

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE

12th December 2013

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR – COMMUNITIES

**Draft Biodiversity and Development: A Green Infrastructure Approach
Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG);
Draft Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) Review; and
Draft Landscape Character Assessment**

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek approval to consult on a draft *Biodiversity and Development: A Green Infrastructure Approach* SPG (Appendix 1) and a draft Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) Review (copies available in Members Lounge). It also advises of the production of a draft Landscape Character Assessment (Appendix 2).

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 The Bridgend Local Development Plan (LDP) is one of the high level strategies which must be prepared and approved for the County Borough. The LDP should express, in appropriate land-use terms those community priorities (expressed in the Community Strategy and its successor, the Single Integrated Partnership Plan) that relate to the development and use of land provided they are in conformity with national and international policy.
- 2.2 A key objective of the adopted LDP is to protect and enhance the environment with more detailed policies aimed at protecting and enhancing the County Boroughs natural assets (green infrastructure).

3. Background

- 3.1 The adopted Bridgend Local Development Plan (LDP) includes policies which are aimed at protecting and enhancing the green infrastructure in the County Borough. The draft documents attached as Appendices (with the exception of the SINC Review – copies available in Members Lounge) supplement policies contained within the LDP providing detailed guidance and supporting information, particularly to the following policies:-

Policy SP4: Conservation and Enhancement of the Natural Environment

ENV1: Development in the Countryside

ENV4: Local/Regional Nature Conservation Sites

ENV5: Green Infrastructure

ENV6: Nature Conservation

ENV7: Natural Resource Protection and Public Health

COM11 – COM14: Recreation Policies

- 3.2 Paragraph 4.1.23 of the LDP requires that, as part of the work relating to a 'Green Infrastructure' SPG, the Council will also review the currently adopted Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) and undertake a comprehensive review of all its sites of importance for nature conservation (SINC's). This SPG is expected to be in place by 2014 and its future adoption as SPG is included as an indicator within the LDP monitoring framework.

4. Current Situation

- 4.1 The **Biodiversity and Development: A Green Infrastructure Approach SPG** (Appendix 1) has two key objectives. The first objective is to provide detailed planning guidance on biodiversity issues. The second objective is to introduce a 'green infrastructure' approach to development.
- 4.2 'Green Infrastructure' is a network of multifunctional green spaces, natural features and environmental management systems which help to provide a natural life support system for people and wildlife. They can provide opportunities for recreation and tourism, public access, education, biodiversity, water management, the protection and enhancement of the local landscape and mitigation of and adaption to climate change and the effects of peak oil. Elements of Green Infrastructure include:-
- Parks and gardens;
 - Amenity green space (eg village greens, playing fields);
 - Natural and semi-natural urban green spaces (eg grassland, woodland, wasteland, open and running water);
 - Green corridors (eg rivers, road and rail corridors and public rights of way including cycling routes, footpaths and bridal ways);
 - Other areas (such as allotments, cemeteries and churchyards).
- 4.3 The LDP is required to deliver 9690 new dwellings up to 2021, together with supporting infrastructural growth in the form of employment development, schools, and community facilities etc. This growth can put a strain on the natural environment if it is not managed properly.

- 4.4 The LDP also had a duty to ensure the protection and enhancement of our natural environment recognising the benefits it offers in managing climate change, water management, safeguarding, enhancing, restoring, and creating wildlife habitats and providing opportunities for recreational activities.
- 4.5 The Green Infrastructure concept reconciles these seemingly 'competing' objectives and introduces a new approach to the way that the 'natural environment' and 'development' are perceived and how they interact. It provides an approach which moves away from the historical view of the environment and development being in conflict to viewing the natural environment as an 'asset' which developers can capitalise on in the development process allowing the County Borough to benefit from the economic prosperity of growth whilst protecting and enhancing the natural environment.
- 4.6 The Biodiversity and Development SPG is divided into two sections. **Section A** defines what is meant by Green Infrastructure and the reasons why it should be provided as an integral part of development projects, it explains how developers are expected to take account of Green Infrastructure in the way they formulate their proposals and formal applications to the Council. **Section B** of this SPG provides more detailed guidance on the requirements and recommended processes for accommodating good Green Infrastructure design in development proposals in relation to biodiversity.
- 4.7 The **Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) Review** (copies available in Members Lounge), is intrinsically linked to the Biodiversity SPG recognising them as one of the 'key' green infrastructure assets that exist within the County Borough. Developments affecting locally designated sites of importance for nature conservation (SINC's), together with regional sites such as local nature reserves are subject to and protected by Policy ENV4 of the LDP.
- 4.8 Currently these sites are addressed in the Council's adopted Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP), which offers SPG to assist in the planning and management. Those SINC's which are already included in the LBAP have been validated on a scientific basis prior to their inclusion. However, the LBAP was produced in 2002 and since that time a number of additional sites have been identified as candidate SINC's by the County Borough Ecologist. Additionally, some sites which are currently identified no longer warrant their formal status. In this regard, it was considered that SINC's would benefit from a substantive review and the Council therefore commissioned consultants to undertake this research.
- 4.9 The SINC Review is a factual document which contains detailed information on the ecological value of each site with a data sheet and boundary map for each. The report also includes recommendations for

further work and guidance on how future SINC habitats should be managed.

