Green Infrastructure and Open Space Assessment & Strategy

Consultants Brief

Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Unitary Council Area

Introduction

On 1 April 2019 Bournemouth Borough Council (BBC), Christchurch Borough Council (CBC) and Borough of Poole (BoP) were replaced by a new council named **Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council** (BCP Council).

BCP Council will commence preparation of a new Local Plan to replace the three existing legacy Local Plans for Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch Councils. The new Local Plan is due to be adopted in 2022, the existing plans and supplementary planning guidance will remain in place during this process.

As part of the preparation of the evidence base to inform the new Local Plan the Council is seeking to commission a Green Infrastructure Assessment and Strategy for the conurbation in accordance with national guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and other relevant Government policy, such as that contained in the 25-year Environment Plan and Natural Environment White Paper.

BCP Council is part of a national cohort of local authorities working as pathfinders towards future policy and strategy for public parks through the Future Parks Accelerator programme. The programme is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, National Trust and Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Our expectation is that the Green Infrastructure Strategy process will propose radical options to BCP Council, which could bring about accelerated positive change in use of green space, physical activity, mental health, social cohesion, climate resilience and abundance/diversity of native wildlife.

BCP Council therefore wishes to invite suitably experienced and qualified consultants to undertake this work.

Purpose

To develop a green infrastructure strategy for the BCP authority area. The strategy should inform development planning policy formation, public space planning and management, and create the best possible green infrastructure for current and future populations of people and wildlife. Our aims are: To make the best use of space to increase health and wellbeing outcomes for residents and visitors (reducing pressures on health and social services); to reverse biodiversity and species loss locally, allowing nature recovery across BCP; and to mitigate the existing and forecast impacts of climate change.

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Scope

The strategy will set out how all open spaces should be conserved, developed and managed to best meet the future needs and challenges faced by society and nature, this will include sustainability and climate change, nature conservation and recovery, active travel, sport and play, local food production, public health, community development and equality of access to all.

All open spaces (both green and blue) within the BCP area should be considered within the scope of the strategy. Land in public ownership should be assessed for quality and function in order to inform direct actions. The strategy will aim to influence areas outside of BCP ownership through policy and advocacy.

The requirement is to:

- Undertake a desktop review of existing and emerging policies, data and best practice, on a local, national and international scale.
- Review and interrogate GIS mapping of open spaces from the four preceding authorities (this includes some data held by Dorset Council) – which is being brought together currently with a new dedicated GIS resource. This will include agreeing and setting typologies and methodologies for assessing local standards.
- Review recent and ongoing audits of open spaces across the BCP conurbation, agreeing and implementing any additional work to ensure they meet the requirements of a sound strategy – audit templates are included as additional information.
- Agree and define local standards for quantity, quality and accessibility of open spaces using relevant typologies.
- Assess existing and future needs of local communities – with a particular focus on regeneration areas - identifying the ability of open spaces to meet these needs making recommendations for new, enhanced or repurposed spaces.
- Consider and integrate the findings from other project strands within the BCP Future Parks programme – pilot parks, trading models, Stour Valley regional park landscape plan, volunteer strategy development and the parks foundation model.
- Consider and reflect on outputs from other FPA partners – Birmingham, Edinburgh, Bristol, Cambridgeshire, Camden & Islington, Plymouth and Nottingham.
- This evidence will then inform and help develop a green infrastructure vision, strategy and policies, setting locally appropriate standards for management and investment in the light of current good practice and with reference to potential innovative solutions.

Bidders note that the requirement is that the strategy will propose both simple and radical options to address critical problems related to health, climate, nature, active travel, pollution and social cohesion.

Background & Local Context

BCP is a predominantly urban conurbation covering an area of circa 161km^2 on the Central South Coast of England. The conurbation has a population of approximately 435,000. It is made up of 3 towns (Christchurch, Bournemouth and Poole) with a number of smaller freestanding villages to the north of Bournemouth and Christchurch.

