

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

11 SEPTEMBER 2019

DISTRICT-WIDE TREE PLANTING INITIATIVES

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To provide information on a number of planned tree-planting initiatives and to seek Committee approval for the allocation of funds to allow some of these initiatives to be progressed.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 Trees are the oldest living species on earth and provide a link between the past, present and future. Newark & Sherwood is home to what is probably the world's most famous forest and some of the trees in Sherwood Forest are hundreds of years old – with the age of the Major Oak being estimated at up to 1,000 years. As well as being an iconic part of our landscape trees provide an enormous range of benefits, including:

- Combatting climate change by absorbing CO2 from the atmosphere
- Preventing flooding by protecting soil from erosion, reducing surface-water run-off and slowing large floods
- Supporting agriculture by improving soil condition, preventing topsoil erosion and creating shelter and shade
- Improving health and wellbeing by reducing air pollution, keeping towns and cities cool and creating spaces for exercise and relaxation
- Encouraging wildlife by creating habitats, ecosystems and wildlife corridors
- Protecting the landscape – a good mix of native trees increases landscape resilience against pests and diseases
- Producing food – Newark & Sherwood is the home of the Bramley Apple
- Being good for the local economy – studies have demonstrated that property values are higher in tree-lined areas and that businesses are more likely to locate to attractive tree-populated areas
- Reducing reduce noise – belts of trees can significantly reduce noise from traffic and industrial processes

2.2 Trees thus play a crucial role in all of our lives and this is reflected in the District Council's Community Plan. The objective to 'protect, promote and enhance the District's natural environment' will be partly achieved by an increased focus on greening the district by 'encouraging tree planting in the District by developing a 'free tree' scheme (subject to funding) and maximising opportunities for free trees from the Woodland Trust, Greenwood, etc;'. The proposals also form part of the Council's much wider strategy (to be presented to Leisure and Environment) and declared Climate Change Emergency. This report outlines a number of current and future schemes that, if delivered, will result in a step change in the number of trees planted in the District and which will enable the District Council to pledge to facilitate the planting of at least 10,000 trees by 2023 (the end of the current Community Plan period).

2.3 Increased tree planting in Newark & Sherwood will also assist the Government in meeting its target of planting 11million trees (of which 1million will be planted in urban areas) in England between 2017 and 2022. Tree cover across Nottinghamshire averages 10% (similar to the rate for England) and the figure for Newark & Sherwood is likely to be slightly higher

than this. However away from the Sherwood area of the District there are lower levels of tree cover and the potential exists for significant new planting.

3.0 Proposals

3.1 The following initiatives to encourage and promote tree planting in the District are proposed.

3.2 Free Tree Scheme.

A similar scheme to that already successfully run by local authorities such as Rushcliffe Borough Council and North West Leicestershire District Council is proposed. All applicants (who would be Newark & Sherwood residents) would be entitled to up to 2 free trees – which would be 2 year-old native specimens between 60 and 90cm in height. The trees would be bare rooted and would thus need to be planted between November and March. The cost to order and supply the trees (including an administration fee) would be in the region of 75 pence each and it is proposed that a target of giving away 10,000 trees over the next 5 years be set. The cost of the scheme would thus be £1,500pa or £7,500 over the initial 5 year life of the scheme. Community groups and schools are already able to receive up to 420 free trees from the Woodland Trust although this is a very popular scheme and applications for trees for planting this winter have already closed.

3.3 Partnership Working.

The Council will work with local businesses and community-based organisations to facilitate and carry out tree planting. Initial talks have already been held with the following organisations:

- Newark Castle Rotary Club. The Club runs a Business Partnership Initiative and their current project is to facilitate tree planting in the Newark area. The Woodland Trust have offered to provide free trees for the initiative (although the maximum number available is not yet known) and the Club is looking for a site or sites where trees can be planted.
- Newark-based food company Bakkavor. Through its Site Employee Forum Bakkavor has pledged £500 for tree planting in the Newark area in the 2019/20 tree planting season. The company has indicated that it will be happy for the District Council to decide upon appropriate sites and source the trees. Bakkavor employees would then assist with the planting of the trees. Based on the above price of 75pence per tree this would allow for the planting of over 650 small trees, however it may be that some larger trees would be planted, depending upon the sites identified.

As this initiative is progressed it is anticipated that other organisations in the District may similarly wish to become involved in tree-related projects

3.4 The Northern Forest Project.

This Government-backed scheme aims to plant 50million trees across an area between Liverpool and Chester in the west, through Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield and across to Hull. Only a very small section of Newark & Sherwood is within the Northern Forest area however a linked project has been initiated by the Nottinghamshire Chief Executives Group. A working group has been set up and this has identified an opportunity to significantly increase tree planting across the County. Working with partners such as land owners, charities, developers and others, the group envisages an ambitious strategy that will enable a bid for funding to be submitted. To take this forward it has been agreed that

there should be a conference to discuss opportunities with partners and the District Council will play a full role in this.

