

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 General

- 6.1.1 Drawing on the findings of the Study, this section sets out guidance to assist in the development and implementation of GI policies in the Wealden Local Plan. It also provides advice and recommendations for developing a GI Strategy for Wealden.

6.2 Green Infrastructure Policies

- 6.2.1 Taking into account the key needs and opportunities identified by this study, guidance for the development of GI policies are set out below for consideration by the Council.

Overarching GI Policy

- 6.2.2 In line with the National Planning Policy Framework, the new Local Plan should require development to contribute to the creation, protection, enhancement and management of GI networks. An overarching policy should be included in the new Local Plan to provide the strategic policy direction for the provision of GI to support the delivery of sustainable development.
- 6.2.3 In line with National Planning Policy Guidance, this GI Study provides an evidence base and proposed strategic framework for GI planning in Wealden District (excluding the South Downs National Park). The Study identifies GI needs and opportunities for the creation of a multi-functional network of green and blue corridors, having regard to factors such as accessibility, existing open spaces, natural and semi-natural habitats, protection of the water environment, landscape and geodiversity, and contribution to ecological networks. These opportunities are reflected in the proposed GI Network set out in **Section 5.0** at a strategic level for the whole of the District, and at a town scale for Crowborough, Uckfield, Heathfield and Hailsham & Polegate where the need for GI to support sustainable communities is greatest.
- 6.2.4 It is recommended that the overarching GI policy should reflect the following elements:
- The overall aim of the policy should be for development to protect, improve and enhance existing GI assets identified in this GI Study, and to contribute towards the provision of additional GI, to support the multi-functional GI network proposed in **Section 5.0**.
 - Proposals should be supported where development:
 - ❖ is designed to respond to the location of existing GI and support and improve its function and benefits;

- ❖ protects and improves the GI network through the provision or enhancement of functional links or corridors between different GI assets; and
- ❖ provides new GI and/or introduces multi-functional use of existing green spaces or links/corridors where opportunities are identified.
- Development should not be permitted where it will result in the loss of existing GI assets or where it may compromise the integrity of the GI network, unless replacement provision or suitable alternative provision can be made that positively contributes to the GI network.
- Where the scale of development would be too small to accommodate on-site GI provision, the Council should seek developer contributions either towards the improvement of existing green spaces or towards the provision of new GI elsewhere.
- Where compensation is required for the loss of existing GI, then the provision of new or enhanced GI as required by the scale of the development should be in addition to the requirement for compensation.
- Where appropriate, the Council should also seek developer contributions for the future management and maintenance of green infrastructure.

Growth Area GI Policies

6.2.5 Where required, the overarching GI policy for the new Local Plan should be supported by GI policies for the main growth areas to support the delivery of sites allocated for residential development. In line with national Planning Policy Guidance, the Wealden Local Plan Sites Landscape & Ecological Assessment Studies (CBA and TLP, 2017) identify more detailed opportunities for GI provision associated with potential development sites in and around the following areas:

- Edge of Tunbridge Wells
- Wadhurst
- Ninfield
- Herstmonceaux
- Heathfield
- Mayfield
- Stone Cross
- Horam
- Westham
- East Hoathly
- Hailsham
- Polegate

6.2.6 It is recommended that GI policies for the main growth areas should reflect the following elements:

- New residential development should be required to make an appropriate contribution to addressing local needs and opportunities for GI provision in and around the growth area by retaining, enhancing and creating green spaces and corridors as part of the GI Network defined by this Study.
- Development should be required to contribute to:
 - ❖ enhancing biodiversity by protecting, enhancing and creating habitats to provide a network of well-connected ecological corridors for the dispersal of wildlife in and around the growth area.
 - ❖ enhancing the landscape setting of the growth area by improving the character, appearance and condition of key access corridors/gateways, settlement edges and landscape features, including historic environment assets.
 - ❖ the production of local energy (e.g. fuel from coppiced woodlands) and food (e.g. allotments and community gardens) where appropriate.
 - ❖ the sustainable use of water resources by incorporating sustainable drainage systems, green roofs/walls and other 'green design' features into development proposals where appropriate.
 - ❖ enhancing the connectivity of residential areas, the high street, outdoor sports and recreational facilities, public transport services and the countryside around the growth area by retaining, enhancing and creating a well-connected network of accessible natural green spaces and access links.

6.3 Green Infrastructure Planning Guidance

6.3.1 Planning principles for embedding GI into new development schemes are suggested below, including recommended standards for the quantity, quality and accessibility of green space provision. The planning guidance is intended to be of value for planners, developers and local communities in helping inform pre-application discussions and consultations, evaluation of planning applications and implementation of developments in respect of GI provision.