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The conurbation sits between the New Forest National Park, UNESCO World Heritage Jurassic Coast and Dorset & Cranborne Chase Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The characteristic habitat of the natural open space in and around the conurbation is lowland heath, which is internationally protected. The whole conurbation is surrounded by Green Belt with the urban area boundaries tightly defined by this Green Belt to the north and the English Channel to the south.

The conurbation has a varied typology of open spaces from parks & gardens, civic spaces and allotments to natural sites, river corridors, beaches, natural harbours and 'green corridors.' Together these constitute an open space network through the urban area, providing health and recreation benefits to people living and working nearby, having ecological value and contributing to green infrastructure as well as being an important part of the landscape setting of built development and an important component of sustainable development. Many of the spaces are multi-functional with overlapping typologies e.g. pitches, amenity, play and nature within one space.

Provision of a range of new or improved open space facilities alongside new development will continue to ensure healthy living opportunities are provided into the future and help address the health challenges faced by the conurbation. Additionally, potential pressures on lowland heath caused by new development will need to be mitigated via habits regulations assessments (HRA) and the Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework (subject to a separate review in 2020/21). A similar framework is being developed to protect Poole Harbour

BCP is one of two authorities within Dorset, the unitary authority adjoins Hampshire County Council & the New Forest National Parks Authority to the east and Dorset Council to the north and west.

Local Planning Policy

None of the preceding local authorities have a current and adopted Green Space / Open Space or Green Infrastructure Strategy. Bournemouth's last Green Space strategy was adopted in 2007, Poole's last Open Space Strategy in 2004 (although there is a 2017 open space needs assessment), whilst Christchurch jointly commissioned an open space, sport and recreation assessment with East Dorset in 2006. An overarching South East Dorset Green Infrastructure Strategy was adopted in 2011. Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole have a current Playing Pitch Assessment and Strategy (2019/20). Bournemouth and Poole have a shared Leisure Facilities Strategy (2014). All of these strategies will need to be considered and reviewed as necessary, although this work will not include revising or rewriting the playing pitch or leisure facilities strategies.

One new local plan will be prepared for BCP Council by 2022. The status of the Local Plans for the preceding authorities is as follows: Bournemouth adopted a Local Plan Core Strategy in 2012. The Bournemouth local plan review was subject to an issues and options consultation and a call for development sites in late 2017. Since that time background work on the Local Plan has progressed however as the councils of BCP became a new unitary authority in April 2019 work ceased on a Bournemouth plan.

The Poole Local Plan was adopted in November 2018 covering the period 2018-33. The Christchurch Local Plan Core Strategy was adopted in April 2014.

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There are a number of relevant existing Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) available across the three existing authorities including the Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework. These will also need to be reviewed to inform the green infrastructure strategy.

It is our intention to have the Green Infrastructure Strategy in place to influence the options and appraisal development of a new Local Plan. This commission seeks to produce a Strategy and we intend to publish a consultation draft version alongside our Issues and Options consultation document in Spring 2021.

Under proposed Government housing targets the BCP Council will need to deliver approximately 2500 new homes per annum. The Local Plan will need to balance how the pressures and opportunities for growth are managed against significant environmental constraints and challenges. In particular BCP and the Green Infrastructure Strategy must consider the need to ensure no harm arises to the Dorset Heathlands Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) from increased visitor numbers arising from net new residential development. At present all developers are required to mitigate impacts within a 5km zone of influence around the designated heathlands generating payments via developer contributions which deliver the mitigation, with an inner 400m zone of zero residential development. However, as we seek to deliver a new Local Plan with associated growth levels we will need to consider the issue of mitigation with a potential role for green infrastructure and suitable alternative natural greenspaces (SANGs).

The Dorset Urban Heaths Partnership will be commissioning further evidence so as this is developed the new Green Infrastructure Strategy will need to have regard to this and dovetail accordingly.

