

The Environmental Framework

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This report relates to a non-Key Decision

Purpose of this report

1. This report provides the Committee with opportunity to review and endorse the Environmental Framework, and understand how the recent public consultation on the Environmental Framework will be used to shape policies in the emerging Local Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive is asked to:

1. **endorse the Environmental Framework as technical guidance to provide an interpretation of the Council's environmental evidence base; and**
2. **delegate to the Director for Regeneration and Business, in consultation with the Executive Member for Regeneration, the approval of any future minor amendments that may be required to the Environmental Framework.**

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

2. This item was discussed at the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 March 2016, where it was recommended that the Executive endorse the Environmental Framework as technical guidance for the provision of interpretation of the Council's environmental evidence base.

Key Points

3. The Central Bedfordshire area has valued and a very high quality environment and landscape. This is described, assessed and prioritised through the wide range of evidence studies, guidance, strategies and plans the Council (often in partnership with others) has produced. These cover on a range of specific areas, features and topics.
4. The Environmental Framework provides an overview of the existing local environmental evidence base, which is made up of studies, associated strategies and plans.
5. The Environmental Framework demonstrates how the Council meets a range of requirements associated with national policy and legislation, whilst also providing the framework for how this local evidence base can be used to inform and shape future policy and action.
6. The Environmental Framework also provides the Council with the opportunity to demonstrate the value of our environment, and set out the range of opportunities to protect and enhance it.
7. The Environmental Framework has been consulted on to support the preparation of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan. The consultation asked stakeholders for their views on how we should reflect national policy and the local evidence base in the local plan through a series of general and topic based questions.

Reason/s for decision

8. The Environmental Framework makes the wealth of environmental evidence available for Central Bedfordshire accessible. Endorsing it as technical guidance gives it a formal status. It supports sound and justifiable decision making across a range of areas, particularly development management decisions, the emerging Local Plan, and other Council plans and strategies.

Council Priorities

9. The Environmental Framework supports all of the Council's priorities, with the most relevant being:
 - a. enhancing your local community – creating jobs, managing growth, protecting our countryside and enabling businesses to grow.

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

10. The Environmental Framework reflects how a number of legislative and national policy requirements would be applied in Central Bedfordshire, in light of the environmental information the Council holds. The focus of this largely relates to planning policy, in relation to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), as well as other legal requirements detailed in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act, the Climate Change Act, the Habitats Directive, the Water Framework Directive and the Flood and Water Management Act.

Financial Implications

11. The Environmental Framework does not require any budget so there are therefore no financial implications.

Equalities Implications

12. The environment is important in people's health and wellbeing. There is significant and growing evidence on the physical and mental health benefits of green spaces. Research shows that access to green space is associated with better health outcomes, and income-related inequality in health is less pronounced where people have access to green space. Access to good quality green space is associated with a range of positive health outcomes including better self-rated health; lower body mass index scores; overweight and obesity levels; improved mental health and wellbeing and increased longevity in older people.

Sustainability Implications

13. The Environmental Framework will ensure that the wealth of environmental information the Council holds is made best use of in order to deliver sustainable development.

Conclusion and next Steps

14. The Environmental Framework if endorsed by the Executive will act as technical guidance relating to the Council's environmental evidence base. This Framework informs a range of functions including strategic planning and development management. The Director for Regeneration and Business, in consultation with the Executive Member for Regeneration, will be given the delegated authority to make any minor amendments to the Environmental Framework.

15. Comments have been sought through public consultation from key stakeholders and other environmental organisations, asking for their views on how the local evidence base detailed within the framework can be used to shape and provide the focus for future policy and action.
16. These consultation comments are being reviewed, and will be used to shape environmental policies in the new Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Environmental Framework

Appendix 2: Consultation summary