GI Planning Principles

6.3.2 The planning and development management process affords considerable potential to promote and deliver GI. The GI planning principles outlined in **Box 6.1** are intended to inform the provision of GI through the planning process:

Box 6.1 - GI Planning Principles

1. GI should be embedded into the layout of new development alongside the design of the built environment and grey infrastructure from the start of the masterplanning process.
2. Development should retain, enhance and/or create green corridors that contribute to the GI Network and support connectivity with town centres, urban fringe areas and the wider countryside.
3. Development that will cause significant harm to the functioning of the GI Network, particularly in relation to reducing the impacts of and adapting to climate change, should be discouraged.
4. Where an adverse impact on GI is unavoidable, development should provide suitable mitigation measures to ensure the overall multi-functionality and connectivity of the GI Network is maintained.
5. Development should provide or contribute towards the provision of on- or off-site GI as appropriate in locations with identified deficiencies, including arrangements for on-going management and maintenance of green spaces.
6. The amount and quality of GI of different types that is required by a development to ensure residents have the opportunity to interact with nature, and encourage recreation, sports and healthier lifestyles, should reflect Natural England's standards for accessible natural greenspace and the standards for open space provision recommended in the Wealden Open Space, Sports and Recreation Study 2016.
7. Development should deliver a net increase in biodiversity by incorporating opportunities to enhance biodiversity and improve ecological connectivity, including contributing to local Biodiversity Action Plan targets.
8. Development should incorporate measures for adapting to and mitigating against the effects of climate change through innovative GI design solutions, including sustainable water management/drainage systems and urban cooling measures.
9. Development involving the re-use, adaptation or conversion of existing buildings within established built environments should include opportunities for retrofitting GI measures into proposals, such as green roofs and green walls for example.

GI Standards

- 6.3.3 Provision of a connected and multi-functional network of high quality green spaces that delivers long-term benefits for people and nature should be a key aim for GI provision in Wealden District. This can best be achieved through adoption of the following standards related to the quantity, quality and accessibility of green space provision.
- 6.3.4 **Accessible natural greenspace standards** are recommended by Natural England to ensure residents have the opportunity to interact with nature and encourage healthier lifestyles. These include the following standards for the quantity, quality and accessibility of greenspace provision:

- **Accessibility and Quantity Standard** – the Access to Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) seeks to improve green space access, naturalness and connectivity by encouraging provision of range of site types and sizes within walking distance and sustainable transport distances of people’s homes¹⁷⁷;
- **Service Standards** – national standards for delivery of core services/facilities for specific green space types (e.g. Country Park Accreditation); and
- **Quality Standard** – The Green Flag Award scheme provides a national quality standard for management of existing green spaces.

6.3.5 Full details of the above standards can be found in Natural England’s ‘Nature Nearby’ Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance (2010).

6.3.6 The **Wealden Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study** (2017) recommends local quantitative, qualitative and accessibility standards for different types of open spaces in and around settlements within Wealden District derived from assessments of needs and opportunities. Development schemes in Wealden District should make provision for open space in accordance with the recommended standards for size criteria and distance catchments set out in the Study.

6.3.7 Raising the standard of building and landscape design quality should also be a key aim for GI provision in Wealden District. Good GI design should work with existing features (e.g. retaining hedgerows to define a greenway network or using existing drainage ditches as part of a sustainable urban drainage system), and be appropriate to the desired primary and secondary functions for GI in the locality (e.g. balancing biodiversity and access, landscape character and flood risk management, etc). *Green Infrastructure by Design: Adding Value to Developments*¹⁷⁸ sets out GI design principles for the masterplanning of new developments based around the seven key functions for GI identified in Natural England’s *Green Infrastructure Guidance* (2009)¹⁷⁹. The Guide provides a valuable checklist for use by developers to help raise the quality of design and development, and also help local authority planners evaluate planning applications to ensure high standards in GI design are achieved.

6.3.8 CABE’s **Building for Life standards** (2015)¹⁸⁰, developed in conjunction with the House Builders Federation, promote the incorporation of GI into housing developments through measures such as sustainable building materials; renewable energy; green design principles (green roofs, grey water recycling, energy efficiency); and sustainable urban drainage systems. Developers should also be encouraged to consider applying to accreditation schemes, such as The Wildlife Trust’s **Biodiversity Benchmark**, to gain recognition of the quality of their work.

¹⁷⁷ The Woodland Trust’s Woodland Access Standard is a complementary accessibility standard to ANGSt endorsed by Natural England (see www.woodlandtrust.org.uk for details).

