

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is not a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PLACE

TREE PLANTING PROJECT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval to release funds for GF 072 – Tree Planting Project

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approve the proposal in section 4.

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 The Council recognises its role in protecting the Borough's natural environment for future generations and has declared a Climate Emergency as a means of galvanising action across the Borough to reduce carbon emissions. Our ambition for the Borough is to be zero carbon by 2045, the focus of our activities will be the reduction of carbon emissions which will be achieved by a variety of interventions including a programme of tree planting.
- 3.2 The council are responsible for some 215,000 trees which reside on public land. Tree canopy coverage in the borough equates to around 16% of all the land in Barnsley and in some electoral wards, this extends to nearly a third. There are four trees to every one resident in Barnsley meaning there is a significant population to manage. Experience to-date suggests that the overwhelming majority of the local tree population are strong, healthy and have been at the heart of our communities for decades.

Current baseline information suggests the following:

- 1,185,729 trees within the Borough of Barnsley over 2m in height,
- 215,447 of these trees are within the boundaries of land owned / controlled by BMBC
- Of all the trees within the Borough;
- 20.75% trees are between 2 & 5 meters
- 27.69% are between 5 & 10 meters
- 21.92% are between 10 & 15 meters
- 17.57% are between 15 & 20 meters
- 9.6% are between 20 & 25 meters
- 2.28% are above 25 meters

There are 54 million square meters of canopy cover across the borough, approximately 16.4% of the whole borough.

- 3.3 Across Barnsley, private, public and voluntary sector organisations are striving to actively respond to the climate and ecological emergencies we face. Never has there been so much public awareness and pressure for politicians and decision-makers to act in tackling these emergencies. In addition, Covid19 has further re-enforced for many the importance of nature and access to green spaces as key to their quality of life.
- 3.4 In responding to these demands, organisations, including Local Authorities, will need to increasingly work across borders, working with nature as dynamic landscapes, river catchments and ever-changing ecosystems. This means more creative and joined-up thinking.
- 3.5 From a workshop facilitated by Business Unit six, Parks Department, involving a number of different organisations such as the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Yorkshire Water, Woodland Trust, Highways England and Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust, we have reviewed the current approach to tree planting and woodland creation and propose a new way forward, coordinating this work across the Borough to both facilitate and increase delivery.
- 3.6 Barnsley Council through its Parks Services department is committed to supporting the wider Council initiative currently being developed, to support tree planting across the borough. We will engage with our communities and schools, work closely with other stake holders and seek funding to plant more trees within our Urban Parks, Country Parks and Open Spaces.

4. PROPOSAL AND JUSTIFICATION

- 4.1 It is proposed that:

In order to realize the Councils ambitions in relation to climate change and its own Zero Carbon vision the council approved a scheme to plant a minimum of 10,000 trees across the borough. This scheme will work in partnership with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT) and colleagues in PLACE directorate who have expertise and a long track record of working in partnership throughout the Barnsley borough. YWT have previously mapped much of the tree cover in Barnsley and currently work in partnership with the council on many projects.

- 4.2 Parks Services will work with partners and grant providers to maximize match funding which will enable a wider programme of planting.

- 4.3 The scheme will:

- Accelerate woodland creation and tree planting in Barnsley in response to the climate emergency
- Reduce carbon through offsetting
- Develop a borough plan that identifies areas for planting that can be used to offset some of the imminent major developments throughout the borough.

- Include tree planting in any future strategy reviews such as the Green Space Strategy.
- Assist in the creation of natural flood defenses
- Education and community work
- Community Orchards
- Develop and deliver a coordinated landowner engagement plan to promote woodland creation and funding available in South Yorkshire
- Identify and bring forward new woodland creation and tree planting opportunities through the use of coordinated mapping, identification of appropriate sites (with reference to priority habitats etc) and direct landowner engagement
- Raise additional funding to facilitate further investment in woodland creation and existing woodland management, for example through applying for grant funding and/or seeking support from new partners and other organisations interested in carbon off-setting or natural flood risk management in Barnsley
- Register land to be able to obtain carbon reduction credits
- Link to the wider city region work, particularly the northern forest and upcoming initiatives from the city region mayor

Key Drivers

Carbon Sequestration

Barnsley Council has declared a climate emergency and considers carbon capture through tree planting an important tool in meeting their carbon zero targets. Yorkshire Water and the National Trust have also publicly stated ambitious tree establishment targets. The Woodland Trust and Community Forest Partners also have ambitious targets for delivering the Northern Forest and increasing canopy / woodland cover. An important next step in declaring climate emergencies and tree planting ambitions is to more precisely quantify the extent to which trees and woodland creation can sequester carbon and to what extent they can contribute to net zero carbon targets in agreed timescales. As part of setting carbon reduction targets it is also important to ensure there is accurate accounting across the Borough and between organisations so as to limit the potential for double counting.

Natural Flood Risk Management

As seen over autumn 2019, flood risk is increasing in South Yorkshire and the impact on local businesses and people's quality of life can be catastrophic. Organisations such as the Environment Agency, tasked with oversight and response to flood risk, believe that a co-ordinated approach across the Don Catchment is key to efficiently and effectively ensuring that tree planting reduces flood risk in key areas, whilst at the same time supporting carbon sequestration, improving water quality and promoting biodiversity.

At a recent Sheffield Lakeland Landscape Partnership event organised by the Environment Agency, Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust and Yorkshire Water, there was a clear willingness across Local Authorities and other partners, to find ways to better co-ordinate woodland creation (and other nature-based solutions) within catchments to aid water retention in the uplands.

