panel

Item

**7**

2<sup>nd</sup> August 2023

|                       |   |               |  |
|-----------------------|---|---------------|--|
| <b>Report of</b>      | <b>Head of Sustainability &amp; Head of Planning</b>              | <b>Author</b> | <b>Head of Neighbourhood Services</b><br>☎ 0330 053 8047 |
| <b>Title</b>          | <b>Colchester Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy update</b> |               |  |
| <b>Wards affected</b> | All Wards   |               |  |

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out changes proposed to the development of plans and strategies within the Council in relation to landscape, nature and waterways.
- 1.2 Since the presentation to the Policy Panel in 2022 on the proposal to develop a Colchester Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy, a wider and more broad ranging project is proposed. This will develop a baseline map of the green assets and waterways in Colchester. It will be consulted on to develop an understanding of barriers and areas of improvement or opportunity, before creating new guiding principles for the Council. These guiding principles and baseline evidence will then inform the Local Plan Review, and the delivery and operational plans for the Parks & Countryside Team, negating the need for a specific and separate strategy, ensuring consistency across the Council in the planning and management of the assets.

### 2. Action Required

- 2.1 For information only.

### 3. Reason for Review

- 3.1 For information only.

## 4. Background Information

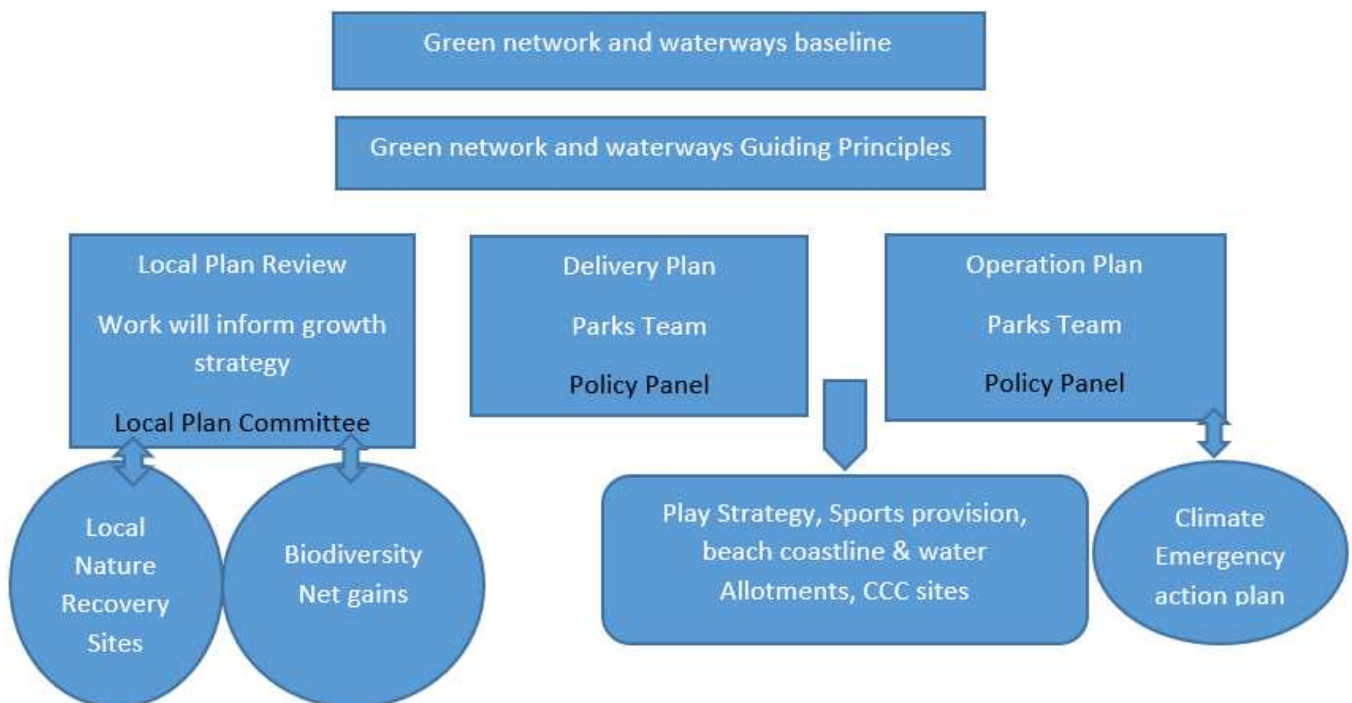
- 4.1 A report was presented to the November 2022 meeting of the Policy Panel outlining proposals for a Colchester Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy. It was proposed that the Panel set direction for the strategy which would include open spaces, natural assets, waterways and coastline, using a series of workshops to produce ideas to bring to a future meeting of the Panel for formal consideration and recommendations to be considered for making to Cabinet. This related to a pilot project undertaken with the University of Essex on participatory strategic development.

