

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S
REPORT TO**

Cabinet
02 February 2022

Report Title: Urban Tree Planting Strategy Update and designation of Urban Carbon Capture Areas.

Submitted by: Executive Director – Operational Services

Portfolios: Environment and Recycling

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To seek the approval of the Cabinet to progress tree planting under the Urban Tree Planting Strategy, and to provide an update on progress with linked initiatives.

Recommendation

That

1. Cabinet notes the Phase 1 sites already planted to coincide with the national tree planting week initiative.
2. The phase 2 of tree planting through the Urban Tree Planting Strategy is approved for immediate implementation, subject to consultation responses, and the Executive Director – Operational Services is authorised to seek and accept quotations for the work.
3. That Cabinet notes progress with other linked initiatives.
4. That the list of future sites for tree planting is approved and work is progressed, with a view to implementation of further phases starting with planting sites for Phase 3 in the autumn/winter planting season of 2022/23.
5. That Cabinet remove the 2 ha. limit to allow larger sites to be considered.
6. That all Council owned site in phases 1, 2 and 3 and future phases outlined in appendix 1. are designated as Urban Carbon Capture Areas in the Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy and considered for an appropriate designation in the developing Local Plan.

Reasons

To contribute to the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy, with particular focus on carbon sequestration and off-setting as part of its journey to net carbon zero

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

To contribute to the good management of the Borough Council's tree stock and appropriate decision making on tree planting proposals

To contribute to the Council's Nature Recovery plans.

To protect urban greenspaces for future generations.

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 On 7th July 2021 the Cabinet approved the Urban Tree Planting Strategy which set out its approach for the management and improvement of the urban forest of Newcastle-under-Lyme. It was resolved that:
 1. The proposed Urban Tree Planting Strategy be 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 and local communities 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. Investigations be made into opportunities to take part in the project to plant an Urban Tree Canopy as part of the celebrations for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022.
 5. An Urban Tree Planting Action Plan be prepared to guide tree-planting projects and link in to the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy.
- 1.3 In November 2021 the Council was the first in Staffordshire to adopt a Nature Recovery motion in Full Council, in recognition that nature is in long term decline and action is needed to halt and reverse this urgently.
- 1.4 To address the nature crisis the Council acknowledged that more space should be given to wildlife, existing wildlife spaces should be expanded, existing wildlife spaces should be improved as well as improving the connectivity between wildlife spaces.
- 1.5 Since this time, officers have progressed a number of initiatives and plans are now in place to begin phased delivery of the Urban Tree Planting Strategy.

2. **Issues**

- 2.1 The following summary outlines progress made to date against each of the 5 resolutions made by Cabinet in July 2021:
 1. Recruitment is in progress to fill the vacant Arboricultural Officer post. When in post, the Arboricultural Officer will undertake the review of the Urban Forest Strategy, incorporating the Urban Tree Planting Strategy
 2. Ward members of urban wards in the Borough were asked in September 2021, to propose potential sites for tree planting. The responses, received in October 2021, were collated into a long list of sites that feed into an Action Plan.
 3. Local organisations and communities were also invited to consider planting trees in their gardens, allotments or green spaces as part of the Council's "Plant a Blooming Tree" initiative, which is the theme for Newcastle in Bloom for 2022.