¹⁷⁸ [Green Infrastructure by Design: Adding Value to Developments](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/GreenInfrastructurebyDesignAddingValueToDevelopments_1000001.pdf)

¹⁷⁹ <http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/Product.aspx?ProductID=cda68051-1381-452f-8e5b-8d7297783bbd>

¹⁸⁰ <http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/guide/building-life-12-third-edition>

GI Design Guidelines

- 6.3.9 The provision of GI should be delivered in accordance with the planning principles set out above. Developers should fully consider opportunities for adding value to the developments by incorporating high quality, sustainable and multi-functional GI within their schemes at an early stage in the place making process, including how it will contribute to, and connect with, the wider GI Network beyond the development site. To assist in this, the GI design guidelines reflecting the multi-functional aspects of GI provision set out in **Box 6.2** are recommended for use as a good practice checklist for site masterplanning and design. These should be used in conjunction with the analysis of existing GI assets, needs and opportunities set out in **Sections 2.0, 3.0 and 4.0** of this Study.

Box 6.2 – GI Design Guidelines/Checklist

Biodiversity

- Retain and enhance existing habitat corridors and provide ecological buffers through grassland, scrub, trees and woodland habitat creation.
- Create a network of habitat links throughout a development, for example using an existing hedgerow network, and enhancing and extending links through habitat creation, including grassland, scrub and trees in adjoining areas.
- Retain and enhance existing watercourse corridors through incorporation into a site's open space network, and consider opportunities for naturalisation/diversification of habitats, such as wetland, grassland, scrub and trees.
- Conserve, strengthen and enhance veteran trees and the existing native hedgerow network within and around a site, and enhance and extend existing woodland, to safeguard biodiversity assets and maintain the landscape structure of a site.
- Encourage use of ecological building design measures that enhance biodiversity – e.g. green roofs, green walls, and tree planting/habitat creation within green spaces, and nesting and roosting spaces for birds/bats.

Landscape & the Historic Environment

- Incorporate a structural network of linked natural green spaces into development to contribute to and enhance the site's landscape setting, and help integrate townscape and landscape elements.
- Plan for and implement new structural landscape planting of native tree species appropriate to local character at the earliest possible stage, to ensure that development is visually well integrated into its landscape context and is appropriate to the local sense of place.
- Design of structural landscaping elements around residential development areas should create a soft edge linking landscape and townscape elements, with use of continuous bands of thicker screen planting to integrate new development areas into the landscape as experienced from within the site and from the surrounding townscape/countryside.
- Encourage use of natural forms of architectural building design and materials to provide landscape and visual mitigation benefits and contribute to sense of place – e.g. green roofs, green walls, timber construction for walls and claddings.
- Use existing landscape structural features to enhance local landscape character and provide mitigation for environmental impacts – e.g. retain and extend woodlands as landscape buffers to visually screen roads, mitigate traffic noise and improve air quality, and integrate flood attenuation areas into the design of the structural landscape buffers.

- Conserve and enhance existing structural features such as woodland blocks and hedgerows within the site to contribute to a strong landscape edge and setting for developed areas, retaining and managing these for recreational and biodiversity value as part of new accessible greenspaces.
- Extend structural landscape screening using shelterbelts with appropriate native species in more open parts of a site, to filter views of development from elevated areas.
- Avoid or limit lighting as far as possible to conserve dark night skies and minimise sky glow.
- Create positive approaches to new and existing development areas around settlements through avenue planting of native street trees on key gateway routes, and ensure that existing street trees are managed and enhanced to ensure that they are sustained as enduring features of the landscape and townscape.
- Plan and design new development to respect sensitive horizons/skylines and views that provide key elements of a site's visual context and setting, and tie development visually to the historic centre of settlements by safeguarding key views of and from local landmarks.

Energy & Food

- Incorporate measures for local renewable energy production into management of green spaces – e.g. energy crops, Combined Heat & Power plant based on local woodland coppice management, micro hydro-electric schemes and wind turbines/solar panels.
- Specify locally sourced and sustainably manufactured/produced materials and finishes wherever possible in the design, implementation and future management of green space to assist in reducing the carbon footprint of delivering GI.
- Encourage local food production by using green spaces for allotments and community gardens/orchards.
- Encourage local food production by creating links with adjacent farms providing small-scale local food production, local produce sales and educational opportunities for children.
- Encourage local food production by using green spaces to provide location for open air market selling local produce.

Water Resources

- Incorporate green building design measures that help reduce water consumption and provide natural shading/cooling to counter the heat island effect of urban areas (such as green roofs, green walls, timber construction for walls and claddings, water saving devices/rainwater recycling and retaining/planting trees within landscaping schemes).
- Safeguard water quality from potential risks of negative impacts associated with drainage from development.
- Incorporate Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) into a site's layout to assist in delivering flood storage and water balancing functions.

Accessible Natural Greenspace and Access Links

- Conserve and enhance existing tracks and field boundaries as green links to provide new footpath and cycle links to connect a development site with its different zones/neighbourhoods, and to link into the wider rights of way and green space network.
- Consider opportunities to create new crossings over/under major transport corridors to provide enhanced pedestrian and ecological connectivity between a site and its wider countryside.
- Provide opportunities to use green spaces and other GI assets as an outdoor classroom by providing access to and interpretation of natural and cultural assets.
- Design community parks to provide a balance between formal and passive recreation and access to nature, and offer varied opportunities for natural play.

