



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

28 September 2021

Report of: Councillor Dr Peter Moseley

Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations



Update on tree planting ambitions

This report provides an overview of tree planting activities within South Kesteven. It also provides an update and sets out options in relation to the ambitions that emerged from the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussion on the 8 June 2021.

Report Author

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Corporate Priority:	Decision type:	Wards:
Clean and Sustainable Environment	Non-Key	All Wards

Reviewed by:	Phil Moore – Special Projects Manager (Planning)	10 September 2021
Approved by:	Gary Smith – Director of Commercial & Operations	13 September 2021
Signed off by:	Councillor Dr Peter Moseley, Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations	17 September 2021

Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s)

1. Note the positive progress and opportunity to continue to work together with Lincolnshire County Council to increase the speed and scale of tree planting across the county.
2. Note the ongoing work with the Woodland Trust and continued opportunities to work jointly, including reviewing grant funding opportunities.
3. Consider the four outlined options for the establishment of new trees on Council managed open spaces, whether these should be recommended to Cabinet and how these could be funded, subject to consultation with local stakeholders.

- 4. Note the limited space that South Kesteven District Council has to develop additional tree planting on amenity spaces.**
- 5. Endorse the enhancement to the tree replacement approach for Council managed trees to plant at least two trees for any trees that need to be removed.**
- 6. Explore the best models for future long-term stewardship of trees and landscaping within large scale developments.**

1 The Background to the Report

- 1.1 This report aims to respond to discussions which took place at the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on [8 June 2021](#) and to provide a comprehensive update on the South Kesteven District Council's tree planting ambitions.
- 1.2 Trees will play an important role in helping us adapt to a warmer world: trees near rivers help to improve water quality and flood risk, and in our towns help to provide shade. The benefits of trees and greenspace for wellbeing and mental health is also becoming better understood.
- 1.3 Tree planting can also play a role in national ambitions to achieve net-zero carbon emissions, through their capacity to absorb and store carbon. Natural climate solutions, including tree planting, can be considered an essential complement to, but not a replacement for, ongoing efforts to decarbonise the economy. The establishment of new wooded areas can play an important role in carbon sequestration and offer potential as assured carbon offset mechanisms. Planting trees and establishing new woodland as a method of carbon capture also is resoundingly popular: the UK's Citizen's Climate Assembly found that 99% of all respondents voted for forests as a means of greenhouse gas removals in the UK.
- 1.4 As a county, Lincolnshire has one of the lowest levels of tree cover in England, at 5.67% compared to an average for England of around 10%. The UK Government published the new [England Trees Action Plan](#) in May 2021, which sets out the target for tree cover in England to be at least 12% by mid-century. This document includes a call to action for stakeholders to help deliver on the long-term vision for trees and woods in England:
 - Apply for grants for establishing and managing trees and woodlands;
 - Access more and better advice and guidance on establishing and managing trees and woodlands;
 - Work with the UK government to unlock more private finance to invest in trees and woodlands;
 - Plant trees particularly where they make the most difference – for water, biodiversity, climate resilience and close to where people work, live and play;
 - Responsibly enjoy wooded landscapes.
- 1.5 South Kesteven District Council is itself responsible for the management of around 6,000 trees of varying age and maturity. The Council's *Tree Guidelines for the Management of Trees in South Kesteven* were approved on [17 September 2019](#). This guidance sets out the Council's approach as an authority to tree management and protection within the district, noting the need to balance safety with amenity concerns and continuity of care for all the Council's tree stock. This document included the new Member Tree Notification Protocol, which outlines who will be notified in the event of major tree works. This document helped to formalise the approach to trees and tree management.
- 1.6 South Kesteven District Council further recognised the value of trees through working with the Woodland Trust to develop and adopt the Local Government Charter for Trees, Woods and People at Cabinet on [12 November 2019](#). This endorses ten key principles to endorse the Council's community leadership role, while recognising the need to balance positive commitments to trees with wider responsibilities including safety, value for money, public amenity and development and growth.

- 1.7 There are several key considerations the Council should have in respect to trees or establishment of any new trees in Council owned open space. It is recommended new trees are not established in close proximity to dwellings to avoid any future potential issues that mature trees can pose to buildings. Consideration should also be given towards any future development plans for the site in question, and whether this is compatible with the establishment of trees. Trees planted with sensitivity to their surrounds have the most potential to offer benefits to the community and to the wider environment. Additionally, there is finite potential for the limited amount of amenity land which the Council manages for new tree planting. Any planting proposals would be expected to be subject to further consultation with local residents and users to ensure that any potential tension between current use of space and future use for tree planting is aligned.
- 1.8 In a discussion regarding ambitions to increase the speed and scale of tree planting as part of the response to the climate emergency on [8 June 2021](#), Members noted that the Council has limited suitable land for tree planting. There is a significant opportunity to engage with communities and key partners in the district to maximise uptake of tree planting schemes, making use of grant funding opportunities where possible. There are also opportunities to promote or prompt this through the planning system and working with developers.

