Glasgow and the Clyde Valley Strategic Development Planning Authority

To: **Glasgow and the Clyde Valley Strategic Development Planning Authority Joint Committee**

On: **12ᵗʰ December 2022**

Report by

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Partnership Working Towards Delivery of the Green Network Blueprint

1.   Introduction

1.1   This report is to update the Joint Committee on progress towards delivery of the Green Network 'Blueprint' and other strategic work relating to the Glasgow City Region Green Network.

2.   Recommendation

2.1   It is recommended that the Joint Committee consider and note the report.

3.   Background

3.1   The twin and interlinked Climate and Ecological Crises have never had a higher public and political focus. This is reflected in the emphasis placed on them in the Revised Draft National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and the suite of supporting guidance and strategies such as the emerging Local Development Plan (LDP) guidance and Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.

3.2   Nature Networks, Active Travel Networks and overarching Green Networks are cited as an effective response to the crises in these documents, particularly when considered at a landscape scale. That welcome focus however comes with a range of new requirements placed, in particular, upon local authorities. Working strategically and regionally, the Glasgow City Region Green Network is therefore ideally placed to support partners in meeting these new requirements and, where appropriate developing a consistent, regional approach. The Green Network Blueprint continues to be a key mechanism to inform this work.

3.3   To better understand the issues and opportunities for partners associated with the new policy landscape, and how Clydeplan/Green Network officers can best support them, sessions have been held with the Clydeplan Environment Topic Group and the Green Network Strategic Environment Partnership. These were extremely useful discussions to help frame our future Work Plan and are expanded upon below.

4.   Strategic Environment Partnership (SEP)

4.1   SEP has continued to meet over the course of the year with positive engagement and feedback from partners. However, we are now entering a new phase of strategic and local planning and this presented an opportune time to review and refine the role and function of SEP, as well as to seek partners' views on the future Work Plan of the Green Network team.

4.2   A facilitated session was held for SEP partners on 16th November 2022 to work through the points highlighted above.

4.3   In summary, partners value the work of and support from the Green Network team with some key areas of work identified where expertise and future support should be targeted. These included:

> ➢ Developing Regional Nature Networks and a consistent approach to Biodiversity Net Gain from development;
> ➢ Integrating Active Travel and Green Active Travel Networks;
> ➢ 20 Minute Neighbourhoods; and,
> ➢ Open Space Audits and Strategies and Play Sufficiency Assessments.

4.4   Partners also expressed a wish to investigate the potential for landscape scale projects across multiple authorities that would deliver on multiple outcomes, recognising that this may be attractive to external public and private funders. This will be a key strand of the team's future work plan.

4.5   Lastly, partners suggested that SEP should evolve again, moving from quarterly reporting meetings to task based sub groups considering particular NPF/LDP works streams. This would facilitate development of collective approaches and sharing of best practice, making best use of officers' capacity. The wider SEP group would meet once annually (with additional meetings if required) to review the work of sub groups and to set future strategic direction.

5.   Blueprint Delivery

5.1   The Blueprint comprises two core elements:

(a) Strategic Access Network - a network of routes completely separated from traffic, using greenspace and green corridors that provide an attractive option for making every day journeys

(b) Strategic Habitat Network based on four habitat types:

> ➢ woodland;
> ➢ peatland;
> ➢ wetland; and,
> ➢ grassland.

5.2   Progress towards securing the capacity, specialist skills and resources required for delivery of each of the elements is described below.

5.3   Strategic Access Network - While there is significant funding available for active travel delivery, it has proven difficult to attract the funding for new staff dedicated to developing the Strategic Access Network to the point where it has deliverable projects. The national and regional active travel delivery landscape is also extremely crowded with multiple strategic players such SUSTRANS, SPT, Living Streets, Paths for All, Nature Scot and local authorities.

