

APPENDIX 12 - GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE

12.1 Green Infrastructure is defined by national policy as a network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity.

12.2 The high-level green and blue infrastructure network for Three Rivers includes key landscape features, strategic wildlife corridors and areas of high biodiversity. Key elements are chalk streams and river valleys, wetland and grazed pastures, dry chalk valleys and chalk landforms, woodlands and ancient woodlands, historic parklands and designed landscapes and farmland. The District has a number of strategically significant and historic green infrastructure assets, such as the corridors along the River Chess, Colne and Gade, and the Grand Union Canal. It also has a network of public access routes enabling people to reach these areas. Safeguarding and enhancing the highly attractive and diverse environment is therefore a key objective.

12.3 Agriculture, horticulture and forestry are traditional, land-based businesses which are still present in the District and continue to contribute to its rural economy. Appropriate and well-designed farming and forestry development (e.g. grazing, coppicing, nature reserves) supports farming and countryside practices that enhance wider biodiversity and landscape quality by supporting economically and socially valuable activities. This ensures that the District's existing land-based business sector continues to flourish, while simultaneously ensuring that the District's landscape is protected.

12.4 This policy demonstrates the Council's commitment to conserve and enhance the District's Green and Blue Infrastructure, which will help to improve the District's Green and Blue Infrastructure network and ensure its multi-functional benefits are achieved. The conservation and enhancement of the Green and Blue Infrastructure network will help to enhance biodiversity resources, support healthy lifestyles, minimise flood risk and mitigate against pollution.

Green and Blue Infrastructure

- 1) The Council will seek a net gain in the quality and quantity of Green and blue Infrastructure, through the protection and enhancement of assets and the provision of new green spaces:
- 2) Where land is provided or identified for Green and Blue Infrastructure purposes as part of a development proposal:
 - a) Applicants will be required to provide appropriate land management and maintenance plans.
 - b) Stewardship plans and funding arrangements will also be required on major developments or ecologically sensitive sites (where appropriate).

- 3) Priorities for Green and Blue Infrastructure focus on conserving and enhancing the following key assets and the linkages between them:
 - a) the corridors of the Rivers Chess, Colne and Gade and the Grand Union Canal;
 - b) the Chilterns National Landscape
 - c) the Colne Valley Regional Park;
 - d) the District's Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites, key biodiversity habitats, species and areas identified in the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan and heritage assets and landscape character within areas of Green Infrastructure.
- 4) The Council will require new development to contribute to the delivery of new Green and Blue Infrastructure, that is safe and accessible where appropriate, and to the management of a linked network of new and enhanced open spaces and corridors, addressing deficiencies in quantity, quality and access across the District.
- 5) Development proposals should improve connectivity between key assets in the Green and Blue Infrastructure network through the establishment of linked and coherent networks and corridors of green spaces. The Council will work with developers and other partners to facilitate the delivery of projects and programmes set out in the Hertfordshire County Council Green Infrastructure Strategy and other relevant strategies (taking account of the priorities identified in the latest audits and future management/maintenance arrangements).
- 6) Public Rights of Way and other sustainable transport links between spaces in the Green Infrastructure network should be protected and enhanced through development proposals, where appropriate buffers of at least 20m around Rights of Way should be incorporated into masterplans. Diversions of Public Rights of Way will only be appropriate where an alternative route of equal or improved character, amenity, safety, directness and convenience is provided.
- 7) Development will not compromise the integrity of the Green Infrastructure network, by causing fragmentation, damage to, or isolation of Green Infrastructure assets including natural habitats and species.

Reasoned Justification

12.5 Green and Blue Infrastructure is essential to the success of the District, given its multi-functional benefits, including the promotion of health and wellbeing through opportunities for recreation, exercise and social interaction, mitigation against climate change and flooding, enables natural flood control; and the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity enables land management and connectivity between sites and facilitates biodiversity net gain.

12.6 The key Green and Blue Infrastructure assets in Three Rivers include:

- the corridors of the Rivers Chess, Colne and Gade and the Grand Union Canal;
- the Chilterns National Landscape;
- the District's Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Nature Reserves, Wildlife Sites, key biodiversity areas and priority habitats and species identified by the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan and Local Nature Recovery Strategy (once published); and
- The Colne Valley Regional Park.

12.7 These form the strategic Green Infrastructure assets within the District into which other assets link through the identified Green Infrastructure corridors, however, these are not the only important elements for Green Infrastructure within and around the District. Open spaces, woodlands, parks and gardens, allotments, amenity greenspace and other spaces may also be important. Green and Blue Infrastructure should seek contribute to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (where appropriate).

12.8 Public Rights of Way provide valuable footpath, cycle and bridleway routes within the urban area and out into the countryside. During the 2020/21 coronavirus pandemic the value of Rights of Way became even more important, providing an extensive network for access and recreation within the countryside. Any new development should take into account the importance of the Public Rights of Way running through the site and development should incorporate an appropriate buffer to enhance the existing Rights of Way. Given its importance to the District, it will be vital that all new developments protect existing and incorporate new green infrastructure wherever possible.

12.9 Green Infrastructure provision should be made safe and accessible (where appropriate) and new or improved active travel routes which connect people to green infrastructure should also be provided where possible in accordance with the Sustainable Transport Policy. These measures will help to ensure that the multi-functional uses of green and blue infrastructure are maximised and that that all parts of the District benefit from high quality and accessible green infrastructure.