

The Natural Environment, Landscape Character and Green and Blue Infrastructure

2.146 The District contains an abundant natural heritage at all scales - reflected in the extensive landscapes of the Epping Forest and Lee Valley Regional Park down to the scale of individual Veteran Trees. The mosaic of countryside, woodland, trees, green lanes, rivers and water meadows, and both rural and urban open spaces are important culturally and for good health, whilst being valued for their modern and ancient landscapes, enjoyment, recreation and the plants and animals they support. These spaces include elements such as allotments, cemeteries, ponds, streams, river tow paths and roadside verges.

2.147 A key characteristic of the landscape in Epping Forest District is trees, as they are the key component of the ancient forests of Epping and Hainault, many woods and miles of ancient hedgerow as well as the dominant asset in urban areas. Particular attention is therefore paid to the importance of trees within the Local Plan strategy.

2.148 The Local Plan provides a positive strategy for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment and recognises its role in adapting to climate change. National policy and legislation supports the implementation through measures including the development of linked, multifunctional spaces networks, and habitat and species protection which seek to achieve net gains in biodiversity. This is commonly known as 'green and blue infrastructure' (the blue referring to the water environment) whilst any component can be termed an 'asset'.

Key Evidence

- Landscape Character Assessment (Chris Blandford Associates, 2010);
- Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study (Chris Blandford Associates, 2010);
- Infrastructure Delivery Plan (Arup, 2017);

- Open Space Strategy (4 Global 2017); and
- Epping Forest Historic Environment Characterisation Study (Essex County Council 2015).

Approach

2.149 The continued improvement of the District's green and blue assets into networks is an important part of the strategy of the Local Plan, and a key aspect of the Council's response to climate change, providing opportunities to mitigate against the impacts of climate change and adapt to the changing climate.

2.150 The Local Plan seeks to protect and improve upon the quality of the natural environment in the District, in tandem with providing for the necessary new development, through the continued development of green and blue networks that provide for multipurpose open spaces and improving access to the natural environment for residents and visitors. The multi-functional nature of the network includes the water environment of the District. Use of the District-wide network includes recreation, flood water storage, nature conservation transport by walking, cycling and horse riding, provision of shade in urban areas, use of trees to alleviate air pollution, sustainable drainage, food production and a host of other uses that do not constitute buildings.

2.151 The Council will work with new as well as existing, initiatives such as the Living Landscapes of the Epping Forest, and the Lea Catchment Nature Improvement Area. These are partnerships for the improvement of habitat at landscape scale. For example the Lea Catchment Nature Improvement Area initiative seeks to establish a joined up and resilient ecological network at a landscape scale through the Lea Valley.

2.152 The Council seeks to ensure that all development will contribute to future accessible networks of green and blue infrastructure as even the smallest site can provide for vegetation, trees or green roofs or walls with careful design. Larger sites can be designed to capitalise on the existing green and blue infrastructure assets by incorporating them into

The Local Plan should be read as a whole. Proposals will be judged against all relevant policies.

layouts and enriching provision, whilst improving links, and the quality of the living environment for occupants. Therefore Policy SP 7 applies to all development The Council will produce a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy with relevant partners to assist the implementation of a comprehensive network of multifunctional spaces across and beyond the District. This will be adopted by the Council as a material consideration to support the implementation of Policies SP 7 and DM 5.

2.153 Further policies are contained in Chapter 4 Development Management of this Plan. These set out in more detail the Council's requirements, see for example Policy DM 5.

Policy SP 7 The Natural Environment, Landscape Character and Green and Blue Infrastructure

A. The Council will protect the natural environment, enhance its quality and extend access to it; this contributes to the health and wellbeing of its people and economic viability of the District. In considering proposals for development the Council aims to create a comprehensive network of green and blue corridors¹ and places, appropriate to the specific rural or urban setting. In so doing, it seeks to connect and enrich biodiversity through habitat improvement and protection at all scales, including priority habitats and extend access to and maximise the recreation opportunities of, our countryside and urban open spaces.

B. The countryside:

- (i) the Council will conserve and enhance the character and appearance of the countryside. Landscape character assessments will be used to assist in judgements on the suitability of new development;

- (ii) the Council will act itself, and in relation to development proposals, to develop a multifunctional countryside, which is productive, rich in biodiversity at all scales, with a well-connected green and blue infrastructure network that is accessible for quiet enjoyment, recreation and exercise.

C. Towns and smaller settlements:

- (i) the Council will protect the green and blue infrastructure assets of the towns and smaller settlements and improve the quality of existing green space in towns and smaller settlements;
- (ii) the Council will ensure that new development is designed to protect existing green and blue infrastructure, enhance networks, secure better provision where deficiencies have been identified and deliver new green and blue infrastructure to link to local or wider green and blue infrastructure networks; and
- (iii) the Council will seek the provision of new quality green space appropriate to the scale of the development.

D. Green and Blue Infrastructure

The District's green and blue infrastructure network (including priority habitats) will be preserved, restored, extended, maintained and enhanced, and priority species protected, as appropriate through the remaining policies in this Plan including:

- (i) The location of development (Policy SP 2 and Chapter 5)
- (ii) Protecting habitat and improving biodiversity (Policy DM 1)
- (iii) Epping Forest SAC and the Lee Valley SPA (Policy DM 2)
- (iv) Landscape Character, Ancient Landscapes and Geodiversity (Policy DM 3)

¹ green corridors and places are any natural areas that can comprise spaces and corridors, so for example a hedgerow can provide a green corridor for wildlife, a green lane a corridor for both wildlife and people, and either of these can join a park with a wood for example – the park and wood being green places. Blue corridors and places are water

courses such as rivers and streams and water habitats such as ponds, lakes, and marshes

⁵ Countryside is defined as land beyond the built edge of settlements

The Local Plan should be read as a whole. Proposals will be judged against all relevant policies.

- (v) Green and Blue Infrastructure (Policy DM 5).
- (vi) Sustainable urban drainage systems (Policy DM 16)
- (vii) Supporting sustainable transport choices (Policy T 1)
- (viii) Open space, sport and recreation provision (Policy DM 6).

E. The Council will therefore expect all development proposals, where appropriate, to contribute towards the delivery of new green and blue infrastructure which develops and enhances a network of multi-functional green and blue assets² throughout the District. This will be proportionate to the scale of the proposed development and the rural or urban context. The Council will support development which contributes to the District's existing green and blue infrastructure and where possible, enhances and protects networks. It will secure additional provision where deficiencies have been identified through the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and other appropriate evidence base documents. Where on-site provision is not feasible then the use of CIL/s106 agreements will be sought to contribute.

² Multifunctional green and blue assets – any corridor or place that has a number of purposes, for example a pond

can provide flood water storage, a place to row a boat and a wildlife haven.

The Local Plan should be read as a whole. Proposals will be judged against all relevant policies.

This page is intentionally left blank

The Local Plan should be read as a whole. Proposals will be judged against all relevant policies.