

Project Initiation Document

Project
Name

Forest of York

Completed by

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Date

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Context and Rationale

Government is due to publish a new England Tree Strategy later this year (2020). It focuses on expanding, protecting and improving woodlands so that trees and woodlands can connect more people to nature, support the economy, combat climate change and recover biodiversity. The draft strategy sets out policy priorities to deliver an ambitious national tree planting programme.

The Forestry Commission is the government department responsible for protecting, expanding and promoting the sustainable management of woodlands and it has a target to increase UK woodland from 13% of all land cover to 19% by 2050.

City of York Council has set a goal to plant 50,000 trees by 2023 to support the national effort and to help achieve York's wider ambition to be net carbon neutral by 2030. Tree canopy cover in York is 10.8% against a national (England) average of 10%.¹

The city is signatory to the Northern Forest initiative that aims to plant 50 million trees across northern England. Woodland cover in northern England is currently just 7.6% of all land cover, well below the UK (13%) and England averages.

It is also a member of the White Rose Forest partnership, a joint venture involving councils and environmental bodies working to support woodland creation across the Leeds City Region and York.

The project makes the following strategic links:

- Work currently underway by York and North Yorkshire LEP to define a carbon abatement pathway. Planting of woodland is considered an important carbon negative intervention in any pathway with a need to significantly increase the amount of woodland across York and North Yorkshire.
- Planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of York's green infrastructure is a key part of the city's emerging new Local Plan.
- Helping deliver York's strategic health priorities. There is significant evidence demonstrating the positive public health benefits of green space including help with physical and mental health, obesity, dementia and autism.
- Creating opportunities for people to walk and cycle in woodland helps drive progress towards more active travel and healthier lifestyles – a central feature of the city's Transport Plan.

¹ Woodland Trust

- The economic impact of COVID on the city is clearly a priority for guiding the investment of time and money at this point. The creation of a large amenity woodland will benefit the city economy by improving the liveability and attractiveness of the city to residents and visitors.

Aim & Objectives

Aim

The aim of this project is to create a large new area of woodland within close proximity to the city in order to provide green amenity space for residents and visitors, and to aid the council's commitment to planting 50,000 trees by 2023.

This goal comes as part of the council's wider ambition to become net carbon neutral by 2030, and supports the emerging blue & green infrastructure strategy and pollinator strategy.

Users of this woodland, and the wider community surrounding it, will benefit from this project as it provides them with a space to socialise, exercise and be educated about nature and biodiversity.

Executive (27 August 2020) approved a draft high level vision for the project to be consulted on as part of the early community and stakeholder engagement work:

"The new woodland will be a well-designed, biodiverse green space providing a place for peaceful contemplation and leisure for the people of York. It will create a new Stray for the city, enhance the setting of the city and make York an even greater place to live work and visit."

Objectives

- Increase amenity green space by 194 acres / 78 hectares, providing new outdoor leisure opportunities, areas for physical activity, walking and cycling, new educational opportunities and linking up York's green corridors
- Plant a minimum of 50,000 trees that will sequester CO2 to support net-zero, improve local air quality and reduce flood risk.
- Create new commercial activity that will fund management/maintenance of the forest and provide new employment, volunteering and green skills development opportunities
- Leverage other public and private sector investment to expand tree planting within the city.

Project Scope

The site for the new woodland currently comprises 190+ acres of arable farmland to the west of the city between the villages of Knapton and Rufforth and fully within the York local authority boundary. Discussions are ongoing regarding other parcels of land adjacent to or close by the site that offer scope to plant more trees and simplify access and layout of the woodland.

The current site is deemed large enough to achieve the council's tree planning target of 50,000 trees and create amenity green space in the west of the city that meets the requirements of the draft Local Plan.

The location is close to the urban footprint of York and to existing sustainable transport links.

The council's Executive (13 February 2020) agreed a £3 million budget to purchase pieces of land over a period of 5 years to plant trees. There are multiple sources of potential external funding including the government's Nature for Climate programme, Countryside Stewardship and Woodland Carbon Fund. Further work is required to establish the levels of grant available to ensure the financial impact to the council can be mitigated as much as possible.

