

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET****DATE: 28 APRIL 2020****REPORT OF: MR MIKE GOODMAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND WASTE****LEAD OFFICER: KATIE STEWART, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE****SUBJECT: NEW TREE STRATEGY****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

In response to the Council's climate change emergency declaration and our target to be a net zero carbon county by 2050, Surrey County Council (SCC) has committed to facilitate the planting of 1.2M new trees in the county by 2030 – one for every head of population. The first of the new trees in Surrey was planted on 5 October 2019 at the Surrey Hills Wood Fair by the Leader and the Chairman of SCC.

Trees and other forms of natural capital (e.g. soils, habitats and vegetation) capture and store, or sequester, carbon dioxide (CO₂), which is the most prevalent greenhouse gas in the United Kingdom. Woodland has been shown to be the most effective habitat at CO₂ sequestration, as emissions are sequestered within the soil as well as the trees. Many international climate scientists have recommended that planting trees is one of the cheapest and most effective ways of taking CO₂ out of the atmosphere; however, for this to happen, it is important that the necessary conditions are in place for trees to grow to maturity, which can take many years. As such, it is important that any strategy seeking to achieve effective carbon sequestration does not exclude consideration of other types of natural capital which can be quicker to establish and which also play an important role as carbon sinks.

SCC's commitment to facilitate the planting of 1.2M trees has the potential to sequester an estimated 300,000 tonnes of CO₂ over their lifetime (approximately 40 years). By way of a comparison this amount is equivalent to the annual carbon footprint of 58,000 Surrey residents, based on the county's total annual emissions of 6 million tonnes of CO₂. This figure makes an important contribution to our work to address the Council's declared climate emergency, helping to raise awareness of the issue and inspiring residents, businesses and other organisations to take action.

Our new tree ambitions are also widely supported by communities and partners across the county due to the numerous other benefits which trees and woodland offer, in addition to climate change mitigation – from climate change adaptation to benefits for our health and wellbeing.

The Strategy aligns with the national Government's targets for tree planting and Government support for this initiative was demonstrated during Surrey Tree Week, in March 2020, when all of Surrey's MP planted a tree within their constituencies. This initiative also aligns with the

Council's Place Ambitions set out in our Community 2030 Vision, as well as our work to improving and bringing the countryside back to residents.

To these ends, the Council has produced a New Tree Strategy which includes the vision that 'by 2030 Surrey will benefit from 1.2 million new trees, with the right trees planted in the right places, including both urban and rural locations, and supported to grow to maturity'. The strategy includes five strategic objectives which set out how we will achieve the vision and includes the principles that we will follow when making decisions about planting trees on our own land and the role of our planning policy in protecting existing trees.

Surrey is currently the most wooded county in England, at 24% coverage of the county, and this initiative is expected to increase tree cover in the county by an additional 800 hectares.

The strategy has been through a period of consultation with partners and experts, and relevant feedback has been incorporated into the final version. Officers are continuing to work with partners to develop a delivery plan which will support the strategy. This will be published in autumn 2020.

The partnership approach is absolutely vital to the success of this initiative. SCC cannot achieve the planting of 1.2M trees on its own land, which itself is a small opportunity in comparison to the much bigger potential across the wide range of landowners and stakeholders across the county. Rather, SCC will take an enabling and facilitative role to encourage tree planting across the county with partners, businesses and residents, whilst at the same time maximising opportunities to plant more trees and woodland on our own land where appropriate. Guidance on tree planting for residents and community partners will be included on the Council's website at www.surreycc.gov.uk/trees. This will include relevant advice, as well as links to funding opportunities relating to tree planting in the Surrey area which will be kept up to date by officers.

The strategy sets out the carbon sequestration opportunities associated with the planting of new trees; however it is acknowledged that trees make up just one part of Surrey's rich and varied natural capital, which provides a wealth of benefits, including carbon sequestration and climate change adaptation as well as biodiversity improvements and commercialisation. The value of our natural capital needs to be better understood, as well as the risks and opportunities associated with it.

