

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Places Select Commission – 19 April 2022

Report Title

Tree Service Progress Update

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Paul Woodcock, Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The report updates Improving Places Select Commission on the implementation of the Tree Management Protocol & Guidance which was adopted in August 2021. The report also details recent tree planting progress against targets set out in the Protocol & Guidance and looks ahead to the next financial year.

Recommendations

The Improving Places Select Commission is asked to:

- Note the report and comment on any issues arising.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 – Tree Management Protocol & Guidance

Background Papers

N/A

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Tree Service progress Update 2022

1. Background

- 1.1 In June 2019, Cabinet endorsed a new Cultural Strategy which set out the goal of: “getting more people, more active, creative and outdoors, more often.” The strategy was co-produced with people and partners from across the borough and set out seven ‘game changers’ including:
- **A Vibrant Heart** – supporting town centre recovery and regeneration
 - **Vital Neighbourhoods** – revitalising our neighbourhoods
 - **Adventures in Rother Valley** – developing the green and active leisure offer in the south of the borough
 - **A Great Place for Wentworth and the Dearne Valley** – building on the cultural heritage of the north of the borough
 - **Turning Passion into a Profession** – developing skills and talent pathways into industry
 - **Amazing Events** – creating magical shared experiences to bring people together and build pride in Rotherham
 - **Children’s Capital of Culture** – working with children and young people to strengthen their voice in the development and delivery of Rotherham’s cultural and leisure offer
- 1.2 The Tree Service plays a key role in delivering on the Vital Neighbourhoods strand of the strategy, ensuring access to nature and supporting the Council’s ambitions to reduce the effects of the Climate Emergency across the borough.
- 1.3 Through the budget setting process for 2021/22 a two-year investment in tree planting programmes was agreed split across two financial years. The approved investment committed the Council to planting 200 trees in 2021/22 and a further 300 new trees in 2022/23.
- 1.4 In August 2021 a new Tree Management Protocol & Guidance was introduced to guide the management of the Council’s existing tree stock in urban areas and areas where woodlands border urban conurbations. The new protocol and guidance set further targets for new tree planting, committing the Council to planting 500 new trees in urban settings each year, with a net gain of 250 new trees in urban setting per year accounting for tree loss throughout the year.
- 1.5 This report will set out progress against the above targets and update on the implementation of the Tree Management Protocol & Guidance and planting programme.

2. Key Issues

Tree Management Protocol & Guidance

- 2.1 Rotherham Council’s Tree Service and Countryside Service are jointly responsible for the care and management of the Council’s tree stock across a range of landscapes including: Highways and pavements; Housing and social care owned land; Parks and green spaces; and Woodlands.
- 2.2 The Tree Management Protocol and Guidance is intended to direct the management of Council-owned trees in urban settings including those in woodlands which impact on residential and industrial areas. The guidance applies to a number of Rotherham

Council departments including: Asset Management, Green Spaces, Highways, and Housing.

The guidance aims to:

- Promote the importance and value of trees across a range of urban settings
 - Set out guiding principles and technical arrangements for the care and maintenance of the Council's existing tree stock
 - Guide the Council's contribution to the planting of new trees, woodlands and hedgerows, contributing to woodland creation for improved biodiversity and supporting measures to tackle the climate emergency
 - Provide a practical framework for elected members, officers and residents in considering the importance and impact of trees and woodlands when responding to common issues
 - Make clear the roles and responsibilities of all parties and establish values in accordance with the Council's Climate Change Strategy and Green Spaces Strategy
- 2.3 Whilst the Council works with many partners and tree owners this guidance relates only to the care and management of its own tree stock.
- 2.4 The Protocol & Guidance covers a range of scenarios for the management of tree stock ranging from pruning and felling to trips and hazards, dropped kerbs and commitments to increased planting and tree cover. The full Protocol & Guidance is attached as an appendix to this report.

