

## Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING	<b>Climate Emergency and Sustainability Policy Development &amp; Scrutiny Panel</b>
MEETING DATE:	<b>21<sup>st</sup> September 2020</b>
TITLE:	<b>Tree &amp; Woodland Plan update</b>
WARD:	All
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>	
<b>List of attachments to this report:</b> None	

### 1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The report provides an update on the progress on the preparation of the B&NES Tree and Woodland Plan.

### 2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Panel note the progress on the preparation of the Tree and Woodland Plan and give its views on the project**

### 3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 Full Council agreed on the 10th October 2019 to “increase tree cover and develop a clear strategy for planting trees in B&NES”. This was then reflected in a press release on 10th October 2019 when Cabinet member for Climate Emergency and Neighbourhoods stated that B&NES would produce ‘A detailed Tree and Woodland Plan will be produced showing where trees will deliver most benefit and how the planting and future management will be resourced in partnership with communities, volunteers and landowners’ and ‘early ambition of planting 100,000 trees, with partners and communities, by May 2023’.

- 3.2 A plan is needed in order to;

- ensure that the right trees are planted in the most appropriate locations across the district so that they deliver and maximise the benefits eg contributing to ecological resilience, reducing pollution, improving mental

health, provide shade, averting flooding, producing vital oxygen and absorbing carbon dioxide.

- ensure that trees are planted to avoid harm to the landscapes and habitats that are valued for absence of trees eg grassland scarps and open plateau but equally promoting planting of trees in those protected sites/areas where trees would enhance character/replace loss including those at the risk /or where disease – Ash Dieback has already taken hold and the majority of B&NES ash woodlands including those on fringes of Bath that are so important to the green setting of the World Heritage Site.
- to respond to new obligations on the Council. The Environment Bill includes the mandatory requirement for development to deliver 10% biodiversity net gain, produce local nature recovery strategies and potential for ‘responsible bodies to agree Conservation Covenants (voluntary landowner agreements to set aside land for environmental benefit). B&NES will undertake a ‘call for sites’ to address climate and ecological emergencies as part of the Local Plan review process.
- The Tree and Woodland Plan will ensure that links are made to deliver on these requirements and set out where the trees should/could go and how the planting, management and maintenance will be resourced in partnership with communities, volunteers and landowners. The Plan would also identify current Council stock and management costs.

3.3 Council also agreed the resources to fund the costs of preparing the Tree and Woodland Plan through the appointment of a Tree and Woodland Officer. The appointment process began earlier in 2020 but was halted by the Covid-19 Pandemic. Although the process has now resumed, this has resulting in a significant delay to the project. The revised timetable is set out below;

*Tree and Woodland Plan Timetable*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
August 2020	Review brief for Tree & Woodland Plan
September 2020	Appoint Tree & Woodland officer/consultant and Tree co-ordinator
October 2020	Prepare Tree & Woodland Plan, review existing tree planting initiatives
November 2020	Public consultation on draft Plan and a launch with early ‘quick wins’ entailing publicity and community engagement tree planting in urban areas, gardens, council property where assessed suitable, liaison with businesses
December 2020	Plan sign-off
January 2021 onwards	Implementation

### 3.4 Objectives for the Tree and Woodland Delivery Plan are to;

- review quality and condition of existing woodlands including Council owned woodland
- identify need and prioritise locations for new woodland and opportunities to link these within and beyond the district
- develop a tree planting plan to define opportunities for street trees and urban woodland
- develop targets for urban and rural woodland cover
- encourage owners to bring existing trees and woodlands into positive management where appropriate and identify Council management costs of managing own stock.
- protect ancient woodlands, veteran and notable trees
- Provide relevant information to set the baseline for monitoring delivery

### 3.5 Notwithstanding the delay, the authorities and WECA have worked together to undertake significant work which has been completed or is progressing that supports the Plan. This includes:

