

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S
REPORT TO**

**Cabinet
07 July 2021**

Report Title: Urban Tree Planting Strategy

Submitted by: Executive Director – Operational Services

Portfolios: Environment and Recycling

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To seek the approval of Cabinet of the proposed Urban Tree Planting Strategy.

Recommendation

That

1. The proposed Urban Tree Planting Strategy is approved for immediate implementation and included in the Urban Forest Strategy when the review is completed.
2. That Ward Members of urban wards in the Borough be asked to propose potential sites for tree planting in their wards.
3. That opportunities to work together with local organisations and landowners be pursued.
4. An Urban Tree Planting Action Plan will be prepared to guide tree planting projects and link in to the Councils Sustainable Environment Strategy.

Reasons

To contribute to the Councils Sustainable Environment Strategy, with particular focus on carbon off-setting as part of its journey to net carbon zero

To contribute to the removal and sequestration of carbon from the atmosphere.

To provide a framework for the good management of the Borough Council's tree stock and appropriate decision making on future tree planting proposals

1. **Background**

- 1.1 The Council adopted its Sustainable Environment Strategy in December 2020 which commits, under the "Offset" theme, to undertaking a feasibility study for a tree planting programme to facilitate carbon capture, and greening. The strategy also makes commitments in relation to tree planting in the priority outcomes for the Natural Environment theme.
- 1.2 In 2013 the Council adopted the Urban Forest Strategy which set out its approach for the management and improvement of the urban forest of Newcastle-under-Lyme.

- 1.3 The strategy was due to be reviewed and updated in 2020, but due to the Council's need to prioritise dealing with and recovering from the COVID19 pandemic, the review was postponed.
- 1.4 The Council adopted the Open Space Strategy and Green Infrastructure Strategy in 2017 which sets local standards for open space and identifies sites which are required to meet those standards, as well as sites which could potentially be repurposed, for example, to improve resilience to climate change.

2. **Issues**

- 2.1 The Urban Forest Strategy reaffirms the widely accepted range of benefits that trees bring to human life, not least by converting carbon dioxide into oxygen and thereby keeping us alive.
- 2.2 It makes the case that all of the trees in the Borough, whether individual specimens, groups or woodlands, together make up the concept of the urban forest as a single entity and need to be managed holistically in order to achieve maximum benefit.
- 2.3 It also acknowledges the importance of "the right tree in the right place", involving the community in managing existing trees and new planting schemes, and the long term nature of urban forest management, reflecting the lifespan of trees and the timescales (20 – 30 years) involved for newly planted trees to grow to the age where they begin to absorb large amounts of carbon dioxide.
- 2.4 There have been a number of recent developments in the climate change agenda (as set out in the Sustainable Environment Strategy) and the Council's response to it, which make the planned review and update of the Urban Forest Strategy even more relevant and intrinsically linked with the other strategies referred to in section 1 of this report as well as the emerging Borough Local Plan. It is therefore proposed to undertake the review over the course of 2021 and to bring a draft updated strategy forward for consultation later in the year.
- 2.5 The strategy contains a number of actions relating to new planting proposals, and guidance has also been recently published (January 2021) by APSE on "the 10 golden rules of tree planting in order to gain maximum climate change and biodiversity benefits". Therefore, as an interim measure, to facilitate some early work to progress on tree planting, it is proposed to adopt an Urban Tree Planting Strategy which will ultimately be incorporated into the Urban Forest Strategy.
- 2.6 The proposed Urban Tree Planting Strategy is based on the APSE guidance, and the principles contained in the Urban Forest Strategy, the Open Space Strategy, the Green Infrastructure Strategy and the Sustainable Environment Strategy. It seeks to pull these concepts and aims together into a single, coherent strategy to guide decision making with regard to potential new tree planting in the Borough in relation to appropriate species, locations, long term management and community impact. Ultimately, it will assist in the Council's aim of becoming carbon neutral through offsetting when the trees begin to mature.
- 2.7 It is intended that the Urban Tree Planting Strategy focuses on carrying out tree planting in the urban wards in the Borough. An initial site, on Sandy Lane, Newcastle, has already been planted with trees as a pilot site as part of an initiative in partnership with the Japanese Embassy who donated Cherry trees for the site.

