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**DRAFT DARLINGTON GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE  
STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of Report**

1. This report summarises the approach and content of the draft Darlington Green Infrastructure Strategy (GI Strategy) and its accompanying Action Plan for Members, as the basis for delivering a strategic, coordinated framework for the future management and development of the Borough's green infrastructure network to 2026. It also seeks Members agreement for the draft Strategy to be used as the basis for community and stakeholder consultation.

**Summary**

2. Darlington's green infrastructure is well used for recreation, biodiversity and food production but more can be made of the extensive space available. Building on Darlington's unique selling point as a high quality green environment to live and work in, we can begin to use green infrastructure successfully to address some of the wider environmental, social, health and economic issues Darlington's community faces; improving the health and well being of residents, encouraging sustainable travel, improving the productivity and value of the countryside and promoting the regeneration of Darlington's neighbourhoods can all be partly addressed through gradually improving green infrastructure.
3. Consequently many different organisations, community groups and Council services can have an interest in green infrastructure. It is therefore important that a more strategic approach to green infrastructure management and development is taken through a GI Strategy, so that these issues are addressed in a coordinated way, maximising the skills and resources available from a variety of different sources. The Strategy and its accompanying Action Plan are attached to this report as **Appendices 1 and 2** and are also available in the Members Room and at [www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy).

**Recommendation**

4. It is recommended that Members approve the content of the draft Green Infrastructure Strategy and Action Plan as the basis for community and stakeholder consultation.

**Richard Alty**  
**Director of Place**

**Background Papers**

None

Karen Johnson: Extension 2047

S17 Crime and Disorder	Protecting, enhancing and maintaining the green infrastructure network should improve their quality and value encouraging positive use.
Health and Well Being	Promoting an accessible green infrastructure network where a range of informal and formal sport and recreation activities can take place will encourage a more active, healthy lifestyle.
Sustainability	Creating a multifunctional green infrastructure network can provide numerous benefits to support sustainability; space for flood storage, sustainable drainage, locally grown food, sustainable transport are all delivered through green infrastructure.
Diversity	Promoting an accessible network will enable the wider community of all ages and abilities space to enjoy green infrastructure for a range of informal and formal activities.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework
Key Decision	N/A
Urgent Decision	N/A
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Implementing the GI Strategy is a key outcome to address the priorities of One Darlington: Perfectly Placed.

## MAIN REPORT

### What is Green Infrastructure?

5. Darlington's existing green infrastructure network provides an interconnecting system of public and private multifunctional green spaces, landscapes and natural environments in the urban and rural area. It is used for recreation, biodiversity and food production, and also supports natural, cultural and ecological processes so delivering multiple benefits for people, wildlife and place. While not continuous, all spaces and features are visually linked and include:-
- (a) Sub regional strategic green corridors: River Tees, River Skerne, River Skerne-Faverdale, Darlington-Middleton St George-A66/A67-Stockton;
  - (b) green wedges: Cocker Beck, Blackwell/Skerne Park, Haughton/Red Hall;
  - (c) locally important open spaces: parks, cemeteries, wildlife friendly greenspaces, green corridors, informal open space, landscape amenity space, children's play areas, civic spaces;
  - (d) playing pitches and outdoor sports facilities;
  - (e) ornamental parklands;

- (f) trees, woodland and community woodland;
  - (g) allotments and community gardens;
  - (h) private gardens;
  - (i) urban fringe;
  - (j) agricultural land;
  - (k) the public rights of way network; and
  - (l) open countryside.
6. Each space or feature can have one or many functions. Some functions may be more obvious than others but all are equally important e.g. South Park provides for sport, recreation, play and wildlife but it is also a valuable flood storage area, helping to mitigate the impact of climate change.
7. Each space or feature also provides many direct and indirect benefits to people, wildlife and place e.g. a green corridor makes it easier for people and wildlife to move around the Borough, encourages healthy lifestyles and sustainable travel helping to reduce Darlington's carbon footprint.

