

Cabinet

17 March 2021

**Woodland Management Overview
and Tree Planting Opportunities
with Young People**



Ordinary Decision

Report of Corporate Management Team

**Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and
Climate Change**

**John Pearce, Corporate Director of Children and Young People's
Service**

**Councillor Brian Stephens, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for
Environment**

Councillor Olwyn Gunn Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Education

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

1. To outline the range of measures underway in managing the County Council's woodlands and expanding tree cover across the County.
2. To seek approval to a scheme designed to maximise young people's involvement with tree planting activities.

Executive Summary

3. The Council owns approximately 1800ha of woodland across 170 sites throughout the county, which is 10% of the County's total woodland resource. Over 300ha of this woodland is ancient. These woodlands have generally existed since 1600 and have considerable wildlife and historical value, which if lost is irreplaceable.

4. Appropriate management of these sites offers a major opportunity for improving the carbon performance of woodlands and their role in tackling climate change. It will also increase amenity value, benefit wildlife conservation and enhance the quality and range of timber products and other ecosystem services that woodlands can provide.
5. Since 2000, the Council, with partners, has planted nearly a million trees on over 500ha of land as well as planting or restoring nearly 200 miles of hedgerow. Over 500 ha of woodland have been in UKWAS (UK Woodland Assurance Scheme, standard for verifying sustainable woodland management) since 2007.
6. There are also several more recent improvements and initiatives now in place that are continuing to build on this work. This includes Durham Woodland Revival, the Urban Tree Challenge Fund, the Durham Woodland Creation Programme, the North Pennines A68 Corridor Project and the proposed North East Community Forest.
7. The Council approved a Climate Change Emergency Response Action Plan which identified woodland creation and tree planting as being a priority area of activity. In response, the Durham Woodland Creation Programme was established last August to establish new woods whilst maximising opportunities for community engagement in tree planting. The programme has ambitious aims to plant 10,000 trees in each of the 14 Area Action Partnerships.
8. There is now opportunity within this programme to plant, over the next three years, a tree for every school child across the county, equivalent to 69,000 trees, working in partnership with the charity OASES, County Durham's Outdoor And Sustainability Education Specialists. Experience from schools, including the Children and Young People's Forum, reveals a strong interest in climate change, and this initiative affords an opportunity from an early age, to make a contribution, as well as learn more about the valuable role of trees in the environment of the County.

Recommendations

9. Cabinet is recommended to:
 - (a) note the range of measures underway in managing the County Council's woodlands and expanding its tree cover,
 - (b) support the commitment to plant the equivalent of a tree for every school child, to be achieved through a combination of the Council's Woodland Creation Programme in collaboration with OASES.

Background

- 10 The Durham Woodland Revival programme is led by Durham County Council and is supported by National Lottery Heritage Fund and other partners. The programme is now established and will run for another three years with the aim of restoring and reconnecting woodlands in County Durham.
- 11 A dedicated team has been working to give landowners and people opportunities to learn about, enjoy and re-imagine a purpose for their woodlands. It also includes the establishment of 60ha of new woodland across three sites. Planting has started this winter at a 10.5 ha site at West Cornforth.
- 12 Management of Council-owned woodland is now being coordinated by an internal cross-service Trees and Woodland Workstream chaired by Head of Environment. This provides clear direction and coordination of woodland management and operations across the Council.
- 13 All of the woodlands owned by the Council now have Forestry Commission approved management plans, unique for councils in the region and possibly nationally. As such, they are eligible for the Woodland Improvement Grant Scheme, a DEFRA grant which will fund a five-year work programme to bring neglected woodlands back into management and improve the condition of ancient woodland. A forestry consultant is assisting with the application, which is timetabled for a September 2021 submission. The funding will be in the region of £0.5 -1 million, and more importantly, secure improved woodland management.
- 14 The thinning programme that began in 2013 is ongoing. This has generated an income of around £70,000 for the Council as well as releasing timber onto local markets and stimulating the forest economy.
- 15 The Council was successful in Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCf) both rounds one and two, with almost £500,000 being awarded. This work is now fully complete, with 1,200 large trees and 12,000 small trees across towns and villages being planted this and last winter. All are either located well away from houses or are of a low growing species, not to cause future problems.
- 16 The Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP) is supporting a four-year countywide Woodland Creation Programme to establish 10,000 trees in each of the 14 AAPs. As part of this, a Woodland Creation Officer was appointed in August 2020 to work with the Corporate Property and Land and local communities to identify and plant up suitable Council-owned sites.