A broad range of council services are within scope of the project including officers working on climate reduction, property and assets, health and wellbeing, sustainable transport, public rights of way, countryside and ecology, policy and city partnerships, communications, learning and skills, ward committees and democratic services.

Approach

Project delivery will be through a partnership approach facilitated by City of York Council.

Membership of the White Rose Forest partnership provides access to a range of expertise throughout the various stages of the woodland design process, including how to design an amenity woodland, the species of trees to be planted and sustainable long term management. It also provides a link into funding opportunities available throughout the WRF Delivery Pathway and assistance in making funding bids.

A stakeholder advisory group made up of informed local residents, charitable trusts and other professionals will be established to inform development and management proposals that meet Forestry Commission regulatory requirements and these will be brought before the council's Executive for agreement.

Ongoing community and stakeholder engagement will ensure local residents, community and charitable groups have an opportunity to shape woodland design,

layout and amenities, with opportunities to be directly involved in woodland creation and long term woodland management.

There is likely to be a requirement to commission detailed survey work to better understand site conditions such as habitats, historic environment, biodiversity, soil, water, landscape, utilities and access that will feed into the Forestry Commission's screening for Environmental Impact Assessment and woodland approval.

Likewise, a detailed site master plan and phased site development plan will also require professional input. The aim is commence tree planting at scale during the 2021/22 planting season.

Outcomes Expected

- A nature based solution to climate change mitigation as part of a local, national and international pathway to net zero carbon. Based on a site of 194 acres / 78 hectares and depending upon the density of planting and species of tree, the woodland could sequester approximately 28,000 tonnes of CO2 equivalent over 50 years.
- A new amenity woodland connecting more people with nature via new/enhanced nature rich active travel corridors joining up the city's green infrastructure and improving peoples' health and wellbeing
- More diverse habitats to support wildlife and the recovery of threatened species
- New employment, volunteering and nature based learning opportunities through woodland creation and longer term woodland management as part of York's growing green economy
- Opportunities for greater public involvement in nature, improving awareness of, and skills for, nature conservation
- New opportunities for community engagement and the establishment of new local groups

Outputs

Output	Description
Identify and purchase suitable land on which to create the new woodland, sufficient to plant a minimum 50,000 trees	The site needs to be of sufficient size to accommodate the required number of trees, be situated fully within York's administrative boundary, be in close proximity to the city

and existing sustainable transport links

Undertake relevant site surveys to fully understand the site and inform project development and detailed woodland design

Applicant led woodland design begins with fully understanding the intended site for woodland creation. This feeds into FC EIA regulatory requirements and helps shape final woodland design

Develop a community co-designed high level vision and key objectives for the site through early community and stakeholder engagement

This high level vision would consider the principle purpose of the new woodland including carbon sequestration, amenity value, improving health and wellbeing, wildlife and biodiversity, employment and skills,

Develop a detailed site masterplan

The site masterplan will detail the layout/design of the new woodland to meet the agreed vision and key objectives. The woodland scheme could incorporate a number of features including new pedestrian walkways, cycle routes, fitness trails, an outdoor play area, forest school space, woodland café and commercial use to sustain site operations/management

Meet all necessary Forestry Commission requirement re. UKFS and EIA

FC approval is required before woodland creation can commence on the site and capital funding can be secured

Develop a phased woodland creation implementation / delivery plan

This plan would guide physical works required to create the new woodland

Identify and put in place long-term sustainable woodland management arrangements

This would build on early community and stakeholder engagement and ideally present opportunities for local people to be involved. There will be examples of other community woodland we can learn from

Assumptions

- Sufficient dedicated staff resource/capacity will be available to drive and support delivery of the project
- Partners within WRF and beyond will be fully engaged and pro-actively support project design and delivery

- There is good buy-in and active participation from relevant teams within the council to ensure wider benefits/strategic opportunities are realised
- Detailed site surveys do not identify significant barriers to meeting the project's aims and objectives
- That plans for the site meet all regulatory requirements and strive for best practice
- There is widespread community support and active engagement in the project to ensure a sustainable future for the woodland as a valued amenity space
- That long-term woodland management options fully explore opportunities for the local community and charitable trusts to take a lead role