### Colchester City's green network and waterways

- 4.2 Since the pilot project has been completed and the presentation to the Policy Panel, the Planning Policy Team and Sustainability Team have started to work together to create guiding principles for Colchester City's green network and waterways. These guiding principles will then be taken forward by both teams as part of the work on the Local Plan Review and form the foundation for the development of several delivery and operational plans managing the city's open spaces, negating the need for a separate Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy to be formally presented to the Policy Panel, ensuring a single evidence base and consistency of approach across the Council.

### Proposed scope

- 4.3 The diagram, below, sets out the proposed outputs of the project and explains the various steps and how the outputs relate to one another. A description follows of each of the outputs with key milestones set out at the end of this project scope. There is potential for interest from other Council teams and further work which is not outlined in this paper.



- 4.4 This project is in early development, but it is proposed that officers will begin by building an accurate spatial understanding of the existing green network and waterways- this will form the 'baseline'. An interactive map of the green network and waterways will be prepared and published on the Council's website for public consultation. The public and stakeholders will be asked if officers have mapped the

baseline correctly, for their comments on the condition of the existing network and opportunities for enhancement.

- 4.5 From this, officers will develop guiding principles which will then inform the Local Plan Review, the work of the Sustainability Team and the Parks & Countryside Team.
- 4.6 The priority for the Local Plan Review, including the spatial strategy and indeed the whole Plan, will be enhancing the green network and waterways and the linked consequential benefits of achieving this. Officers intend to do this by seeking to protect the existing green network and waterways, create linkages between green spaces and enhance the network through the creation of new green spaces, in locations where it is most needed. The consultation comments and guiding principles will inform this work.
- 4.7 The next section provides some background and context with reference to the Environment Act. Further sections explain more about each of the outputs set out in the diagram above.

#### **Environment Act and 25 Year Environment Plan**

- 4.8 The [25 Year Environment Plan](#) was published in 2018. The Environment Plan sets out the government's goals for improving the environment within a generation. It aims to leave the environment in a better state and details how government will work with communities and businesses to do this over the next 25 years.
- 4.9 The [Environment Act 2021](#) puts the 25 Year Environment Plan into law and creates a statutory framework for environmental principles. The Act introduces a Nature Recovery Network and Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), which will establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits. Under the Environment Act 2021, all planning permissions granted in England (with a few exemptions) will have to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain. Biodiversity net gain will be measured using Defra's biodiversity metric and habitats will need to be secured for at least 30 years. In addition, and of relevance, the Environment Act includes a strengthened legal duty for public bodies to conserve and enhance biodiversity and new biodiversity reporting requirements for local authorities.
- 4.10 A Nature Recovery Network is a strategy to tackle biodiversity loss. 500,000 hectares of additional wildlife habitat will be created. Wildlife sites will be connected, and opportunities will be provided for species conservation and the reintroduction of native species. Green networks will be an important part of the Nature Recovery Network. The government intends that as well as helping wildlife thrive, the Nature Recovery Network could be designed to bring a wide range of additional benefits, including public enjoyment, pollination, carbon capture, water quality improvements and flood management.
- 4.11 Local Nature Recovery Strategies are spatial strategies that will establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits. Local Nature Recovery Strategies aim to actively restore the natural world and halt the decline in species abundance by 2030. Local Nature Recovery Strategies will apply at county level. Colchester City Council is a Supporting Authority and will work with Essex County Council (the Responsible Authority) to ensure that we influence the LNRS, and that relevant Council work is taken into account as part of the LNRS.

