

**Climate Emergency Policy and Scrutiny
Committee**

28 February 2023

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

Tree Canopy Target Update and York Green Streets

Summary

1. The report provides an update on progress towards York's tree canopy expansion target. This work encompasses the delivery of York Community Woodland (YCW) and York Green Streets (YGS), a new project aiming to enhance tree planting in the city's urban and peri urban areas from April 2023.

Recommendations

2. The committee is asked to:
 - I. Note the progress made on expanding York's tree canopy cover, including the achievement of key milestones in line with Council Plan 2019-23 commitments.
 - II. Note and comment on proposals for enhancing York's urban tree canopy cover via the YGS project and monitoring wider tree planting contributions to enable a more comprehensive picture of tree canopy expansion to be given.

Reason: To support the Council Plan priority for a greener and cleaner city and Climate Change Strategy objectives, including enhanced natural capital and tree canopy cover.

Background

3. In 2019, the council set an ambition to achieve net zero carbon by 2030 in response to the climate emergency. As part of this, the council committed to planting 50,000 trees by the end of the Council Plan 2019-23 period to help mitigate against residual CO₂ in the atmosphere.

4. In Autumn 2020, the council purchased land in the west of York between the villages of Knapton and Rufforth for the purpose of creating a new large-scale community woodland. Together with existing landholdings the site comprised a total of 78ha.
5. The White Rose Forest (WRF) commissioned a one-off study of district level tree canopy cover in 2019 to inform the development of district level expansion targets to feed into the WRF Plan. York's canopy cover at this time was assessed as 2,926ha, representing 10.8% of its total area, with 60% of this being made up of trees outside woodlands.
6. The Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change at a public Decision Session on 5 May 2021, agreed a new tree canopy expansion target for the city to feed into the regional WRF Plan. The target aims to increase York's tree canopy cover to 13% by 2050 - roughly equating to 21ha of additional canopy cover each year.
7. The Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change at a Decision Session on 7 September 2022, considered a report outlining opportunities for further tree canopy expansion in York's urban and peri-urban areas. This 'York Green Streets' report identified 63 technically feasible planting locations across the city accommodating up to c4,000 trees.
8. In December 2022, Council approved the Climate Change Strategy 2022-2032 including objectives to increase tree planting, increase carbon storage, promote sustainable land management, reduce the impacts of extreme weather events and climate risks.
9. Progress against these targets is detailed below. The Council has successfully secured c£1.35m of external funding for the creation of York's Community Woodland, mapping of potential locations for additional urban trees, and more recently, funding capacity to engage neighbourhoods and arrange planting of more urban trees – all aimed at increasing York's tree canopy and contributing towards York's ambition to be net zero by 2030.
10. A programme to better understand York's climate risks is underway. It is too early to pre-empt the outcome of this, however, we do know that one of the key adaptations to the risk of over-heating infrastructure such as roads and buildings is a tree canopy that can withstand drought and extreme cold.

Progress update

York Community Woodland

11. Since project inception in September 2020, the following key milestones have been delivered:
 - I. Secure external funding to support the council's YCW project team, minimising call on the council's 'Northern Forest' budget: A £110,000 grant over two years was obtained from the WRF.
 - II. Establish robust project governance and management arrangements including an ambitious delivery pathway/project plan to deliver Council Plan pledges: A multi-disciplinary project team has ensured wider project benefits are maximised.
 - III. Complete all necessary land character, heritage, ecology, soil and transport assessments in a timely manner to meet regulatory requirements and inform the development of initial woodland concept plans. The council accessed specialist support from the WRF core team and successfully applied for a Forestry Commission Woodland Creation Planning Grant totalling £14,000.
 - IV. Design and implement a community and stakeholder engagement strategy to ensure the full involvement of residents and local stakeholders in the co-design of a community woodland vision and objectives. The project has benefitted from extensive public interest, input and support as a result of this approach.
 - V. Procure specialist woodland design services to translate the community woodland vision into a UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) compliant woodland masterplan, showing YCW spatial layout, recommended trees species and mitigations for issues raised during public consultation. Capital costs were estimated at c£1.3m (excluding long-term management and maintenance liabilities).
 - VI. Secure Forestry Commission (FC) regulatory approval to deliver the woodland masterplan and detailed specification. The FC is the planning authority for woodland creation in

England and, based on the work outlined above, granted woodland approval in December 2021.