3.5 The Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCf).

This Government initiative involves central funding of £10 million which will contribute towards the planting of at least 20,000 large trees and 110,000 small trees in urban areas in England. The UTCf is open to any organisation which wants to plant trees in urban or peri-urban areas, as long as there is full management control of the land in question or consent to use the land for the duration of the agreement has been received. The planting location must be an urban area and in Newark & Sherwood all of our towns and large villages (those with a population of at least 2,000) qualify. Areas have been assessed as to their existing tree cover and whether they are classed as Priority People areas and applications will be scored and ranked to identify projects that will provide the greatest environmental and social benefits to an area. Value for money may also be taken into account, with additional points being awarded where applications demonstrate this. The fund provides up to 50% of the cost of planting large and small trees and their establishment costs. The remaining funding must be met through match funding, either in the form of money or labour. The deadline for applying for the first year of UTCf funding has already passed however expressions of interest are being accepted for the second year of the fund (2020). These require an approximate scheme value to be stated and in order to give the Council the best chance of succeeding in its final application, it is proposed that match funding of £7,500 be allocated as an initial amount. This will allow for at least 6,000 small trees (100-125cm in height) or at least 15 large (3m or more in height) specimen trees to be planted. Further work will need to be carried out to establish which communities in the District offer the best possibility of receiving grant funding and where potential planting sites are located.

3.6 MOREwoods.

This Woodland Trust scheme provides 75% of the costs of large scale planting schemes (at least 500 trees planted on an area of at least 0.5ha) where the trees are planted by the landowner. Where a contractor is used to plant the trees the Trust will contribute 60% of the cost. Local authorities are eligible to apply and the Council funding described at 3.6 could also be used to match fund a MOREwoods planting scheme. An assessment will thus need to be made as to the best route for the Council to take should a sufficiently large piece of land be identified.

3.7 National Tree Planting Week.

This is the UK's largest annual tree celebration, marking the start of the winter tree planting season (November to March each year). It is organised and promoted by the Tree Council, one of the UK's leading charities for trees and this year it takes place between 23 November and 1 December. It is recommended that this week be used to promote a number of the proposed initiatives.

4.0 Equalities Implications

4.1 The free tree initiative will be available to all residents of the District. Tree planting funded through the Urban Tree Challenge Fund is likely to be targeted towards the more deprived areas of the District. Wherever possible community involvement in the planting of trees will be encouraged and this will be open to all.

5.0 Financial Implications (FIN19-20/318)

5.1 The Free Tree Scheme requires £1,500 budget per year, for 5 years, with effect from the current year (2019/20). There are sufficient funds within the CSG/Enforcement reserve which could be used to fund these trees, if agreed. For the Urban Tree Challenge Fund additional budget of £7,500 will be required to match fund the government grant. This would be used over a 4 year period from 2020/21. Again, there are sufficient funds within the CSG/Enforcement reserve which could be used to fund this.

6.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

6.1 As per para 2.2 these proposals will directly contribute towards the delivery of the Community Plan objective to ‘protect, promote and enhance the District’s natural environment’. They will contribute to greening the district by ‘encouraging tree planting in the District by developing a ‘free tree’ scheme (subject to funding) and maximising opportunities for free trees from the Woodland Trust, Greenwood, etc;’ and ‘assist with identifying opportunities for greening urban areas’.

6.2 Increasing the level of tree cover in the District, making our communities more attractive places to live and work and involving local people in tree-related initiatives will also have beneficial effects on the following community Plan objectives:

- Improve the cleanliness and appearance of the local environment
- Increase visits to the District and the use of visitor attractions by local people
- Enhance and sustain town centres
- Improve the health and wellbeing of local residents
- Increase participation with the Council and within local communities

7.0 Comments of Director(s)

7.1 The initiatives proposed are a reflection of how the Council, its businesses, and its residents can collectively commit to achieving a step-change in tree planting at a local level. The proposals are welcomed.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that:

- a) the initiatives outlined in Section 3.0 of this report, including the institution of a free tree scheme and the submission of an expression of interest to the Urban Tree Challenge Fund, be supported;**
- b) funding of £15,000 over a 5 year period be identified to support tree-planting initiatives across the District and Policy & Finance Committee be asked to ratify this spending;**
- c) the 2019 National Tree Week be used as an opportunity to promote tree planting.**

Reason for Recommendations

To encourage and facilitate increased levels of tree planting across Newark & Sherwood and to deliver environmental, social and economic benefits associated with this.

Background Papers

None.

For further information please contact Phil Beard on Ext 5714.

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