Dependencies

The project links to the following work and initiatives within City of York Council:

- **Carbon reduction and climate adaptation programme:** Carbon sequestration will be an important component of York's emerging carbon reduction pathway towards net zero carbon
- **Local Plan/Green Infrastructure Strategy.** Planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of York's green infrastructure networks is part of the emerging new Local Plan/s strategic approach to spatial development
- **Health and wellbeing strategy:** This recognises the important role that York's landscapes, geodiversity, biodiversity and natural environment play in supporting healthy communities
- **Draft pollinator strategy:** Currently under development, the Strategy aims to protect pollinating insects which support our food production and the diversity of our environment
- **Sustainable transport:** The strategy prioritises active travel and supports this by creating opportunities for residents to walk and cycle
- **York Outer Ring Road (ORR) A1237 project:** This presents further opportunity to invest in trees, woodland and fauna and flora on land adjacent to the ORR
- **Major projects:** Work is ongoing to take forward opportunities for tree planting across the city and to promote tree planning as part of development activity, as can be seen by the outline planning application for York Central

- **Skills and employment:** Creating a large amenity woodland will benefit the city economy by improving liveability and enhancing attractiveness of the city to residents and visitors. Woodland planning and creation presents opportunities for green skills development
- **Safer communities for all:** The new amenity woodland will create a range of additional leisure opportunities for residents

There will need to be effective relationship across all these initiatives to fully realise and ensure the holistic benefits of the project are fully realised.

Constraints

Regulatory: The woodland plan must meet or exceed Forestry Commission regulatory requirements

Political: Woodland planning, creation and management is a long term undertaking requiring ongoing political commitment/support

Financial:

Staff capacity: Ability and capacity of relevant CYC service teams and external partners to actively contribute to the project at the pace and scale required to drive delivery due to other priorities, and reductions in staff/changes in working practices (WFH) brought about by the coronavirus pandemic.

Environmental: There is a relatively short window if planning is to commence towards the latter part of 2021 (within optimal tree planting season) and be completed by the latter part of 2023.

Project Team and Structure

Project Sponsor:

- Neil Ferris, City of York Council Corporate Director, Economy and Place on behalf of Cllr Paul Widdowson, Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change

Project Team:

- Project manager:
 - 1 x fte Internal CYC secondment
- Engagement manager/officer:
 - 1 x fte Internal secondment

