

**Decision Session – Executive Member for  
Environment and Climate Change**

**5/05/2021**

Report of the Chief Operating Officer

**York's Tree Canopy Expansion Target**

**Summary**

1. This report provides analysis of an appropriate tree canopy expansion target for York, which will contribute towards the city's net zero ambition, biodiversity and improve air quality.

**Recommendations**

2. The Executive Member is asked to:

- 1) Approve a 13% target for tree canopy cover in York by 2050

Reason: Increasing the tree canopy cover to 13% from the current level of 10.76% will produce carbon sequestration, biodiversity and health benefits. A target of 13% is achievable when balanced against the capacity for tree planting within the unique landscape and setting of York.

- 2) Acknowledge that this target will form part of a wider ambition for the White Rose Forest across the region

Reason: The regional ambition will be published in a report by WRF on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021.

**Background**

3. City of York Council is a member of the White Rose Forest (WRF) partnership, a local authority joint venture hosted by Kirklees Council, which acts as the partnership's accountable body.

4. WRF is the community forest for North and West Yorkshire, one of four community forests in the north of England working together to create the larger Northern Forest that will stretch from Merseyside across Manchester and Yorkshire.



5. WRF are planting millions of trees in urban centres and countryside that will help manage flood risk, combat climate change, create jobs and provide happier and healthier places.
6. The WRF reports to a Director of Development (DoD) group comprising directors of development across each constituent local authority. In Nov 2019, DoDs gave the WRF Carbon Group responsibility to identify a methodology to calculate the region's tree canopy expansion target by 2050. Targets emerging from the methodology will form the basis of a carbon-led tree planting strategy for the WRF area known as the WRF Plan.
7. WRF commissioned a group of regional and national experts to assess the potential level of carbon sequestration that could be achieved through tree planting across the WRF area . Phase 1 of this study was completed in September 2020. The study set out to:
  - help local authorities understand the potential for carbon sequestration through woodland creation and to estimate the carbon contribution of existing trees outside of woodland and;
  - provide local authorities with evidence to help set carbon-led ambitions for 2050 tree canopy expansion.
8. On 14 December 2020 the study findings were presented to the districts to initiate individual district discussions on tree canopy ambitions for 'Phase 2'.

9. WRF set a deadline for districts to conclude these 'Phase 2' discussions and make recommendations regarding their district level tree canopy expansion target for respective DoD sign off by the end of January 2021. CYC have reached an agreement with WRF that we provide a suggested target for York in March 2021, for sign-off by the WRF Steering Group.
10. The WRF area target is due to be presented to the Yorkshire Regional Leaders' Group in spring 2021 with the WRF Plan being officially published on 1st August 2021 (Yorkshire Day).

### **Current Tree Canopy Cover & Regional Targets**

11. Annex 1 details current district level tree canopy cover (ha/%). This shows:
  - That average tree canopy cover across the 9 districts is 11.96% against a national average of 13% (Across the expanded WRF area of all 13 districts the average is 10.95%)
  - Leeds and Kirklees are the only two districts with current tree canopy cover in excess of the national average at 17.16% and 15.17% respectively
  - Craven and Selby are well below this average at 5.37% and 9.94% respectively
  - York's current tree canopy cover is 10.76%
12. York currently has 2,926 ha of tree canopy cover, representing 10.8% of its total area. 60% of this canopy cover is made up of trees outside woodlands.
13. The declared 2050 tree canopy targets from 7 of the 9 original WRF districts shows a collective ambition to increase tree canopy cover to an average of 19.14% by 2050

### **Consultation**

14. This report and associated documents has been developed in consultation with the White Rose Forest, Community Forest Trust and The Forward Plan Team within City of York Council.

## Analysis

### Developing an Evidence Based Tree Canopy Cover Target

15. Increasing York's tree cover from the current 10.76% of total area to 13% (national average) by 2050 would require 608 ha of new cover, or 21 ha per year.

Tree cover in 2050 (%)	New Canopy Cover (ha)	Annual increase (ha/yr)
13	608	21
15	1,150	39
20	2,506	86

16. Achieving 21 ha of tree planting every year in York would result in the annual removal of 1-2% of the estimated regional residual emissions in 2038, rising to 8-15% of residual emissions in 2050.
17. WRF has provided each district with data showing areas for potential low risk woodland creation. This data shows York to have over 8,000 hectares of assessed low risk woodland (LRW) land (low risk in terms of political and ecological constraints).

Area	Total Low Risk Area for Woodland Creation	
	Hectares	% of Total Area
York	8,245	30

18. Officers have combined this dataset with available information relating to heritage and land designation to identify existing and potential constraints and considerations to tree planting and canopy creation (Annex 3).
19. Following this process, it is estimated that a maximum of 6,500 ha of land identified by WRF has potential for tree planting. While further work is required to understand impacts on key views and desirable openness of land, further limiting the available planting area, the implication is that York could accommodate greater tree canopy cover.
20. The rate of viable delivery imposes a significant constraint on new canopy cover. The York Community Woodland project in West York aims to deliver 50-60 ha of new tree cover over the next two years. A 13% target for 2050 would require a similar level of growth every two years.

21. This target would result in an annual carbon sequestration rate at 2050 of circa 9,000tCO<sub>2</sub> per year; equivalent to around 1% of the regions total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions between 2020-2050.
22. This target is considered achievable when balanced against the capacity for tree planting within the unique landscape and setting of York.

## Council Plan

23. The project accords with the Council Plan 2019-2023 in regard to the following core outcomes of the Plan:
  - A greener and cleaner city – Working towards becoming a carbon neutral city by 2030
  - Getting around sustainably – Cutting congestion, pollution and carbon emissions
  - Good health and wellbeing – Promoting active travel, healthy eating and improving air quality
  - Safe communities and culture for all – Supporting groups who are at greatest risk of climate change
  - Well paid jobs and an inclusive economy – Creating employment opportunities in the green economy

## Implications

**Financial** – No financial implications associated with this report

**Human Resources** – None associated directly with this report

**Equalities** – None associated directly with this report

**Legal** – None directly associated with this report

**Crime and Disorder** – None directly associated with this report

**Information Technology** – None associated directly with this report

**Property** – None associated directly with this report

**Other** – None associated directly with this report

**Risk Management** – None identified in relation to this report

## Risk Management

24. There are no known risks associated with this report.

## Contact Details

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### Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

**Ian Floyd**  
Chief Operating Officer

**Report**  **Date** 13/04/2021

**Approved**

**Wards Affected:** [List wards or tick box to indicate all]

**All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

### Background Papers:

Council Plan 2023

### Annexes

*Annex 1 – District Tree Canopy Ambition 2050*

*Annex 2 – UBoC/WRF Summary*

*Annex 3 – Mapping WRF Outcomes and Local Constraints*

### List of Abbreviations Used in this Report

CO<sub>2</sub> – Carbon Dioxide

DoD – Directors of Development

LRW - Low Risk Woodland

WRF – White Rose Forest