The Strategy will also need to consider emerging Government policy on offsetting, biodiversity net gain, green infrastructure standards and natural capital, and how we might respond to this by using the Strategy to inform local policy, the setting of standards and management into the future. This will need to be discussed with the project team at inception to ensure consistency and dovetailing with other work going on in the area.

A natural capital account for the conurbation is being prepared by Vivid Economics, suggesting values for mental and physical health, climate change mitigation and amenity. The account is not able to place a value on biodiversity.

Draft Timeline

Inception Meeting -	Summer 2020
Desktop Review of research/data/policies/best practice -	Summer 2020
Open space quality assessments -	Summer 2020
Resident / stakeholder surveys & workshops -	Autumn 2020
Mapping and modelling -	Throughout 2020
Issues and options review -	Winter 2020
Draft strategy and options for consultation -	Spring 2021

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Second draft strategy for adoption -	Summer 2021
Strategy adopted -	Summer 2021

The successful consultant would be required to work closely with a strategy project group meeting a minimum of every 2 months throughout the project, with regular contact outside of meetings.

Time must be allowed to present both issues and options and the draft strategy to BCP Management and Members. This work would be supported by BCP's Strategic Lead for Greenspace and Conservation.

Outcomes

Define open space typologies for BCP – in collaboration with project team.

Use existing information and any additional survey work to map existing open spaces.

Create unified open space and typology map for BCP from existing layers, with assistance of BCP GIS resource.

Review and adopt assessments regarding the quality, quantity and accessibility of open space. (BCP have commenced auditing.)

Gather existing data to understand open space use by residents and visitors.

Develop and undertake representative surveys to understand demand for open space types, what is being done well, and what could be improved to impact positively on use, including increased engagement with green infrastructure by under-represented groups. This should identify sectors of community who could be better served by the existing service, including identifying how those sectors might need to be served in different ways i.e. the existing service might not meet their needs or they need something different.

Qualitative engagement with residents, staff, stakeholders and user groups.

Consider the Total Economic Value for parks – following existing work undertaken by Vivid Economics alongside models run to define the additional value of park facilities to communities.

Raw data, spreadsheets, mapping data etc. will be the property of BCP Council to allow future manipulation and interpretation of data and must be supplied to the Council in an editable electronic format as specified by the Council

Make recommendations on:

Localised neighbourhood standards and proposals for green space including parklands, natural space, play and allotments (considering existing sports and playing pitch strategies), this should be on a ward cluster level with spatial provision expressed as area per thousand of population;

Connectivity corridors for walking, cycling and habitats;

Provision of new green infrastructure or facilities to meet current/future demand;

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Changes of use of existing infrastructure to meet current/future demand;

Future models of parks management and types to meet demand;

Governance and ownership of the strategy for the conurbation;

Further work required to embed nature recovery indicators and actions into BCPs corporate strategy;

The report will provide standards supported by the necessary evidence, suitable for inclusion in formal planning policy documents (Local Plan, Supplementary Planning Document and Neighbourhood Plans).

The report will be split into a strategy document and background assessment data, both will be supplied in a PDF format.

Bidders note that we require ambitious and radical options to present to Members.

Project management and monitoring

Following award of the contract a steering group will be created between the appointed consultant and the Client to establish clear objectives, timescales and working methodologies.

Payment Schedule

Payment will be authorised upon acceptance of milestone achievement to an appropriate quality by the Future Parks Strategy Team.

Draft report on local GI and open space context 20%

Proposed quality, quantity and accessibility standards & analysis of future demand 20%

Issues and Options paper 20%

Draft Strategy 20%

Final Strategy 20%

Additional Information:

BCP Corporate Strategy 2019

BCP Parks Audit Form 2020 (on request michael.rowland@bcpcouncil.gov.uk)

SE Dorset GI Strategy 2011

BCP Draft Playing Pitch Strategy 2020

B&P Leisure Facilities Strategy

BBC Green Space Strategy 2007-11

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