Tree Planting Programmes 2021/22

- 2.5 In 2021/22 the Council exceeded its target of planting 500 new trees planted, planting a total of 22,139 new trees across both woodland and urban settings.
- 2.6 The target for tree planting set by the protocol & Guidance is for 500 per year in urban settings. Of the 22,139 new trees planted 1,485 of these were in urban settings.
- 2.7 The target for overall net gain in urban settings is 250 trees, taking into account trees that are felled or fallen or new planting which is damaged as not all new trees survive the natural environment. In 2021/22 398 trees were felled or lost due to storm damage or natural causes and the service estimates that around 10% of new planting (2,215) will not survive. This gives an estimated overall net gain of 19,546 new trees in 2021/22 and estimated net gain of 1,336 in urban settings.
- 2.8 The Tree Management Protocol and Strategy also set a target to dedicate a minimum of 5 hectares of land to woodland creation, either through planting or re-wilding, up to 2030. This will see the Council's woodlands estate increase in size by at least 10%. To date the Council has already exceeded this target planting 10 hectares of new woodland this planting season of which nearly roughly 1.5 hectares was planted by volunteers.

New planting took place in locations across the borough including:

Location	Type	Tree Nos.
Woodland Tree Planting		

Holmes/Ickles Lock	Whips	2768
Swinton Piccadilly	Whips	3802
Greenland Park	Whips	2610
Winterhills - Western Boundary	Whips	4500
Brecks Lane/ Herringthorpe Wood	Whips	4725
Herringthorpe extension	Whips	1800
Holmes/Ickles Lock	Semi Standards	61.5
Swinton Piccadilly	Semi Standards	84.5
Greenland Park	Semi Standards	58
Winterhills - Western Boundary	Semi Standards	100
Brecks Lane/ Herringthorpe Wood	Semi Standards	105
Herringthorpe extension	Semi Standards	40
Total Number of Woodland Trees Planted		20,654
Urban Tree Planting		
Fenton Road		1100
Eldon Road		8
Cherry Tree Park		70
Bawtry Road		116
Effingham Road		3
Herringthorpe Playing Fields		143
Broom Valley Road		22
Newhill Park		23
Total Number of Urban Trees Planted		1,485
Total Number of Trees Planted		22,139

- 2.9 Trees planted in new woodland settings are a mixture of native species such as Pedunculate Oak, Silver Birch, Spindle, Hazel and Sweet Chestnut.
- 2.10 In urban settings the service has planted a mix of native and non-native trees at a ratio of 2:1. The planting of non-natives is in response to climate change as non-natives should be more resilient to changing climatic conditions and diversify our tree stock to mitigate species specific tree diseases such as Ash Dieback.

2.11 Following the principle of 'right tree, right place', species chosen for urban settings tend to be species that are smaller at maturity to reduce concerns from some residents regarding larger trees near their homes.

2.12 Since the appointment of the Trees & Woodlands Engagement Officer in June 2021, 24 tree planting programmes have been delivered across a range of community groups with some groups becoming more established, meeting regularly and undertaking repeat activities and some acting as more of a drop-in for people to try something new. To date these events have engaged with 555 residents in total.

2.13 Outside of these community programmes relationships have also been forged with local schools engaging 392 children and young people from six different schools within the borough.

2.14 Case studies from the Tree Planting programmes include:

- **A Family Tribute at Brecks Lane Woodland**
A family contacted the Council wanting to celebrate their Mum, Meg's 100th birthday, with the planting of 100 trees. The family raised money to buy the whips, a rustic bench and an owl box to go in the corner of the field that was being planted. In total 14 people attended and it was set up for all to take part with Meg planting the 100th tree to mark her birthday. The family brought a picnic and arranged for a birthday cake to mark the occasion.
- **Rotherham Scouts**
Rotherham Scouts booked in over a weekend on individual group sessions to do tree planting. Seven different groups attended and planted up nearly a quarter of Brecks Field planting the woodland edge species near the hedgerow. The explorer scouts in the scout hut directly next door to the field have adopted the planted woodland for the next three months to ensure that trees remain guarded and well as part of their work towards one of the badges.
- **Rotherham Fire Cadets**
This dedicated group had two different planting sessions one at the start of planting season on Herringthorpe extension and again on Winterhill Field overall the group planted nearly 600 trees and are keen to join in planting in the next planting season.