- 4.12 Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach to development, and/or land management, that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. BNG requires developers to deliver for nature, setting a minimum requirement to increase biodiversity by 10% compared to the baseline (net gain). The idea behind BNG is that the environment does not suffer as a result of development, and that there will be higher-quality places for wildlife to thrive and for people to enjoy.

#### **Green Network and Waterways Baseline**

- 4.13 The green network and waterways project will begin with the preparation of a map of the existing green network and waterways.
- 4.14 All local green spaces (above a minimum size threshold) will be mapped including, public and strategic private open space and nature conservation designations such as Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, Ramsar (wetlands), Sites of Special Scientific Interest, local wildlife sites and the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Waterways will also be mapped including coastal areas, rivers and other strategic waterways such as Abberton Reservoir.
- 4.15 The green network and waterways map will be interactive, and users will be able to select layers. It will be useful to view CCC owned open space and, as part of further work on the green network and waterways, consider the potential for improving connections between CCC open spaces. Engagement will take place with the public and stakeholders to check that the baseline map accurately records the green network and waterways, secondly to ask for comments on the condition of the green network and waterways and thirdly to ask for ideas on opportunities to improve the green network and waterways.
- 4.16 Ideas for opportunities to improve the network will be mapped and considered, alongside opportunities for offsite biodiversity net gain (BNG) sites, as part of the development of the Local Plan Review spatial strategy.

#### **Green network and waterways Guiding Principles**

- 4.17 Officers intend to use the consultation comments from the publication of the baseline map, Natural England's green infrastructure strategy and other strategies such as the Woodland & Biodiversity Project and Essex County Council's green infrastructure guidelines, to prepare guiding principles for the green network and waterways. A member workshop will be held to ensure member views are incorporated. These guiding principles will be taken forward and incorporated into the work of the Planning Policy Team and Parks & Countryside Team.

#### **Local Plan Review**

- 4.18 The Planning Policy Team intend to use Colchester's green network and waterways and the 'creating a better environment' agenda as the starting point of the Local Plan Review.
- 4.19 Green spaces and waterways have multiple benefits including for wildlife, active travel, health and wellbeing, climate change adaptation, air quality, flood and water management. New development can facilitate new and improved green spaces and biodiversity net gain (BNG) and provide opportunities to create a better environment.
- 4.20 As part of the call for sites officers are proposing asking for BNG offsite sites, green spaces and improvements to waterways, as well as housing and employment sites and any other land uses as appropriate. This will provide the Council with intelligence on potential BNG offsite sites at an early stage of plan making.

- 4.21 Officers also consider there maybe potential to allocate sites to deliver biodiversity net gain and corridors to enhance connections between existing and new wildlife sites. This could help inform decisions on the future spatial strategy and will help officers plan for the highest gains for biodiversity as part of the plan making process.

#### **Parks & Countryside Delivery Plan and Operational Plan**

- 4.22 The strategy referred to in this report will form part of the Delivery Plan element of the project and work will follow once the guiding principles have been agreed. The Operational Plan will include details on the biodiversity and management of CCC sites. The Operational Plan will influence the Climate Emergency Action Plan and vice versa.

#### **Governance and timeline**

- 4.23 The green network and waterways project outlined in this report is wide ranging and affects many different aspects of the Council's work. Governance has been explained in the descriptions of each of the outputs above, but this section summarises the governance of each part of the project.
1. The baseline map is factual and will be prepared by Officers (Summer /Autumn 2023).
  2. The guiding principles and will be prepared by Officers (Winter 2023/2024).
  3. The Local Plan Committee (LPC) has authority to determine on behalf of the Council preparation of the Local Plan. LPC Members, will be updated on progress (Ongoing).
  4. The Delivery Plan and Operational Plan will be approved by the Policy Panel (2024/25).

