

Committee/Meeting: Cabinet	Date: 9 February 2011	Classification: Unrestricted	Report No:
Report of: Corporate Director: Aman Dalvi Originating officer(s) Michael Bell – Strategic Planning Manager		Title: Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy Wards Affected: All wards in Tower Hamlets	

Lead Member	Cllr Rabina Khan Cabinet Member for Housing
Community Plan Theme	A Great Place to Live, A Healthy Community
Strategic Priority	Supporting and improving open spaces; Adapting our built environment to cope with the changing climate and weather patterns; and Slowing down the increase in obesity

1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy (Green Grid) is a project, funded and managed through the Council's Healthy Borough Programme. It seeks to create a network of open spaces across the borough. It aims to enhance the quality of existing open spaces, to create new public open space as well as strengthen connections between them for the enjoyment of local communities. It promotes a viable, convenient, safe and enjoyable alternative to private transport and promotes increased physical activity. The Green Grid was also expected to increase access to existing sports facilities in open spaces that are currently cut off from parts of the population.
- 1.2 The delivery of the Green Grid is a long term strategy. It will provide a tool to attract and direct investment in open spaces in the borough. It is proposed to be managed and monitored through a Business Plan which translates the Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy into action.
- 1.3 A copy of the Green Grid is included in Appendix 1.

2. **DECISIONS REQUIRED**

Cabinet is recommended to:-

- 2.1 Approve the Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy in Appendix 1 as a strategy that will help guide and manage investment in new and existing open spaces in the borough.

3. **REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 3.1 The Green Grid will assist in maximising opportunities for improving the quality of life as well as:

- Realising the aims and objectives of The Community Plan, i.e. of “Creating a Healthy Community and a Great Place to Live.

The Green Grid is a central delivery tool for the Community Plan priority of:

- Supporting and improving open spaces;
 - Adapting our built environment to cope with the changing climate and weather patterns; and
 - Slowing down the increase in obesity
- Implementing the health aspects of Tower Hamlets Core Strategy Objective of “Strengthening Neighbourhood well-being”, by providing a high quality walking and cycling network to promote active travel and reduce reliance on vehicular transport.
 - Providing a positive influence on physical and mental well being, which is one of the objectives of Healthy Tower Hamlets Programme
 - Assist in achieving key National Indicators including NI186 and NI189

4. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 4.1 There were three courses of actions that were considered for delivering new open space and walking routes within the borough:

- I. The objectives of the Community Plan and Core Strategy are delivered through the policies contained within Development Management Development Plan Document and Site Allocation & Place Shaping Development Plan Document. These policies would direct the applicants to provide for public open space according to the location, designated land uses and viability of the site.

- II. The Open Space Strategy and the Public Realm Strategy guide investment in managing and improving existing open space and public realm.
 - III. Develop a comprehensive strategy that would deliver new open spaces and create green links between existing and new open spaces. It would prioritise investments as per the supporting Business Plan.
- 4.2 Option (i) was considered to be inadequate on its own. The Development Management Development Plan Document does not identify locations for open space. The Site and Place-making Development Plan Document, on the other hand, is dependant on a strategy that would identify locations for Public Open Spaces.
- 4.3 Option (ii) was also considered to be inappropriate in terms of providing guidance on connecting and identifying preferred locations for new open space. Whilst heavily interconnected, it was outside the intended remit of these strategies to address these issues.
- 4.4 Option (iii), i.e. Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy was considered to be the best option whereby it would be able to direct investments in places where open spaces are required and connections in between the open spaces can be created. The THGG Strategy takes into account the aims and objectives of delivering new publicly accessible open space in the right place at the right time. It provides references to locations where provision of open space can be prioritised.

5. BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The Tower Hamlets Open Space Strategy identified that Tower Hamlets has an open space deficit. This deficit has an impact across the borough on people's health and well being, the quality of the environment, as well as the borough's ability to manage issues such as climate change. Through the work on the Core Strategy it was further identified that maintaining the current standard of 1.2 hectares of open space per 1000 population is proving to be difficult given the housing growth and jobs targets within that plan. The Core Strategy, whilst still committed to delivering new open spaces, also focuses on improving the quality and usability of existing open spaces. Furthermore, locations for delivering additional large open spaces are being explored through the emerging LDF Sites & Placemaking Development Plan Document. The Green Grid Strategy is central to this holistic approach open space planning in Tower Hamlets.
- 5.2 In November 2008, Tower Hamlets was awarded "healthy town status" as part of the Government's National Change 4 Life Initiative to become one of nine 'Healthy Towns' nationally. The Green Grid was created as a project that was included as a part of the Council Healthy Borough Programme, as well as to support the Core Strategy.

- 5.3 The Green Grid seeks to create a network of open spaces across the borough. It aims to enhance the quality of existing open spaces, create new public open space as well as strengthen connections between them for the enjoyment of local communities. It promotes a viable, convenient, safe and enjoyable alternative to private transport and to promote increased physical activity. The Green Grid is also expected to increase access to existing sports facilities in open spaces that are currently cut off from parts of the population.
- 5.4 It has been developed along side the Core Strategy (as key evidence base), the Open Space Strategy and the Public Realm Strategy. It also seeks to deliver on a number of national and regional policy requirements.
- 5.5 The Green Grid idea has stemmed from the East London Green Grid developed in 2007. The Mayor of London is now in the process of developing a Green Grid for London.
- 5.6 It is also supported by an extensive evidence base including a Pedestrian Environment Review System Audit.