2.8 There will be 2 phases of site selection. The first phase will look at suitable areas of open space that have less than 2 ha of open area. The second, later phase' will look at sites with larger than 2 Ha of open areas and a more comprehensive approach to appropriateness of those areas will be undertaken at the time.

2.9 Ward Members in the urban wards of the Borough will be invited to propose areas of Borough Council owned open space in their wards for planting and for each site that is considered suitable for planting consultation will take place with residents.

2.10 Although the main focus of the planting will be on land that is owned by the Borough Council, this does not preclude opportunities to work with other land owners, particularly where there is land in other ownerships that lies adjacent to Borough Council land. It is proposed to work closely with organisations including Staffordshire County Council and Aspire Housing who have their own sustainability commitments.

2.11 The Urban Tree Planting Strategy is attached to this report at Appendix 1 and is recommended for approval and subsequent inclusion in the Action Plan of the Urban Forest Strategy when the review is completed.

3. **Proposal**

3.1 That the proposed Urban Tree Planting Strategy is approved for immediate implementation and included in the Urban Forest Strategy Action Plan when the review is completed.

4. **Reasons for Proposed Solution**

4.1 To contribute to the Councils Sustainable Environment Strategy, with particular focus on its journey to net carbon zero in terms of removing and sequestering carbon emissions from the atmosphere.

4.2 To provide a framework for the good management of the Borough Council's tree stock and appropriate decision making on future tree planting proposals

5. **Options Considered**

5.1 The options considered are whether or not to review and update the existing Urban Forest Strategy to take account of developments in related fields over the 8 years since it was originally adopted, and to include an appropriate approach to future urban tree planting in the Action Plan.

5.2 It is recommended that the review and update is progressed to ensure that the strategy remains relevant, fit for purpose and aligned with the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1 The Council, as a landowner, has a statutory duty to ensure that it's tree stock is managed safely. It also has a "biodiversity duty" under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, to which the provision and management of trees and woodlands contributes.

7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 There are no direct equality impacts associated with this report.

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 8.1 There are no direct financial or resource implications arising from the proposed adoption of the Urban Tree Planting Strategy, nor the review of the Urban Forest Strategy. The preparation of both strategies can be programmed into the workload of existing staff.
- 8.2 However, should proposals for planting new trees come forward there will be a significant requirement for staff time to engage and consult with affected communities and other stakeholders, design schemes, seek tenders and appoint contractors. This will require reprioritising of other projects and work streams depending on the scale and timing of the proposals.
- 8.3 Also, new planting schemes will require funding as no provision is available in current revenue or capital budgets. It is understood that a sum has been included in the general fund capital programme for progression of some items in the Sustainable Environment Strategy Action Plan, and that a portion of this may be available for new planting schemes. Full costings will be prepared and reported for any planting proposals which are brought forward so that appropriate funding mechanisms can be agreed.
- 8.4 Opportunities to secure external funding for planting schemes will also be explored to supplement the Council's resources.

9. **Major Risks**

- 9.1 The major risks associated with this report relate to the Council's duty to safely maintain its current tree stock, and its ambition to be carbon neutral across its operations and assets by 2030 through a combination of reducing carbon production and offsetting of any residual carbon emissions. Tree planting, particularly in the urban areas of the Borough, would ultimately assist in such offsetting.
- 9.2 There is also a risk of a lack of community support for proposed new tree planting, depending on location and scale. This risk will be managed through community engagement and consultation on planting proposals for any sites identified for this purpose.

10. **UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)**

- 10.1 The Urban Forest Strategy and Urban Tree Planting Strategy will support the realisation of the aims of UN SDG 3, 13 AND 15.

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

https://30312f94-9adb-4918-80dd-708c590bada3.usrfiles.com/ugd/30312f_79b08331d11e44bc888e1ee08c05474e.pdf



11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 Approval of the strategy is considered to be a key decision as it impacts on all wards in the Borough and may require cumulative expenditure of over £100,000 should the action plan be progressed. It has been included in the Forward Plan.

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

12.1 None

13. **List of Appendices**

13.1 Appendix 1 – Urban Tree Planting Strategy (2021)

14. **Background Papers**

1. Urban Forest Strategy 2013
2. Open Space Strategy and Green Infrastructure Strategy 2017
3. Sustainable Environment Strategy 2020
4. APSE – The 10 golden rules of tree planting in order to gain maximum climate change and biodiversity benefits