### **5. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications**

- 5.1 This report sets out proposals for an approach to developing a new strategy. It does not propose or set out to make any service changes at this stage and to that extent it does not impact on the promotion of equality and overcome discrimination in relation to gender, gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, and race/ethnicity. However, any proposed changes through the development of the strategy will give proper consideration to equality, diversity, and human right implications.

### **6. Strategic Plan References**

- 6.1 This project will cut across all aspects, priorities and outcomes of the Council's Strategic Plan 2023-2026.

### **7. Consultation**

- 7.1 As set out earlier in the report, consultation will be undertaken, with the intention to use an interactive map to help ensure that the baseline map accurately records the green network and waterways. It will also seek to gain feedback from stakeholders and partners on the condition of the green network and waterways and lastly to see ideas on opportunities to improve the green network and waterways.
- 7.2 Ideas for opportunities to improve the network will be mapped and considered, alongside opportunities for offsite biodiversity net gain (BNG) sites, as part of the development of the Local Plan Review spatial strategy.

## 8. Publicity Considerations

- 8.1 There are no implications at this stage, but as the project develops and the consultation is undertaken, due consideration will be given to the approach to publicity.

## 9. Financial implications

- 9.1 There are no implications at this stage, but as the development of the strategy takes place, proper consideration of financial implications will be made. For example, operational budgets, the wider impact and benefit of natural assets on the local economy, the development of partnership and/or applications for external grant funding, creating attractive areas for investment, supporting the environmental resilience of economic sites, promoting economic growth, employment and skills improvement, supporting local businesses, tourism and visitor destinations, and responding to growth of Colchester.

## 10. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 10.1 Any proposed changes through the development of the strategy will consider health, wellbeing, and community safety implications.

## 11. Health and Safety Implications

- 11.1 There are no implications at this stage, but as the development of the strategy takes place, proper consideration of health and safety implications will be made.

## 12. Risk Management Implications

- 12.1 There are no implications at this stage, but as the development of the strategy takes place, proper consideration and reporting of risk management will be made.

## 13. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 13.1 The consideration of environmental and sustainability implications of the decision being taken is set out in the table below:

| <b>Sustainability theme</b>   | <b>Positive environmental impact</b> | <b>Neutral impact/ Not applicable</b> | <b>Negative environmental impact</b> | <b>What are the positive and negative impacts on carbon reduction / environment?</b> | <b>How will positive impacts be enhanced/ encouraged? And negative impacts minimized or eliminated</b> |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Energy                        |                                      | ✓                                     |                                      | n/a  | n/a  |
| Waste                         |                                      | ✓                                     |                                      | n/a  | n/a  |
| Procurement                   |                                      | ✓                                     |                                      | n/a  | n/a  |
| Biodiversity and green spaces | ✓                                    |                                       |                                      | The proposed approach to the development of the project set out within               | n/a  |

|                         |   |   |  |   |   |
|-------------------------|---|---|--|---|---|
|                         |   |   |  | the report will have clear objectives to improve the management and planning of green assets and waterways.   |   |
| Transport               |   | ✓ |  | n/a   | n/a   |
| Adaption                |   | ✓ |  | n/a   | n/a   |
| Water                   |   | ✓ |  | n/a   | The proposed approach to the development of the project set out within the report will have the opportunity to improve the management and planning of waterways and wetlands. |
| Digital                 |   | ✓ |  | n/a   | n/a   |
| Community               |   | ✓ |  | n/a   | n/a   |
| Housing/<br>Development |   | ✓ |  | n/a   | n/a   |
| Carbon Emissions saving | ✓ |   |  | The proposed approach to the development of the project set out within the report will have clear objectives to improve the management and planning of biodiversity net gains. Creating and enhancing habitats can lead to greater storage of carbon. | n/a   |