

Environment Sub Committee

Tuesday, 7 September 2021

Present: Councillor B Burdis (Chair)
Councillors G Bell, L Bell, M Green, M Hall, J Harrison,
C Johnston, J Kirwin, G Madden, J Mole and J Shaw

In attendance:
Councillor M Thirlaway

Apologies: Councillors P McIntyre

E5/21 Declaration of Interests and Dispensations

There were no Declarations of Interest or Dispensations reported.

E6/21 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

E7/21 Review of Tree Management Policy and proposed Tree Planting Strategy

Consideration was given to a report which outlined the latest version of the Authority's Tree Management Policy following a review. The report also presented an overview of a proposed Tree Planting Strategy.

In July 2019 the Authority had declared a climate emergency which reflected the Authority's commitment to tackling climate change and preserving the natural environment in North Tyneside. The Authority had worked with a range of stakeholders to develop a Climate Emergency Action Plan in which it had been recognised that trees had an important part to play in meeting the agreed targets through the removal of carbon emissions from the atmosphere.

The Authority's Tree Management Policy had been refreshed and a new Tree Planting Strategy had been developed. It was explained that the Tree Management Policy had been updated to contain a section on climate change.

Reference was made to the list of planting locations which had been identified in the Tree Planting Strategy and it was explained that this list was subject to change as suitable land for tree planting was identified and existing proposed planting sites assessed. It was acknowledged that it was important to get the right tree in the right place as the wrong tree in the wrong location caused long term problems for residents and the Authority.

North Tyneside Council was one of 6 local authorities in the region who had joined forces with environmental groups and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to plant up to 500 hectares (ha) of trees across the north east by 2025 as part of the

North East Community Forest. In the first year it was anticipated that up to 25 ha of tree planting would take place across the area and that funding of £480,000 had been secured from Defra's Nature for Climate Fund to facilitate the tree planting. It was explained that it was anticipated that of the 500 ha of tree planting across the area around 4 ha of the planting would take place in North Tyneside, this was due to the limited area available for tree planting in the borough. The Authority had worked with landowners to identify areas for additional tree planting. It was also explained that several successful funding bids had been made for further tree planting in the borough including Trees for Cities. In addition, funding for tree planting had also been secured through Section 106 contributions from developers and the Community Infrastructure Levy in respect of the grant of planning permissions.

Reference was made to the previous removal of a number of trees across the borough and clarification was sought that the Authority had a record of the trees removed. It was explained that where the Authority had been involved in the removal of the trees a suitable record had been kept. It was also explained that if residents in the area wanted the trees to be replaced this could be facilitated but there would need to be a majority of the residents in favour of the replacement of the previously removed trees.

Reference was also made to the number of complaints received from residents in relation to trees that they considered were too close to their property and were causing damage or nuisance. It was explained that historically there had been instances of trees being planted which were not appropriate for the location in which they had been planted, such as street trees. It was suggested that many of these trees had outgrown their location and were causing ongoing issues for residents including shading, damage to footways from root growth and problems with leaf fall.

Clarification was sought in relation to the tree planting plans for the former Fenwick Pit site. It was explained that although some trees had been planted on the site there were parts of the site which were designated a site of special interest, for example as a habitat for the Dingy Skipper Butterfly, which would not be planted. Reference was also made to the need for a variety of planting to take place including hedgerow species to maintain and improve the biodiversity of the area.

Clarification was also sought as to what the proposed tree planting was designed to achieve. It was suggested that there was a need to paint a picture of why trees were important for carbon reduction, protecting the environment, providing habitat and improving the landscape. It was suggested that this could be covered in an amended Section 5 of the Tree Planting Strategy

Reference was made to examples of previous planting in North Tyneside, for example at the Rising Sun Country Park where the results of the planting which occurred over 40 years ago could now be seen. Reference was also made to the benefits that hedgerow planting could have as an alternative to fencing and again this was demonstrated at the park. It was suggested that consideration needed to be given to ensuring that appropriate maintenance was factored in when designing planting schemes. Comments were made in relation to areas of hedgerow, for example on the Waggonways, which would benefit from regular maintenance to improve their condition and visual appearance. It was acknowledged that this would have ongoing resource implications for landowners and this needed to be factored in when designing planting schemes. It was explained that the community forest scheme included an element of funding for future maintenance of any planting schemes.

It was explained that there were currently approximately 140,000 trees in North Tyneside

and an audit of the trees in the borough was to be carried out.

The Sub-committee heard from a member of the public who referred to appropriate maintenance of the existing tree cover in the borough to ensure that the trees remained healthy. Reference was made to trees which had been damaged and therefore required works to repair or remove damaged branches. It was suggested that tree planting was not the only solution in relation to carbon capture as other forms of plant material also contributed to the reduction of carbon in the environment. It was explained that in addition to tree planting the Authority carried out a number of projects in relation to rewilding areas of the borough. Many of the schemes were as part of the Biodiversity Action Plan which had been reported to the Sub-committee at previous meetings. Reference was made to the works carried out in relation to the planning process to enhance habitat in the borough although it was acknowledged that this was only one part of the jigsaw.

The Chair thanked Councillor Thirlaway, the officers and the member of the public for their contribution to the meeting.

Resolved that the report be noted.