

## **POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE**

**25 NOVEMBER 2021**

### **VICARDALE WOODLAND CREATION SCHEME**

#### **1.0 Purpose of Report**

1.1 To seek approval for the planned tree planting scheme at Vicar Water Country Park.

#### **2.0 Background Information**

2.1 In August 2021 Newark & Sherwood District Council entered into a no commitment partnership with Nottinghamshire County Council and the Sherwood Forest Trust to assess the suitability of a major tree planting scheme on the Vicardale site of Vicar Water Country Park. The partnership work concluded that the site is suitable for planting and consultation work has been since undertaken to gauge support.

2.2 The area of Vicardale is an area of around 4.4 hectares, which has previously been grazed by a local sheep farmer, however he has retired creating an opportunity for an extensive habitat creation scheme within the Green Flag award winning Vicar water Country Park.

2.3 The district council's greening agenda recognises the urgent need to plant more trees to help with climate emergency and biodiversity loss. It also supports Nottinghamshire County Council's Tree for Climate project, which will fully fund it.

2.4 Through direct planting and free tree give-aways the district council has planted over 10,000 trees since 2019, already in excess of our original target to plant 10,000 trees by 2023. This project combined with our annual free tree giveaways puts us on course to potentially double this target figure by 2023.

#### **3.0 Proposals**

3.1 The proposed tree planning will help to join up two existing woodland areas to create a wildlife corridor.

3.2 We plan to plant 4000 new trees to create a mixed broadleaved woodland providing benefits for people, wildlife and the landscape. It is hoped planting work can commence in January 2022.

3.3 As shown on the attached map, trees will be planted on the majority of the slope as it goes upwards from Vicar Water towards the heathland paddock of Bower Hill Heath at the top. These blocks will grow on to become high forest with a mixture of native woodland species which will have irregular edges and planting is expected to avoid straight regimented lines.

3.4 Access routes for maintenance and other open spaces will be incorporated into the design and transitioning from short herbage in the centre, to longer soft vegetation, to woody shrubs, to high forest woodland. Trees will be planted more sparsely towards the top of the slope with the introduction of clumps of trees reminiscent of small copses or groups of trees that evaded animal browsing. This approach will help transition the change from woodland, to longer grass and into the existing heathland.

- 3.5 The trees will bring about improvements to local biodiversity with future plans for woodland flower planting and wildlife habitats including bird boxes and bat boxes. Some tree species including hawthorn will be important for pollinators.
- 3.6 We propose continued no public access to the area while the trees establish. There may be future opportunity to open new pathways for improved amenity. The project will use fencing to protect the trees from animals rather than multiple plastic tree guards.
- 3.7 The council's planning team and legal team have studied the plans are happy that the planting of the trees will not fundamentally change the character of the area to any degree which causes demonstrable harm and therefore no planning permission is required for change of use.
- 3.8 We believe the local views from homes looking out over Vicardale will be improved as local residents can view the changing seasons of the deciduous trees.

### **3.9 Proposed species list**

The following species mix has been proposed:

Pedunculate Oak, Silver Birch, Downy Birch, Aspen, Wild Cherry, Sm. Leaved Lime, Rowan, Hornbeam, Common Whitebeam, Common Alder, Field Maple, Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Hazel, Crab Apple, Holly, Guelder Rose, Wych Elm, Goat Willow, Purging Blackthorn, Dogwood, Spindle, Grey Sallow, Wayfaring Tree, Wild Privet.

### **3.10 Consultation**

Details of the plans have been sent out to the following organisations:

- Clipstone Parish Council
- Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust
- Notts Heritage Service
- Environment Agency
- Natural England
- RSPB
- Birklands bird ringing group

Public consultation has been conducted through our website and social media channels as well as drop in sessions and display boards at the Vicar Water Park visitor centre and it has been overwhelmingly positive. We did have one resident worried about the disturbance to ground nesting birds, but they have been assured that planting will only be on the former pasture land, the heath will be left undisturbed. Other responses were supportive but said they would miss the sheep and deer which sometimes graze the site (both will still be found on the park). Other comments received included:

- “Fantastic this will help with the biodiversity of the area and create much needed homes for wildlife”
- “Absolutely brilliant idea.”
- “Fabulous”
- “Great well thought out plans”

The professional bodies consulted (listed above) were supportive but did raise some queries around the species mix which will be reviewed to ensure it is site suitable. All of the received responses have been passed to the Sherwood Forest Trust as the project managers.

#### **4.0 Equalities Implications**

4.1 There are no equalities implications at this time. The site is not accessible to the public at present and the planned works will not affect site access via any public routes. In future, new routes may be opened up as the site matures.

#### **5.0 Digital Implications**

5.1 There are no digital implications.

#### **6.0 Financial Implications (FIN21-22/2271)**

6.1 There are no financial implications to the Council. Sherwood Forest Trust will manage provision of the trees, the planting and the maintenance of the site for the first 12 years, funded by Nottinghamshire County Council. After this time, the site should be established to a point that maintenance can be integrated into the routine running of the park.

#### **7.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives**

7.1 This scheme aligns with the Community Plan Objective for enhancing and protecting the district's natural environment. In future there is scope for walking routes to be opened through the site which would support the objective to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents.

#### **8.0 RECOMMENDATION**

**That Members approve the Vicardale Woodland Creation Scheme.**

#### **Reasons for Recommendation**

- **To help achieve the councils commitment to plant 10,000 trees**
- **To support the community plan**
- **To support biodiversity and wildlife in the area**

#### **Background Papers**

Nil.

For further information, please contact Matt Adey on Ext 5253.

Matthew Finch  
Director – Communities & Environment

