



DRAFT PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

PROPOSED INDIVIDUAL DECISION BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND ENVIRONMENT AND THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR FINANCE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

TOPIC – WINCHESTER ECOSYSTEM SERVICES ASSESSMENT – RELEASE FROM PLANNING (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT) GRANTS

PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

The Access to Information Procedure Rules – Part 4, Section 22 of the Council's Constitution provides for a decision to be made by an individual member of Cabinet.

In accordance with the Procedure Rules, the Chief Operating Officer, the Chief Executive and the Chief Finance Officer are consulted together with Chairman and Vice Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and any other relevant overview and scrutiny committee. In addition, all Members are notified.

If five or more Members from those informed so request, the Leader may require the matter to be referred to Cabinet for determination.

If you wish to make representation on this proposed Decision please contact the relevant Portfolio Holder and the following Democratic Services Officer by 5.00pm on Friday 5 July 2013.

Contact Officers:

Case Officer: Damian Offer, Tel: 01962 848 419, doffer@winchester.gov.uk

Democratic Services Officer: Nancy Graham, Tel: 01962 848 235, ngraham@winchester.gov.uk

SUMMARY

The Council requires evidence to support the development of a Winchester Green Infrastructure Strategy, which will facilitate the delivery of Local Plan policy. The Ecosystem Services Assessment (ESA) offers a structured means to provide evidence base for the development of a Green Infrastructure Strategy. The ESA will provide its output in a suite of composite maps, which can be easily interpreted to inform decision-making and spatial planning. The ESA will:

- Clearly show which areas of land should be retained because they deliver vital functions that support community well-being;

- Highlight less significant areas that could be enhanced to deliver additional services.
- Highlight areas that could be put to alternative use (i.e. development) without compromising service provision for the community;
- Provide vital evidence to underpin the development of the Winchester Green Infrastructure Strategy, which will in turn support Local Plan policies; and
- Enable the development of specific Green Infrastructure (GI) enhancements, projects and initiatives that could be funded through Community Infrastructure Levy.

This report seeks Portfolio Holder approval for:

1. The allocation of up to £24,500 from the Planning (Environmental Improvement) Grants budget to employ specialist consultants to produce an Ecosystem Services Assessment for Winchester District; and
2. The evaluation of quotes for this work to be made on the basis of 60% Quality and 40% Price.

PROPOSED DECISION

1. That approval be given to the allocation of up to £24,500 from the Planning (Environmental Improvement) Grants budget for the employment of consultants to undertake the Winchester District Ecosystem Services Assessment.
2. That approval be given to the evaluation criteria for assessing quotes received through tender being 60% Quality and 40% Price, where Quality includes consideration of expertise, ability to deliver to the specification and demonstrable previous experience of GIS analysis and ecosystem service assessment.

REASON FOR THE PROPOSED DECISION AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

The National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA) highlighted the need to recognise ecosystems as providing goods and services, the continued delivery of which are vital to economic prosperity and human well-being. These 'Ecosystem Services' (ES) are provided at several levels (local, regional and global) and to different groups (individuals, commercial firms and public bodies). The NEA advocates as essential the need to consider Ecosystem Services when making critical decisions (i.e. where to site development).

The pace of development in southern England (including Winchester District) is putting significant and increasing pressure on the environment. In many instances, open space provision for recreation (a type of Ecosystem Service) has so far failed to keep pace with development (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, 2012). In order to ensure that future development is viable, the ES requirements of both existing and new communities must be considered. If the Council does not do this, it cannot ensure that sufficient provision is made in the right place in the right way.

The Local Plan Part 1 requires the provision of Green Infrastructure (GI) to support development over the next 25 years. This GI is vital because it will deliver those Ecosystem Services that are vital to ensure the ongoing viability and success of new communities. To ensure that it achieves this, the Council needs a GI Strategy to underpin Local Plan policy and this GI Strategy must be developed from a sound evidence base.

The relevant Local Plan policy is policy CP15:

‘The Local Planning Authority will support development proposals which:-

Maintain, protect and enhance the function or the integrity of the existing green infrastructure network identified at a District and sub-regional level, including strategic blue and green corridors and spaces, as illustrated on Map 9 particularly where the proposal allows for the enhancement of GI both on-site and in the immediate area.

Provide a net gain of well managed, multifunctional green infrastructure, in accordance with the categories and standards specified in Policy CP7 and appropriate for the scale of development, through on-site provision which:-

- ***addresses deficits in local green infrastructure provision where appropriate;***
- ***integrates with the green network/grid identified at the District and sub-regional level (as illustrated on Map 9);***
- ***provides a high quality public realm for the local community;***
- ***encourages public access to and within the natural environment where appropriate;***
- ***allows for adaptation to climate change;***
- ***is well planned to allow cost effective ongoing management of the GI.***
- ***links areas of biodiversity***
- ***is provided at the earliest feasible stage.***

Where on-site provision is not possible financial contributions will be required for the provision and management of GI sites and will be negotiated on a site by site basis.’