As a consequence of the above, over the coming year officers will work with key partners from the Boroughs and Districts, Surrey Nature Partnership, Surrey Wildlife Trust, Surrey Hills AONB, as well as the Forestry Commission and Natural England to develop a wider **Land Use Framework**. The framework will inform decisions on how land and natural capital is used, managed and protected, as well as the role of the planning policy framework across all 12 local authorities in achieving this and maximising biodiversity net gain from future developments.

This New Tree Strategy, and accompanying delivery plan, is a key first step in the development of that coordinated approach to land use and will be a pivotal piece within the Framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Endorse the New Tree Strategy;
2. Supports the continued engagement with partners in order to develop a delivery plan which will support the strategy and our ambition to facilitate the planting of 1.2 million trees by 2030. This will be completed by September 2020 to align with the start of the tree planting period.
3. Supports engagement with partners to develop a wider Land Use Framework, to be completed by March 2021.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Implementation of the Strategy will result not only in reductions in carbon emissions, thereby helping to mitigate climate change, but it will also have numerous co-benefits for residents' health and wellbeing. Trees and woodland have been proven to be good for both our mental health by minimising anxiety and stress for those able to enjoy green spaces, and our physical health by improving air quality through the same carbon capture that makes them so beneficial to the mitigation of climate change.

In addition, trees play an important role in climate change adaptation by providing areas of shade in built up urban areas during heatwaves as well as providing a source of natural flood risk management. Increasing tree cover in the county will create biodiversity benefits and increased habitats, provided that the right trees are planted in the right places.

Finally, it is important to note that other types of natural capital also play an important role in sequestering CO₂ and minimising the impacts of climate change. The proposed Land Use Framework will provide a mechanism that enables the Council and our partners to understand the condition and full potential and value of our natural environment, as well as how we can best support that environment.

DETAILS:

Context: Climate Change Strategy

1. The Council's Tree Strategy has, in part, been prompted by SCC's wider ambitions to mitigate and adapt to climate change, which itself is part of a wider national agenda. The Government has committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions in the UK by 2050, and on 9 July 2019 SCC followed suit by declaring a climate emergency and committing to becoming a net zero county by 2050.
2. Over the last seven months, the Council has worked with districts and boroughs, other partners, businesses, residents and experts to develop an ambitious and forward-thinking Climate Change Strategy for the county. The strategy will be published in April, with the delivery plan being finalised in Autumn 2020.
3. The Climate Change Strategy has identified objectives across a number of key sectors. One sector is Land Use and Food Systems, which includes the role of green

infrastructure and land in the county in capturing and storing carbon emissions, as well as helping the county to adapt to a changing climate. The Strategy sets a target to facilitate the planting of 1.2 million new trees by 2030, supported by a strategic priority to *'increase the potential of Surrey's land, biodiversity, current and future woodland to sequester and capture carbon, and to strengthen resilience to climate change.'*

New Tree Strategy

4. To this end, in July 2019, as well as declaring a climate emergency, the Council committed to facilitate the planting of 1.2M new trees in Surrey – one for every head of the population - by 2030. Carbon reduction through sequestration is the main driver behind this initiative, with the potential to sequester an estimated c. 300,000 tonnes of CO₂; however, the additional co-benefits of tree planting and woodland creation on human health and biodiversity are recognised.
5. The initiative was launched on 5 October 2019 at the Surrey Hills Wood Fair when SCC's Leader, Tim Oliver, and Chairman, Tony Samuels, planted the first of the 1.2M new trees. At this event, free trees were given away to over 600 families to plant within their communities. This was the start of a number of planting events and activities supported by the Council, including our Trees for Christmas campaign, in partnership with Squires Garden Centres, which encouraged residents to make a donation towards the cost of planting new trees in Surrey when purchasing their Christmas trees.
6. Since this time, the Council have been developing a New Tree Strategy which sets out our vision for the planting of these 1.2M new trees (below). The vision is supported by five strategic objectives, which include:
 - partnership working
 - ensuring the right trees are planted in the right places,
 - planting and after care,
 - leading by example through tree and woodland planting on our own land
 - recognising the importance of green infrastructure and the role of planning.
7. The Vision for Strategy states that "by 2030 Surrey will benefit from 1.2M new trees, with the **right trees** planted in the **right place**, including both urban and rural locations, and supported to **grow to maturity**."
8. The strategy includes a suite of detailed guidance as supporting appendices, which include:
 1. Locations for planting;
 2. Benefits and planting considerations for urban trees;
 3. Highway tree planting and verge enhancement best practice Guidance; and
 4. Carbon storage potential of woodland and different habitats