### **Green Infrastructure Strategy: Scope and Approach**

8. Green infrastructure now has a prominent place in the policy process; the draft GI Strategy (attached as **Appendix 1**) has been prepared in the context of up to date European and national legislation and national, regional, sub regional and local guidance. In summary, the Strategy aims to:-
- (a) Provide a clear vision and objectives for the future management and development of a quality, integrated and multifunctional green infrastructure network to 2026;
  - (b) Make sure that green infrastructure is planned and managed in ways which support the delivery of other local plans and strategies including the Tees Valley Green Infrastructure Strategy (TV GI Strategy), One Darlington: Perfectly Placed, the Darlington Core Strategy, the Open Space Strategy and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan;
  - (c) Influence other plans and strategies, particularly the new planning policy documents including the emerging Making Places and Accommodating Growth Development Plan Document, so that green infrastructure remains central to the sustainable development of the Borough;
  - (d) Identify the many functions and benefits green infrastructure has in Darlington for people, wildlife and place;
  - (e) Set out the priorities for the future management, maintenance and development of Darlington's green infrastructure and provide a framework for delivery of specific projects in the accompanying Green Infrastructure Action Plan;

- (f) Provide a degree of certainty for partners and stakeholders, particularly those who will be involved in delivering new green infrastructure in the Borough to 2026.
9. The starting point in the Strategy is to understand the key characteristics and functions that exist in the green infrastructure network, illustrated by examples of good practice in the Borough. Opportunities for improvement are also highlighted. These have been discussed under the following broad themes:
- (a) Helping to Mitigate The Impact of Climate Change
  - (b) Integrating Sustainable Movement
  - (c) Promoting a Distinctive Townscape and Landscape
  - (d) Maintaining and Enhancing Biodiversity, Air and Water Quality
  - (e) Providing Opportunities for Sport, Recreation and Play
  - (f) Generating Productive Landscapes
  - (g) Enhancing Community Ownership and Stakeholder Involvement
  - (h) Promoting Cultural Heritage
  - (i) Creating a Quality Environment for Investment and Development

### **Working in Partnership**

10. Darlington's green infrastructure network and the functions it performs are so wide ranging that the successful delivery of the Strategy must be the collective responsibility of a broad range of stakeholders, including Friends Groups, community groups, residents, sport and recreation organisations, transport bodies, education facilities, developers, landowners, Local Nature Partnerships, Members as well as the Council. All will be represented on the Darlington Green Infrastructure Delivery Group responsible for:
- (a) Updating and revising the Green Infrastructure Strategy and its Action Plan;
  - (b) Helping to secure and coordinate funding and other resources;
  - (c) Promoting and implementing the strategy;
  - (d) Leading on monitoring and evaluation.
11. This strategic partnership approach has many benefits. It is expected that over the lifetime of the Strategy there will be limited resources available to the Council so collaborative working will make sure that organisations play to their respective strengths, available resources will be better targeted and not duplicated to help deliver the projects identified in the Action Plan.
12. Friends Groups and Allotment Associations are already very active in the ongoing management, maintenance and development of Darlington's parks, Local Nature Reserves and allotments. But we need more people to play a more active role in the successful delivery of the Strategy. Opportunities will be mixed and varied, but it is intended that by working with people and developing their skills and knowledge new Groups and Associations could be established, while other groups could become more actively involved in the planning, delivery and on-going management of these greenspaces. Potentially there could be a higher success rate in securing external funding for key projects; community groups are better equipped to apply for external funding from organisations like the National Lottery to see improvements take place more quickly on the ground.

## Green Infrastructure Action Plan

13. Many challenges face the Council and its partners in delivering the accompanying Action Plan. It will be a living Action Plan, giving the Council and its partners flexibility to maximise Darlington's green infrastructure resource; updated each April, new projects can be added to reflect changing priorities, needs and resources, while completed schemes will be removed. This will ensure that the necessary resources will be secured to deliver each project within the correct timeframe. It also makes it much easier to coordinate green infrastructure projects with new development and as part of other wider initiatives.
14. The focus of the Action Plan is around twelve green corridors and the Rural Area. It is made up of the four sub regional, strategic green corridors identified in the TV GI Strategy in Darlington as well as eight smaller local green corridors, identified because of their scale as well as their current and potential importance for access, recreation, landscape, heritage or ecological value. The draft Action Plan is attached as **Appendix 2:-**
  - (a) **Strategic green corridors** – (the numbering is not consecutive, reflecting the TV GI Strategy):
    - 1 River Tees Corridor
    - 3 River Skerne Corridor
    - 4 River Skerne Corridor To Faverdale
    - 5 Darlington, Middleton St. George, A66/A67 Corridor to Stockton
  - (b) **Local green corridors** – includes:
    - A Former Barnard Castle Trackbed
    - B Cocker Beck
    - C West Beck
    - D Baydale Beck
    - E Salters Lane
    - F Nunnery Lane-Cemetery Lane
    - G Central Park Corridor
    - H A66 Corridor
  - (c) **Rural area** – includes all other green infrastructure outside the urban area.
15. The corridors include a mix of public and private land. The identification of land within these corridors does not necessarily mean that there is public access or that such access would be available in the future. They incorporate strategic green infrastructure features including parks, Local Nature Reserves, sporting hubs, community woodland, wildlife corridors and other large green spaces as well as providing connections to the Core Strategy strategic development locations.
16. The priority is to add value to each corridor, making better use of the space available. For each corridor the Action Plan will:
  - (a) Set out a long term vision describing its key characteristics in 2026;
  - (b) Identify one or more significant projects to deliver the corridor's vision and the GI Strategy's objectives;
  - (c) Set out a series of actions for each project, some can be delivered individually others together;