Head of carbon reduction

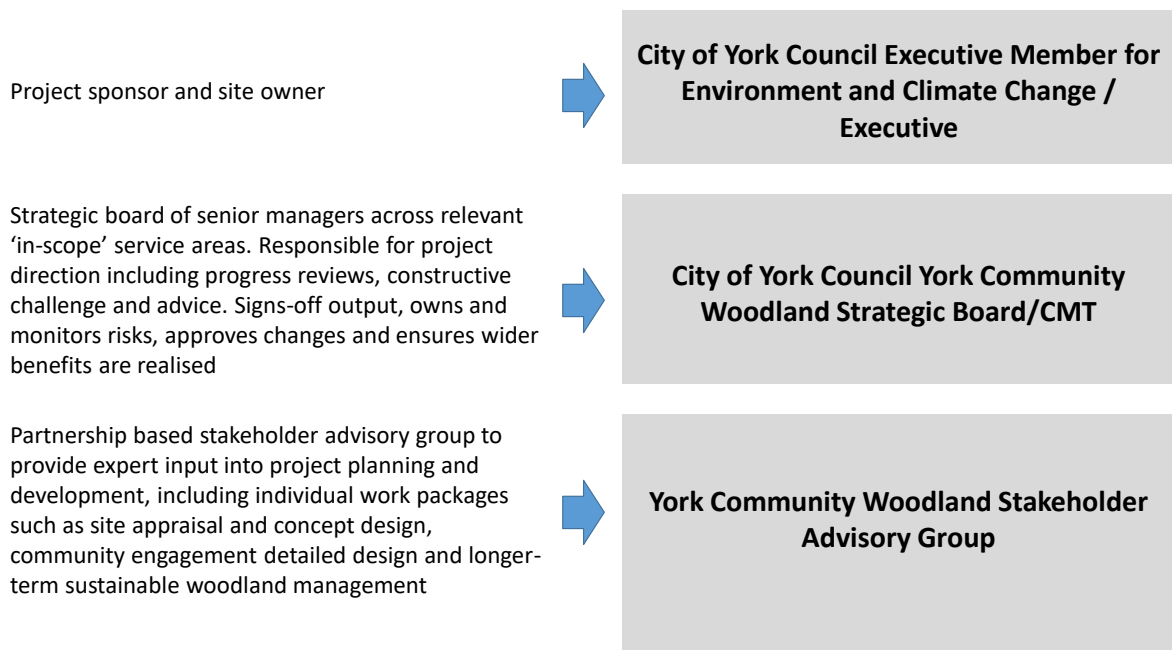
York Forest project manager

York Forest engagement officer

Governance

The project follows approval at Budget Council (February 2020) to allocate £3m to support Northern Forest ambitions and the subsequent Executive report (27 August 2020) to approve the purchase of land to the west of York to create a new amenity woodland.

An internal project group of senior managers has met frequently to drive progress and ensure an agreed PID is in place as a framework for future working and in accordance with the Council's agreed approach to project management. The following diagram shows the governance structure for this project.



Benefits

Benefit	Measurement
A minimum of 50,000 trees planted	No. of trees planted by 2023
Sequestration of up to 28,000 tonnes of	Utilising Woodland carbon Code

CO2 equivalent over 50 years following woodland creation	methodology
More people aware of and engaged in nature conservation	No. of people actively engaged in woodland creation and longer-term woodland management
Increased biodiversity and wildlife habitats	Ongoing monitoring of biodiversity and wildlife habitats against a 2020/21 baseline
A new 190+ acre green amenity space/recreational stray for residents and visitors	No. of visitors to the site compared against 2020/21 baseline
More people engaged in active travel and healthy lifestyles	No. of people walking a cycling within X km of the site / Incidence of
Increased opportunities for employment and volunteering in woodland management / nature conservation	No. of people employed / volunteering on the site compared to 2020/21 baseline
More active travel corridors linking green spaces	Additional km of walking and cycle routes

Risks and Issues

(See Annex)

Key Milestones

- Establish a partnership based **York White Rose Forest (York Forest) delivery group** and agree Terms of Reference and project governance arrangements - by Oct-Dec 2020 (PM)
- Design an 'early community and stakeholder engagement plan' to inform overall project vision and key objectives (including priority engagement with relevant elected representatives) - by Oct/Nov 2020 (JC)
- Develop a project communications plan (and associated resources) setting out how the project will be branded and communicated locally, regionally and

nationally, incl. social media/web presence and linkages – by Oct-Dec 2021 (JC)

- Develop a community engagement plan setting out opportunities/approaches for ongoing resident and stakeholder engagement, volunteering and skills development opportunities during woodland planning and creation – by Oct/Nov 2021 (JC?)
- Commence/implement early community and stakeholder engagement Jan/Feb 2021
- Undertake all necessary site surveys to fully understand the site (soil, water, habitats, biodiversity, landscape, heritage assets, utilities etc.) and to inform subsequent woodland design/layout - by April 2021
- Ensure the Forestry Commission's UK Forest Standard (UKFS) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) requirements are fully met to secure woodland approval - by June 2021
- Complete a site masterplan and phased implementation plan detailing what the site will look like, key features and how/when these will be delivered - by July 2021
- Develop options for the woodland's long-term sustainable management in partnership with community stakeholders and relevant bodies - by Jul/Aug 2021
- Commence Phase 1 tree planting within peak tree planting season (Aug-Spring 2021/22)
- Commence Phase 2 tree planting within peak tree planting season (Aug-Spring 2022/23)
- Complete initial project evaluation - by June 2022

Associated documents

- YCW Project Plan
- YCW Key Process Steps (Critical Path)
- YCW Risks and Issues Log