9. Over the coming months, officers will work with partners to develop a delivery plan to support this ten-year strategy and this will be published in September 2020, in order to align with the new tree planting season. The delivery plan will include a number of specific initiatives including the following:
 - a. Identifying suitable areas of Surrey owned land where woodland could be created (i.e. on closed landfill sites);
 - b. Working with Government to support its tree planting ambitions in Surrey;
 - c. Working with Boroughs and Districts to ensure Surrey's approach to tree planting across the county is coordinated to the extent possible;
 - d. Identifying and working with landowners of stretches of land along motorways and high trafficked A roads to establish tree barriers where possible;
 - e. Establishing a Tree Friendly business initiative;
 - f. Working with SWT and other partners on fundraising initiatives, including developing the Trees for Christmas campaign in partnership with Christmas tree retailers;
 - g. Communicating the benefits of, and advice about, tree planting to residents and community groups: and
 - h. Supporting other partners across the county in their tree planting activity, including accessing funding

10. A Trees Officer Task Group with representatives from SCC's Environment, Countryside, Highways, Planning, and Property teams, as well as a representative from the Surrey Parks and Countryside Forum, which represents all of the officers from the Borough and District with responsibility for tree planting and maintenance, will be established to support the ongoing development and delivery of the action plan throughout the timeframe of this strategy.

11. The Task Group will meet every two months to review progress against the strategy's objectives and will report updates to the SCC Climate Change Board and external partners every six months. The delivery plan will be a live document and will be updated as and when required, and formally reviewed every year.

12. The New Tree Strategy is a critical first step in the development of a wider Land Use Framework that the Council will be delivering with partners over the coming year, which will inform decisions on how land and natural capital is used, managed and protected, as well as the role of planning policy in achieving this and maximising biodiversity net gain from future developments.

CONSULTATION:

13. In November 2019, the draft Strategy and appendices were sent out to a number of partners and experts for consultation. Consultees included:
 - Officers from SCC's own Countryside, Property, Highways, Planning teams
 - Borough, district and parish councils
 - Surrey Wildlife Trust
 - A wide range of relevant local and national organisations and charities such as the Forestry Commission, Forestry England and the National Trust.

- Further consultees that provided input included: City of London Corporation, Dorking Trees for Life, British Horse Society, Surrey Hills AONB, Tilhill Forestry and Roots for Future

14. The consultation responses have been reviewed, and overall, the initiative is generally well received. Suggestions and comments from the consultation were incorporated into the final draft of the strategy, where relevant, and will inform the development of the delivery plan as well as the Land Use Framework. A high-level summary of the key responses and the action taken, is included below.

Consultation feedback	Action taken
1.1 The tree planting initiative should be presented as part of a wide, far reaching and coherent package of measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to mitigate the impacts of the climate emergency.	These points are consistent with our approach, but we have set out these principles more explicitly within the final strategy.
1.2 New trees must be part of a holistic approach to tree and woodland management, with potentially greater carbon sequestration benefits resulting from effective management of existing trees and natural succession.	We have extended our approach to include a focus on natural capital and the protection of other natural wildlife habitats including hedgerows. As made clear earlier in this report, we have confirmed an intention to develop a Land Use Framework in the coming year.
1.3 We need to protect our other natural wildlife habitats and carbon sinks, and these must not be compromised as a result of the ambition to plant more trees.	
1.4 We could also include hedgerows within the initiative.	
1.5 We need a strategic approach and planning to determine where new woodland and trees should be planted, and to ensure suitable stock and long-term management.	This will be developed as an action within our delivery plan.
1.6 We should also consider the long-term objectives for trees we plant and potential models for woodland management, e.g. timber production and / or biomass.	Further exploration around potential models for woodland management including biomass will be included as an action within the delivery plan.
1.7 Farms provide a significant opportunity to enable the planting of more trees if a suitable funding model was available to	The strategy includes the further exploration of the potential role for the Council in lobbying Government to

