

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee
DATE	11 June 2024
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Trees and Woodland
REPORT NUMBER	CR&E/24/166
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	Mark Reilly
REPORT AUTHOR	Steven Shaw
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The report provides an update on the ongoing Council work to Aberdeen's public trees and woodland following the storms of 2021, 2022 and 2023.
- 1.2 The report also gives an update on Environmental Services' sustainability projects and initiatives undertaken to protect and enhance Aberdeen's public trees and woodlands including the 1 Million Trees initiative and the work to deliver elements of the Tree & Woodland Strategic Implementation Plan.
- 1.3 This report also seeks approval for Environmental Services to continue to explore funding options, including grants and sponsorship to help fund further tree planting programmes in Aberdeen.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Notes and welcomes the information contained within this report; and
- 2.2 Instructs the Chief Officer – Operations, to continue to explore funding options, including grants and sponsorship to help fund further tree planting in Aberdeen.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

3.1 Storm Damage Work

- 3.1.1 The storms of the last three years have had a devastating impact on Council's tree population and had a significant impact on Aberdeen's open spaces.
- 3.1.2 All types of trees have been affected. A substantial number have blown down, many have been uprooted, branches and limbs snapped off, and several trees left in a precarious and dangerous position. Trees in schools, parks, play areas, open spaces, streets, and woodlands have all been impacted.

- 3.1.3 The Arboricultural team were called out and worked in the worst of the storms to ensure trees were made safe and that roads were cleared for safe access. The team has continued to work continuously on trees and woodland impacted since the storms. Storm damage has been the focus of the team's work since Storm Arwen hit.
- 3.1.4 In February 2022 City Growth and Resources Committee agreed to set aside a sum of £500K from the General Fund Contingency budget, for the Council to deal with the storm damage caused by Storms Arwen, Malik, and Corrie.
- 3.1.5 This additional funding has made an enormous difference to the recovery work. The funding has allowed for additional resources to be brought in to help repair the devastation and tree loss caused by the storms. The team has been able to clear damaged areas, remove high risk trees and replant where trees have been lost. It has allowed woodland devastated by the storms such as Carnie Woods and Hazlehead, to be clear felled and restocked. The funding has also allowed for repair works to be completed. This has included path repairs and fence repairs. All the additional funding has been spent.
- 3.1.6 The majority of tree work required to deal with the damage caused by Storm Arwen has now been completed, but it will take many years for our woodland to fully recover.
- 3.1.7 The impact of the storms has had a devastating impact on Aberdeen's trees, but the team has done an incredible job working through the hundreds of incidents that have resulted from the storms. The recovery work continues to be a focus for the team and is going well.

3.2 Tree & Woodland Strategic Implementation Plan

- 3.2.1 The Tree & Woodland Strategic Implementation Plan was approved by the former Operational Delivery Committee in June 2022. The plan sets out the vision, priorities and an action plan stewardship and expansion of Aberdeen City's urban, street trees, rural trees, and woodlands. It provides a long-term framework for ensuring that their qualities are measurable, recognised, properly valued, protected, and permanently enshrined in the environmental fabric of the city.
- 3.2.2 Work is currently ongoing to deliver Priority 2 of the plan - Expanding and enhancing the Granite City Forest.
- 3.2.3 This work will see a report completed that will provide a rationale to identify the best and most suitable sites for woodland creation in the city. The report that is currently being drafted will categorise areas for planting. This will include a searchable and quantifiable spatial register with analysis maps showing potential sites to take forward and develop as woodland creation schemes.
- 3.2.4 This work will also include Carbon Code (or equivalent) certifications to underpin our Climate Plan and Carbon Budgets.

3.2.5 The next step is for an operational plan to be drawn up with target planting schemes identified. This work will allow for tree planting to begin for the 2024/25 season. This work will be shared with the Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee in due course.

3.3 **Aberdeen Open Space Audit Report 2024**

3.3.1 The work involved in Aberdeen's trees and woodland has a direct link to the Aberdeen Open Space Audit Report. This report will be shared with the Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee in June 2024 for approval.