- Connect housing and employment areas to wider greenways network to contribute to healthy communities and green travel objectives.
- Provide a hierarchy of access routes, segregated as necessary, for pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists.
- Engage local communities at all stages of the planning and design process to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility for the long-term care of green spaces – e.g. design workshops and involvement in implementation through community planting/open days.
- Design recreational and play spaces to have a distinct sense of place, which provides an enjoyable and visually rewarding environment for all users and responds to and reflects its landscape context.
- Design play spaces to provide opportunities for a wide range of types of play, including active and passive or quieter, creative forms of play.
- Design green spaces and links to be accessible and inclusive to all ages and community groups, and to accommodate a wide variety of specific requirements including users with mobility impairments.

6.4 Developing a Green Infrastructure Strategy for Wealden

6.4.1 The Government's Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) on Green Infrastructure advises that:

'To assist in planning positively for green infrastructure local planning authorities may wish to prepare an authority-wide green infrastructure framework or strategy. This should be evidence-based by, for example, including an assessment of current green infrastructure provision that identifies gaps in the network and the components and opportunities for improvement. The assessment can inform the role of green infrastructure in local and neighbourhood plans, infrastructure delivery plans and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) schedules.

Local Plans should identify the strategic location of existing and proposed green infrastructure networks. Where appropriate, supplementary planning documents can set out how the planning, design and management components of the green infrastructure strategy for the area will be delivered.

This strategic approach to green infrastructure may cross administrative boundaries. Therefore neighbouring authorities, working collaboratively with other stakeholders including Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), may wish to consider how wider strategies for their areas can help address cross-boundary issues and help meet the Duty to Cooperate.'

6.4.2 This GI Study provides a baseline for developing a GI Strategy for Wealden District. The analysis of existing GI assets, needs and opportunities set out in **Sections 2.0, 3.0 and 4.0** provide an up-to-date and coherent understanding of existing GI provision within Wealden District.

6.4.3 The focus of the GI Strategy should be to provide a long-term and overarching strategic framework for guiding action in areas of clearly identified need, where investment in a high quality, sustainable and multi-functional GI network can deliver the greatest benefits for people and the natural environment. The proposed GI network for Wealden District set out in **Section 5.0** provides a starting point for developing the GI Strategy in this respect.

- 6.4.4 The GI strategy should articulate a coherent vision for sustaining and improving GI provision to support sustainable development; encourage effective stakeholder partnerships; advocate the need for innovative GI management and funding; and also facilitate cross boundary working on GI delivery. In addition, the GI strategy should identify priorities for investment based on policies, public benefits and local needs, and outline a clear implementation strategy for delivery of GI. The implementation strategy should identify GI delivery mechanisms and potential funding sources, supported by a costed action plan to guide delivery. A concerted effort over a long period will be necessary to ensure that GI is planned, delivered and managed to fully meet the needs of existing and new communities; protect and enhance the environment; address the challenges of climate change; and underpin the economic stability of the District. Priorities for the successful delivery of GI include:
- Championing the importance, benefits and principles of GI to a wide audience – including the public, private and voluntary sectors.
 - Influencing and enabling delivery of GI.
 - Marketing and advocacy to promote the GI approach.
 - Identification and selection of GI projects for funding.
 - Establishing partnerships for the funding, delivery, management and ownership of specific GI projects.
 - Identifying and disseminating information on best practice approaches to GI delivery.
 - Liaising with neighbouring areas to co-ordinate cross-boundary delivery of strategic GI projects at the regional scale.
- 6.4.5 Effective strategic governance, leadership and co-ordination through stakeholder partnerships is key to effectively planning, managing and delivering GI. This is particularly important as there is currently no dedicated funding stream for GI. A long-term and strategic approach is also necessary as investment in new and enhanced GI provision is likely to be delivered incrementally, facilitated by, and in step with, development. As mainstream public sector funding for delivery of GI is expected to continue to decline, contributions towards GI provision from new development are increasingly a key delivery mechanism. Funding for delivery of GI related to specific developments may be secured from developer contributions (either through planning obligations or the Community Infrastructure Levy) in line with appropriate Local Plan policies. Investment by the private sector in supporting a high quality environment and moving to a low carbon future through corporate environmental/social responsibility spending also provides a further potential funding source for GI investment.
- 6.4.6 To ensure that GI is implemented effectively, the relevant findings and recommendations of the GI Strategy should be embedded in spatial planning and development management through inclusion of appropriate GI policies and standards in the Local Plan as suggested in **Sections 6.2 and 6.3** above.