Recent tree planting schemes that have been taken forward by South Kesteven District Council and partners include the Wyndham Park Grantham Heroes Commemorative Orchard, where 75 fruit trees were planted on land leased from the National Trust, and South Kesteven District Council supported the Wyndham Park Forum and coordinated a crowdfunding effort for the work.

2 Tree planting and Planning

2.1 Current work

- 2.1.1 The Council's Planning Department has been working proactively to encourage more tree planting, as well as better landscape design and management within new developments. This is being achieved in a number of ways including through policies in the local plan, pre-application advice given by officers and recommendations/decisions on planning applications.
- 2.1.2 Regarding planning policy, the Council's adopted local plan ([adopted 30 January 2020](#)) is much stronger on sustainability, climate change, design and environmental issues, than previous versions. This is consistent with national planning policy. Overall there is now a much greater emphasis on good design than previously – tree planting and landscaping, (including street trees) are key components to good design. Notably, the latest version of the National Planning Policy Framework (August 2021) contains the following paragraph:
- 2.1.3 *“Trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments, and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards), that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible. Applicants and local planning authorities should work with highways officers and tree officers to ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places, and solutions are found that are compatible with highways standards and the needs of different users.”*

- 2.1.4 The Planning team now benefit from greater expertise including an in-house design officer and retained landscape and arboricultural consultants. The team has set up monthly “Design PAD” meetings – these are round table meetings with developers, planners and relevant consultees where pre-application enquiries and planning applications are discussed with a view to improving design. Through this forum planners have been able to negotiate improved proposals from developers including more trees and better landscaping.
- 2.1.5 Street Trees – over the past couple of years, Lincolnshire County Council Highways have taken much more of a “placemaking” approach to new development, as opposed to their previous more rigid engineering led approach. Working in collaboration with South Kesteven District Council planners, they now positively encourage street trees within new development and will adopt them. As a result, many more developments being approved include street trees.
- 2.1.6 Liaison with the Woodland Trust – Planning Officers are working proactively with the Woodland Trust and the promoters of major developments including the two garden villages allocated in the Local Plan (Spitalgate Heath and Prince William of Gloucester Barracks) to evolve masterplans and landscape strategies to maximise tree planting. The Woodland Trust are also routinely consulted on pre-application enquiries and planning applications where there is a potential impact on woodland or significant new tree planting.
- 2.1.7 Prince William of Gloucester Barracks – the local plan allocation policy requires “*the feasible retention of as much existing woodland as possible including recently planted areas, as well as the provision of new areas of woodland and green access routes*”. The policy recognises that not all of the recently planted Diamond Jubilee Woodland can be retained if the site is developed to accommodate the policy requirement of a minimum of 3500-4000 dwellings, and it is recognised that some compensatory planting will be needed off site. Officers are working with the promoters to help identify suitable sites nearby for new planting – these could include Council owned land.
- 2.2 **Future Aspirations regarding tree planting**
- 2.2.1 Stewardship – the planning team are exploring the best models for future long-term stewardship of trees and landscaping within large scale developments – particularly the two garden village schemes. The district already has a good example of a large-scale development with stewardship undertaken by a Community Trust, at Elsea Park in Bourne, which has carried out proactive tree planting.
- 2.2.2 Further opportunities include more strongly worded landscape conditions on planning permissions, including enforceable landscape management plans, which are being considered.
- 2.2.3 There is also a potential review of tree preservation orders (TPOs) which could possibly include more TPOs.
- 2.2.4 Currently the Planning Team use the services of a consultant arboriculturalist to advise on tree related applications. There are potential cost savings and other benefits from employing a full time in-house arboriculturalist who could offer advice to other departments as well as Planning.
- 2.2.5 There is increasingly closer liaison with the Sustainability and Climate Change Officer and other Council departments on tree and environmental issues.

3 Council Tree Planting Proposals

- 3.1 In addition to the Council's own work and aspirations around tree establishment, Lincolnshire County Council are also advancing work with the same goal of planting new trees. In an announcement of budget proposals on [21 February 2020](#), Lincolnshire County Council announced that the Council will plant one tree for every resident in Lincolnshire within the next three to five years, and have committed to replant at least four trees for every removed while undertaking key projects. The potential for establishing new saplings alongside highways developments is noted, and further sites will need to be identified to meet the goal of planting at least 750,000 trees in the next three to five years. There is significant potential for the two authorities to work in tandem to identify sites within South Kesteven, and to attract grant funding to increase the speed and scale of tree planting in the district.
- 3.2 Proposals for increasing the speed and scale of tree planting schemes have been discussed and considered for this report and include a number of projects as detailed below.
- 3.3 As proposed at the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on [8 June 2021](#), four sites, one in each town of the district, have now been identified for potential additional tree planting. Further detail of this is included at Appendix A, which includes high level site details. Proposed high level costs are included as below:

Average cost of single sapling and maintenance in year 1	Cost per site, based on 20 trees	Total cost for four sites
£375	£7500	£30,000

- 3.4 In order to proceed, funding for these four sites would need to be identified and allocated. It is hoped that grant opportunities may be identified for this planting, including external grant funding (eg Woodland Trust), SK Community Fund grant (this would require partnership working with a community group or parish/town council). Otherwise, there is potential to review unassigned but within scope s106 funds or reprioritisation of existing budgets from across the Council.
- 3.5 If funding is secured and the rollout approved, it is proposed that the relevant SKDC ward Councillor/s are engaged to seek the views of local residents, groups and the parish/town council.
- 3.6 In addition to the above proposal which makes use of Council open amenity space, there is further potential to review the viability of several Housing Revenue Account open spaces. While there may be additional considerations here around proximity to dwellings and current use of open space, there are several areas that may be good candidates for tree planting schemes. A site is currently being investigated with the requisite Parish Council to better understand site specific requirements to establish new trees.
- 3.7 The Council's approach to tree planting and replacement is that new trees will be planted in suitable Council open space if budgets allow, as detailed in the *Tree Guidelines for the*

Management of Trees in South Kesteven agreed on [17 September 2019](#). The practice is that at least one tree is planted or any tree removed. There is potential to consider strengthening this so that the Council commits to plant two new trees whenever a tree needs to be removed, as part of the Council's support for wider tree planting in the district. This is expected to be able to be achieved within existing budgets.

- 3.8 South Kesteven District Council liaised with Lincolnshire County Council to participate in a joint partnership bid they were coordinating into the DEFRA Treescapes fund, which made available £2.7 million on a competitive basis to increase tree planting and natural regeneration in local communities. Top tier authorities were eligible to apply and each of the districts engaged with the call for sites. South Kesteven District Council proposed that 500 trees be included in the bid for the district, with potential identified to engage with Parish Councils who may be interested in developing tree planting schemes for their land holdings. The final application was submitted by Lincolnshire County Council in early June 2021, and at the time of writing, the successful applicants to the Treescapes fund have not been notified. However, a successful allocation would be a significant boost to planned tree planting in the district.
 - 3.8.1 As part of this bid, Lincolnshire County Council contacted Parish Councils throughout the county to understand interest in tree planting schemes in Parish Council managed spaces. Further conversation with Lincolnshire County Council found that there was a strong response from Parishes based in South Kesteven in particular, which saw the most expressions of interest of each of the Lincolnshire districts, and included one proposal for a larger planting scheme at Swinstead. There is potential to further review sites with Parish and Town Councils for future work or should the Treescapes fund bid for Lincolnshire not prove successful for this round.
 - 3.8.2 A call of interest to landholders and farmers in Lincolnshire was also held, with the assistance of the National Farmers Union. There was a strong response from this across the county to participate in the Treescapes bid, as well as participating in future grant funded schemes for tree planting that may become available.
 - 3.8.3 Lincolnshire County Council have expressed an interest in continuing to work closely with South Kesteven District Council to meet joint ambitions to increase tree planting in the district, and to work together to attract grant funding to achieve that goal.
- 3.9 South Kesteven District Council have also contacted the National Farmers Union to discuss further how we can support and promote tree planting with landowners in the district. The England Woodland Creation Offer has been raised as a significant new opportunity for interested parties. The new fund is open to landowners, land managers and public bodies to receive financial support to create new woodlands on areas of land as small as one hectare. This grant offers improved financial rewards compared to previous tree and woodland creation grant schemes and recognises the role of essential ecosystem services like flood prevention that trees can play.
- 3.10 Furthering work with the Woodland Trust also represents a significant opportunity to advance work around tree planting. The Council continues to hold regular meetings with key Woodland Trust contacts to discuss projects and furthering support for tree protection and establishment within the Council's remit. The Council is also exploring opportunities with the Woodland Trust for possible additional tree planting which could be part of the wider Queen's Green Canopy (QGC) initiative. The QGC has been created to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee in 2022, and will create a national network of trees, avenues,

copses and woodlands in honour of the Queen's service and legacy she has built. Options are being developed with the Woodland Trust who are keen to support and it may be possible for the Woodland Trust to fund.

