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| Meeting: | Executive Member Decision Session |
| Meeting date: | 18/09/2024 |
| Report of: | Claire Foale |
| Portfolio of: | Executive Leader, Policy, Strategy and Partnerships |

Decision Report: Coronation Living Heritage Fund Micro-woods Site Approval

Subject of Report

1. This report seeks Executive Member approval for micro-wood creation at two recommended planting sites following a successful funding application to the Government's Coronation Living Heritage Fund (CLHF) and subsequent detailed site identification and appraisal. Each of the micro-woods will be approximately 200sqm in size and within York's urban area.
2. It is intended the micro-woods will be delivered during the 2024/25 tree planting season (October to March) in accordance with grant requirements.

Benefits and Challenges

3. The woods will be planted using the Miyawaki¹ method, entailing high density planting of native mixed broadleaf species. The method delivers fast-growing woods rich in biodiversity.
4. A key challenge for planting trees within York's urban area is finding suitable sites free of physical and other constraints.

Policy Basis for Decision

¹ Further information on the Miyawaki method can be found on the Tree Council website.
<https://treecouncil.org.uk>

5. The Council Plan 2023-2028 set a target to plant 4,000 new trees within York's urban area as part of a wider aim to enhance biodiversity, support nature recovery and mitigate the impacts of climate change.
6. The new micro-woods will contribute towards the council's agreed tree canopy expansion target that aims to increase York's tree canopy cover from a baseline of 10.8% in 2021 to 13% by 2050.

Financial Strategy Implications

7. Expert advisors have confirmed that the CLHF Capital Grant award of £38,748 should be sufficient to fully-fund micro-wood creation and initial aftercare, subject to securing volunteer input to assist with planting and establishment. In the event that tendered costs are above what is available, adjustments will be made to site size and specification to come within the available funding.
8. Delivery will be managed by the council's York Green Streets (YGS) project team, itself fully funded by external grant until 31 March 2025.
9. The grant award covers aftercare costs for three years to support successful establishment, after which the woods will maintain themselves as they begin to self-select and gap-up to prevent weed growth.
10. A contractor/s will be sought to deliver and initially manage the woods through a competitive tender process in line with the council's contract procurement rules and within the funding available.

Recommendation and Reasons

11. The Executive Member is asked to:
 - i) Approve the two preferred locations for micro-wood creation within the 2024/25 tree planting season:
 - a) Land to the South-West of Village Street, Rawcliffe and Clifton Without Ward (see attached map at Annex A). With delegated authority granted to the Director of City

Development to approve the planting block within this location following targeted resident consultation.

Reason: This site is in an area deemed to be a high priority for new tree planting according to the Woodland Trust's Tree Equity Score UK² (TESUK). It is publicly accessible and relatively free of constraints. Three feasible locations (labelled A, B and C on the map) have been identified. Block A provides an extension to an existing woodland strip and visually frames the nearby beacon and pavilion building. All blocks are easily visible aiding self-policing. Final block selection will be informed by targeted resident/stakeholder consultation.

- b) Land to the north of The Fox Inn, Holgate Ward (see attached map at Annex B).

Reason: This site is in an area deemed to be a high priority for new tree planting according to the TESUK, is publicly accessible and free of physical constraints. The site is a former industrial brownfield site. It is highly visible from Holgate Road and the adjacent cycle and pedestrian pathways.

- ii) Approve the following site as a reserve option should either of the preferred sites above prove undeliverable.

- a) Land to the south of Burnholme Sports Centre, Heworth Ward (see attached map at Annex C).

Reason: This site is in an area deemed to be a high priority for new tree planting according to TESUK. It is publicly accessible and free of constraints.

Background

12. In September 2023, the Council submitted a bid for grant funding to the CLHF to support the creation of two new micro-woods, each approximately the size of a tennis court and including up to 600 trees each. The CLHF fund was established to mark the coronation

² Tree Equity Score UK is a map-based application that was created to help address disparities in urban tree distribution by identifying the areas in greatest need of people-focused investment in trees.
<https://uk.treeequityscore.org>

of King Charles III. The bid for £38,784 capital grant was successful.

13. In early 2024, residents, elected members and parish/town councils were invited to suggest potential locations for the new micro-woods. Over 50 ideas were received. Site suggestions were initially screened to against essential criteria, including being within York's urban area, of the required minimum size, being on publicly accessible land and not subject to protected habitat status and/or special land designation.
14. Sites meeting essential criteria were then screened for feasibility in terms of archaeology, ecology and the presence of utility services and other site constraints, including highways considerations. Site planting plans have been informed by these specialist inputs, for example, the Holgate Road site will be planted to allow sufficient minimum distance from the existing cycle/pathway to accommodate potential future widening of the cycle/pathway should funding become available.
15. Finally, sites were prioritised using the Woodland Trust Tree Equity Score UK, a map-based application created to help address disparities in urban tree distribution by identifying the areas in greatest need of people-focused investment in trees.
16. Following this process, a shortlist of four sites was arrived at. Using external grant funding, the council appointed a consultant landscape architect to advise on the detailed suitability of each of the four shortlisted sites. As set out in the officer recommendation above, two sites were assessed as highly suitable (the preferred sites) due to being free of constraints, in highly visible locations and in areas deemed to be high priority for new tree planting. One site was recommended as a reserve site with the remaining site deemed unsuitable due to a range of factors including challenging topography, drainage issues and the presence of invasive species and pernicious weeds.
17. The council's consultant landscape architect has advised that micro-wood delivery should be achievable within the grant funding available, though not without securing volunteer input into planting and aftercare. This requirement will be built into the contract specification. The landscape architect has also advised that substantial soil amelioration will be required on both preferred sites due to existing ground conditions.