6. THE TOWER HAMLETS GREEN GRID

- 6.1 The Green Grid is a combination of spaces and routes that encourage people to walk, cycle and enjoy their local environment. At the same time, greener spaces and routes can help tackle climate change, promote regeneration and enhance bio-diversity.
- 6.2 The Green Grid consists of walking routes, which comprise of the;
- § Strategic London wide routes such as Jubilee Walk, Lea Valley Walk, Capital Ring;
 - § High Street 2012; and
 - § Local routes within Tower Hamlets
- 6.3 THGG also consist of open spaces within the borough such as;
- § parks,
 - § natural habitats,
 - § recreation and playing fields,
 - § burial grounds, amenity spaces,
 - § children’s play areas, and
 - § rivers, canals and docks
- 6.4 The vision of the Green Grid Strategy is “To create an interlinked network of high quality, multi-functional accessible, green open spaces and waterways in Tower Hamlets that will encourage active lifestyles and improve the quality of life”. In essence, this means protecting existing open spaces and walking routes and creating new ones where the opportunity arises.
- 6.5 The Strategy proposes three distinct types of complementary initiatives, called “Strategic Initiatives” as the main means of delivery of the Strategy. They are

intended to provide the most effective means of attracting new investments into creating a Green Infrastructure for the borough. These are:

- i. **Investment Programmes**, which are a collection of local projects of similar nature.
- ii. **Strategic Projects**, which are major projects which will have more than a local impact because of their nature, scale, location and will come up for development in the near future.
- iii. **Area Frameworks**, which are locations on the Tower Hamlets Green Grid network where intense change is expected to happen and are likely to impact on the existing open space and walking routes and create opportunities for new open spaces.

6.6 The Green Grid also provides the Council with a framework for attracting, directing and coordinating investment in open spaces, particularly that coming from planning contributions. It is proposed to be managed and monitored through the Business Plan which translates the Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy into action.

7. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

7.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval to adopt the Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy. This will assist in guiding and managing investment in new and existing open spaces in the Borough for future years.

7.2 The work carried out to date on the development of the Strategy in respect of consultation and forming an evidence base has predominantly been funded through the Healthy Borough Programme. The remaining allocation for 2010/2011 is £7,500.

7.3 Any further expenditure to be incurred on the strategy (over and above the £7,500) will need to be funded through existing revenue resources identified within the Service's funding for 2010/2011.

8. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL SERVICES)

8.1. The Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy will play a key role in assisting the Council to realise the priorities of the Community Plan insofar as the Strategy will be a key document informing future Development Plan Documents (DPDs) and Supplementary Planning Documents including the Development Management DPD and Site Allocation and Place-Shaping DPD. The Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy also formed part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy.

8.2. The Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy is not being adopted as an Local Development Framework (LDF) document, rather it is an overarching strategy that will inform the LDF, and therefore will not attract the same weighting in terms of the Council's local planning policy. However approval

of the Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy by Cabinet will see the Strategy approved as a key strategic policy tool to inform LDF documents and will bring about the results set out at part 3 of this report. Such approval raises no immediate legal implications.

- 8.3. The Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy will be delivered and monitored through a separate Business Plan and thus the approval of Cabinet to authorise the production of this Plan is welcomed in order to formally bring about the key actions required to deliver the Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy.

9. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 The concept of a Green Grid is defined in the GLA's East London Green Grid Framework Supplementary Planning Guidance of 2008 as: "A network of inter-linked high quality and multifunctional open spaces, rivers and other corridors and links in between that maximises opportunities for improving the quality of life."

- 9.2 The Green Grid is a key strategy for delivery of a range of objectives of the Community Plan especially A Great Place to Live. It is also one of the key strategies in the 'Programme of Delivery' identified in the LDF Core Strategy and is a part of the Healthy Borough Programme.

- 9.3 The Green Grid has been aimed to benefit all sections of the population, although after detailed assessment, it was determined that this strategy will be particularly focused at sections of the population such as parents, and carers with young children and the elderly who depend most on the quality of local environment to access shops, public transport, schools and parks. The equalities impacts associated with this strategy have been considered as a part of the detailed Equalities Impact Assessment for the Local Development Framework Core Strategy.

- 9.4 Specific consultation and engagement has been undertaken with a number of residents and interested groups, such as the Mile End Cemetery Park Trustees. It has also been considered by the Great Place to Live and Healthy Communities Community Plan Delivery Groups.

10. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 10.1 The Green Grid, other than reducing the deficiency of open space and promoting active lifestyles, will also provide other benefits. These include
- Protecting and enhancing bio-diversity and wildlife habitats in close proximity to local communities,
 - Improving the quality of air and moderate extremes of temperatures and mitigating against urban heat island effect,
 - Improving ecological value of lands along rivers, canals, roads/ paths and railways,
 - Reducing flood risk and water run-off and;

- Providing environmental infrastructure to improve water quality and flood control

11. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The Green Grid Strategy development has been overseen by the Green Grid Steering Group, who comprised of internal officers and key external agents such as the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation. This group managed identified risks as they emerged. Progress on its development has also been overseen by the Healthy Tower Hamlets Board.

12. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 Well maintained open spaces and walking routes that are safe at all times help in decreasing anti-social behaviour and crime. Maintaining the visual amenity and increasing the attractiveness of a locality develops a sense of pride within the community and acts as a deterrent to crime and disorder.

13. EFFICIENCY STATEMENT

- 13.1 The Green Grid has been designed to provide a number of functions, including evidence base to the Core Strategy.
- 13.2 This strategy will also used as a tool to attract further investment of private and public agencies for the investment of open space in the borough.

14. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – The Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy

F

**Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)
List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report**

None

N/A