
Report to: Place Panel

Date: 28 January 2021

Subject: **Green Infrastructure Standards Trial**

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1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To give an update on the national Green Infrastructure Standards Trial (GIST) to test and develop a national Standards Framework for Green Infrastructure and seek comments on survey responses providing feedback to Natural England on the draft Framework.

2. Information

- 2.1 Natural England are developing a national Framework of Standards for Green Infrastructure (GI), delivering a commitment in the Government's 25-year Environment Plan. A national trial is underway to test the draft Standards Framework. West Yorkshire Combined Authority was provided the opportunity to take part through its Devolution Deal, and Leeds City Region is one of the 10 trial areas in England included in the trial.
- 2.2 The Combined Authority's involvement in the national trial was confirmed as part of the West Yorkshire Devolution Deal signed in March 2020. Participation in the trial forms part of a wider workstream on spatial planning and tackling climate emergency, which is being progressed as part of the transition to a Mayoral Combined Authority.
- 2.3 The national trial is planned to be complete in mid-February 2021. The draft Framework will be updated based on feedback from the trial areas, for a planned soft launch later in 2021. The finalised national Standards Framework is planned to be published in 2022.
- 2.4 An informal steering group has been set up for the West Yorkshire trial area, including representatives identified by the Local Nature Partnership, Leeds City Region Heads of Planning and West Yorkshire Ecology Steering Group. The steering group has been considering opportunities to test elements of the

draft Standards Framework as part of work already underway, and to provide feedback to Natural England on the draft document. The steering group includes representatives from Bradford, Calderdale, Craven, Harrogate, Kirklees, Leeds, North Yorkshire (representing Selby) and Wakefield councils, along with Yorkshire Water, Environment Agency, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and Groundwork.

- 2.5 The draft Standards Framework is made up three main elements. A detailed overview of the draft Standards Framework is provided as Appendix 1:
 - a set of principles for Good Green Infrastructure and associated guidance
 - updated standards for accessible natural greenspace (based on existing Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards)
 - a new national green infrastructure dataset and online mapping platform.
- 2.6 The scope of the West Yorkshire trial project was agreed with Natural England with three key elements.
- 2.7 **Leeds City Region Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and Delivery Plan Review:** undertake a review of the existing Strategy and Delivery Plan using the draft national Principles for Good Green Infrastructure and self-assessment checklists, included in the draft Standards Framework.
- 2.8 The review will identify the extent to which the existing Strategy aligns well with the draft Principles, and areas where the Strategy could be strengthened to reflect the best practice in developing Green Infrastructure policy identified by Natural England. The outcomes of the review will be applied to future development of the Strategy and development of an action plan for tackling the climate emergency.
- 2.9 **Investigating the potential for the Standards Framework to be considered as part of Combined Authority-supported scheme development processes** which could link to future updates to the Assurance Framework. As the Standards Framework is at a relatively early stage of development, changes to formal Combined Authority processes would not be achieved within the project timescale.
- 2.10 However, approaches to using elements of the Standards Framework to support schemes benefitting from investment will be considered ahead of its publication in 2022. Elements of the draft Standards Framework for review provided by Natural England could be shared with scheme promoters to guide development of Green Infrastructure focussed projects, or schemes incorporating green infrastructure.
- 2.11 Where relevant, **review and potential testing of elements of the Standards Framework by the Combined Authority and local partners** in development of local policy and future investment programmes. For example, use of the proposed national data set and mapping to identify areas of deficit in accessible natural greenspace, or opportunities to invest in green infrastructure investment.
- 2.12 The Government's 25-year Environment Plan sets out the ambition for the Standards Framework to help in "ensuring that new developments include accessible green spaces and that any area with little or no green space can be

improved for the benefit of the community”. As part of this, the plan sets out the intention to support local authorities to assess green infrastructure provision against these standards, and to work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to see how government’s commitments on green infrastructure can be incorporated into national planning guidance and policy.

- 2.13 The development of a national Framework of Standards provides an opportunity to create a common understanding of what good green infrastructure means in practice, as well as guidance on planning for and developing green infrastructure within development. It therefore offers the potential to support local authorities in place making work, improving the quality and quantity of green infrastructure in their region, as well as to prepare for potential changes in the planning policy framework relating to biodiversity and nature recovery.
- 2.14 Participation in the trial allows the Combined Authority and local partners to have early sight of the draft national Standards for Green Infrastructure and to help shape the national Standards to help ensure they are as effective and provide as much support to local authorities as possible. This could be of value if the Standards Framework is incorporated into national planning guidance and policy in the future.

Feedback to Natural England

- 2.15 As part of involvement in the national Standards Framework trial, local trial areas will provide feedback to Natural England on the draft Standards Framework and associated products.
- 2.16 Feedback will be submitted via Natural England’s online survey which will be launched for trial areas to respond by mid-February 2021. Partners have begun reviewing the draft Standards Framework and providing initial views on relevant elements, and providing feedback to be included in our response.
- 2.17 The Combined Authority will feed back through Natural England’s online survey as the lead authority for the local West Yorkshire trial areas, incorporating feedback from local partners in its response. Local partner organisations are also invited to submit feedback to the national Trial project team independently if they wish to do so.
- 2.18 The draft response is being developed with input from the project steering group, and comments will be sought from other related groups including the West Yorkshire Ecology Steering Group, Leeds City Region Heads of Planning and Duty to Cooperate Group, the White Rose Forest and Local Nature Partnership.
- 2.19 A separate survey has been launched by Natural England for feedback on the national dataset and mapping. The feedback in the draft survey response for this element has been based on partners’ experience of initial demonstrations of the data and mapping provided by Natural England. As the national mapping data is in the process of being released, further feedback may be

added to the current draft response reflecting experience of the full data set, where this is possible in the time available for response.

- 2.20 The draft survey responses are attached as appendices 2 and 3 for Place Panel's comment. The Green Economy Panel are also being invited to comment on the draft response. The survey response will be submitted in line with the Combined Authority's consultation response process.

3. Clean Growth Implications

- 3.1 The draft Green Infrastructure Standards Framework is intended to improve the quality of green infrastructure, and when launched will help local delivery on green infrastructure and tackling the climate emergency. Participation in the national trial of the draft Standards Framework offers the chance to ensure that the benefits of good green infrastructure in supporting carbon emission reduction are emphasised within the Framework.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

6. Staffing Implications

- 6.1 There are no staffing implications directly arising from this report.

7. External Consultees

- 7.1 No external consultations have been undertaken.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 That the Panel note the progress made on the Green Infrastructure Standards Trial, and provide comment on the draft survey responses on the national Standards Framework and national mapping database.

9. Background Documents

["A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment"](#), HM Government, 2018 – Chapter 3

10. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Green Infrastructure Standard Trial – overview of draft national Green Infrastructure Standards Framework

Appendix 2 – draft survey response – main Standards Framework survey

Appendix 3 - draft survey response – national mapping and dataset survey