- 4.10 The biodiversity SPG builds on this factual research, providing detailed guidance on the future protection and maintenance of the SINC.
- 4.11 The LDP also requires that all development should create high quality, attractive, sustainable places which enhance the community in which they are located, having a design of the highest quality possible whilst respecting and enhancing local character, distinctiveness and landscape character. The **Landscape Character Assessment (Appendix 2)** helps meet this requirement by providing a short checklist of the sensitivities and guidelines for development in each of the 15 distinct 'Landscape Character Areas', which are the result of a comprehensive assessment commissioned by the Council to inform the emerging *Landscape Design Guide: A Green Infrastructure Approach SPG* and *Renewables in the Landscape: A Green Infrastructure Approach SPG*.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The draft SPG, SINC Review and Landscape Character Assessment have been the subject of internal consultation and agreement. Approval is now being sought to formally consult with other interested parties, outside bodies and the public on the content of the draft SPG and SINC Review. The Landscape Character Assessment will not be consulted upon at this stage but will be used in the interim as Development Control guidance before supporting the emerging Landscape Design Guide SPG which will be brought to the Development Control Committee in due course.
- 5.2 This SPG is the first of a suite of 'Green Infrastructure' led SPG which will collectively contribute to driving forward this important agenda in Bridgend. In this regard the Council is also in the process of developing further work which will build upon the work already undertaken. These elements of work include:
 - I. ***A Landscape Design Guide: A Green Infrastructure Approach*** – This will provide practical advice and solutions on how to manage changes in the landscape which respond to and enhance its distinctive character, and work with other design considerations.
 - II. **A Review of the Landscape Working for Bridgend (LBAP)** - This will spatially set out the prime habitats and species within BCBC, based on the landscape character areas aimed at promoting eco-connectivity. The LBAP will also identify evidence gaps for further research and opportunities to draw down funding and community participation.

- III. **A Green Infrastructure online-tool** - This will provide an interactive online resource that will attract and engage the following target audiences on issues relating to green infrastructure, countryside management and biodiversity, these are:-
- School children engaged in relevant studies;
 - Members of the public with an interest in/enquiries about Countryside Management/Biodiversity issues who are seeking information;
 - Members of the public looking for volunteering opportunities relating to Countryside management and biodiversity;
 - Members of the public and developers engaged in planning processes.
- IV. **Renewables in the Landscape: A Green Infrastructure Approach SPG** – This project will build upon the Landscape Character Assessment of the Landscape and Biodiversity SPG to provide guidelines for use in assessments of the impacts of wind turbines (particularly multiple applications and cumulative visual impacts) on the landscapes within the County Borough.

It is envisaged that the guidance will provide a consistent approach to the assessment of planning applications for wind turbines/farms and solar farms in the context of the surrounding landscape and also provide clarity for developers when making planning applications for small and medium wind energy projects in areas outside Strategic Search Areas (SSA's) as to what is required of them and what is likely to be acceptable to the local authority.

5.3 The timetable for completion of these other projects is April 2014.

6. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules

6.1 The draft SPG, and its supporting information, in the form of the SINC Review and Landscape Character Assessment, expand upon the existing land-use planning policy framework contained within the Local Development Plan giving the public and developers certainty in the Council's expectations in relation to the protection and enhancement of Green Infrastructure in the County Borough.

7. Equality Impact Assessment.

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment Screening has been undertaken and the proposed recommendations are unlikely to have an impact on equality issues.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 None.

9. Recommendations

9.1 That the Development Control Committee:

- (1) approves the draft Biodiversity and Development: A Green Infrastructure Approach SPG (**Appendix 1**) and the draft Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) Review (**copies available in Members Lounge**) as the basis for public consultation;
- (2) notes the production of the draft Landscape Character Assessment (**Appendix 2**) as evidence base to support the emerging Landscape Design Guide SPG; and
- (3) authorises officers to make appropriate arrangements for public consultation; and awaits a further report on the outcome of the consultation process.

Mark Shepard
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Background documents

Draft Biodiversity and Development: A Green Infrastructure Approach SPG

Draft Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) Review

Draft Landscape Character Assessment