- 17 The North Pennines AONB & A68 Corridor is a joint project with the Council and the North Pennines AONB, Woodland Trust and Forestry Commission. The area to the west of the A68 has been identified in the County Durham Landscape Strategy as one of the few areas in the county suitable for large scale woodland creation. The project officer is working to engage with private landowners to advise on woodland creation schemes and management plans using funding mechanisms to secure results.
- 18 The north east has been targeted by the Government to create a Community Forest (CF). Newcastle City Council is leading the bid to establish the CF with England's Community Forests (ECF). If successful the Forest Partnership Team will comprise of six local authorities: Newcastle, Durham, South Tyneside, North Tyneside, Gateshead and Sunderland. County Council officers have been involved with the core working group since the initial draft bid was released by Newcastle City Council last August. A final submission was made at the end of February 2021, with the outcome expected by early April 2021.
- 19 England Community Forests has already been successful with its 'Trees for Climate' bid to Defra to access £640 million from the national Nature for Climate Fund for a 5-year programme of planting which will secure £17k/ha for new woodland within CFs. This fund will also match revenue posts raised by the partners in the proposed North East Community Forest.
- 20 If successful, the forest staff and plan will be in place next year and the first trees will go in the ground over winter 2021/22. In County Durham, these are likely to be Council-owned sites identified under the Woodland Creation Programme.

Tree Planting Opportunities for Young People

- 21 The Woodland Creation programme will be the main vehicle to achieve a 'Tree for Every Child' ambition, announced at County Durham Environment Partnership awards 2020. The idea is to plant a tree for each of the 69,000 school children of County Durham to help tackle climate change. This will be done in collaboration with OASES (Outdoor and Sustainability Education Specialists), to enable school planting activities over the next four years.
- 22 Ideally each of the county's 69,000 school children would physically plant a tree but given financial and logistical constraints, a more pragmatic approach has been proposed by allocating a proportion of the planting target across five schools from each of the county's 14 AAPs, with the remainder being planted through the Woodland Creation programme and the Heritage Lottery-funded Durham Woodland Revival

(DWR) project. Discussions are underway with the Woodland Trust to plan opportunities at the three new woodland sites at Frankland, Thornley and West Cornforth, once Covid restrictions allow.

- 23 OASES is a charity, based in Esh Winning, that has been successfully delivering and promoting outdoor learning and global sustainability for over 20 years with excellent links with County Durham schools. It has agreed to develop educational resources and deliver an educational programme of practical tree planting events to enable pupils to appreciate their contribution towards meeting the carbon reduction target of the CERP.
- 24 The costs of engaging OASES and for all items such as trees and educational materials is £74,000 and will be funded through the CERP. This will enable whole school planting activities to take place over the next 4 years and involve as many children as possible.
- 25 Planting will be across a range of sites, the majority being on Council owned land which has approval for tree planting through the Woodland Creation programme. The remainder will be on participating school sites with enough land to accommodate planting as appropriate to the availability of space and maintenance regime. The scheme is programmed to continue until July 2024.
- 26 The OASES team will plan and coordinate all activity, ensuring all appropriate risk assessments are in place. In addition to tree planting, OASES will work with younger school age children to collect and plant local tree seeds to create small tree nurseries that can be planted out at a later date.
- 27 The approach of working across all AAPs is intended to achieve the broadest engagement opportunity across the whole county and it is anticipated that approximately 10,500 school children will be directly engaged from the 70 schools during the four year programme. To ensure we are as inclusive as possible the project will involve Year 5 and 6 children who are looked after by Durham LA as part of a transition programme that reflects their hopes and dreams for the future. This will involve about 85 children from 55 different primary schools across County Durham.
- 28 Each participating child will plant at least one tree (ideally more) and every tree is to be recorded. There will be a variety of species being introduced to sites comprising small whips which generally take well once introduced and offer the best value for money. It is likely that further interest in small scale tree planting projects by additional schools can be accommodated using trees from the Woodland Trust or other sources such as The Orchard Project. The educational resources will be phased in appropriately and provide extension learning activities to be used before and after the tree planting sessions.