In order to deliver a significant impact on flood risk management downstream in Doncaster, there may be the need for increased tree planting in the Upper Don sub-catchments in Barnsley and Sheffield. However, critically this needs to be mapped against important wetland, peat bog and older pasture habitats, which themselves also offer water retention and carbon capture. This re-enforces the need for a coordinated approach across south Yorkshire with local Barnsley plans linking into any wider South Yorkshire approach.

New Legislation Requirements

From the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan flow two critical pieces of legislation for the natural environment:

Environment Bill - currently stalled but will be brought forward in the autumn

A key proposal in the Environment Bill is the statutory requirement on Local Authorities to produce Nature Recovery Network (NRN) maps and facilitate Local Nature Recovery Strategies. In addition, the Bill brings forward proposals for biodiversity (and environmental) net gain to be delivered through Local Planning Authorities. Biodiversity net gain (BNG) of 10% will be a requirement of the majority of developments, and any off site compensation for new habitat creation will need to be directed to the right place with reference to the NRN maps. BNG has the potential to fund significant habitat creation, including woodland creation, across Barnsley but mapping the scale of opportunity and the locations is key.

Agriculture Bill - progressing to the Lords

The Agriculture Bill proposes fundamental changes to the agri-environment scheme following our departure from the EU. The new proposals promote the payment of 'public money for public services' – meaning that they will use natural capital accounting to help identify the optimum locations for public funds to be invested, based on where they will yield the most benefits for the public. Across Barnsley there will be a need to map and value existing natural assets and to identify where to invest and create new natural assets – with woodlands creation being an obvious opportunity (as well as wetland creation etc) .

Health & Wellbeing

Covid 19 has highlighted for many the importance of their connection with nature and their access to good local green space. Trees and tree planting have always presented an ideal opportunity to involve a wide range of people in active, practical outdoor tasks.

Engaging the communities of South Yorkshire in tree planting and new woodland creation can help to promote both their own health & wellbeing by taking part in the actual activities, but also potentially through improved air quality in urban areas and access to new woodland spaces previously unavailable.

5. CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- 5.1 This project covers a wide range of environmental issues including carbon credits, biodiversity, health and tree planting and consequently there are no other options.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE/SERVICE USERS

- 6.1 Trees decrease pollution levels and enhance local spaces benefitting health and wellbeing. Tree planting presents an opportunity to engage with local communities and educate for life on the benefit of trees in the local environment.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Consultations on the financial implications have taken place with representatives of the Service Director – Finance (S151 Officer).
- 7.2 As part of the One off investments for 2020/21, the Council set aside £385,000 of funding for the Tree Planting Project. The report seeks approval for the release of this funding to allow a minimum of 10,000 trees to be planted across the borough.
- 7.3 As part of the Project, the Council will be working with the Yorkshire Woodland Trust who will contribute £50,000 of officer time to the project. It is also anticipated that further external funding will be available to fund further work on this project. The additional work will not be undertaken unless the additional funding is actually secured.

8. EMPLOYEE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 This project will contribute to the Council's responsibilities in the upcoming Environment Bill by identifying areas for Biodiversity net gain.

10. CUSTOMER AND DIGITAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The service has purchased data from a digital tree asset mapping solution which enables the GIS mapping and identification of tree populations across the Borough.
- 10.2 Aligned to the Digital First Strategy, mapping will be recorded as a digital GIS layer.

11. COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 A communications plan will be devised to support the project. This will be integrated into the services' proactive campaigns throughout the course of the year.

12. CONSULTATIONS

- 12.1 A number of internal stakeholders have been consulted including Finance, Asset management, Housing and Energy, Planning, Bio Diversity Officer, Parks, Neighbourhood Services, Communications and Culture Services.

13. THE CORPORATE PLAN AND THE COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

13.1 This project aligns strategically to outcome 11 within the corporate plan by protecting the borough for future generations and supports the council's net carbon zero plan to reduce the carbon footprint by maintaining a healthy tree population.

14. PROMOTING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

14.1 Where issues arise relating to the access or mobility needs of disabled people, the presumption in favor of tree planting will be weighed against those needs through Equalities Impact Assessment on a case-by-case basis. This recognises that the planting of trees must be balanced with the Council's duty under the Equality Act 2010 to advance equality of opportunity for disabled people, as well as other people with protected characteristics specified in the act. This shift in the balance of consideration will only be applied where a disabled person's needs are specifically related to their impairment or disability, as distinct from general views or preferences that might be shared by any citizen.

15. TACKLING THE IMPACT OF POVERTY

15.1 Not Applicable

16. TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

16.1 Nurturing a positive, natural environment where trees continue to grow and thrive will provide the right environment to encourage people to be physically active and enjoy a better quality of life.

17. REDUCTION OF CRIME AND DISORDER

17.1 Providing suitably accessible planting schemes will provide opportunities for volunteers who will take "ownership" and subsequently informal stewardship. The project also offers diversionary activities for young people who otherwise may drift in anti social behaviour.

18. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

18.1 Risks such as flooding and appropriate planting will be considered as part of this project.

19. HEALTH, SAFETY AND EMERGENCY RESILIENCE ISSUES

19.1 Not Applicable

20. COMPATIBILITY WITH THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

20.1 Not Applicable

21. CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY

21.1 The project will consider any biodiversity issues as part of the mapping of potential planting sites and will work collaboratively in order to preserve and protect local environments.

22. LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Financial Implications

23. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email governance@barnsley.gov.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made

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