- VII. Procure the services of a woodland creation delivery partner with the expertise, experience and resources to deliver the woodland masterplan within strict project timescales. The council was the first in the country to enter a Forestry England (FE) Woodland Partnership arrangement, whereby FE fully fund the capital costs of woodland creation, establish the woodland over the medium term and take responsibility for woodland management for the next 120 years. The arrangement is underpinned by a formal (legal) lease and a Partnership Agreement containing arrangements for community engagement, joint governance and ongoing monitoring and reporting against project outcomes (see Annex 1). This approach delivers on the council's aim to minimise call on council resources and returns an annual rental income.
- VIII. Ensure the ongoing involvement of residents in woodland creation and management. Residents have been actively involved through a series of community wildflower meadow and tree planting events, including the planting of 70 specimen trees to celebrate the Queens Jubilee year. More events are planned with the latest taking place over the February 2023 half-term. Further opportunities will be advertised through FE's dedicated YCW webpage, which allows people to sign-up for regular updates.
- IX. Plant 50,000 trees by 31 March 2023. On 17 February 2023 the Lord Mayor of York, the Leader of City of York Council and the Executive Member for Environment and Climate change planted the 50,000th tree on YCW. Further planting over subsequent seasons will raise this to 210,000 trees, one for each resident of York. c66% of the 78ha YCW site (c51ha) will have canopy cover once the woodland matures. FE are currently installing initial site infrastructure, such as paths and trails and public access is scheduled for 2024.
- X. Ensure project objectives are met. Over the next 100 years as the woodland matures and develops the cumulative sequestration of CO₂ will be in the region of 26,000t. These carbon credits have been registered with the Carbon Code,

directly contributing to the council's organisational net zero ambitions. There will be a significant biodiversity enhancement, including the protection and enhancement of endangered species and habitats. Residents will benefit from increased access to nature and active travel opportunities, enhancing local health and wellbeing outcomes. The ongoing process of woodland creation, establishment and management will deliver opportunities for green jobs, volunteering opportunities and skills development. A bespoke policy is in place to ensure the use of plastics is minimised, forming part of national trials (see Annex 2).

York Green Streets

12. Phase 1 of the YGS project was completed in January 2022. This consisted of an opportunity mapping exercise commissioned by CYC to identify new tree planting sites across the city's urban and peri-urban areas. This work was fully funded by a £25,000 grant from WRF.
13. The results of the mapping were reported to the Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change at a Decision Session on 7 September 2022. As part of the report, the Executive Member gave approval for officers to apply to the Forestry Commission Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF) to support additional officer capacity aimed at turning the opportunities identified into a programme of delivery over 2023-2025.
14. The WCAF funding bid was successful, with City of York Council being awarded £150,000. Officers are in the process of recruiting to the new posts, which will sit within the council's carbon Reduction team working closely with colleagues in Public Realm and Highways. The grant is revenue based only and specifically for new officer capacity, not for the capital costs of tree purchase and planting.
15. Phase 2 of York Green Streets will commence 1 April 2023, subject to successful recruitment. Initial tasks will include identifying and securing external capital funding to support delivery, with an initial focus on the government's Local Authority Treescapes Fund (LATF) and Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCF), both of which will be re-launching shortly. Other capital

funding streams will also be explored, such as the Woodland Trust's Trees for Schools fund.