The Winchester Green Infrastructure Study conducted in 2010 provided the necessary evidence base for the inclusion of policy CP15 in Local Plan Part 1 (LPP1). However, the LPP1 policy and GI Study do not go into sufficient detail to guide the provision of green infrastructure. There is now a need for further work to develop a more detailed Green Infrastructure Strategy for Winchester District, which will identify specific projects and initiatives that will deliver the improvements in GI required to meet the requirements of policy CP15. The GI Strategy will help ensure

that sufficient GI of the appropriate type is provided in the right places to deliver the Ecosystem Services upon which new communities will depend. The GI Strategy will also serve to provide developers with clear guidance as to the GI enhancements that the Council is expecting them to deliver or fund in association with development in order to meet the requirements of CP15.

Green Infrastructure (GI) describes all of the natural and managed green spaces, features and water bodies that together make up a multifunctional network or grid across rural and urban areas. The GI network includes five key elements:-

- spaces;
- links and features such as parks and gardens (on private or public land);
- green links between spaces such as hedgerows and rights of way;
- green roofs/walls, and
- 'blue corridors' such as rivers and ponds.

Together, these all provide environmental, economic and quality of life benefits (i.e. Ecosystem Services) which underpin the principles of sustainability. GI has many benefits, from encouraging people to walk or cycle along routes of local significance bringing local communities together, to increasing health and well being, enhancing landscapes and protecting cultural heritage, providing ecosystem services and linking spaces for biodiversity, managing natural resources sustainably and facilitating adaptation to climate change.

Ecosystem Services Assessment (ESA) is a sophisticated technique that combines multiple Geographic Information System (GIS) data-sets (i.e. digital mapping) to identify the most important areas for providing key Ecosystem Services for the community. The ESA for Winchester will show which areas of land should be retained because they deliver important services that are vital to support existing and new communities. It will highlight those areas which could, through enhancement, offer enhanced services of benefit to existing and new communities. It will also identify those areas which are less significant for provision of vital services and which would thus be most suitable for conversion to alternative use (i.e. development) without threatening the community.

A piece of land can provide diverse Ecosystem Services including recreation, flood alleviation, climate change mitigation, and support for biodiversity or contribution to local amenity. Considering Ecosystem Services is a way of looking at land in terms of what functions it fulfils, rather than what it is. For example, a wood can be considered in terms of its obvious uses such as producing fuel or timber. However, in Ecosystem Service terms it should also be considered in terms of its role in intercepting rainfall, slowing run-off and reducing the potential of downstream flooding. Cut the woodland down and the owner realises the benefit of a saleable commodity (a few thousand pounds worth of timber) but this comes at the cost of hundreds of thousands of pounds of damage to flooded properties.

Ecosystem Services Assessment (ESA) offers the means to achieve the evidence base for the GI Strategy. Using this ESA approach as the evidence base for the

Council's GI Strategy will ensure that the proposals in the GI Strategy are robust and more likely to stand up against challenge. The ESA will also provide an evidence base for other Council work, including climate change and resource protection, issues which will only grow in significance for the Council in years to come.

Due to their complexity, it is impossible to integrate and assess the multiple data-sets manually (which is why many GI Strategies have so far failed to achieve their aspirations). Specialist expertise and GIS techniques are required to collate and analyse the multiple data-sets. The Council does not have the technical expertise or IT capability to do this in-house, and therefore needs to buy in the services of a specialist consultant who can undertake the required data collation, manipulation and analysis. Officers have been able to reduce the potential costs by supplying data already collated by the Landscape Team for the initial Winchester GI Study. Discussions with potential contractors over the last three months have provided indicative costs for the work, which have guided the budget proposed in this PHD Notice. Given the costs involved, the project will be put out to tender and it could potentially cost less than the proposed budget.

ESA is at the forefront of current thinking and the application of GIS technology. It will become much more common approach in strategic and spatial planning in future. The Council has the opportunity to lead the way and innovate; using this technique to ensure that it is using the best available data to inform strategic and spatial planning.

A few other Councils have already seen the value of the ESA approach and are using it to inform strategic planning. Birmingham City Council is currently using ESA to inform its spatial planning, climate change and health strategies. Assessments undertaken by Torfaen Council, Bridgend Council and Dorset AONB are also being used to inform spatial planning and improve decision-making.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- An indicative quote has been obtained from a potential contractor, suggesting that this work will cost £20-£24,500. A sum of £15,000 was earmarked from an under-spend in the Planning (Environmental Improvement) Grants budget for 12/13 to fund this work. Given the indicative quote received, a carry forward of £15,000 from 12/13 budget has been requested, which will be augmented by an additional £9,500 from the 13/14 Planning (Environmental Improvement) Grants budget to provide the anticipated total budget of £24,500. This report requests approval for the release of up to £24,500 from the Planning (Environmental Improvement) Grants for this project.
- In order to comply with Council procurement rules, three quotes for this project will sought from suitable contractors, which will be evaluated on basis of Quality 60% and price 40%.
- There will be some officer time required to supervise the project, anticipated at 4-5 hours per month for three months, which will be feasible within existing Landscape Team capacity.

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN ON THE PROPOSED DECISION

The Head of Landscape and Open Spaces has consulted colleagues in Strategic Planning and Planning.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Organisational Development has approved the tender evaluation model.

FURTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED FOLLOWING PUBLICATION OF THE DRAFT PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

N/A

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY THE DECISION MAKER OR A MEMBER OR OFFICER CONSULTED

None.

DISPENSATION GRANTED BY THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

None.

Approved by: (signature)

Date of Decision

Councillor Jan Warwick – Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Environment

Councillor Stephen Godfrey – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Organisational Development