

<p>Title of Report:</p> <p>Natural Capital Account of Public Accessible Greenspaces in the District</p>	<p>Officer Presenting:</p> <p>Director of Environment and Regeneration</p> <p>Author:</p> <p>Biodiversity Officer</p>
--	---

1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present Members with the Natural Capital Account (NCA) of all public and accessible greenspaces within the District as an action arising from the Derry and Strabane Green Infrastructure (GI) Plan 2019 – 2032, which will assist Council and its GI Stakeholders, place a value on, assist with management and assess proximity of residential properties to public and accessible greenspaces.

2 Background

- 2.1 Members will recall approving the Derry and Strabane GI Plan (ER51/19 and ER161/19), which aims to protect, improve and increase greenspaces (vegetated areas) and blue spaces (waterways), to provide a multitude of environmental, recreational, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for the public.
- 2.2 Members will recall approving the development of a NCA of Council's 242 green and blue spaces (ER164/19). Since the initial NCA in 2019, Council have experienced a significant increase in demand for access to its greenspaces for recreation during the current COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2.3 Members will recall approving an updated NCA, to calculate the increase in visitor numbers and value provided by all public and accessible greenspaces within the District (ER26/20).
- 2.4 Council have secured £13,040 (50% funded) from the Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs' Challenge Fund, to conduct a wider NCA, to include all public accessible green and blue spaces within the District. The additional match funding was provided by Council Officer's time to provide datasets for the NCA assessment.

2.5 Natural capital describes components of the natural environment (including green and blue spaces) that provides economic benefits to people, for example, cleaner air and water; improved physical, mental health and wellbeing; carbon storage, temperature and flood risk regulation. A NCA assigns a monetary value to key services provided by green and blue spaces. It will help to inform and improve decision making by framing public greenspaces as economic assets.

3 Key Issues

3.1 Outlined below and in the attached NCA report (Appendix 1), are the main findings:

- a) There are 9,000 ha of publicly owned accessible greenspaces within the District for recreation provision.
- b) Council's 240 green and 2 blue spaces (~800 ha) have experienced a 30% increase in visitors, from 5.1 m in 2019, to 6.5 in 2020. These greenspaces provide £98 million in benefits to residents each year.
- c) An estimated 8.5 million visits were made to the 400 publicly owned accessible greenspaces in 2020, which provide £141 million / annum in benefits to residents.
- d) The return on investment for every £1 spent on investment / maintenance by Council and its GI Partners, provides £21 of benefits to the wider society (green spaces provide £1,000 of benefits per adult resident each year).
- e) The main value provided by greenspaces is enhancing health and wellbeing for adult visitors:
 - a. £89 million a year in mental wellbeing value;
 - b. £48 million a year in physical health value;
 - c. 99% of residential properties in urban Derry and 97% in urban Strabane area are within 1 km of a public accessible greenspace;
 - d. £2 million a year to local property value; and
 - e. £2 million a year in carbon sequestration value.

- 3.1 The NCA demonstrates that Council's and other public owned and managed greenspaces are value creating assets. COVID-19 has demonstrated the importance of providing access to greenspace throughout the District for health and wellbeing benefits. These vital greenspaces have played an invaluable role in supporting safe recreation and social interactions. In the coming months and years, investing in COVID-19 safe public greenspaces can support a healthy economic and social recovery.
- 3.2 The findings will help the GI stakeholders to value greenspaces and deliver shared outcomes to improve the environment, health and wellbeing of the District, linked to the Strategic Growth Plan and Local Development Plan 2032. For example, it highlights that green spaces offer an affordable option for improving health and wellbeing within the District.

4 Financial, Equality, Legal, HR, Improvement, Rural Needs and other Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial, equality, legal, HR, improvement, rural needs or other implications associated with this item.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

Background Papers

ER38/19, ER51/19, ER161/19, ER164/19 and ER26/20.

Appendix 1 – Derry and Strabane Natural Capital Account