- Adoption of the West of England Joint GI Strategy (JGIS) by the West of England Joint Committee in June 2020. The JGIS Action Plan includes a high level sub-regional Tree and Woodland Strategy to provide the strategic overview needed to progress the B&NES Tree and Woodland Plan. This will support joint bids and delivery of tree and woodland planting on a landscape scale and be an effective use of resources.
- Biodiversity Net Gain Guidance and implementation plan is now forming basis for individual Unitary Authority Planning work and will link with supporting delivery of the West of England Nature Recovery Network (NRN) including woodland.
- The West of England Habitat Project will confirm areas of high interest for further investigation/survey, areas of low interest and areas of uncertainty that may be investigated further as and when opportunity arises.
- The Nature Recovery Network (NRN) Implementation plan is currently being drafted. This will identify projects that include woodland creation and tree planting.
- A number of sub-regional Green Infrastructure projects have been identified which include woodland and tree planting.
- the Council's Parks team has completed an exercise to identify suitable locations for tree planting in council owned parks and green spaces and on highways for the 2020-2021 planting season and (provisionally) for the next four years. This is anticipated to include the planting of up to 4250 trees during the 2020/21 season.
- The Council's Parks Team has been working with the Forest of Avon Trust and others to secure external funding for new tree planting- outlined in section 5.2; and has been progressing with the planting of s106 funded replacement trees across the estate.

- Council officers have been supporting the not for profit community group More Trees for B&NES with their aspirations to create a 'community tree nursery' where volunteers and schoolchildren can help grow some of the trees required for the delivery of this project. Several open spaces in Bath were considered for the scheme, but organisers have now settled on a non-B&NES site for the initiative.
- Ash die back disease is expected to have a significant impact on tree cover in B&NES and it is anticipated that the disease could kill up to 95% of all ash trees across the district. Ash trees make up around 12% of all tree cover in the south west and the replacement of trees lost to ash die back will need to be factored into the Council's target to plant 100,000 (net) new trees. Without resources to replant trees lost to ash die back, the Council's tree planting target will be jeopardised by starting from a 'deficit' position of ash tree numbers.
- An Ash die back Action Plan has been developed which sets out the authority will manage the disease on its land, but resources have yet to be allocated to cover the costs of replacement trees.

#### **4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 4.1 The Tree and Woodland Plan will assist in delivering the Council's obligations arising from the Climate Change Act 2008. The Government's Climate Change Committee has set a target of doubling tree cover in the UK by 2050 to help increase carbon sequestration. The West of England Nature Partnership, which includes B&NES, through its Nature Recovery Network, has a target of doing so by 2060 and is currently reviewing how that could be brought forward to 2050 (taking account of ash die-back),
- 4.2 The Plan will also help to contribute to the increased obligations for ensuring a net in biodiversity in new development arising from the Environment Bill when enacted.

#### **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)**

- 5.1 Resource for the preparation of the Tree and Woodland Plan was set aside by Council in the budget for 2020/21. Council also agreed to set aside an additional £75,000 CIL funds for implementation. It is anticipated that the Tree and Woodland Officer should be able to increase this with grant and funding applications.
- 5.2 The £75,000 CIL will potentially be allocated as follows;
- £10,000 – Free tree scheme and Cllr empowerment fund
  - £10,000 to support landowners with top up grants or small scheme funding
  - £5,000 Forest of Avon Trust advisory service
  - £40,000 – Tree & Woodland planting on council owned land
  - £10,000 Community engagement

5.3 The preparation of the Plan requires a cross-service approach as part of the B&NES Green Infrastructure Strategy and Local Plan policy. Other Services have a key role; Parks, Sustainability, and Environment & Design Practice, but also other Services especially Highways and Council departments with landownership responsibilities will be involved as required. The Council will also need to work with its partners/partnerships eg West of England Nature Partnership (WENP) and local communities.

## 6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision-making risk management guidance.

## 7 EQUALITIES

7.1 The Tee and Woodland Plan will entail preparation of an Equalities Impact Assessment, for example to ensure that tree planting in urban areas takes into account access for wheelchair users. This will be facilitated by public engagement on the draft Tree and Woodland Plan.

## 8 CLIMATE CHANGE

8.1 The Tree and Woodland Plan will directly help with the Climate and Ecological Emergency through increasing biodiversity, facilitating sequestration of carbon, a potential renewable energy source and increasing resilience to climate change through flood risk mitigation and shading.

## 9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 The Council could decide not to prepare a Plan but without a Plan for tree planting, some tree planting can inadvertently be harmful through planting the inappropriate types of trees or planting in the wrong locations. The Plan will also provide a basis for community engagement and funding bids.

## 10 CONSULTATION

10.1 The preparation of the plan will entail community engagement before sign-off as described in section 3 above.

<b>Contact persons</b>	Simon de Beer 01224 477616; Richard Daone 01225 477546, Carol Maclellan 01225 39 4106
<b>Background papers</b>	B&NES Climate Emergency Progress Report October 2019.
<b>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</b>	