
Report to: Green Economy Panel

Date: 7 July 2020

Subject: **White Rose Forest Plan and the Nature for Climate fund**

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1. Purpose of this report

1.1 To provide an interim report on the

1) progress of the White Rose Forest (WRF) Plan with respect to planting targets, the WRF delivery pathway and future governance

2) progress on the England's Community Forest Trees for Climate business case to DEFRA

2 Information

WRF Plan

- 2.1. The White Rose Forest (WRF) is one of four community forests which span the width of England from Liverpool to Hull. It is the delivery vehicle for the Northern Forest¹ in the Leeds City Region, which has backing of £5.7 million from government and a further £10 million from the Woodlands Trust.
- 2.2. The WRF and the development of the WRF Plan is identified in the Leeds City Region Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy as one of 12 key action areas. It recognises the multiple benefits that trees can generate including flood alleviation and improved physical and mental health. Trees also have a key part to play in the region achieving its target of being net-zero carbon by 2038.

The WRF Plan has been taking shape over the last few years. The basic framework and approach is now in place. The current consultation round with WRF Partners is focusing on setting planting and sequestration targets and

¹ The Northern Forest is an ambitious plan to plant around 50 million trees from Liverpool to Hull over the next 25 years.

the practicalities of setting up and resourcing a multi-partner WRF Delivery Pathway.

The basic multi partner framework can be outlined as follows

- 1) Co-ordinated landowner marketing and engagement
- 2) Multi-disciplinary design (Right tree right place etc)
- 3) Wider stakeholder involvement in funding and delivery

The two programmes that operate under this framework are

1) Landscapes for Water (catchment approach / rural)

The priority catchments for landowner engagement are the Aire , the Calder and the S.U.N.O (Swale, Ure, Nidd and Ouse) catchments. Our priority landowners are Yorkshire Water and the National Trust.

2) Green Streets (key transport corridors/urban areas)

The priority landowners are Local Authorities and Highways England.

It is still intended that the WRF Plan will be completed and approved by December 2020

2.3 Setting Targets

The primary target in the WRF Plan will be for increasing the area of tree canopy cover by 2050 for the Leeds city region. It is currently 11.2%. The WRF Carbon Group is undertaking a carbon led approach to this using a range of data from the Forestry Commission and others such as Blue Sky digitised tree canopy data, Woodland Carbon Code, Leeds I-tree study, Woodland for Water, Low Risk planting data and the Ecological Site Classification. The study will provide a realistic range for increasing tree cover and, from that, provide a meaningful assessment of the city region's carbon sequestration potential. We hope to provide a range of options for each Local Authority to consider by September 2020. This work will be linked to both the West and North Yorkshire emissions pathway work streams.

The WRF Plan will set out a clear targets for actual planting schemes for both its programmes in the next 5 years. Currently, subject to funding, it stands at

Landscapes for Water including Yorkshire Water and National Trust land (Common Cause)		1535 hectares
Green Streets including Local Authority land		1080 hectares

Other targets

The WRF Plan will look at setting targets for bringing ancient semi natural woodland into management under a **Woodland Ways** programme

Secondary metrics for biodiversity (exploring links with DEFRA's Biodiversity Net Gain), flood reduction, health and air quality, access and community engagement are being considered based on the simple use of geographic information systems (GIS) and incorporating suitable design processes.

These secondary metrics will be the basis for scoring schemes entering the WRF Delivery Pathway.

It should be noted that DEFRA's current Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)metric does not fully support the benefits of woodland and is artificially weighted in favour of non -tree habitats. This has been raised with DEFRA and the Forestry Commission nationally. If this is not resolved then there will be an unnecessary competition between a BNG and WRF "landbanks" in West Yorkshire. The Right Tree in the Right Place approach should provide the optimum biodiversity benefits for both tree and non-tree habitats within the same design process as successfully demonstrated with the Gorpley Reservoir project.

2.4 Some WRF Plan highlights

1) Landowner engagement

The multi partner approach to landowner engagement is being pioneered in the Aire catchment in partnership with the Leeds FAS 2 NFM programme. The contract with the Environment Agency has been delayed due to Covid 19 but is expected to start in October. It should be noted that this project is exploring some interesting innovation that could, if successful ,provide real benefits for the Northern Forest and beyond.

2) WRF Staff capacity boost

Kirklees Council, the accountable body for the WRF joint venture has, as a response to its climate emergency declaration, agreed to employ two further staff members to support the WRF Partnership Manager in the development of the WRF Plan

Firstly, a Data Analyst/GIS manager to help set up a region wide GIS platform to record data and plan for the change in woodland cover

Secondly, an External Relations manager to work the WRF website and its donations facility as well as link up WRF partners to provide a continual supply of good news stories across the city region as part of a **Trees for Yorkshire** campaign

3) WRF structures update

Each Local Authority in the Leeds city region (except Barnsley) has now set up a **District WRF Group** to help steer its response to the WRF Plan locally.