4. In addition, the Council has set up a “treetotalizer” on its website, where residents and community groups can add a tree or trees they have planted, with a view to planting 850 trees to mark the 850th anniversary of the Borough in 2023.
 5. Engagement is in progress with all local primary schools to encourage participation in the “Plant a Tree for the Jubilee” initiative to celebrate the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee in 2022. Some schools are already signed up to the scheme and are accessing the tree packs provided by the Woodland Trust, the partner for the initiative.
 6. Other schools have expressed interest in working with the Council to plant trees either within their school grounds, or on a local green space owned by the Council. Planting will take place in two phases during 2022 – firstly in March 2022, and secondly in November/December 2022.
 7. An Urban Tree Planting Strategy Action Plan has been prepared as an appendix to this report, which identifies a long list of sites for tree planting projects in urban wards in the Borough, which will link to the Sustainable Environment Strategy. This Action Plan represents a commitment to undertake tree planting on urban greenspaces well into the future, which will in time form a lasting legacy for future generations.
 8. A shortlist of sites has been prepared, (see 2.7 below) with a view to implementing tree planting at these locations in March 2022, subject to consultation with local stakeholders.
- 2.2 The Action Plan and the linked initiatives, follow the principles of the Urban Tree Planting Strategy in 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 They also acknowledge 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. Ultimately, they will assist in the Council’s aim of becoming carbon neutral through carbon sequestration and offsetting when the trees begin to mature.
- 2.4 National Tree Week
- 2.5 As a forerunner to the implementation of the next phase of tree planting, to mark the recent National Tree Week and the Borough’s 30th year of participation in Britain in Bloom, planting of 30 native broadleaf trees was undertaken at 2 sites in December 2021. 15 trees were planted at Newchapel Recreation Ground, and a further 15 at Sandy Lane.
- 2.6 Queens Green Canopy 2022 – ‘Plant a Tree for the Jubilee’
- 2.7 At the time of writing this report, 17 primary schools have indicated that they will be participating in the “Plant a Tree for the Jubilee” project, and intend to plant their trees by March 2022. Work is ongoing with other schools, with a view to the remainder of planting with interested schools taking place in November/December 2022.
- 2.8 Newcastle under Lyme Local Plan and Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy
- 2.9 Many of the Council’s formal parks and open spaces are already recognised in the Council’s emerging Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy (formerly Greenspace Strategy) as

being required to meet the open space needs of the community. Additional sites where tree planting is carried out will be included in the Strategy as urban carbon capture areas.

- 2.10 Further, sites where tree planting is carried out as part of the Urban Tree Planting Strategy will also be considered for designation in the Local Plan to reflect the role that they will perform in the creation of a mosaic of urban parks and greenspaces that will play a important long term role in reducing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and providing important local wildlife habitats.
- 2.11 The Urban Tree Planting Strategy will focus on carrying out tree planting in the urban wards in the Borough, as this is where carbon capture or sequestration will be most needed to mitigate the carbon footprint generated in built-up areas.
- 2.12 Work is also ongoing to investigate and develop a system where the future benefits of carbon capture deriving from additional trees can be measured and monitored to demonstrate their contribution towards the Councils carbon zero goals.
- 2.13 The Action Plan proposes 3 initial phases of site selection for suitable areas of open space that have less than 2 ha of open area:

Site	Ward	Area (ha)
Phase 1 – National Plant a Tree Week sites		
Sandy Lane	May Bank	0.91
Newchapel Recreation Ground	Newchapel and Mow Cop	1.96
Phase 2 – March 2022		
Repton Drive	Westlands	0.11
Winchester Drive	Westlands	0.13
Westbury Road	Westbury Park and Northwood	0.48
Wilson Street	Town	0.44
Hanbridge Avenue	Bradwell	0.48
Phase 3 – under consideration for Autumn/Winter 2022/23		
Harriet Higgins/Poolfields LNR	Thistleberry	0.73
Leys Dr./Whitmore Road	Westlands	1.29
Former pitch and put Lyme Valley Parkway	Clayton	1.04
Rear of Homebase/Lyme Valley Parkway	Town	0.17
Moreton Parade	May Bank	0.04
St Edmunds Avenue	Wolstanton	0.25
Coalpit Hill	Talke and Butt Lane	1.74
Mount Road/Weir Grove	Kidsgrove and Ravenscliffe/Newchapel and Mow Cop	0.14
Silverdale crossroads	Silverdale	0.67
Parts of larger greenspaces as referred to in appendix 1.	various	

