

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S
REPORT TO**

**Cabinet
17 October 2023**

Report Title: Urban Tree Planting Strategy Update 2023

Submitted by: Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery Services

Portfolios: Sustainable Environment and Recycling

Ward(s) affected: Westlands, Clayton, May Bank, Wolstanton, Bradwell

Purpose of the Report

To update Cabinet on progress with the Urban Tree Planting Strategy and to seek approval for Phase 5 of the proposed planting schemes

Recommendation

That

- 1. Phase 5 of the tree planting under the Urban Tree Planting Strategy is approved for implementation, subject to consultation responses, and the Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery Services is authorised to seek and accept quotations for the work.**
- 2. That the Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery Services is authorised to bid for and accept external grant funding and secure community donations to contribute to the delivery of the Urban Tree Planting Strategy and other related projects.**

Reasons

To contribute to the Councils 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 Councils Nature Recovery plans.

To enable external grant funding and donations to be received that contribute towards the delivery of the Urban Tree Planting Strategy and other projects

1. Background

- 1.1** The Council adopted its Sustainable Environment Strategy in December 2020 which commits, under the "Offset" theme, to a tree planting programme to facilitate carbon capture and greening in the priority outcomes for the Natural Environment theme.

- 1.2 On 7 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.
- 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 Over the last 3 years, the Council has delivered the first 4 phases of the Urban Tree Planting Strategy, planting 14,947 trees over 21 sites, and plans are now in place to deliver phase 5 over the winter of 2023/24.
- 1.5 A number of other linked initiatives have also been delivered including the planting of wildflower meadows at Sandy Lane and Winchester Drive and the Treetotalizer which now stands at over 9995 trees which have been planted by the community as part of the Britain in Bloom Plant a Bloomin' Tree project, meaning that when added to the trees the Council has planted in the first 4 phases of the Urban Tree Planting Strategy, 24,942 trees have been planted in the Borough in the last 3 years.

2. Issues

- 2.1 A list of sites for Phase 5 tree planting has been identified. The list includes 6 sites at Bradwell Dingle, Grange Lane Community Centre, Betley Place in Clayton, Earls Drive in Clayton, Wolstanton Marsh and Wye Road which are suitable for community planting and therefore consultation will be undertaken and, dependent on the outcome, planting will be scheduled to be completed by March 2024.
- 2.2 The latest Phase continues to follow the principle of 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.
- 2.3 The Urban Tree Planting Strategy is focusing 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.
- 2.4 The approved Urban Tree Planting Strategy Action Plan proposed 4 initial phases of site selection for suitable areas of open space that have less than 2 ha of open area and the first 4 phases have been successfully completed over the last 3 years as per the following table:

Site	Ward	Area (ha)
Phase 1 & 2		
Sandy Lane	May Bank	0.91
Newchapel Recreation Ground	Newchapel and Mow Cop	1.96
Phase 3		
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
Harriet Higgins/Poolfields LNR	Thistleberry	0.73
Phase 4		
Leys Drive/Whitmore Road	Westlands	1.29
Former pitch and putt Lyme Valley Parkway	Clayton	1.04
Rear of Homebase/Lyme Valley Parkway	Town	0.17
Moreton Parade	May Bank	0.05
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	3.64
Silverdale crossroads	Silverdale	0.67
Kennet Close / Severn Drive	Westbury Park & Northwood	0.14
Clough Hall Park	Talke and Butt Lane	0.05
Arnold Grove	Bradwell	2.24
Keele Golf Course	Silverdale	3.20
Sheldon Grove	Holditch & Chesterton	2.40

Phase 5 is now planned for delivery in January – March 2024 as follows:

Phase 5 – for planting Autumn/Winter 2023/24		
Bradwell Dingle	Bradwell	3.29
Grange Lane Community Centre	Wolstanton	0.11
Betley Place	Clayton	0.19
Earls Drive	Westlands	3.69
Wolstanton Marsh	Wolstanton	7.37
Wye Road Community Centre Car Park	Westbury Park and Northwood	0.15

- 2.5 A dedicated web page has been set up on the Council's website with information about the benefits of tree planting, details of the proposed Phase 5 sites and an invitation to residents to let the Council know their views on tree planting and any other suggestions for further nature recovery improvements. Consultation on the Phase 5 sites will run for 6 weeks from October 2023 to November 2023 and dependent on a consensus of support for the proposals, planting will be planned for January - March 2024.
- 2.6 Ward Members of the phase 5 sites will be issued 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 undertake appropriate distribution in their area.
- 2.7 In order to provide an opportunity for the community to sponsor a tree or make a contribution to a particular site or project, a donation scheme has been set up on the council's website. Residents and businesses will be able to contribute to the Urban Tree

Planting Strategy for which any donations collected will be used on the rolling programme of tree planting. Suggested donation amounts are included on the webpages as a guide, and the funds received will be stored in specific account areas. This will ensure that any funds raised are appropriately managed and can be rolled forward to match suitable planting seasons.

2.8 The intention is also to establish the principle of securing donations for other future council projects, subject to ensuring that such projects meet requirements for this funding mechanism.

3. **Proposal**

3.1. Phase 5 of the tree planting under the Urban Tree Planting Strategy is approved for implementation, subject to consultation responses, and the Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery Services is authorised to seek and accept quotations for the work.

3.2 That the Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery Services is authorised to bid for and accept external grant funding and to secure community donations to contribute to the delivery of the Urban Tree Planting Strategy as well as other related projects.

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 proposal.

4.3 To enable residents to contribute towards this and future tree planting and other projects.

5. **Options Considered**

5.1 The options considered are whether or not to approve Phase 5 of the tree planting under the Urban Tree Planting Strategy.

5.2 It is recommended that the proposed phase 5 of the tree planting is approved and implemented, subject to consultation responses, 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, 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.

6.2 Donations from the community can only be used for non-statutory purposes; the proposed tree planting is not something that the Council is required to do and therefore the proposed donation scheme can be set up and used to support this purpose.

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 planting.
- 8.3 This work, in relation to Phase 5 of the tree planting has been reprioritised over other projects and work streams to enable successful delivery within the required timescales.
- 8.4 Cost estimates in the sum of £70,000 have been prepared for Phase 5 of the tree planting. A sum of up to £80,000 has been allocated in the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to cover the estimated total cost of the Phase 5 scheme.
- 8.5 As a contingency, work is in progress on external funding bids to the Forestry Commission. This funding will be used to supplement the UKSPF if required.
- 8.6 On receipt of quotations and tenders, consultation will be undertaken with the Portfolio Holder prior to awarding contracts for the planting proposals so that funding amounts can be agreed and budgets managed appropriately.
- 8.7 Provision will need to be made for any future phases in 2024/25 and onwards. The UKSPF bid also includes sums for tree planting in 2024/25 and this funding will be drawn down in the first instance.
- 8.8 Opportunities to secure external funding for planting schemes are also being explored to supplement the Council's resources for future phases, and any successful bids will be reported. This includes the option of the donation scheme to enable residents and businesses to contribute towards the planting projects. Any amounts received via this route will be recorded and used to offset the above costs.

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.



11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 This is not considered to be a key decision.

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

12.1 December 2022

13. **List of Appendices**

13.1 None

14. **Background Papers**

1. Urban Tree Planting Strategy
2. Sustainable Environment Strategy