Leeds CC have hosted a Chairs of the Districts WRF Group to bring together all the Chairs and WRF Leads in each District into one group. This group will meet twice a year and help co-ordinate delivery on Local Authority land across the city region.

It should be noted that most Local Authorities have allocated additional staff time and financial resources to expanding tree cover within their respective landownerships.

The **WRF Funders' Group** has also been established to bring together all tree planting and woodland creation funders into one place to help link the right funding for the right project.

4) WRF Delivery Pathway

The process of long term land use change is a complex process with an array of competing interests. The WRF Delivery Pathway sets out to simplify this process by offering support to landowners, their agents and WRF partners from the initial enquiry stage, through to design and regulatory considerations, finding suitable funding opportunities and exploring delivery options. If no support is required each scheme can still recorded to keep track progress on achieving overall tree planting targets for the city region.

2.5 WRF Governance

The current WRF joint venture (2009) requires updating on account of the following.

- 1) The WRF Plan will require a change of structure and partner responsibility if its new targets are to be met on time
- 2) New partners joining the venture
- 3) The regulatory environment has altered since 2009 so it needs bringing up to date

A **WRF Governance working party** has started work in looking at this issue with a view of providing recommendations for a revised joint venture once the WRF Plan has been agreed in December 2020.

2.6 Northern Forest update

The WRF Plan will be the West and North Yorkshire contribution to the Northern Forest. As an original partner in the formation of the Northern Forest the WRF has stated with Director of Development support its long term

ambition to remain as a core decision making partner on the Northern Forest Board and to ensure the central role of community forestry.

A Northern Forest Operations Group has been set up to bring together best practice from across the Northern Forest.

2.7 Nature for Climate Fund

The Government announced a £640m Nature for Climate Programme on the 11 March 2020 budget. This funding is to support climate mitigation programmes, sequestering and storing carbon from the atmosphere in trees and peat. The Nature for Climate programme is part of an array of actions needed to reach the UK government target of net zero carbon by 2050 to avoid dangerous global temperature rises. The target for this parliament is to plant 30,000 hectares of new trees and woodland.

The England's Community Forest (ECF) network have been invited to submit a proposal to DEFRA to plant 6000 hectares of that target and sequester 2,000,000 tonnes of CO₂. An ECF **Trees for Climate** proposal has been submitted with the WRF contributing at least 1500 hectares to that total. The Forestry Commission nationally are supporting the ECFs proposal.

A decision on the success of this ECF proposal is expected in the Autumn along with other elements of the Nature for Climate fund.

Encouragingly, the first year of revenue support (£2.5million) for the ECF network has been given the go-ahead and therefore at the time of writing Kirklees Council should be expecting, in July, an offer letter for £727,000 for 2020/21 to expand its partnership capacity ("boots on the ground") to develop the delivery pipeline for the expected capital programme.

The allocation of these revenue funds will reflect the current shape of the WRF Plan (Landscapes for Water/Green Streets etc). New posts won't be advertised until the full capital programme is secured in the Autumn as the revenue stream is expected to last over 5 years.

Some points to note

The revenue fund for 2020/21 will include costs for

- 1) Revising the WRF joint venture in early 2021.
- 2) Extending the WRF Carbon study including the Blue Sky digitised data for tree canopy to the rest of North Yorkshire and to Hull and East Yorkshire
- 3) Supporting Local Authorities and Common Cause partners in allocating staff resources to develop the planting pipeline

The capital fund 2020-2025 will include the establishment and management costs of a given site over 15 years.

3. **Financial Implications**

- 3.1 If the Nature for Climate proposal is supported then the necessary approvals within Kirklees Council (as accountable body for the WRF) are required to be in place. A report is currently being written for the 30 June Kirklees Cabinet for this purpose

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 The WRF and other ECF partnerships are currently working with the Forestry Commission to identify a legally secure and robust landowner agreement for woodland creation schemes on 3rd party land.

5. Staffing Implications

- 5.1 The Nature for Climate funding will require the recruitment, in the next 12 months, of between 12-20 new staff across West, North and East Yorkshire and this will provide a challenge for community forestry sector.

6. External Consultees

- 6.1 All 33 of the WRF joint ventures have been consulted on the WRF Plan. The next version will then go out to external landowner organisations such as the National Farmers Union . This can only be done once the status of the Nature for Climate fund is understood.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 The WRF Plan once agreed offered for endorsement by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and used to inform recovery thinking.
- 7.2 The Green Economy Panel be presented in the Autumn with a summary of the WRF Plan once the current round of WRF partner consultation is complete.

8. Background Documents

- 8.1 None

9. Appendices