16. Tree planting in the locations identified through the Phase 1 mapping exercise will be subject to detailed community and elected member consultation at the local level. Individual scheme design will embrace good practice, such as sustainable urban drainage solutions where appropriate and trees species selection will follow the principle of 'right tree in the right place', including resilience to climate change and other threats.
17. There is increasing evidence of the critical role urban trees play in keeping city environments cool, whilst at the same time enhancing physical and emotional wellbeing, improving air quality and making cities attractive places to live, work and invest in. Urban treescapes are therefore an essential component of climate adaptation plans and strategies aimed at building local resilience against the risks associated with climate change.

Other work contributing to tree canopy expansion aims

18. In March 2022, the YCW project team coordinated a highly popular 'tree giveaway' event that saw residents receive 500 free trees supplied by the Woodland Trust. Tree species were those best suited to gardens and easy to maintain, such as Hazel and Rowan. There was no capacity for ongoing monitoring to assess how many of these trees were planted and successfully established.
19. The council's Public Realm team are responsible for looking after the council's tree assets. A key focus is on management and maintenance of the council's c35,000 existing trees. The council's highway trees have an asset value of around £79 million.
20. Each year, Public Realm plant on average 20-40 standard trees and hundreds of saplings which are to offset annual losses. Public Realm's 2022/23 tree planting programme will see a total of 748 trees planted. Key threats to the council's tree stock include site use changes, storm damage, age and diseases such as Ash dieback and Phytophthora. Public Realm has no specific budget for new tree planting.
21. Other bodies, organisations and parish councils also plant trees, such as the recent Environment Agency scheme on Water Lane.

Treemendous, a local voluntary organisation dedicated to tree canopy expansion in York has also initiated and delivered several planting schemes over the years, most recently along the A66 highway verge at Murton.

22. The council does not have a mechanism to capture the wider contribution private citizens and other organisations make towards York's tree canopy expansion target, nor for accurately recording the number of trees felled each year.
23. The council cannot deliver the 13% tree canopy cover by 2050 alone. This will involve contributions from all city stakeholders including private citizens, local business and organisations. Finding ways to fully account for these contributions remains challenging. In the meantime, we will continue to work through the WRF to re-assess district level canopy cover in the future.

Council Plan

24. Enhancing York's tree canopy cover, including progress delivering YCW, the emerging YGS project and ongoing work to manage the council's existing tree stocks contribute to the following Council Plan outcomes:
 - A greener and cleaner city – Carbon sequestration and amenity green space
 - Getting around sustainably – New pedestrian and cycle routes
 - Good health and wellbeing – Creation of new open spaces to support healthy lifestyles for residents, businesses and visitors.
 - Safe communities and culture for all – A range of leisure opportunities for residents
 - Well paid jobs and an inclusive economy – Green skills development.

Implications

- **Financial** – There are no implications directly related to this update report.

- **Human Resources** – There are no implications directly related to this update report.
- **Equalities** – There are no implications directly related to this update report.
- **Legal** – There are no implications directly related to this update report.
- **Crime and Disorder** – There are no implications directly related to this update report.
- **Information Technology** – There are no implications directly related to this update report.
- **Property** – There are no implications directly related to this update report.
- **Other** – There are no implications directly related to this update report.

Risk Management

25. There are no direct risks associated with this update report.

Contact Details

Author:

Paul McCabe
York Community Woodland
project manager
Tel: 01904554527

Chief Officer responsible for report:
Claire Foale
Assistant Director, Corporate Policy and
Strategy
Tel: 01904552057
Report Approved ✓

Date 15/02/2023

Background Papers:

- Executive report 27 August 2020: Creating a new woodland/Stray for York
- Executive Member Decision Session 5 May 2021 - York's Tree Canopy Expansion Target
- Executive Member Decision Session 8 September 2021 - York Community Woodland final design, external capital funding source and delivery partner
- Executive member Decision Session 7 September 2022 - York Green Streets: Identifying opportunities for new non-woodland tree canopy cover

Annexes

1. Partnership Agreement
2. York Plastics Policy