- (d) Set out timescales for development and delivery of projects and actions;
  - (e) Identify lead partners and other delivery partners;
  - (f) Identify funding sources and status - whether under development, committed with funding identified or part secured, through development or to be confirmed;
  - (g) Provide a framework for monitoring project delivery;
  - (h) Provide a detailed map for each corridor.
17. A technical schedule will summarise the action plan detailing the practical project management information of each action.
18. A range of projects have been identified for each corridor. Making the most of the spaces and features that exist along and close to each corridor, they reflect the specific issues and opportunities that each corridor and the Rural Area face. Some are new, others are long standing committed projects while some are under development. Some of the projects are straightforward, others are more challenging. Some help increase use or improve management, others support delivery or provide guidance on how to create the change.
19. To manage expectations projects will be delivered over three timeframes; 2012-2016, 2016-2021 and 2021-2026. Projects that will deliver multiple GI Strategy objectives or address an identified need will be prioritised where possible so that the wider community will experience multiple benefits in a realistic timeframe. Where projects are to be coordinated with new development, the time periods are the same as those in the Darlington Core Strategy. Where opportunities arise project start dates may be brought forward. Comments made by the Green Space Forum in August 2010 have informed the process.

### **Resource Implications**

20. Adopting a strategic, coordinated Green Infrastructure Strategy and Action Plan will provide the Council and its partners with several benefits:
- (a) it will inform the Council's capital spending process and help other infrastructure providers, developers and local communities to be able to properly plan for, fund and coordinate green infrastructure to support and inform the delivery of One Darlington: Perfectly Placed and will provide the basis for new green infrastructure allocations in the new planning policy Making Places and Accommodating Growth DPD;
  - (b) it could be used to inform other decisions relating to capital investment across the Council and help organisations apply for funds by providing a commitment for match funding;
  - (c) partnership working will better target resources, avoid duplication of effort, and see organisations using their specialist knowledge in a coordinated way, avoiding the need to engage external consultants;
  - (d) greater community participation could potentially help secure more external funding for projects across the Borough while freeing up Council resources for other initiatives;
  - (e) it will speed up and streamline the planning process; developers and officers will have greater certainty from pre-application stage enabling positive negotiations to take place in relation to the provision and/or improvement of green infrastructure through new development;

- (f) it will provide greater transparency for green infrastructure bodies, Members and the community; an annual report will be taken to Place Scrutiny to show how delivery of the Action Plan has been achieved while highlighting the priorities for the following year.
21. Some of the projects identified in the Action Plan rely on funding being secured for new provision or to improve an existing space. Funding opportunities are likely to be challenging and will vary through the lifetime of the GI Strategy but the Action Plan sets out a realistic delivery programme taking into account the limited availability of resources coming from the following main sources:-
- (a) The Council's Capital Programme: to supplement other grants and funding secured;
  - (b) External funding: as opportunities arise partner organisations will bid for additional capital resources like the Big Lottery Fund;
22. Developer contributions: these will be used for the provision, maintenance and enhancement of open spaces to mitigate the impact of new development.

### **Community and Stakeholder Consultation**

23. With this Committee's approval, the Council will consult the community and stakeholders on the draft GI Strategy between the 20 June and the 25 July 2012. The consultation will involve a programme of events and activities including:-
- (a) public drop in sessions at the Dolphin Centre;
  - (b) presentations to meetings of the Green Spaces Forum;
  - (c) focus group meetings with interest groups including, young peoples groups, GOLD, wildlife groups, cycle and walking groups and others.
24. Items about the consultation will be carried in the local press and the consultation will also be advertised in some Councillors' newsletters. The documents and comments forms were available at all the Borough's libraries.
25. In addition, over 900 interested organisations, agencies and residents will be contacted by letter or e-mail to notify them about the consultation, and to provide them with information about the GI Strategy and Action Plan. Published information includes the document itself and an introductory leaflet. All these documents, and the opportunity to reply to the consultation on-line, will be available on the Council's website.

### **Next Steps**

26. Following the end of the consultation period all comments received will be considered and changes to the Strategy and Action Plan made where appropriate. It is intended that the finalised Strategy and Action Plan will be adopted by Council in November 2012 as a framework for delivering and managing Darlington's green infrastructure.