- 3.11 Linked to this, the Woodland Trust have made the Council aware of their new Emergency Tree Fund, targeted at local authorities. The application process for this is expected to be announced later in 2021, and several opportunities for tree planting schemes and wider opportunities to promote and support tree establishment are being reviewed in advance of this scheme opening for applications. The Woodland Trust have shared examples of their work with other local authorities in the pilot phase, which included one council who engaged Parish Councils in a successful call for planting sites, and another authority who focussed on urban street trees.
- 3.12 Regarding wider work to promote tree planting, it is recognised that the Council has an important community leadership role. As well as considering where tree planting schemes can be developed for the Council's open spaces, there is a significant opportunity to develop a hub of resources for all interested stakeholders in the district. This could signpost residents, businesses, farmers, landholders and land managers, Parish and Town Councils and any other interested party towards information on tree planting and direct towards any available sources of grant funding to support establishment of new trees.
- 3.13 Finally, the Council continues to have an opportunity to look to reduce paper used for general office printing, committees and agenda packs, and wider communications with residents. While the Council has obligations which necessitate the use of printed media, and covid lockdowns have helped to reduce general office printing, opportunities still can be explored to reduce paper where possible. Any reduction in paper used by the Council will help to reduce trees felled globally, as well as providing a cost saving for the Council.

4 Consultation and Feedback Received, Including Overview and Scrutiny

- 4.1 The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered two presentations at the meeting of [8 June 2021](#) and agreed the actions set out within this report.
- 4.2 Consultation regarding tree planting opportunities has been ongoing with colleagues at Lincolnshire County Council, who have expressed support for working closely with South Kesteven District Council to increase the speed and scale of tree planting.

5 Available Options Considered

- 5.1 The Council could choose to focus only on its managed open spaces as the focus for tree planting schemes. While there would be a significant level of control for new planting schemes, viable space is currently limited to bring forward larger planting schemes.
- 5.2 The Council could focus exclusively on opportunities to increase the speed and scale of tree planting outside of its land holdings. This offers more scale to develop schemes.

6 Preferred Option

- 6.1 Consider the recommendations as set out and develop Council open amenity areas including the proposal at paragraph 3.3, as well as furthering work with Lincolnshire County Council, the Woodland Trust, the National Farmers Union and other key stakeholders to maximise opportunities to increase the speed and scale of tree planting in the district.

7 Reasons for the Recommendation (s)

- 7.1 This approach recognises that the Council can have an important role in making use of its own spaces, where possible, to develop new tree planting areas that will provide significant community and amenity benefit as they develop. Furthermore, the most significant opportunity to maximise tree planting potential is to encourage stakeholders throughout the district to consider where tree planting schemes could be developed, from small urban additions of trees to larger plantations.

8 Next Steps – Communication and Implementation of the Decision

- 8.1 This report sets out several points for consideration which can help increase the speed and scale of tree planting.

9 Financial Implications

- 9.1 There is currently no Council budget to fund the four tree planting options set out in paragraph 3.3 for a total £30k. Grant funding would need to be secured to fund these or a budget amendment agreed by Cabinet which would require the identification and reprioritisation of funds from elsewhere.

Financial Implications reviewed by: Richard Wyles, Assistant Director of Finance and s151 Officer

10 Legal and Governance Implications

- 10.1 There are no specific legal or governance implications from the proposals set out.

Legal Implications reviewed by: Mandy Braithwaite, Legal Executive

11 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

- 11.1 No significant issues identified.

12 Risk and Mitigation

- 12.1 The risks and the Council's management obligations for established trees are set out in the Tree Guidelines for the Management of Trees in South Kesteven. These considerations should also be given where newly planted trees are being established.

13 Community Safety Implications

- 13.1 No significant issues identified.

14 How will the recommendations support South Kesteven District Council's declaration of a climate emergency?

- 14.1 The establishment of new trees within the Council's remit will help support wider objectives around climate change. Whilst not within the Council's carbon footprint, additional trees planted are an essential complement to ongoing decarbonisation works, as well as supporting national ambitions for additional tree cover in England.

15 Background Papers

- 15.1 17 September 2019 (item 15):
<http://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/documents/s23924/2019-9-17%20-%20Env%20OSC%20-%20Tree%20Guidelines%20Report.pdf>

- 15.2 12 November 2019 (item 40):
<http://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/documents/s24267/2019-10-8%20-%20Cabinet%20-%20Tree%20Guidelines%20Report%20v2.pdf>
- 15.3 30 January 2020 (item 77):
<http://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/documents/s24718/Council%20report%20300120%20Local%20Plan.pdf>
- 15.4 21 February 2020, Lincolnshire County Council Budget Speech 2020:
<https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/3597/lcc-budget-speech-2020-pdf>
- 15.5 8 June 2021 (item 6):
<http://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=630&MId=4098&Ver=4>
- 15.6 The England Trees Action Plan, UK Government:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/987432/england-trees-action-plan.pdf

Report Timeline:	Date of Publication on Forward Plan (if required)	n/a
	Previously Considered by: Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee	8 June 2021
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