incentivise widespread woodland creation and sustainable management.	address the need to incentivise the use of farm land for tree and other planting.
1.8 Several respondents stated strongly that we should only plant native trees to reduce the risk of imported disease; however, others disagreed and argued that non-native trees from more southerly regions would be better able to adapt to increased temperatures resulting from climate change.	The position taken in the strategy is that appropriate non-native trees in certain circumstances may be better suited to a changing climate (e.g. drought resistance), and impacts of imported disease can be avoided by ensuring that any non-native trees are grown from seed within the UK and meeting strict quality control standards.
1.9 We need to consider impacts and opportunities through new development, including biodiversity net gain, and replacing trees that are removed	This is an important part of our strategy and further exploration and discussion is needed to develop our approach with partners. This will be ongoing and will be included within the delivery plan.
1.10 There is a need for clear governance, accountability and monitoring. For example, are replacement trees for those removed counted within the 1.2M?	Governance and monitoring mechanisms to be developed as part of our delivery plan. Our strategy now confirms that replacement trees will not be counted within the 1.2M.

15. The strategy was discussed at Select Committee on 24 March, and no recommendations for changes to the Strategy or approach were made.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

16. There are health and safety risks associated with tree planting and tree maintenance. However, SCC and our contractors have approved risk management processes in place for activities relating to trees on our land. Where we are supporting partners in tree planting, we will work with them to ensure that they are aware of the risks and the need for mitigation strategies. Further information will be included within the delivery plan.

FINANCIAL AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

17. There are costs associated with planting trees, and the cost of the tree itself is often a small part of the overall picture when considering the financial outlay associated with planting, establishing young trees for the first few growing seasons to ensure survival, and ongoing maintenance.

18. The cost of planting a street tree in a highway verge is approximately £255 per tree, and this can increase significantly if a tree pit is required. Further, any new tree in an urban setting will need to be watered during the growing season for at least two years. This means that an urban tree can cost approximately £400 per tree for watering and establishment costs alone, although economies of scale can bring

these costs down significantly if a volume of urban trees are planted in relative proximity. Trees planted along the highway, in urban areas or along public rights of way, will require safety inspections and maintenance to ensure health and safety.

19. Further, if the tree strategy is to be successful, woodland management will be necessary to ensure healthy landscapes that are more resilient to pests and extreme weather events associated with climate change. Management costs can also vary depending upon type of woodland, with costs for complex mixed woodland averaging £2,750 per hectare, while management of naturally colonising woodland costs significantly less at approximately £350 per hectare. It is, however, normal practice for the costs of woodland maintenance to be subsidised through income received from the sale of the felled wood products as timber or biomass.
20. Whilst the majority of the trees planted under this initiative will be planted outside of the SCC estate by partners who will bear the responsibility for the associated costs, the Council is also committing to increase tree planting on our own land, along our highways and on our closed landfill sites. In these cases, there will be revenue costs to the Council, but officers will seek to minimise these financial impacts.
21. In doing so, officers will in the first instance attempt to identify full or partial funding for tree and maintenance from the following sources:
 - Grants (see examples below)
 - Cost recovery models (for example partnering with businesses looking to offset carbon emissions and/or wood crop (biomass/timber) companies that will cover the planting and maintenance costs of woodland)
 - Fundraising initiatives

In some instances, additional funding for large scale tree planting schemes may be required. Where possible those costs will be contained within the existing budget envelope, or will be accommodated within the future Medium Term Financial Strategy e.g. through the identification of offsetting efficiencies.

22. It is not expected that tree planting on the highway will incur additional costs as the Council's Highways Tree Planting and Verge Enhancement Guidelines specify that tree planting requests will not be funded from the SCC Highways budget. The cost of new trees planted along the highway will therefore be required to be funded by residents/community groups or through alternative funding arrangements (for example grant funding, as set out below).
23. Furthermore, prior to planting, a sponsor must be identified who will take on responsibility for watering the tree for the first two growing seasons. The remaining maintenance costs for new highway trees will be contained within the existing budget. There are approximately 2M trees within the network, at present, and tree numbers fluctuate, so the maintenance costs of new trees is expected to be balanced with the reduction in maintenance costs where other trees die, or are removed.