	Phases 1, 2 and 3 total area	10.58 ha./25.39 ac.
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- 2.14 Consultation with appropriate stakeholders is in progress regarding the first phase sites, and subject to responses received, it is proposed to plant a mix of native broadleaf and fruit trees as appropriate on these sites in March 2022.
- 2.15 A dedicated web page has been set up on the Councils website with information about the benefits of tree planting, details of the proposed phase 2 sites and inviting residents to let the Council know views on tree planting and any other suggestions for further nature recovery improvements.
- 2.16 Ward Members of the phase 2 sites have been provided with a pack including a consultation letter that can be delivered to residents and a plan of the particular site involved, with the intention that Ward Members can determine and undertake appropriate distribution.
- 2.17 The third phase will then look at further sites with less than 2 ha of open area, as well as parts of sites with larger than 2 ha of open areas and further consultation in relation to those areas will be undertaken at the appropriate time. It is from Phase 3 and onwards when there will be a significant ramping up of the number of sites where trees will be planted and in the number of trees planted overall. Further sites will be considered for addition to the Action Plan on an ongoing basis.
- 2.18 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.
- 2.19 The Urban Tree Planting Strategy Action Plan is attached to this report at Appendix 1 and is recommended for approval for consultation with appropriate stakeholders on a phased basis.

3. **Proposal**

1. Cabinet notes the Phase 1 sites already planted to coincide with the national tree planting week initiative.
2. The phase 2 of tree planting through the Urban Tree Planting Strategy is approved for immediate implementation, subject to consultation responses, and the Executive Director – Operational Services is authorised to seek and accept quotations for the work.
3. That Cabinet notes progress with other linked initiatives.
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6. That all Council owned site in phases 1, 2 and 3 and future phases outlined in appendix 1. are designated as Urban Carbon Capture Areas in the Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy and considered for an appropriate designation in the developing Local Plan.

4. **Reasons for Proposed Solution**

- 4.1 To contribute to the Council's 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 contribute to the good management of the Borough Council's tree stock and appropriate decision making on tree planting proposals

5. **Options Considered**

- 5.1 The options considered are whether or not to approve tree planting through the Urban Tree Planting Strategy and to continue to progress the linked initiatives.
- 5.2 It is recommended that the proposed second phase of tree planting is implemented, subject to consultation responses, and that the linked initiatives detailed in this report are also progressed, in line with the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy.
- 5.3 It is also recommended that work begins on developing future phases of tree planting, starting with phase 3 tree planting, including consultation with appropriate stakeholders.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 6.1 The Council, as a landowner, has a statutory duty to ensure that its 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 financial and resource implications arising from the proposed delivery of the Urban Tree Planting Strategy as follows.
- 8.2 There is a significant requirement for staff time to engage and consult with affected communities and other stakeholders, design schemes, seek tenders, appoint and manage contractors and arrange and manage community-planting events with schools and other groups.
- 8.3 This work, in relation to phases 2 and 3 of the tree planting, and the other linked initiatives detailed in the body of this report, has been reprioritised over other projects and work streams depending on the scale and timing of the proposals.
- 8.4 Cost estimates are being prepared initially for phase 2 of the tree planting, which will require capital funding. Provision has been included in the general fund capital programme for 2021/22 for progression of projects in the Sustainable Environment Strategy Action Plan, and that a portion of this is available for new planting schemes.
- 8.5 Full costings will be reported to the relevant Portfolio Holder for any planting proposals which are brought forward so that appropriate funding amounts can be agreed. Further provision will be required in the 2022/23 capital programme for phase 3, and for any future phases in 2023/24 onwards.
- 8.6 Opportunities to secure external funding for planting schemes are also being explored to supplement the Council's resources, and any successful bids will be reported.

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>



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 draft Action Plan

14. **Background Papers**

1. Urban Tree Planting Strategy
2. Sustainable Environment Strategy