5.4   This raises a fundamental question on how the Green Network team can best deploy its limited resources to best effect in terms of active travel. This question was posed to SEP partners at the recent workshop and we were given a very clear steer that our time should be dedicated to ensuring the Green Network and the Blueprint are fully embedded in the new suite of Regional and Local Transport and Active Travel Strategies. Our approach now will therefore be to seek early engagement with partners in Active Travel Strategy development as and when the timing is right, and to influence the content and action plans of those documents.

5.5   Strategic Habitat Network - progress towards each of the habitat network strands is described below:

>   **Peatland** - The role of peatland restoration in contributing to the drive for Net Zero, and to flood mitigation, is well recognised. It is also a UK and Scottish priority habitat and therefore the case is strong for targeting effort and resources at the significant areas of peatland within the Glasgow and Clyde Valley.

The Green Network launched the Clyde Peatlands initiative at the Glasgow City Region Cabinet in June to coincide with the recruitment of 2 new Peatland Officers funded through the Scottish Government's Peatland ACTION Fund, administered by NatureScot.

The posts were to be hosted by South Lanarkshire Council on behalf of City Region Partners but unfortunately, we were unable to recruit. This did however allow a period of review and it was decided in discussion with partners to combine the two posts into a single, longer-term and higher grade post.

This time the post will be hosted by Clydeplan/Green Network greatly simplifying the management structure. The post will initially be advertised until April 2025 thanks to Clydeplan underwriting an additional year to the contract as agreed by the Joint Committee in September.

It is very likely that NatureScot will extend the post for a further year when the next round of Scottish Government funding is secured. The post will be advertised in the next two weeks.

The Clyde Peatlands launch generated a great deal of interest and requests for assistance. In the interim a substantial portfolio of potential project work has been collated which will allow the new officer to hit the ground running.

➤ **<u>Grassland and Wetland</u>** - The new Green Network Development Officer, funded for two years through Clydeplan reserves as agreed by the Joint Committee, joined the team in April with the specific remit of driving forward the grassland and wetland elements of the Blueprint.

Both of these habitat types have far less dedicated funding than woodland and peatland and are therefore more difficult to progress.

However, we currently await the decision on a Scottish Government Nature Restoration Fund application for developing a regional grassland network. If successful, this will give us the tools we need for public and private sector engagement and to make the case for substantial delivery funding.

The Development Officer has also been working with East Dunbartonshire Council on a pilot wetland project in the Kelvin Valley, spanning into neighbouring North Lanarkshire and Glasgow. The project will seek to maximise the biodiversity, flood management and visitor benefits of a strategic wetland network, and the work has just been awarded £50,000 from the Shared Prosperity Fund. We hope to use this as a pilot that can be learned from and replicated elsewhere in the City Region.

There is a strong correlation between the work described above and the development of Nature Networks as required by NPF. The SEP workshop gave a strong steer that some of the new Development Officer's time should be directed to supporting this workstream at the appropriate time.

➤ **<u>Woodland</u>** - As previously reported to the Joint Committee, the woodland element of the Blueprint is being driven forward by the Clyde Climate Forest (CCF).

After a difficult period with loss of staff, CCF is now making significant progress on each of its 3 strands of work: (i) urban tree canopy cover, (ii) rural planting for climate change and (iii) woodland habitat connectivity.

In addition to its core staff the CCF is now supported by seconded officers from the Green Action Trust and Trees for Cities. CCF continues to report to the Green Network on progress towards Blueprint delivery through SEP.

6   Glasgow City Region

6.1   The Glasgow City Region Land Use and Sustainability Portfolio Group (LUS) is an important forum to the Green Network in which to report on progress. It provides valuable exposure for the Green Network team's work to senior officers as well as support and guidance.

6.2   In addition to reporting to the quarterly LUS meetings, the Green Network Development Officer attends fortnightly meetings with the LUS Chair, East Dunbartonshire's Chief Executive, and other senior officers, to discuss work programmes and other pertinent business. These meetings provide a valuable sounding board for ideas.