

CLIMATE CHANGE EXECUTIVE ADVISORY PANEL

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Report Title	Tree Management & Planting opportunities
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List of Appendices

None

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide a position statement requested by the Climate Change Executive Advisory Panel on:
 - a) The different tree management approaches across the Council.
 - b) Explore tree planting funding bids and opportunities and the council's plans for the Queens Green Canopy.
 - c) Identify key elements for development of a Tree Strategy.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Government has established a target of increasing tree planting across the UK to 30,000 hectares per year by the end of the current Parliament. To deliver this pledge 'The England Trees Action Plan 2021-2024' sets out steps to support delivery of this long-term plan for expanding the Treescape in England.
- 2.2 As a significant landowner, the Council has an important role to play in maintaining its current tree stocks and supporting the delivery of this target through tree planting, where appropriate.
- 2.3 Tree management currently varies across the Council, with a mixture of in-house and contracted delivery and differing standards. The council should aspire to aligning current arrangements and consider budgetary impacts in doing so.
- 2.4 Various tree planting funding opportunities are available, and opportunities to participate in the Queen's Green Canopy campaign. To maximise the benefit of

these funding opportunities it is vital that any proposed tree planting is planned and takes steps to ensure the long-term success of tree planting across North Northants.

- 2.5 The development of a council wide Tree Strategy will ensure a consistent approach to the management of all trees and help secure a long-term future for our trees and woodlands for generations to come. A Strategic tree working group could be formed to progress this work.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Climate Change Advisory Panel is asked to consider the following proposals:
- a) That harmonisation of the care and management of trees should be further investigated across the Council, to provide a consistent approach for the benefit of our communities & environment in line with current government aims with regards to increasing tree coverage and care across England, making best use of existing skills and experience.
 - b) That the Council approach tree planting in a fully planned way ensuring all trees, including those to be planted as a part of the Queen's Green Canopy, have the best opportunity to establish successfully.
 - c) Commit to developing a Comprehensive Tree Strategy for North Northamptonshire, as outlined in the report.
 - d) Establish a strategic tree strategy working group/tree forum to work on the initial development of the Tree Strategy, while improving co-ordination and communication between separate Council services and stakeholders such as Town & Parish Councils.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 The pivotal role that trees have in stabilising and mitigating climate change is widely recognised by government, the scientific community and industry advisory groups. The Government's 25 Year Environmental Plan draws this to our attention:

"By using our land more sustainably and creating new habitats for wildlife, including by planting more trees, we can arrest the decline in native species and improve our biodiversity"

- 4.2 The Government has set itself a target of increasing tree planting rates across the UK to 30,000 hectares per year by the end of the current Parliament. The figures are associated with the Government's commitment to the Committee on Climate Change's net zero projections advocating the need for 30,000 ha of new trees being established in the UK every year to 2050, to take woodland cover in the UK from 13% to 17%.
- 4.3 To deliver on this pledge, in May 2021 the Government produced 'The England Trees Action Plan 2021-2024', setting out its long-term plan for the treescape in England, and the economic, environmental, and social benefits that will be realised through new trees and woodlands. Not least the plan sets out an intention to spend £500m between 2021 and 2025 to support its tree planting targets.

- 4.4 This document demonstrates the push for more tree planting and longer-term interventions to preserve our treescapes for future generations. As a large landowner the Council is well placed to support tree planting across the area.
- 4.5 Further, the new National Planning Policy Framework (Paragraph 131) gives planners and tree officers the ability to put more pressure on new developments not only for the planting of trees, but also encourage use of the most appropriate species and planting technique, to avoid loss of new trees. It also points out the importance of funding the future maintenance of trees to ensure these trees reach maturity and are safe.
- 4.7 Trees provide a range of benefits, including:
- Nature recovery, through the creation of new habitats, connecting habitats, and increasing biodiversity.
 - Climate change mitigation, by reducing carbon dioxide and carbon off-set mechanism.
 - Economic benefit, through coppicing and sale of timber.
 - Natural flood risk alleviation, by intercepting precipitation.
 - Supporting Health & Wellbeing, improving air quality and creating a sense of place.
 - Heritage and Landscape, providing important features in our towns and countryside.
- 4.8 In the above context it is crucial the Council considers how it can use its assets to develop North Northamptonshire's treescape.