- 29 A trial planting day took place at South Stanley Junior School on 26 November 2020. The Woodland Creation Officer along with OASES staff and most of the pupils, staff and parent helpers, planted over 400 small whip trees around the perimeter of the school grounds. It worked well, incorporating social distancing rules, and the school was delighted with the outcome.
- 30 Each site and precise location of tree planting will be carefully assessed to ensure suitability for planting, and checks made to ensure that it does not conflict with other future planned uses, including development. Furthermore, the exact location of planting and species will be selected to ensure they do not pose problems as they grow, thereby avoiding issues (especially in urban areas) such as shading to housing or damage to drainage that might arise. The Council sites will be maintained by the Clean and Green team, drawing down resources for day to day maintenance for forestry and other grants when available. Under the guidance of the Council's Civic Pride Teams there may also be opportunity for volunteer involvement with these developing woodlands.

Conclusion

- 31 The Council has an excellent track record in woodland creation, with nearly a million trees planted since 2000. Furthermore, we are one of few local authorities nationally that have a Forestry Authority approved management plan for all of its woodland sites, paving the way for grant income towards maintenance programmes.
- 32 The Council has had recent success in obtaining funding for a range of schemes including Durham Woodland Revival (with support from National Lottery Heritage Fund), and the Urban Tree Challenge (with support from Defra). A bid to Government has recently been submitted for establishment of a North East Community Forest, covering six local authorities, including County Durham, which would bring increased incentives for tree planting.
- 33 A key opportunity for engagement is with young people, many of whom are interested in the natural environment and keen to make a difference in tackling climate change. A specific project has therefore been developed involving schools and each of the Area Action Partnerships, which over the next three years, would afford opportunity for tree planting, and a contribution to the future environment of our county.

Authors

Sue Mullinger	Tel: 03000 267033
Rich Hurst	Tel: 03000 265089

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None.

Finance

Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP) funding will cover the amount required to deliver the project (£74,000). The remaining costs will be met through time allocated to the project by the Woodland Creation Officer, who will be working with OASES to identify and assess suitable planting sites. This is work that the post holder is currently undertaking in order to reach planting targets for the Woodland Creation programme and as such, there will be no additional costs to the Council.

Future management and maintenance costs which exist for DCC are to be identified and subject to external grant funding, such as Forestry Commission grant which is available for certain sites. In some cases, where the planting is on mown amenity grassland, maintenance costs will be reduced through the planting of trees.

Consultation

The consultation on the CERP carried out in 2019 revealed that 52% of respondents (out of 1,025 responses) identified tree planting as a priority in tackling climate change.

70 schools will be recruited which will involve around 12,600 pupils. This will result in the establishment of approximately 8,400 trees, plus local tree seed nurseries established.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

No impact.

Climate Change

A woodland area of 70 ha has the potential to store almost 30,000 tonnes of carbon, based on Woodland Trust figures. It will provide an important contribution towards the newly agreed Climate Emergency target of achieving carbon neutrality for County Durham by 2050.

Human Rights

No impact.

Crime and Disorder

No impact.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

None.

Procurement

Appointment of OASES is being finalised by Corporate Procurement in line with the Council's contract procedure rules.