3.3.2 An Open Space Audit is an evidence gathering exercise used to assist with protecting and enhancing blue-green spaces both through the Planning process, by supporting blue-green infrastructure policies in the Aberdeen Local Development Plan and National Planning Framework 4, the spatial strategies for Aberdeen and Scotland. The Planning system plays an important role in protecting and enhancing open spaces for community use, sport and recreation as well as providing high quality new spaces. Open spaces, natural areas and green belt designations are used to protect our most important environmental assets and areas.

3.3.3 A periodic audit provides key information on the types, distribution, qualities, and accessibility of open and blue-green spaces across Aberdeen. This information is also critical to directing green space policies, management of spaces and the interventions of partners. These Audit findings will inform various strategic outcomes for Aberdeen, for example through the Council's Climate Change Plans, the collective citywide Net Zero Aberdeen, Aberdeen Adapts and associated place-based strategies, especially the Natural Environment Strategy and Place based outcomes in current and future Local Outcome Improvement Plans. The findings will also be of use to professionals across a range of fields, community organisations and city partners to aid in their own approaches to open space.

3.3.4 The audit process identifies community views on the value of open spaces and this was completed through an Aberdeen Open Space Audit Public Survey. The findings from the Survey present the views of residents and visitors on how they use and perceive Aberdeen's green and open spaces.

3.3.5 The key findings of the Audit that link to trees and woodland are -

3,902 hectares of open space were surveyed as part of the Open Space Audit.

Natural / semi natural greenspaces are the largest category of open space with 1796 hectares equating to 46% of open space, with open semi natural space (1057ha 59%) and woodland (687ha 38%) being the primary sub types.

- 82% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to see more greenspaces managed in a more natural way for the benefit of wildlife and nature.

- 49% of respondents said they would be encouraged to visit spaces more often if they were managed for wildlife and nature.

Parks, woodlands and natural or semi-natural areas had the highest citywide satisfaction rates reported by respondents:

- Parks: 86%
- Woodlands: 82%
- Natural or semi-natural areas: 82%

3.3.6 The findings of the Open Space Audit have an important role to play in the future tree and woodland work and specifically with regards to protecting our open spaces and planning future tree planting.

3.4 1 Million Trees

3.4.1 Environmental Services has been restocking areas affected by storm damage and also planting trees on new areas of land identified as suitable for tree planting. The team has worked in partnership with communities, including schools and businesses, to plant trees across Aberdeen.

3.4.2 Environmental Services has planted 38399 trees since the Winter of 2022. This is more tree planting than has been achieved for many years, and we are proud of what has been achieved. We need to say a huge thank you to the local communities who have helped us plant the trees.

Carnie Woods(Arwen damage restocking)	Nov-22	8688
Brotherfield Woods(Restocking after clearfell)	Nov-22	8711
Crematorium amenity strip(Arwen restocking)	Nov-22	800
Inverdee(Scout nature conservation initiative)	Mar-23	334
Ellon Rd(Friends of Westfield Park)	Mar-23	55
Parkway(Friends of Westfield Park)	Mar-23	50
Seaton (Beating up NorthStar plantation)	Mar-24	1000
Hazledene Road(Arwen restocking)	Apr-24	496
Denwood(Arwen restocking)	Apr-24	8925
Tullos Hill(Nature Restoration Fund)	Apr-24	9340
Total May 2024		38399

3.5 Street Tree Planting

3.5.1 A commitment to plant new and replacement street trees continues. Street tree planting has been allocated £12,000 from the Nature Restoration Funding and this will be used to plant new and replace street trees across Aberdeen in the 2024/2025 planting season.

3.6 Woodside Wee Forest

3.6.1 The first Wee Forest was planted in Aberdeen in 2022 thanks to the joint efforts of Aberdeen City Council's Environmental Services team, NatureScot, and pupils and staff of Woodside Primary School.

3.6.2 Led by NatureScot, the programme aims to give people the opportunity to help tackle the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss by creating and caring for their own forest in their own neighbourhood.

3.6.3 To create each forest, around 600 native trees have planted by "Wee Foresters" in an area the size of a tennis court. Volunteer keeper teams look after the forest over the long term and school will use the forest for outdoor learning.

