

Executive Member Decision Session

7 September 2022

Report of the Assistant Director of Policy and Strategy
Portfolio of the Executive Member for the Environment and Climate
Change

York Green Streets: Identifying opportunities for new non-woodland tree canopy expansion

Summary

1. The report summarises the outcomes of the York Green Streets (YGS) 'opportunity mapping' exercise undertaken earlier this year to assess the scope for new tree planting in York's urban and peri-urban area towards the council's agreed 2050 tree canopy target.
2. It also outlines suggested next steps and includes a recommendation for the Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change.

Recommendation/s

3. The Executive Member is asked to:
 - i. Note the contents of the report and progress made to date, including the council's recent bid for Forestry Commission Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF) revenue grant to support additional officer capacity for new urban and peri-urban tree planting.
 - ii. Subject to a successful WCAF bid, support a recommendation for delegated authority to the Assistant Director for Policy and Strategy to identify and apply for external capital funding to support delivery of the opportunities identified.

Background

4. On 5 May 2021, the Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change agreed a new tree canopy expansion target for York to feed into the regional (West and North Yorkshire) White

Rose Forest Plan. The target is to increase York's tree canopy cover from 10.8% currently to 13% by 2050. The target roughly equates to 21ha of new tree canopy cover in York each year.

5. Land purchased in the west of the city has led to the creation of the new 78ha York Community Woodland accommodating circa 210,000 new trees – one for each resident of York. Through its partnership with Forestry England, the project is on course to deliver the first 50,000 trees by 31 March 2023, in line with Council Plan 2019-23 commitments. York was also awarded Queens Green Canopy 'Champion City' status for 2022, in return for pledging to actively promote new tree planting activity. As part of this, the council oversaw the successful distribution of 500 free trees to York residents earlier this year.
6. To better understand the scope for non-woodland canopy expansion within York's urban and peri-urban areas, a £25,000 revenue grant from the White Rose Forest (WRF) partnership was secured. The grant did not include funding for the purchase, planting and ongoing maintenance of new trees.
7. Groundwork Yorkshire (GY) was appointed through open procurement to undertake this work over a twelve-week period beginning February 2022. The tender design and project contract management was undertaken by a YGS project group comprising officers from the council's Public Realm and Carbon Reduction teams.

YGS opportunity mapping – Overview of key findings

8. The council identified an initial list of potential new tree planting locations based on knowledge of York's existing urban treescape. Further to this, GY invited all Ward councillors, Parish and Town councils and schools to suggest locations they felt might be suitable for new trees.
9. Just over 80 locations were put forward, including 13 school sites. GY visited each location to assess its suitability for tree planting. This process, known as 'ground-truthing', involved assessing the physical or other barriers to tree planting, such as the presence of underground services and nearby utilities.
10. GY, in collaboration with YGS project team, developed an expanded Red / Amber / Green (R.A.G) rating system, as detailed below, designed to show the technical feasibility of each location for new tree planting.

Rating	Description
Green	Confident to plant
Grey / Green	Hard tarmac / Cobbles / Confident to plant
Light amber	Only one service running near to location
Grey / Light amber	Hard tarmac / Cobbles / Only one service running nearby
Dark amber	More than one service running near to location
Grey / Dark amber	Hard tarmac / Cobbles / More than one service running nearby
Red	Services too close to tree site / High cost / Too narrow
Black	Service check not completed

11. Of the 81 locations, 64 were assessed as containing Green and/or Light amber rated tree planting opportunities – the most technically feasible - across 16 or York's 21 wards. Taken together, the locations have potential to accommodate almost 4,000 additional trees – with 951 of these being within streets/open spaces and just over 3,000 within school sites. Annex 1 provides a summary of these most technically feasible opportunities by ward area and Annex 2 shows a list of school sites.
12. If Dark amber and Grey/Dark amber rated opportunities were also included as 'most technically feasible' (albeit involving more challenges) then the number of sites would rise to 79, a further 279 trees.
13. Locations assessed as offering little or no scope for new planting have also been clearly documented, for example Bootham (YO30 7DF), which received a combination of Red and Dark amber ratings for the 17 trees originally proposed. This data will be a useful resource to inform future opportunities.
14. Ward areas with the highest number of planting opportunities include Huntington and New Earswick (566) followed by Haxby and Wigginton (124). Of the 64 locations, nine are within the 25% most deprived Lower Super Output Areas nationally according to the latest Index of Multiple Deprivation.
15. GY developed indicative planting schemes for each of the Green and Light amber rated planting opportunities, showing suggested tree numbers, sizes, and species and these are detailed in the YGS Final report.

