

Report to: Essex Flood Partnership Board	Report Number AGENDA ITEM 7 (EFPB/05/19)
Date of report: 09/01/19	County Divisions affected by the decision: All
Title of report: Green Essex Strategy	
Report by: Jayne Rogers, Environment Officer	
Head of Service: John Meehan Head of Planning and Environment	
Enquiries to: Jayne Rogers, 03330136729	

1. Background

In the past our natural environment has been seen as nice to have, but in fact should be core to the council's decision making due to its multi-functional benefits. Councillor John Spence in 2017 raised with the Political Leadership Team (PLT) the importance of developing quality green spaces across Essex to accompany planned growth in the county over the next twenty years. In the absence of a Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy, the PLT agreed for the development of a Strategy for Essex.

2. Purpose of report

The purpose of the report is to raise awareness to the Flood Partnership Board on the development of a Green Infrastructure strategy called Green Essex and highlight the opportunities of green infrastructure to alleviate flooding.

3. Aim of the GI Strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to take a positive approach to enhance, protect and create an integrated network of high-quality green infrastructure in Essex. The aim is to guide and shape planning and other services through setting principles that can inform plans and strategies that will enable a coherent approach and partner collaboration in the delivery of multi-functional natural assets which will provide environmental, social and economic benefits for Essex.

To develop the GI Strategy, it was proposed to:

1. Build a robust evidence base to increase our understanding of the value of our green assets.
2. Engage with key service areas to build upon the Steering Group and Subgroup to inform and help shape the development of the strategy.

4. Green Essex Strategy

4.1 Robust GI Asset Evidence base

In 2017, key spatial environmental data held by Essex County Council (ECC) and its partners - both national and local was collated and captured within the Essex Natural Capital Asset Check. This Asset Check established a baseline of Essex's Natural Capital. As part of this work University of East Anglia (UEA) mapped the Green Infrastructure asset for Essex using Geographic Information System (GIS). This map has since been updated and UEA have agreed to undertake a review of the Green Infrastructure provisions against the local development maps from Local Development Plans, demographic information (such as population growth) and flood risk mapping to highlight any deficits and potential opportunities to improve and enhance our existing GIs to provide multi functions to maximise the benefits to our communities.

A saving of £21,000 has been estimated based on the value of university's time spent on this study through partnership working and we have been awarded funding through the Business and Local Government Research Centre to allow the university to continue to develop this GIS model on our behalf. On 27 November this study was presented by the university as a case study at the national Business and Local Government Data Research Centre Conference.

4.2 GI Stakeholder Engagement

The input and support from internal and external partners is vital to ensure adoption and ownership of the aims and objectives. This is the reason a consultation of the draft strategy is being undertaken. Full details of those involved in the drafting of the document is listed within the strategy.

An online collaboration platform was launched in June 2018 creating a virtual subgroup to engage with wider stakeholders. A restricted (invitation only) group called the Essex Green Infrastructure Strategy Partnership was set up on the Knowledge Hub. The link to the group is <https://khub.net/group/essex-green-infrastructure-strategy-partnership>.

4.3 Proposed Vision

We will protect and grow a high quality connected Green Infrastructure network which extends from our City and town centres to the countryside and coast which is designed for people and wildlife whilst being self-sustaining.

***Attachments:** The accompanying presentation introduces the Green Essex Strategy and the potential linkages and actions to flooding have been highlighted.*

5. Implementation

It is the intention that this strategy embeds green infrastructure requirements within new developments and other planning programmes. Green infrastructure is to become an integral part of the day-to-day considerations in other key sectors and services to ensure that future planning and design is coherent, structured and focused. the following sectors

also have the potential to make a significant contribution to protect, improve, create and sustain our green infrastructure:

- Minerals and Waste
- Health
- Education
- Energy
- Highways and Transport
- Flood and coastal Management


6. Delivery

An action plan sets out a programme of proposed actions for implementation of the Green Essex Strategy to achieve the green infrastructure objectives. It is proposed to consult on a draft document in early Spring 2019.

7. GI and Flooding

Green infrastructure provides significant opportunities to deliver space for water and natural options for water resource and flood management. Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are the preferred approach to managing surface water. However, incorporating more natural flood management techniques could provide clear opportunities to deliver wider benefits including creation and restoration of wetland habitat. This will entail further work and liaison with Essex Highways and the Flood Water Management teams to seek funding for the provision of green infrastructure and SuDS using natural flood management techniques providing multiple functions and benefits.

The key project proposals and actions in relation to flooding coming out of the strategy are:

Theme	Objective	Proposal	Action
Improve, repurpose and create new multi-functional green infrastructure	Improve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Realm green infrastructure improved to reduce pollution and improve character and sense of place 	Working with health and flood partners to seek funding to create a Green Infrastructure Pilot project to support people to lead healthier lives.
Natural Flood Management techniques		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create Water Gardens, Green roofs and Bio retention areas to absorb urban water Continue creating green spaces which also function as Natural Flood Management and SuDs schemes 	<p>Liaise with Essex Highways and Floods teams to seek funding for the provision of green infrastructure and SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems).</p> <p>Seek funding from partners to address flooding but also create green spaces with multiple benefits and provide environment net gains.</p>

Green infrastructure can be less expensive than the installation and management of 'grey infrastructure' (i.e. pipes, ditches, detention ponds). Therefore, improving our green infrastructure will not only help to improve people's health, reduce health inequalities and provide educational value it is essential for delivering sustainable development, will help the council to drive down its cost, whilst reducing pressure on our services, and making Essex a desirable place for people to live, invest and work.

8. Current outcomes from the development of the Strategy

8.1 The Environment team have provided consultation responses regarding Green Infrastructure and other environmental topics since the development of the strategy on:

- A number of planning documents, and the garden communities.
- The sections relating to GIs within the ECC Neighbourhood Plan Guide has been redrafted to give a clearer and more focused guidance regarding what Neighbourhood Plans should consider with regards to GIs.
- South Essex Green Infrastructure study and strategy.
- Maldon's GI Strategy

8.2 Other GI related activities

ECC is now an observer partner for an EU Interreg project. Nature Smart Cities is where a business model and methodology process will be developed to demonstrate how green infrastructure projects can be funded in the absence of European or national subsidies.