Leveraging additional funding

2.15 In 2021/22 the service was successful in securing an additional £272,600 in grant funding to support tree planting programmes including:

- £82,600 from the Local Authority Treescapes Fund
- £140,000 from the Urban Trees Challenge Fund
- £50,000 from South Yorkshire Combined Authority Mayoral Fund

2.16 The service is waiting to hear the outcome of further bids to the Emergency Tree Fund which, if successful, will include both Capital and Revenue funding to further support tree planting programmes, community engagement opportunities, volunteer and ranger training and the provision of electric vehicles to support the tree planting programmes, further reducing the carbon impact of the service and its activities.

Tree Planting programmes 2022/23

2.17 Building on the relationships that have been established in the first year of the Tree Planting programme a number of groups are looking to return again this including:

- A number of local schools have expressed an interest in volunteering, and some are looking to also undertake foraging activities to collect seeds and nuts to grow their own trees as part of a longer-term environmental education programme.
- Rotherham U3A are looking for an area of land for planting to celebrate the groups 40th anniversary. The group are keen on the idea of also starting a volunteer tree warden group to look after the trees.
- Education and awareness raising will take place at key events including UEFA Women's Euros and Rotherham Show helping to launch volunteer and tree adoption programmes.

2.18 In addition to the above programmes which build on the relationships and connections made in 2021/22, additional trees will be planted as part of the 'Queens Green Canopy' programme for the national Queens Platinum Jubilee Celebrations.

2.19 After an initial year of targeted tree planting programmes which have taken place across the borough the service will be undertaking a review of its consultation processes and is inviting feedback from Elected Members on local groups in order to shape a new Consultation protocol for future tree planting programmes.

Additional Investment

2.20 On 2nd March 2022 the Council approved its budget for the year ahead which included:

- Permanent investment in supporting tree planting programmes through the provision of a dedicated Trees & Woodlands Engagement Officer and a small operating budget to support engagement programmes. The total investment for this provision is £50,000 per year.
- An additional allocation of £100,000 to the base Tree Service budget to be ring fenced to support additional works from service requests and member case work.

2.21 The Tree Management Protocol & Guidance sets out a RAG rating system for tree works following tree inspections which is used to prioritise its available resources.

RAG Rating	Description	Timescale
	Urgent or emergency works requiring the removal of immediate danger	24 hours response and works within one month
	Foreseeable threat or risk that requires remediation or repair	Within six months
	Works that would be of benefit to the trees health but are not health and safety related	When resources allow

2.22 The Protocol and Guidance introduced a more conciliatory approach to tree management taking a case-by-case view of where tree works might be required to improve the quality of life for residents but where these works were identified the service did not have the means to undertake them. Previously the Tree Service budget allowed only for 'Red' works with a backlog of 'Amber' works to the value of £158,000 and a backlog of requested 'Green' works to the value of £5,000.

2.23 Additional investment added to the base budget for the service will be ringfenced to case work and will be apportioned as follows:

- 70% of the budget is allocated to 'Amber' works to prevent future service requests.

- 5% of the budget is allocated to undertaking existing 'Green' works.
- The remaining allocation is held to manage 'Green' service requests throughout the year
- Any remaining funds in January 2023 will be used to manage the backlog of 'Amber' works at that time.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 This report is for information however members are invited to comment on its content and provide feedback on the consultation process for tree planting programmes.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 There are no specific proposals as the report is for information purposes. However, elements of the activities outlined in this report such as the location of future sites for tree planting will be consulted upon in due course as they are identified.

5. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications (to be written by the relevant Head of Finance and the Head of Procurement on behalf of s151 Officer)

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report, which is for information purposes. The body of the report includes information on both Council investment and external funding, which has supported both the management of the Council's existing tree stock and the development of new planting schemes across the borough

6. Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)

6.1 There are no direct Legal implications arising from this report.

7. Human Resources Advice and Implications

7.1 There are no direct HR implications arising from this report.

8. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

8.1 Encouraging children and young people to learn about the natural environment, conservation and climate change is a key aspect of the Trees Service's work. In the last nine months partnerships have been developed with six schools and more are in discussion with volunteer programmes established with young people's charities and volunteer groups including Rotherham Scouts, and Rotherham Fire Cadets.

8.2 Examples of work with schools include:

- Winterhill School Outdoor Learning & Conservation
Winterhill School Ponds Project Group were one of the first groups to take part in tree planting on Winterhill Field planting several of the trees in the first section of planting. Lots of trees were carefully planted and with the group meeting regularly to do conservation work on site will be checking on the trees.
- Eldon Road Adopt a Tree Programme
This was delivered in partnership with Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust Natural Neighbours team. Trees were planted and the local schools adopted a tree each (due to tree size they couldn't actually plant the tree). The Trees were placed in pre-dug holes by the Council's Grounds Maintenance team and students planted bulbs around the trees. They then named their tree and an information board was put on each with

the species, the trees adopted name (one is called Buzz) and which school had adopted it.

9. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 9.1 The service is committed to ensuring equal access to its trees and woodlands. The service undertakes specific Equality Impact Assessments relating to its activities and hosts regular consultation sessions working with a diverse range of groups with protected characteristics.

10. Implications for Partners

- 10.1 Over the coming months the Council will work with partners to convene a group of landowners and estate managers in order to co-produce a shared Tree Planting Strategy. The aim of the Strategy is to:
- Agree shared targets for tree planting, rewilding and woodland creation
 - Identity areas of land and estate across the borough that is suitable for planting programmes
 - Unlock further funding and investment in environmental programmes, education and climate conservation

11. Risks and Mitigation

- 11.1 Competition for funds: In the short term, funding for new tree planting and management of existing woodlands has been available from a number of external funding bodies and a number of successful bids has allowed the service to over achieve on its early forecasts and targets as described above. Funding has also been sought in partnership with the other three South Yorkshire local authorities, the SYMCA and Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust and the Yorkshire Wildlife trust along with other partners in a consortium known as the South Yorkshire Woodland Creation Partnership to allow capacity building and further shared external bidding for trees and woodland expansion.
- 11.2 However, longer term funding for tree planting and woodland creation is uncertain and could reduce the Councils capacity to continue to increase woodland cover in the medium and long term.
- 11.3 Damage to new planting schemes: The right tree in the right place is a concept adopted by the Councils Green Spaces Service which hopes to reduce perceived nuisance reports in future by planting suitable species in urban locations so that trees are more welcomed by their near neighbours.
- 11.4 A minority of planting schemes have seen some early resistance from individuals or have fallen foul of vandalism and have suffered damage to or complete removal of newly planted trees. The current level of damage and early loss is within the 10% expected and is sustainable within the schemes overall objectives but will remain a risk if damage or removal increases.
- 11.5 Identification of suitable land for planting: Further work is required to identify suitable land for tree planting both in the urban and woodland context. Many residents welcome trees but there are also many that are resistant to new trees near their properties. We hope to overcome these fears through engagement and sharing information regarding to positive benefits trees provide and the development of a clearer consultation protocol. We are also seeking further land for woodland expansion but at a time of demand for land for new homes, green energy production and other uses there is a call on suitable sites for a number of beneficial uses. In

future we hope to be able to work more with private landowners to provide space for trees. To this end we are starting to make these links with larger landowning bodies such as Wentworth Estates and Parish Councils.

12 Accountable Officer(s)

Leanne Buchan, Acting Assistant Director, Culture, Sport & Tourism

Approvals obtained on behalf of: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive		Click here to enter a date.
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Named officer	Click here to enter a date.
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Named officer	Click here to enter a date.
Assistant Director of Human Resources (if appropriate)		Click here to enter a date.
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)		Click here to enter a date.

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