



SOUTH  
KESTEVEN  
DISTRICT  
COUNCIL



# Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date 14<sup>th</sup> March 2023

Report of Councillor Mark Whittington,  
Cabinet Member for Waste and Climate  
Change

## Development of a Tree Strategy for South Kesteven

### Report Author

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### Purpose of Report

To provide an update regarding a tree strategy for South Kesteven.

### Recommendations

#### That the Committee:

1. Notes the update regarding the development of a Tree Strategy for the district of South Kesteven.

### Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	Healthy and strong communities Clean and sustainable environment
Which wards are impacted?	All wards

## 1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

### ***Finance and Procurement***

- 1.1 Although there is a specific budget of £20,000 identified for climate change projects although there would be no direct costs incurred by the Council if the Lincolnshire County Council Woodland Creation Officers draft the strategy and subsequently apply for funding on behalf of the wider County.

Completed by: Richard Wyles, Chief Finance Officer

### ***Legal and Governance***

- 1.2 There are no legal or governance implications of this report.

Completed by: Graham Watts, Assistant Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer

### ***Climate Change***

- 2.6 While tree planting programmes provide a host of benefits, it is important to understand that tree planting alone will not deliver the significant carbon reductions required to mitigate climate change within the district.

Completed by: Serena Brown, Sustainability and Climate Change Officer

## 2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 In order to help achieve this, the government has targeted 30,000 Ha of new tree planting each year until 2025, recognising the wider role of the right tree in the right place helping us reach our legally binding carbon mitigation goals. Trees also play a potentially more significant role in adapting to a changing climate: 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.
- 2.4 Further benefits accrue either through biodiversity enhancement, or through the production of commercial timber products for construction, where the UK currently imports 93 per cent of its requirements.
- 2.5 Local authorities are looking to make progress on the ground to meet this target. To enable this and target informed selection of sites for wider scale planting, local authorities are starting to produce tree strategies, and some have commenced mass planting programmes.
- 2.6 While tree planting programmes provide a host of benefits, it is important to understand that tree planting alone will not deliver the significant carbon reductions required to mitigate climate change. Trees, even planted at scale, take many decades to become effective carbon sinks and action is required more immediately to reduce carbon emissions. A tree planting programme can however deliver immediate benefits for adapting to climate change as well as addressing biodiversity loss.

### County context

- 2.7 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%. This reflects the high

proportion of land use dedicated to agriculture in the county, as well as habitats such as wetlands which are not appropriate for tree planting.

- 2.8 Lincolnshire County Council has set the ambitious target of planting 750,000 trees by 2025, roughly equivalent to 1 tree per resident of Lincolnshire. They have been successful in obtaining funding for tree planting schemes in 2021/22 through the Local Authority Treescapes fund, which saw over 10,000 trees planted in the Lincolnshire County Council area.
- 2.9 Lincolnshire County Council has also been awarded funding through the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund, which provides financial support to increase the capacity of local authorities to deliver tree and woodland creation commitments. Through this funding, it is expected to appoint two new Woodland Creation Officer roles in 2023, who will be responsible for work with district, parish and town councils to develop sites for tree planting in Lincolnshire.

### **South Kesteven context**

- 2.10 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.
- 2.11 South Kesteven District Council was invited to apply to the Woodland Trust's Local Authority Emergency Tree Funding and developed a bid in late 2021. This bid focused on funding for a fixed-term officer post to develop a Tree Strategy for South Kesteven, identify SK owned sites for further tree planting and work with other landowners on larger scale tree planting opportunities. Unfortunately, we were made aware in June 2022 that the funding bid was not successful.

### **Links to Corporate priorities**

- 2.12 The Council has obligations around the approximately 6,000 trees found on Council owned or managed open spaces. These are surveyed to ensure the health of the tree and that they do not pose any safety issues from fallen limbs. While there is potential for further tree planting on Council managed open spaces within the district, these spaces are limited.
- 2.13 There is an ongoing requirement from the planning and development management directorate to have comments on ecological and biodiversity improvements. This is currently secured externally on a pro rata basis of around 1 day per week.
- 2.14 The Environment Act (2021) included some detail on expectations for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) approach to development for Local Planning Authorities. Currently expected to come into force from November 2023, there will be a requirement for planning permissions granted to have to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain. This will be reflected in updated planning policy. While a number of varied habitat types will need to be delivered through BNG duties, there is potential to use this mechanism for additional tree planting.

## **Options for strategy development**

- 2.15 There is an opportunity for further work with newly appointed officers at Lincolnshire County Council, to review and refine a tree policy and strategy and appropriate site selection for tree planting.
- 2.16 It may be possible to appoint external support to take forward a Tree Strategy or undertake specific areas of research to develop an evidence base as required.
- 2.17 The development of a new fixed-term post to take forward a Tree Strategy as well as outcomes and planting plans from a completed strategy can be considered. A new role would likely add additional value to the work of the planning team and provide more robust guidance on tree and woodland management.
- 2.18 Considerations are also being made around new obligations for biodiversity net gain and ensuring this is appropriately resourced across the county. There may be some overlap in ensuring tree planting projects deliver the right trees in the right place, and delivery of biodiversity net gain.

## **Sources of support for delivery**

- 2.19 The Local Authority Treescapes Fund (LATF) is a key government offer to local authorities to restore tree cover in non-woodland areas. The fund is focused on planting and natural colonisation of trees in areas outside of woodlands, including parklands, riparian zones, urban areas, beside footpaths and roads and trees in hedgerows and field boundaries (although not hedgerows themselves).
- 2.20 Lincolnshire County Council were successful in securing funding from a previous round of LATF funding to help meet ambitions to plant 750,000 trees within Lincolnshire by 2025. A third round of funding has recently been announced for local authorities, noting partnership arrangements to deliver tree planting schemes are welcomed.
- 2.21 A separate source of funding, the Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCf) is also available to provide 80% of the costs of planting and establishment of trees in urban and peri-urban areas. This is open to a broad range of applicants and is not limited to local authorities.
- 2.22 It is also important to consider obligations for ongoing management of trees once planted and once established.

## **3. Key Considerations**

- 3.1 The report provided is for information rather than decision. Members are asked to take note of the report contents.

## **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1 The Council could appoint consultancy support to draft a Tree Strategy, this would incur a cost to the authority.

- 4.2 We could not adopt a Tree Strategy, but this would mean that we would be less likely to apply for funding opportunities without this in place.

## **5. Reasons for the Recommendations**

- 5.1 The LCC Woodland Creation officers are to be appointed to work across the whole of Lincolnshire providing this support and subsequent funding applications. There is understood to be no cost implications to SKDC for this support, but they are unlikely to take up appointments until summer 2023.

## **6. Background Papers**

- 6.1 17 September 2019 (item 15): [2019-9-17 - Env OSC - Tree Guidelines Report.pdf \(southkesteven.gov.uk\)](https://www.southkesteven.gov.uk/2019-9-17-Env-OSC-Tree-Guidelines-Report.pdf)