

**Environment and
Sustainable Communities
Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**

19 November 2019

Woodlands Overview



**Joint Report of Ian Thompson Corporate Director of Regeneration
and Local Services and Lorraine O'Donnell, Director of
Transformation and Partnerships**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide members of Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of woodlands in County Durham.
- 2 Arrangements have been made for Sue Mullinger, Landscape Delivery Officer to present information to members at their meeting on the 19 November 2019.

Executive summary

- 3 Durham Woodland Revival programme is led by Durham County Council and is supported by National Lottery Heritage Fund and other partners. The programme will run for four years with the aim of restoring and reconnecting woodlands in County Durham. A dedicated team has been recruited.
- 4 Durham Woodland Revival programme will lead to improved management of the Council's forest estate through Forestry Commission approved management plans and collaboration with neighbouring woodland owners.
- 5 Approximately 60 ha of new woodlands will be created as part of the programme on land that has been transferred to the Woodland Trust, who can assess enhanced funding rates for tree planting schemes.

- 6 Initial management plans are almost complete and through thinning of woodlands have brought an income of £60,000.

Recommendations

- 7 That members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to receive the report and presentation and comment accordingly.

Background

- 8 Members of the committee carried out a scrutiny review looking at the management of DCC's woodland estate in 2014 and have provided progress on the committee's recommendations.
- 9 The Committee has received three progress updates on their review recommendations the last update was received by the committee at its meeting on 16 November 2018.
- 10 Members asked at the meeting on 3 September 2018 that the Strategic Walking and Cycling Delivery Plan be included in their work programme for 2019/2020 so that members can be updated on the delivery plan.

Detail

- 11 The Durham Woodland Revival (DWR) programme is led by the Council and supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), along with partners Woodland Trust, Northwoods, Wear Rivers Trust and the Forestry Commission. The programme is £820,000 in total and will run for 4 years with the aim of restoring and reconnecting woodlands. Delivery has just begun, and the programme manager is now in post. Two further members of staff have been appointed and are due to start before Christmas, the programme will then begin in earnest.
- 12 DWR will improve management of the Council's forest estate through the implementation of Forestry Commission approved management plans and collaboration with neighbouring woodland owners to achieve improved opportunities for thinning works. DWR will also provide support to existing community woods groups, and the establishment of new, to help local people manage the Council's woodlands.
- 13 Approval from the Forestry Commission is pending on management plans for the remaining 1100ha of the Council's forest estate. This will mean that all 1821ha of the Council's woodlands have management plans with associated approvals for active management. Thinning from

initial plans are almost complete and have brought in an income of around £60,000.

14 Around 60 ha of new woodland will be created as part of the DWR programme. This is on land that has been transferred to the Woodland Trust, who can access enhanced funding rates for tree planting schemes. Woodland creation is a key mechanism to lock up carbon in trees and soils and provide an alternative to fossil fuel energy. The County Council is committed to tackling climate change and for the County to become carbon neutral by 2050. It will be achieved through a range of measures, which includes woodland planting. This new woodland for DWR has the potential to store almost 25,000 tonnes of carbon (based on Woodland Trust figures) and will provide an important contribution towards achieving new targets for carbon reduction by the Council.

15 Tasks ahead include reviewing volunteering opportunities, with close attention to work emerging from DWR and how this may integrate with existing volunteer, schools and community provisions. Woodland management and creation needs to be accommodated at a cross-service function level and any structural changes that enable a consistent co-ordinated approach need to be instigated.

Conclusion

16 Durham Woodland revival programme will enable all of Durham County Council's woodlands to have management plans with associated approvals for active management once approval from the Forestry Commission is received

Background papers

None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

Woodlands have a positive impact on climate change and carbon emissions because of their ability to store carbon.

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable