

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-058-2020/21

Date of meeting: 21 January 2021



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Planning & Sustainability – Cllr. N Bedford

Subject: Tree Planting Strategy

Responsible Officer: Nick Dawe (01992 562541).

Democratic Services Officer: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

Note the work being undertaken by officers on a large-scale tree planting strategy, endorse the approach and provide any further guidance to officers

Executive Summary:

This report looks to update Cabinet on work being done to move forward a joined up and proactive strategy that aims to increase tree and hedgerow planting throughout the Epping Forest District. The overall aim is to enable and support all organisations in the public and private sector to have a proactive approach to planting. Initially the Council will look to lead this activity by getting significant planting underway this planting season (November-March).

The Council's Corporate Plan aims to make the District a good place to live, work, study and do business, significant tree planting supports these aims by enhancing health and wellbeing in the area, capturing carbon and improving air quality. This strategy also encompasses the tree planting project within the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and the call for sites from Essex County Council for the Essex Forest Initiative.

I should be noted, that the success of this initiative is dependent on the established and developing links with Parish and Town Councils and other interested groups, charities and volunteers.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

This report does not require a decision or recommendation as all actions suggested are within existing budget provision.

Other Options for Action:

N/A

Report:

1. Work has been undertaken to devise a joined up and proactive strategy that aims to increase tree and hedgerow planting throughout the District. The Council's Corporate Plan aims to make the District a good place to live, work, study and do business, significant tree planting supports these aims by enhancing health and wellbeing in the area, capturing carbon and improving air quality. There is also alignment to the tree planting project within the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and the call for sites from Essex County Council for the Essex Forest Initiative that aims to plant 375,000 trees across Essex in the next 5 years.
2. The first priority for the Council is to take action and show leadership by planting trees on Council owned land, therefore an internal working group has been established internally to champion this activity. The group includes representatives from the Countryside and Planning service areas.
3. Work has started to identify available land with a call for sites internally. The group are reviewing numbers to be planted and assessing deliverability in the short term, while also looking at medium- and long-term planning. The area of land available from the initial call for sites, without a full review is reasonable but it is highly unlikely all these will be able to be brought forward. The density of trees to be planted on each site will also be variable depending on the location. The intention is to get significant planting underway this planting season within the £250k existing budget that has been allocated to support and underpin work such as this.
4. A supply of trees has been identified and funded from a private sector company, but investigations have shown initial barriers of land acquisition as well as post planting maintenance and care. It is thought that Qualis Community Interest Company could take on a stewardship role with regards to maintenance and care and this issue is being followed-up.
5. The plant trees at scale previous links were built with neighbours through the Green Arc partnership, chaired by Nigel Bedford. This was hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown, with the work parked until the new climate change officer started in post to give resource to move this forward. The strategy aims to renew this and activate public sector body, private sector and private landowner planting action across the District.
6. Parish Councils have already been proactive by accessing resource from Woodland Trust, something we would like to promote to others including community groups and schools. The overall aim is to enable and support all organisations to have a proactive approach to planting. Officers are also exploring provisions to support partnerships with farmers and private landowners with regards to the Agriculture Act that comes into force in 2021.

Resource Implications:

Officer lead – support from John Houston, internal working group
Budget

Legal and Governance Implications:

No immediate implications

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

This tree planting strategy has been designed to underpin the values of safer, cleaner and greener.

Trees capture and store carbon emissions through photosynthesis and within a woodland ecosystem carbon is stored within the living wood, deadwood, surrounding soils and associated vegetation. Increased capture of carbon will play a role in reaching the ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030 alongside carbon reduction activities. By planting new native woodland well suited to the area, this will boost biodiversity and help wildlife.

Trees have also been shown to improve air quality particularly in urban areas by removing gaseous air pollution through uptake on the plant surface and interception of airborne particles.

Reduced flooding can be another benefit where trees directly intercept rainfall, promote higher soil infiltration rates and use a greater amount of water.

A greener area with trees planted has also been found to improve the mental health and wellbeing of residents.

Consultation Undertaken:

A number of significant external conversations have been held with public bodies in and around the District to establish and assess the commitment to work jointly.

Background Papers:

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

Essex Forest Initiative Paper

Green Arc Briefing Paper

Risk Management:

Risks are being identified and mitigated and are alluded to in this report. However it should be observed that this is a start of a process and plan.