5 Tree management approaches across the Council

- 5.1 The current approaches to tree management across North Northamptonshire area vary considerably between the former Councils' areas.

5.2 Kettering and Corby

- 5.2.1 Trees in Corby/Kettering are managed by a single inhouse team, covering parks, housing areas, cemeteries, public gardens, open spaces, and Highway's streets. The team includes qualified and experienced arboriculturists to inspect and plan work programmes as well as a dedicated tree gang, supplemented with the use of specialist contractors. All trees managed by the team are inspected and regularly maintained.
- 5.2.2 Tree planting has formed a big part of the teams Kettering Grounds Maintenance service, with over 2,000 trees planted since 2011, partly supported through recent capital investments. These works are wholly carried out by an inhouse tree team.
- 5.2.3 Separately, a woodland management team have responsibility for trees in Corby's ancient woodlands and some key open space. The team have built up strong 'friends of' groups, and a cadre of volunteers helping the team with coppicing, splitting, chipping, and a whip planting schedule. Extracted timber is seasoned and sold for firewood locally through the East Carlton shop which generates income to reinvest in the project.

- 5.2.4 The Corby Woodland Project is funded through S106 money, including 3 members of staff. The funding is expected to run out within the next 5 years and continued investment will be required for the project to continue the management of these key areas of ancient woodland and open spaces.

5.3 Wellingborough

- 5.3.1 Tree work and management is carried out under contract by Wellingborough Norse, a jointly owned company. Trees are inspected on a regular basis, but maintenance has been limited to safety work only.
- 5.3.2 Tree work schedules are necessarily spread across the year to allow for budgets to absorb emergency costs, and emergency tree works outside of normal working hours are not covered by any budgeted on-call service.
- 5.3.3. There is currently no programme in place for regular tree planting, or to replace trees lost to disease and decay that have to be removed for safety.

5.4 East Northants

- 5.4.1 With much of the responsibility for management of open spaces devolved to Town & Parish Council's, the Council's responsibility is limited to land and facilities still in its ownership, with maintenance managed on an ad-hoc basis by the Facilities Management team.
- 5.4.2 It is important the Council engages with all Town & Parish councils across North Northamptonshire to explore any opportunities to work collaboratively on tree planting projects.

5.5 Country Parks

- 5.5.1 The Country Parks owned and managed by NNC include Irchester, Sywell, Barnwell, Fermyn Woods and East Carlton. All of these parks are long established green spaces containing mature woodland areas. The current tree planting opportunities within them are restricted largely to infill planting, diversification (e.g., replacing conifers with native broadleaves) and replacement of lost trees. They do not provide significant larger areas, or opportunities, for new woodland creation. The country parks; however, do provide opportunities for small scale ceremonial planting involving community groups as part of the Queen's Green Canopy celebrations, from now until the end of 2022. This would provide opportunities to both celebrate the Queen's platinum Jubilee and promote the wider benefits of tree planting for health, wellbeing, biodiversity and carbon capture. This is investigated further, later on in this report.

5.6 Highways Trees

- 5.6.1 Highway trees are some of the most prominent trees in our towns and villages, adding valuable landscape and amenity value enhancing and softening the built environment and street scene. They are the most instantly visible parts of any street, and if they are not managed properly, they also create the most requests for work from the public.

- 5.6.2 Due to very limited budget resources, work is limited to safety critical work and clearance of sightlines only. There is no pro-active works on trees, and no new trees have been planted in recent years.
- 5.6.3 Much of the urban management of trees was devolved to former District & Borough Councils, and so the tree management varied locally.

6.0 External funding for Tree planting

6.1 Local Authority Treescapes Fund (Forestry Commission)

A bid was recently submitted to the Local Authority Treescapes Fund for funding to plant 1,040 standard trees at a capital cost of £47,444.80, this covers sites in Kettering, Corby and one site in Raunds. All planting sites have been designed with “right tree, right place” in mind. This application also covers funding of £180,960 (£60,320 per annum for 3 years) for watering and maintenance of the newly planted trees. Additional funding has been applied for of £11,500 for kit purchases and other incidentals. A decision on the bid is due in late August.

