
Report to: Green Economy Panel

Date: 25 February 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), led by Natural England. Leeds City Region is one of 10 trial areas, and participation was confirmed as part of the West Yorkshire Devolution Deal.

2. Information

- 2.1 Background information on the GIST was provided to the Panel at their meeting in November 2020, including the scope of the national trial; shape of the national Green Infrastructure (GI) Standards Framework; proposed scope of the West Yorkshire trial; and the support that is potentially available to the Combined Authority and local partners through participation in this trial.
- 2.2 The national trial project, which involves review and testing of a draft national GI Standards Framework in 10 trial areas in England, is planned to complete in mid-February 2021. The draft Framework will be updated based on feedback from the trial areas, for a soft launch later in 2021. The finalised national Standards Framework is due to be published in 2022.
- 2.3 A steering group has been set up for the West Yorkshire trial, including representatives identified by the Local Nature Partnership, City Region Heads of Planning and West Yorkshire Ecology Steering Group. The Steering Group will consider 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.
- 2.4 The draft Standards Framework is made up of a set of principles for Good Green Infrastructure and associated guidance; updated standards for

accessible natural greenspace (based on existing Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards); and a new national green infrastructure dataset and online mapping platform.

2.5 The West Yorkshire trial project has 3 key elements:

- **Leeds City Region Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and Delivery Plan Review:** undertaken on the existing Plan using the draft national Principles for Good GI and self-assessment checklists included in the draft Framework. The review will identify areas of alignment and where the Strategy could be strengthened to reflect best practice in developing GI policy – for consideration in future development of the Strategy.
- **Embedding elements of the draft Standards Framework into the Leeds City Region Assurance Framework:** to support current and future reviews of the Assurance Framework and aligned to the Carbon Impact Assessment methodology work.
- 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.

2.6 A more detailed overview of the draft Standards Framework is at Appendix 1.

Feedback to Natural England

2.7 As part of the trial, local areas are expected to provide feedback to Natural England on the draft Standards Framework and associated products. The Combined Authority has submitted feedback as the lead partner for the West Yorkshire trial area, incorporating feedback from local partners.

2.8 The survey responses were developed through partners' review of the draft Standards Framework application or use of elements of the framework within the timescales available. Input was sought through the project Steering Group, the West Yorkshire Ecology Steering Group, Leeds City Region Heads of Planning and Duty to Cooperate Group, the White Rose Forest and Local Nature Partnerships. Partner organisations were also invited to submit feedback independently if they wished to do so.

2.9 To meet Natural England's deadline, the draft survey response was shared with Green Economy Panel members for comment via email. Place Panel were also invited to comment. The responses were submitted in line with the Combined Authority's consultation response process.

2.10 The key points raised in the survey responses on the draft Standards Framework submitted to Natural England are:

- The draft Framework offers significant potential at national and local levels to support local authorities and delivery organisations in increasing delivery of multi-functional green infrastructure and maximising the benefits of green infrastructure for the environment and human health.

- Further revision and expansion of the Framework will help fulfil its potential and provide the greatest amount of support to local partners possible, especially given new requirements on local authorities in development of nature recovery strategies and addressing net biodiversity gain requirements as part of the planning process.
- We support the recognition the Framework gives to the importance of creating networks of accessible natural greenspace (for example, incorporation of the updated Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard – ANGSt - as a core standard to be adopted) and that understanding the extent of accessible natural greenspace, and levels of access to it, is useful as a way of identifying deficiencies in terms of people’s ability experience nature and greenspace – which helps build wider understanding of the importance of nature and of conserving it.
- However, the Framework should also ensure focus on the full range of benefits of GI, and updated ANGSt should be accompanied by other core standards recognising the ecological benefits, including protecting/ enhancing biodiversity, carbon mitigation and reduction of flood risk.
- This approach would reflect the proposed fundamental principle of multi-functional GI proposed in the Framework. The updated ANGSt proposals in isolation may not be sufficiently balanced as a metric to assess the level of provision of multi-functional, high quality GI – and should be used in conjunction with others, potentially as a sub-set of an overarching measurement tool.
- The guidance provided in the draft framework – and the associated national data set and mapping – provides a useful basis for local authorities in developing GI policy and making use of the national data set. We would like to see this expanded to provide more detailed guidance on the principles and policy development, as well as on ways to make the most of the national data set and online mapping platform.
- Incorporation into the national planning framework, potentially providing statutory status for the Framework, would ensure the greatest possible impact in terms of multi-functional greenspace provision, local planning authorities must however retain the ability to develop and implement policy that suits individual circumstances and locally determined objectives. More information is needed on government/Natural England’s long-term ambitions for the Standards Framework.

3. Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications

- 3.1 Participation in the GIST is one of the commitments in the West Yorkshire Devolution Deal that aims to tackle the climate emergency and support the ambition to become a net zero carbon economy by 2038.
- 3.2 The draft Standards Framework recognises the role that GI can play in reducing carbon emissions and supporting climate resilience and adaption, and use of the Standards Framework an associated national mapping data as part of future work to inform GI investment and delivery is expected to help

identify where GI delivery can offer greatest contribution to carbon mitigation and resilience against climate change.

4. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 4.1 The draft Green Infrastructure Standards Framework recognises the importance access to GI providing health benefits, and to ensure that provision of green infrastructure is targeted at those who need it most. This includes communities experiencing the greatest levels of deprivation or poor health, who often have poor access to existing greenspace. The emerging national GI dataset includes analyses of access to GI according to levels of deprivation, disability and long-term illness.
- 4.3 Use of the Framework and the national mapping dataset will help the Combined Authority and partners to target improvements and investment in GI to ensure those in greatest need can access the physical and mental health benefits GI can provide, and will contribute to the wellbeing goal in the draft Inclusive Growth Framework endorsed by LEP Board in January 2021.

5. Financial Implications

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

6. Legal Implications

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

7. Staffing Implications

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

8. External Consultees

- 8.1 No external consultations have been undertaken.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 That the Panel note the progress made on the GIST, and the submission of survey responses to Natural England providing feedback on the draft Standards Framework and the national green infrastructure mapping dataset.

10. Background Documents

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

11. Appendices

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