The 600 plants, which include alder, cherry, Scots pine, crab apple, holly, juniper, elder, willow, oak, rowan, and hazel trees along with dog roses, broom, gorse, blaeberry, heather, hawthorn, and blackthorn, have been planted by staff and pupils in a grassy area across Clifton Road from the school with help from the City Council's Countryside Rangers.

3.6.4 Now starting to mature, the Woodside Wee Forest is thriving, with most of the trees in leaf. The Alder and Willow are doing particularly well, now being over two metres tall.

Biodiversity increases in the Wee Forest with every passing year; a variety of invertebrates have colonised the Wee Forest and many are used to feed chicks of the many birds in the greater Woodside area.

The Wee Forest is used every week by outdoor education groups from Woodside Primary School and Nursery, with pupils and staff helping to maintain and monitor the plants.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Funding required to meet the Tree & Woodland Strategic Implementation Plan and Council's ambitions will be identified through commissioning intentions.

4.2 Funding will be a challenge but there are opportunities to access funding and options will be explored by the service through continued positive and constructive collaboration with partners, sponsorship, and appropriate grant funders.

4.3 Environmental Services has funded recent projects with Scottish Government Nature Restoration grant funding, Paths for All grant funding and sponsorship.

Over £50,000 of external funding has been accessed in 2023/24 to fund tree planting and woodland paths projects.

- 4.4 Nature Restoration Funding of £75,000 has been set aside to help with tree planting for the 2024/2025 season.
- 4.5 Street tree planting has been allocated £12,000 from the Nature Restoration Funding and this will be used to plant new and replace street trees across Aberdeen in the 2024/2025 planting season.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Aberdeen’s trees and woodland can help to address the climate change and biodiversity loss crises through sustainable management of the natural environment, by planting the right trees in the right places.
- 6.2 Our tree and woodland work and projects focus strongly on implementation and helping to deliver against the City Council and City’s strategies, notably Net Zero Aberdeen Natural Environment Strategy, Goals 7 and 9 of Aberdeen Adapts, the Council Climate Change Plan and Granite City Growing amongst others.

7. RISK

The assessment of risk contained within the table below is considered to be consistent with the Council’s Risk Appetite Statement.

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) <small>*taking into account controls/control actions</small>	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	No significant risks.	Future trees and woodland works will link and align to a future ACC Forest and Woodland Strategy.	L	Yes
Compliance	No significant risks.	Continue to monitor.	L	Yes
Operational	Suitable space for future tree planting.	To work with internal and external partners to identify suitable spaces.	L	Yes

Financial	Lack of internal and external funding sources and the inability to continue to fund further storm damage works and any proposed tree planting programmes.	Build programme as part of commissioning intentions and budget process. Continued positive and constructive collaboration with partners and appropriate grant funders.	M	Yes
Reputational	Failure to fully support Aberdeen's tree planting programme identified through Climate Plan and LOIP.	Continued positive and constructive collaboration with partners and appropriate grant funders.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	Tree planting programmes identified through Climate Plan not realised. Carbon impacts of tree planting not measured and not usable in carbon budgets.	Continued positive and constructive collaboration with partners and appropriate grant funders. Ensure woodlands are climate certified to support Council Climate Plan.	L	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement <u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u>	Supports the delivery of Aberdeen City Council Policy through the Council's commissioning intentions, aligned to the LOIP key drivers, and stretch outcomes.

<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26</u>	
Place Stretch Outcomes	<p>Climate Change. Supports Outcome 13. Addressing climate change by reducing Aberdeen's carbon emissions by at least 61% by 2026 and adapting to the impacts of our changing climate.</p> <p>Nature and Safe Spaces. Supports Stretch Outcome 15. 26% of Aberdeen's area will be protected and/or managed for nature and 60% of people report they feel that spaces and buildings are well cared for by 2026.</p>
Regional and City Strategies	The work related to this report supports objectives in a range of regional and city strategies including: Strategic and Local Development Plans, Local Outcome Improvement Plan, Aberdeen Adapts, Net Zero Routemap and Natural Environment strategy for the City.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Previous Integrated Impact Assessment relating to the Trees and Woodland Committee Report May 2023 has been reviewed and no changes required.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required.
Other	None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

NA

11. APPENDICES

None.

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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