6.2 The Queen’s Green Canopy

- 6.2.1 The Queen’s Green Canopy (QGC) is a unique tree planting initiative created to mark Her Majesty’s Platinum Jubilee in 2022 which invites people from across the United Kingdom to “Plant a Tree for the Jubilee” from October 2021, through to the end of the Jubilee year in 2022.
- 6.2.2 This initiative is gaining interest across lots of different areas, and the Council is well placed to encourage a consistent approach to ensure trees are planted appropriately with the right species in the right place.
- 6.2.3 Also the Council is well placed to plan Queen’s Green Canopy tree planting events across the area with chosen natural sites such as Kingswood, Fermyn Woods and Desborough Green Space, amongst others. The public will be able to book themselves onto these events, which will be promoted by the Woodlands and Country Parks rangers and will be supervised and run by staff in those areas.
- 6.2.4 To sit alongside this initiative Kettering and Corby inhouse team provides an Operation Spring Bloom event where primary schools are offered bulbs to plant on their land. This scheme could be rolled to include a native tree (of minimal cost) with support on species and sites from qualified officers and access to a web-based support network of videos about how to plant a tree by the Councils inhouse tree team.

6.3 Further tree planting funding opportunities

- 6.3.1 There are a number of tree planting funding opportunities that can be investigated, including:
- The Tree Council: Community Hedge Fund, Orchards for Schools and The Branching Out Fund.
 - Urban Tree Challenge Fund
 - Countryside Stewardship Fund

7.0 The Importance of planned tree planting & long-term care

- 7.1 Whilst the number of trees planted is important, mass tree planting of the same type of tree can result in same aged monocultures of unnaturally grown nursery trees, with little genetic diversity and poor biodiversity value. Good tree planting practices happen over a long period, planned around current tree species on a site and an arboriculturist knowing when trees are likely to reach the end of their life or fail so succession planting has already taken place to replace that lost canopy cover.
- 7.2 Care and maintenance of young trees is also vital, as they are more likely to die within their first 5 years than at any other time in their life. Care taken in the early stages can avoid expensive maintenance later. This includes post planting watering, maintaining weed free areas around the bases of trees and loosening of ties, formative pruning and removal of stakes once the tree is established. These steps help increase the number of trees that can be expected to survive to maturity.
- 7.3 The requirement for aftercare and maintenance needs to be widely recognised and understood as planting any tree is a long-term investment. Therefore, to maximise the benefit and success of tree planting, it should be planned and not reactive.
- 7.4 Important considerations include:
- a) The Right Tree, Right Place approach is essential to allow any trees planted to reach full height and maturity and remove the requirement for resource intensive pruning programmes, and to minimise the nuisance to adjacent properties.
 - b) The importance of a mix of native and non-native tree varieties to safeguard against the increased risk of the loss of one or more tree species due to pest or disease or changes in the environment.
 - c) Appropriate communication and engagement with residents and local stakeholders to ensure the scheme is successful.
 - d) The impact tree planting has on time for maintenance of existing trees.
 - e) The availability of skilled resource to plant trees correctly and ensure their long-term maintenance and aftercare.

8.0 Tree Strategy

- 8.1 A Tree Strategy provides a point of reference for public, Councillors, Officers and stakeholders to establish a clear, consistent and structured approach to tree management. A strategy should enable a local authority or other organisation to manage the trees it looks after well, taking into account the benefits and risks of trees, setting long-term goals to drive up tree numbers and canopy cover, diversifying the tree stock, replace trees removed due to disease or decay, and ensure a healthy and attractive tree stock is preserved for future generations.