Consultation

18. Residents, elected members, parish/town council's as well as a range of internal council teams were invited to suggest potential planting sites.
19. As part of the technical feasibility assessment and prioritisation process, a range of specialist internal teams have been consulted including Archaeology, Ecology, Landscape architect, Public Realm, Property Assets, Highways, Leisure Services and Housing. Detailed site design has been informed by comments received through this consultation.
20. The Director of Regeneration Partnerships (York) at Homes England, a key partner in the York Central Development Team, has been consulted on the Holgate Road site and confirmed their support.
21. An active community group currently tending the wider Holgate Road site on a volunteer basis has been engaged with no objections lodged. Officers will continue to liaise with this group as a potential volunteer base for micro-wood delivery and aftercare and seek to support our shared objectives for the area within the grant funding available.
22. More focussed resident consultation will be undertaken prior to implementation.

Options Analysis and Evidential Basis

23. The following options have been considered:
 - i. Do not progress with micro-wood creation and return the grant money to the funding body.
 - ii. Approve the recommended sites for planting, with one back-up site as reserve.
 - iii. Identify entirely new sites.

Options analysis:

- i. Do not progress with planting at these sites – This option would reduce the council's ability to meet planting targets as set out in the Council Plan and involve returning £39,000 of awarded grant.

- ii. Approve the two recommended sites for planting, subject to any further local consultation, with the one back-up site as reserve. This option would contribute significantly to the council's tree planting target as set out in the Council Plan and enable the council to fully utilise £39,000 of external grant funding.
- iii. Look for entirely new sites. This option would cause delays in micro-wood delivery and would not provide sufficient time for a full re-appraisal of sites within the funding and delivery timescale available. This would significantly impede progress towards the council's tree planting target.

Organisational Impact and Implications

- **Financial** - Micro-wood creation will be fully funded by a Section 31 CLHF Capital Grant of £38,748 received in 2023/24 and managed by the council's York Green Streets (YGS) team, which is itself fully funded by external grant.
- **Human Resources (HR)** - No HR implications identified.
- **Legal** – No legal implications identified.

24. **Procurement** – A contractor/s will be sought to deliver and initially manage the woods through a competitive tender process in line with the council's procurement procedures and within the funding available.

- **Health and Wellbeing** – There is a significant evidence base that indicates that being close to woods and trees has a positive impact on our health, it does this in many ways including reducing stress levels, improving mood and boosting the immune system. The closer we live to green spaces the more likely we are to use them so boosting physical activity levels, which has positive impacts on our weight, and our cardiovascular health. Being close to green wooded space can be seen as a health boosting, and a positive preventive tool in reducing ill health, so improving quality of life. Public Health fully support the creation of green spaces that are available to all.
- **Environment and Climate action** – Tree planting aligns with the city's climate change objectives, providing both carbon

sequestration and adaptation benefits. Trees have the potential to provide urban cooling, shading and natural flood resilience while also enhancing biodiversity and connectivity to nature.

- **Affordability** – No affordability implications identified.
- **Equalities and Human Rights** – No equalities implications identified.
- **Data Protection and Privacy** – The DPIA screening questions were completed for this report and as there is no personal, special categories or criminal offence data being processed for the options set out in this report, there is no requirement to complete a DPIA at this time. However, this will be reviewed where required, on the approved options from this report.
- **Communications** - Communications will be developed to support the Micro-wood project, including media release.
- **Economy** – No economy implications identified.

Risks and Mitigations

25. Key risks include:

- i. Procuring the services of a contractor to deliver and initially manage the woods within the timescale and grant funding available.

This risk will be mitigated through early planning. There is sufficient time between the approval of sites and the 2024/25 tree planting season to enable the procurement to conclude. Early discussions have taken place with potential contractors eager to undertake this work and there are aware of the standard costs associated with the grant funding.

- ii. Deliverability within the timescale and budget available.

This risk will be mitigated by procuring experienced contractors, creating the woods on land owned by City of York Council. Localised consultation will be undertaken where necessary to ensure local support.

Volunteer inputs into planting and aftercare will be required as part of the contract specification to help reduce costs. Additional costs arising from ground preparation and soil amelioration requirements may require adjustments to be made to the size of the wood/s so that costs remain within the overall fixed budget available.

iii. Ensuring successful establishment of the woods.

This risk will be mitigated through a detailed aftercare arrangements within the contract. Funding for management and maintenance (3 years) is included in the grant award. The woods will be protected with temporary fencing / tree guards as part of the contract.

Wards Impacted

- Holgate
- Rawcliffe and Clifton Without
- Heworth

Contact details

For further information please contact the authors of this Decision Report.

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Background papers and references

- Executive Member for Climate Change and Environment report May 2021: York Tree Canopy Expansion Target.
[EMDS_Tree Canopy Expansion Target.pdf \(york.gov.uk\)](#)
- Tree Equity Score UK is a map-based application that was created to help address disparities in urban tree distribution by identifying the areas in greatest need of people-focused investment in trees.
<https://uk.treeequityscore.org>

Annexes

- Annex A: Land to the South-West of Village Street, Rawcliffe and Clifton Without Ward
- Annex B: Land to the North of The Fox Inn, Holgate Ward
- Annex C: Land South-West corner of Burnholme Sports Centre field, Heworth Ward.