

10 June 2021

Report of	Assistant Director of Place and Client Services	Author	Catherine Bailey ☎ 503530
Title	Essex Green Infrastructure Standards Guidance		
Wards affected	All		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report is for Members' information and provides information on proposed Essex-wide Green Infrastructure Standards produced by Essex County Council. These proposed standards are currently being consulted on by Essex County Council.
- 1.2 The concept of green infrastructure originated in the 1990s and was embodied in national UK planning policy guidance of that time. The first comprehensive national guidance was written by Natural England in 2009, which recognised the role and function of varied typologies of greenspace, green corridors and more local elements such as green roofs and gardens, and that these all provided support to natural and ecological processes, as well as opportunities for community enhancement. Green Infrastructure provides the opportunity to underpin the sustainability of towns and cities making them resilient to the effects of climate change, protecting ecosystem services and creating nature recovery networks for wildlife and biodiversity. Colchester Borough Council carried out a detailed Green Infrastructure Strategy in 2010-2011.
- 1.3 Green Infrastructure is currently defined within the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPF) 2019 as:

"A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities."
- 1.4 An updated NPPF definition is expected to acknowledge the importance of green infrastructure as a climate mitigation opportunity.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 No decision is required since the report is for information only. The report is intended to prompt discussion and inform the response to be sent to ECC.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The report provides information on the Essex Green Infrastructure Standards Guidance. The Council's response provides an opportunity to influence the content of the Guidance.

4. Alternative Options

4.1 Members could decide not to respond to the consultation.

5. Background Information

5.1 The Essex Green Infrastructure Standards Guidance has been developed to support policy and decision making in the planning and delivery of multifunctional green infrastructure for placemaking and place keeping. It is designed to help secure green infrastructure as part of new development as well as providing support for retrofitting of green infrastructure to existing neighbourhoods. It encourages the view of green infrastructure as critical infrastructure.

5.2 Green infrastructure can help deliver on a number of key national challenges:

1. Climate emergency
2. Ecological extinction
3. Public health/Active living
4. Green growth

5.3 The Essex Standards document has been developed as one of the pilots for a National Framework of Green Infrastructure Standards identified in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan. Natural England has been working with Defra and others to design the Framework.

5.4 Essex County Council has developed and adapted this framework to the Essex context through a series of workshops to ensure that a set of principles and standards for Essex are suitable and locally oriented to meet the needs of the county. These principles and standards for green infrastructure for Essex are:

Green infrastructure (GI) principles	Green infrastructure (GI) standards
Mainstreaming and Integration	The Placemaking and Place-keeping policies in Local Plans recognise GI as a key delivery mechanism. GI functions and associated benefits are recognised and valued in key strategic documents and policies, beyond those with an environmental scope
Evidence-led	The planning, design and delivery of GI is evidence-led using natural capital and ecosystem service assessments, and GI GIS mapping to ensure appropriate place-based GI interventions are being implemented and enhanced.
Multifunctionality	GI interventions are designed, planned and delivered to enhance multifunctionality and deliver multiple benefits to people and biodiversity in both rural and urban areas.
Early Engagement	There is early collaboration and engagement with all relevant stakeholders, partners and communities to support the delivery of effective and connected GI.
Managing different expectations	Differing views need to be identified early and managed effectively and in a transparent manner to secure both short- and long-term outcomes.
Health, Wellbeing and Social Equity	GI is designed to meet different people's needs (including physical and mental health), providing accessibility to GI, green spaces and local amenities, while ensuring GI is inclusive to all. This includes:

Connectivity	GI interventions are designed, planned and delivered and connected across multiple scales; from the wider landscape scale network to more local and neighbourhood scales including green corridors habitat and nature recovery networks to enhance connectivity for people, wildlife and habitats.
Strong policy wording and commitment	Policy for GI is strongly worded with a commitment to positive action(s) as reflected in statutory plans and industry/local guidance and supported by incentives and clear guidance about what success looks like.
Stewardship	The long-term management and stewardship plans are identified at the early stage with the necessary funding and monitoring components in place.

- 5.5 Colchester Borough Council welcomes the creation of a set of principles and standards for green infrastructure in Essex, particularly in relation to its role in place-making, inclusivity and the need for an up-to-date evidence base including mapping. The Council has had a Green Infrastructure Strategy in place for ten years and was one of the early adopters of these sorts of strategies at a local level. The Council has a comprehensive policy on green infrastructure in the emerging Local Plan, *Policy ENV3: Green Infrastructure*, that seeks to protect and enhance the existing network of green and blue infrastructure and to secure new infrastructure in areas of deficiency. In relation to community benefits, the Council has actively sought to support the Colchester Orbital, a circular walking and cycling route around the outskirts of the town, led by Walk Colchester, and has invested in a Greening the Orbital plan to seek ways of retrofitting enhanced green infrastructure along the route. The Council is also seeking to ensure that the new garden community to the east of the borough, as well as major allocations in the emerging Local Plan, are green infrastructure led.
- 5.6 The Council recognises that the evidence has increased that green infrastructure can mitigate climate change, poor air quality and nature recovery since the existing Green Infrastructure Strategy was written, alongside a change in the policy context at both a national and local level. The Council will therefore seek to update the existing Green Infrastructure Strategy to take account of these changes at an appropriate time, and in recognition of any adopted national or county-level standards in place at that time. The Council will continue to seek to set local quantity, accessibility and quality standards for green space, and green infrastructure where applicable, based on identified local need but mindful of national or sub-regional frameworks and principles, and to identify its own strategies and framework for delivery.
- 5.8 The Essex Green Infrastructure Standards Guidance provides a useful supporting document, but the Council would not be seeking to adopt the standards or to enforce assessment and accreditation at a local level without a review of its local needs and strategy having taken place at the appropriate time. It has the potential, however, to form the basis for future standards and an assessment checklist for development management at a local level in due course.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 The proposed Essex Green Infrastructure Standards could be incorporated into a revised Green Infrastructure Strategy for Colchester, and form part of the evidence base for the

Local Plan. An Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared for the Local Plan, and is available to view by clicking on this link:

<https://cbccrmdata.blob.core.windows.net/noteattachment/Equality%20Impact%20Assessment%20June%202017.pdf>

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 All themes in the Strategic Plan are relevant, in particular 'Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability' including the priority of 'Conserve and enhance biodiversity' and the theme of 'Creating safe, healthy and active communities' including 'Tackle the causes of inequality and support our most vulnerable people'.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 The Essex Green Infrastructure Standards Framework Guidance has been drafted through collaboration by Essex County Council with a wide range of stakeholders and partners, including Colchester Borough Council, as a result of the Making Better Planning for Better Placemaking and Place-Keeping workshops held in 2020. Adoption of the proposed standards by Colchester Borough Council, if appropriate, would need to take place as part of a reviewed Green Infrastructure Strategy which would be subject to consultation by The Council at that time.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 No direct implications at this time.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 Response to the Essex Green Infrastructure Standards forms part of evidence gathering for ongoing Local Plan work which is provided for in the Council's budget.

11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 Evidence gathering is part of the development of the Local Plan that is intended to support the health, wellbeing and community safety of Borough residents.

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 No direct implications.

13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 Evidence gathering is part of the development of the Local Plan whose policies will guide future development in the Borough, and which is intended to reduce the risk of inappropriate development. It will provide consistent advice to landowners, developers, officers, Councillors and members of the public.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 14.1 The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has committed to being carbon neutral by 2030. Creation of a robust network of green infrastructure will contribute to supporting several of the actions within the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan through mitigation, climate adaptation and environmental stewardship.