- 8.2 The Tree policy for the council should consider:
- a) A consistent and pro-active management of North Northamptonshire's treestock, including regular inspection.
 - b) Encourage the planting and replacement of trees to encourage growth of tree coverage.
 - c) Require the development of tree management plans, appropriate to the locality of the tree.
 - d) Set out when Tree work will be undertaken, e.g. safety works or to prevent damage to property.
 - e) Set out when Tree work will not be undertaken, e.g. falling leaves, sap, or blocking a view of a residence.
 - f) Investment in the skills and resources to achieve these objectives.
- 8.3 A tree strategy with strong policies will help secure a long-term future for our trees and woodlands for generations to come, providing the right management and strong protection, ensuring their positive contribution to a growing area, recognised for its dynamic and sustainable economy and high quality of life.
- 8.4 To maximise the benefit it is crucial that a Tree Strategy for North Northamptonshire Council considers all trees within the Council's ownership, and seeks to harmonise the current differences in standards applied. Whilst the Council should aspire to the best standards possible, limitations on current budget and the need for long-term investment should be noted.
- 8.5 There is also the opportunity to work with Town and Parish Councils as well as private owners. The extensive survey conducted for the government sponsored Trees in Towns II report found that 70% of urban trees in England fall within private property. Although mechanisms to influence private trees differ from those available for trees on publicly owned land, they are equally important to consider they make up the wider visible treescape.
- 8.6 To develop the work identified in this paper a cross-disciplinary working group is proposed to be established to look at the development of a North Northamptonshire Tree Strategy. This will involve key representatives from within all areas of tree responsibility and promote effective co-ordination and communication between different council services (including parks, highways, countryside services and planning).

9.0 Implications (including financial implications)

9.1 Resources and Financial

- 9.1.1 Staff and resource to facilitate the planting, weeding, and watering of newly planted trees will need to be considered. It should be noted that the cost of planting and maintaining trees in an urban context will be significantly higher than, larger scale planting of new woodland on non-urban land where the use of bare rooted whips and community/volunteer input may be more available. resource to facilitate the planting and watering of newly planted trees will need to be considered.

9.2 Legal

- 9.2.1 Without ever achieving a robust tree management system with a focus on proactive rather than reactive, areas of NNC could be vulnerable and open to claims and legal action.
- 9.2.2 Any tree planting needs to be thought out, so risk of legal issues is mitigated for the future of each tree.

9.3 Risk

- 9.3.1 Without robust management of trees in public places there is a public safety risk that trees will not be identified for removal or remedial works when in a poor state, which results in un-safe open spaces
- 9.3.2 Tree planting and good management is a very visual way councils can show their determination to take climate change seriously. It is often the first subject that will be scrutinised.
- 9.3.3 Without a robust tree management policy there is a risk that trees may be lost unnecessarily.
- 9.3.4 By harmonising policy and procedures through a tree forum to share ideas and experience, the council can mitigate the above risks.

9.4 Consultation

- 9.4.1 Information gathered for this report came from across various teams across the Council. Further consultation amongst specialist Officers in the form of a tree forum is however now necessary to ensure a rounded and consistent approach to tree issues is adopted.
- 9.4.2 With regards to actual tree planting, wider external consultation may be required when tree planting takes place and will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

9.5 Climate Impact

- 9.5.1 As trees grow, they absorb and store the carbon dioxide emissions that are driving heating of the globe, and the Governments Climate Change Committee recommends that tree planting is increased across the UK to help meet net zero targets. This is why the Government has committed to increasing tree planting rates across the UK to 30,000 hectares per year by the end of this Parliament, as part of their plan to achieve net zero to address climate change.
- 9.5.2 By improving tree management and tree cover in Council controlled assets through the adoption of clear standards that protect, care and encourage planting of trees, we will be playing a small part in tackling climate change.

9.6 Community Impact

- 9.6.1 The planned whip planting activities for the Queen's Green Canopy will have a positive impact on communities and neighbourhoods who want to feel the

benefits of contributing to the natural world, and the benefits on physical and mental health by working and being in the natural world.

10 Background Papers

- 10.1 Government 25 year Environment Plan
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf
- 10.2 The England Tree Action Plan 2021-2025
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/987432/england-trees-action-plan.pdf
- 10.3 The Queens Green Canopy
<https://queensgreencanopy.org/>