24. Initial revenue funding of £120,000 has been allocated to the delivery of the New Tree Strategy from the Council's 20/21 transformation budget. Although the initial investment will cover the cost of some tree planting and maintenance activity, the purpose of this funding is to establish a more sustainable approach to attracting funding for tree planting and maintenance on an ongoing basis into the future. The budget will fund an officer who will be responsible for establishing funding mechanisms that will enable SCC and partners to finance future tree planting and maintenance activity, as well as working with Government to help bring its ambitious tree planting ambitions to fruition in Surrey. The budget may also be used as match funding for grant applications; current funding sources being explored include:

- A range of [Government grants](#) for woodland creation and urban tree planting¹
- [Woodland Trust grants](#) for communities²
- [Tree Council grants](#) for communities³

25. Although this Strategy will not generate direct financial benefits for the Council, trees have been linked to a wide range of economic benefits, which will deliver *indirect* financial benefit across the county. Green infrastructure supports local economic growth through inward investment, visitor spending, environmental cost savings (i.e. reductions in flood damage), improvements in public health and the associated reduction in pressure on healthcare services, market spend and employment generation.

SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTARY

26. Although significant progress has been made over the last twelve months to improve the Council's financial position, the medium term financial outlook is uncertain as it is heavily dependent on decisions made by Central Government. With no clarity on these beyond 2020/21, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority in order to ensure stable provision of services in the medium term.

27. As set out in the section above, the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy includes funding to develop a sustainable funding model for planning and maintaining trees, with much of the responsibility and cost expected to be borne by partners, met from additional external funding such as grants, or contained within existing maintenance budgets. Where necessary, additional costs will be reflected in future year's Medium Term Financial Strategies. The costs associated with planting and maintaining trees are dependant to a significant extent on where those trees are located, and this will need to be taken into account when developing plans.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/create-woodland-overview>

² <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/schools-and-communities/>

³ <https://treecouncil.org.uk/take-action/grants-for-trees/>

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS – MONITORING OFFICER

28. In carrying out its many functions, the Council has the ability via the wellbeing power contained in the 2000 Local Government Act, supplemented by Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and Sustainable Communities Act 2007, to engage directly and work with other agencies in helping to tackle climate change.
29. The specific legal implications of the projects identified in the report will be assessed as individual projects to deliver the Strategy are developed.

EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY

30. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been produced and is appended to this report. The impact of the strategy upon residents and staff with protected characteristics is positive, and therefore no amendments to the strategy have been required as a result.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

31. An Environmental Sustainability Assessment (ESA) has been completed and the results show that the New Tree Strategy will have a number of environmental benefits. These benefits are summarised within the report and include contributions to the following:
- Carbon reduction;
 - Adaptation to climate change;
 - Reduction in air pollution; and
 - Increased biodiversity, including habitat creation
32. The ESA did identify an environmental risk in that certain species of tree (such as beech and other low root species) are particularly vulnerable to heat waves. The Strategic Objectives will ensure correct species selection, with priority given to species that are better adapted to Surrey's climate generally and specifically, higher temperatures.

PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

33. The Strategy will have direct public health benefits. There are numerous academic studies which show the links between trees and woodland on the one hand, and health improvements on the other. This research is set out in the EqIA (Annex 2) includes evidence that access to trees and woodland minimises anxiety and stress, as well as helping to protect people from the effects of air pollution, which are most harmful to the elderly and those with existing respiratory conditions.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

34. The New Tree Strategy will be published on the SCC website. Officers will continue to develop the New Tree Delivery Plan, which will be published on the SCC website in Autumn 2020.

35. The Council will also continue to work with partners to facilitate tree planting activity across the county, identifying suitable sites where tree planting and woodland creation will deliver maximum opportunities and identifying grant funding and other funding mechanisms.

36. The Council will lobby Government for support with the following:

- Policy changes which will incentivise land owners to plant trees and woodland; and
- Additional funding for urban tree planting initiatives, to include establishment and maintenance costs

37. The Council and partners will start work to develop the Land Use Framework. £100,000 has been allocated from the Council's 2020/21 transformation budget to support this piece of work.

Contact Officer:

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Consulted:

- Details of consultation are included above. Select Committee for Communities, Environment and Highways

Annexes:

- Annex 1: New Tree Strategy and appendices
- Annex 2: Equalities Impact Assessment

Sources/background papers

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