Equality Impact Assessment

Equality Impact Assessment

1. Under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010, when making decisions, Epping District Council must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, ie have due regard to:
 - eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and other conduct prohibited by the Act,
 - advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not,
 - fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
2. The characteristics protected by the Equality Act are:
 - age
 - disability
 - gender
 - gender reassignment
 - marriage/civil partnership
 - pregnancy/maternity
 - race
 - religion/belief
 - sexual orientation.
3. In addition to the above protected characteristics, you should consider the cross-cutting elements of the proposed policy, namely the social, economic and environmental impact (including rurality) as part of this assessment. These cross-cutting elements are not a characteristic protected by law but are regarded as good practice to include.
4. The Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) document should be used as a tool to test and analyse the nature and impact of either what we do or are planning to do in the future. It can be used flexibly for reviewing existing arrangements but in particular should enable identification where further consultation, engagement and data is required.
5. Use the questions in this document to record your findings. This should include the nature and extent of the impact on those likely to be affected by the proposed policy or change.
6. Where this EqIA relates to a continuing project, it must be reviewed and updated at each stage of the decision.
7. All **Cabinet, Council, and Portfolio Holder reports must be accompanied by an EqIA**. An EqIA should also be completed/reviewed at key stages of projects.
8. To assist you in completing this report, please ensure you read the guidance notes in the Equality Analysis Toolkit and refer to the following Factsheets:
 - Factsheet 1: Equality Profile of the Epping Forest District
 - Factsheet 2: Sources of information about equality protected characteristics
 - Factsheet 3: Glossary of equality related terms
 - Factsheet 4: Common misunderstandings about the Equality Duty
 - Factsheet 5: Frequently asked questions
 - Factsheet 6: Reporting equality analysis to a committee or other decision-making body

Section 1: Identifying details

Your function, service area and team: **Climate Change (Chief Operating Officer)**

If you are submitting this EqlA on behalf of another function, service area or team, specify the originating function, service area or team: **NA**

Title of policy or decision: **Tree Planting Programme**

Officer completing the EqlA: **Tel: 07939449512 Email: ndawe@eppingforestdc.gov.uk**

Date of completing the assessment: **6th January 2021**

Section 2: Policy to be analysed

2.1	Is this a new policy (or decision) or a change to an existing policy, practice or project? No
2.2	Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the policy (or decision): Tree planting and environmental improvement What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve (ie decommissioning or commissioning a service)? Spatial and environmental improvements
2.3	Does or will the policy or decision affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• service users• employees• the wider community or groups of people, particularly where there are areas of known inequalities? Only beneficially and proportionately Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate? No
2.4	Will the policy or decision involve substantial changes in resources? No from within existing budget and from external sources
2.5	Is this policy or decision associated with any of the Council's other policies and how, if applicable, does the proposed policy support corporate outcomes? Local Plan (draft) other policies to follow

Section 3: Evidence/data about the user population and consultation¹

As a minimum you must consider what is known about the population likely to be affected which will support your understanding of the impact of the policy, eg service uptake/usage, customer satisfaction surveys, staffing data, performance data, research information (national, regional and local data sources).

3.1	What does the information tell you about those groups identified? No adverse impact after review
3.2	Have you consulted or involved those groups that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision you want to implement? If so, what were their views and how have their views influenced your decision? Partners involved in the initiative and project and broader community support is required during implementation stage.
3.3	If you have not consulted or engaged with communities that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision, give details about when you intend to carry out consultation or provide reasons for why you feel this is not necessary: NA

Section 4: Impact of policy or decision

Use this section to assess any potential impact on equality groups based on what you now know.

Description of impact	Nature of impact Positive, neutral, adverse (explain why)	Extent of impact Low, medium, high (use L, M or H)
Age	Beneficial	Marginal
Disability	Beneficial	Marginal
Gender	Beneficial	Marginal
Gender reassignment	Beneficial	Marginal
Marriage/civil partnership	Beneficial	Marginal
Pregnancy/maternity	Beneficial	Marginal
Race	Beneficial	Marginal
Religion/belief	Beneficial	Marginal
Sexual orientation	Beneficial	Marginal

Section 5: Conclusion

		Tick Yes/No as appropriate	
5.1	Does the EqlA in Section 4 indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more equality groups?	No <input type="checkbox"/>	No
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	If ' YES ', use the action plan at Section 6 to describe the adverse impacts and what mitigating actions you could put in place.

Section 6: Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

What are the potential adverse impacts?	What are the mitigating actions?	Date they will be achieved.

Section 7: Sign off

**I confirm that this initial analysis has been completed appropriately.
(A typed signature is sufficient.)**

Signature of Head of Service: **Nick Dawe**

Date: **06/01/2021**

Signature of person completing the EqIA: **Nick Dawe**

Date: **06/01/2021**

Advice

Keep your director informed of all equality & diversity issues. We recommend that you forward a copy of every EqIA you undertake to the director responsible for the service area. Retain a copy of this EqIA for your records. If this EqIA relates to a continuing project, ensure this document is kept under review and updated, eg after a consultation has been undertaken.