Next steps

16. The 64 locations have been digitally mapped within the WRF Geographic Information System (Kompas) as a potential pipeline of tree planting opportunities contributing to the wider WRF regional targets. Mapping opportunities in this way enables overlaying priority issues such as social and economic deprivation, public health (incl. air quality) and flood risk, which could prove useful when making external funding bids to support individual schemes (see below).
17. All ward members, parish councils and schools taking part in the opportunity mapping exercise are now invited to inform the detailed results, providing additional local insight and intelligence.
18. With no capital budget to support new tree planting at scale, to progress schemes through to delivery will require additional work to identify appropriate grant funding opportunities. Indicative outline costs are prepared for each scheme, and these would act as a guide to support funding bids.
19. Tree planting schemes succeed with local community support and prior to seeking capital funding, more detailed stakeholder consultation will take place, including ensuring relevant ward members and Parish/Town councillors are fully involved in any detailed community consultation.
20. On 8 July 2022, an Expression of Interest was submitted to the Forestry Commission's Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF) seeking a 100% revenue grant (circa £150,000 over 2.5 years) for new officer capacity within the council's Public Realm team, dedicated to supporting delivery of the YGS opportunities up to March 2025 (three planting seasons).
21. If successful, this capacity would help match YGS schemes to funding sources and support the drafting of bids. This resource would also provide dedicated scheme-based project management to support stakeholder consultation, detailed scheme design, procurement, tree planting and ongoing maintenance. The outcome of this bid will be known by early August.
22. Whilst 64 technically feasible opportunities is a good number, it is worth noting the assessment was not exhaustive and there remains scope for more non-woodland sites to come forward should a longer/wider assessment be undertaken in future.

23. WRF agreed to fund YGS as a regional pilot to help inform future policy and practice - identification of suitable sites being key to WRF ambitions. Insights from the York mapping exercise have been used by WRF to inform a funding proposal to West Yorkshire Combined Authority involving a pitch to the Mayoral 'gainshare' pot to fund a roll-out of York's model across the districts of West Yorkshire.

Summary

24. The YGS opportunity mapping exercise has identified 64 technically feasible planting sites across the city directly addressing one of the key barriers to tree canopy expansion – the availability of suitable sites. Having an identified and evidence-based pipeline of sites puts CYC in a better position to secure external grant funding to support delivery.
25. Much depends on the WCAF bid in terms of how the YGS opportunities move forward. Without the extra capacity offered through the grant, CYC will be constrained and opportunities may not be fully realised within the national tree strategy grant funding window (DEFRA's Nature for Climate fund, which sits behind many of the capital funding offers from Forestry Commission and WRF etc. cannot be guaranteed beyond March 2025).

Consultation

26. YGS mapping exercise has developed in consultation with carbon reduction and public realm officers. In addition, GY invited all Ward councillors, Parish and Town councils and schools to suggest locations they felt might be suitable for new trees.
27. As paragraph 19 outlines, it will be important to ensure those living near to any proposed planting schemes are fully consulted prior to the development of detailed delivery plans so each scheme to better understand local insight and intelligence.

Recommendation/s

28. The Executive Member is asked to:
 1. Note the contents of the report and the progress made to date, including the pending WCAF grant funding application to support

additional officer capacity for new urban and peri urban tree planting.

- II. Grant delegated authority to the Assistant Director for Policy and Strategy to identify and apply for external capital funding to support delivery of the opportunities identified, following further extensive local stakeholder engagement.

Implications

- **Financial**

29. There are no immediate implications associated directly with this report, though clearly any additional future tree planting undertaken by CYC would also require ongoing long-term management and maintenance resource to support. Indicative costs are being sought from the council's Public Realm team to inform an estimate based on different numbers of new trees delivered. Some external grants allow for several years of establishment (management and maintenance) after that the tree becomes the responsibility of the landowner/operator.

- **Human Resources (HR)**

30. A successful WCAF funding bid would enable CYC to employ additional officers on a fixed-term basis (for the duration of grant funding) to help take forward Green Street opportunities. This would be done in accordance with the council's Human Resources policies and procedures.

- **Equalities**

31. No implications associated with this report.

- **Legal**

32. A successful WCAF funding bid would require CYC to enter into a grant agreement with the Forestry Commission and this would be done with all necessary input and advice from the council's legal team.

- **Crime and Disorder**

33. No implications associated with this report

- **Information Technology (IT)**

34. No implications associated with this report

- **Property**

35. No implications associated with this report

- **Risk Management**

36. No implications associated with this report

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Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate: ALL*

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

- *York Green Streets report 2022- available on request*
- *York Tree Canopy Target – EDMS report 5 May 2021*

Annexes

- *Annex 1: Tree planting opportunities assessed as R.A.G. rating 'Green' and 'Light Amber' by Ward area*
- *Annex 2: School sites*

