
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

26 January 2021

Cabinet

Title:	North Ayrshire's 2030 Woodland: A Tree Planting Strategy
Purpose:	To seek approval of the proposed 'North Ayrshire's 2030 Woodland: A Tree Planting Strategy' detailed at Appendix 1.
Recommendation:	That Cabinet approves the proposed 'North Ayrshire's 2030 Woodland: A Tree Planting Strategy' detailed at Appendix 1.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council has made excellent progress in tackling carbon emissions in North Ayrshire. In the last five years alone, emissions have reduced by over 28% within the Council's estate following implementation of a wide range of ambitious carbon reduction projects.
- 1.2 In 2019, the Council raised ambitions further by declaring a Climate Emergency and announcing a target date of 2030 to become carbon 'net-zero'. In March 2020, the Council allocated £500,000 from its newly created Investment Fund for tree planting to provide carbon absorption to meet the net-zero aspirations as well as providing a wealth of other benefits.
- 1.3 Despite the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, and in recognition of this important commitment, officers have developed a document entitled 'North Ayrshire's 2030 Woodland: A Tree Planting Strategy' (see Appendix 1) and undertaken early work to facilitate initial implementation of a potential pilot first phase of tree planting during the 2020/21 growing season which runs until March 2021.
- 1.4 This paper sets out the background to the proposals, provides an update to the Cabinet on progress so far, and seeks approval of the strategy document at Appendix 1 which includes the intended next steps to deliver the tree planting commitment.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 places climate change duties on Scottish public bodies, including Councils, and set a target to reduce Scotland's emissions of all greenhouse gases to net zero by 2045 at the latest.
- 2.2 The Council has set its own ambitious target of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030. In principle, this means that the Council aims to reduce as much carbon as

possible in the next 10 years and offsetting any remaining emissions through carbon absorption.

- 2.3 In March 2020, the Council allocated £500,000 from its newly created Investment Fund towards achieving the required carbon absorption through tree planting in recognition of the importance of trees as part of our overall approach to becoming net zero.
- 2.4 This commitment will be delivered as part of a large-scale woodland tree planting programme. The afforestation initiative will aim to plant around 108,000 trees, covering over 40 hectares, in order to provide the anticipated level of carbon sequestration required to meet the net-zero ambition.
- 2.5 The increase in trees will help combat climate change as trees absorb substantial amounts of carbon from the atmosphere. However, it is important to recognise the wider reaching and longer-term benefits of trees and woodlands which align with the Council Plan and which will be delivered as part of the afforestation programme:
 - Employment and training opportunities for local people and potential co-operatively owned commercial forestry opportunities as part of our Community Wealth Building Strategy
 - Health, wellbeing and physical activity opportunities
 - Improved habitat creation, enhanced biodiversity and creation of new green corridors
 - Regeneration
 - Community food growing (fruit trees)
 - Sustainable flood risk management
 - Improved air quality
- 2.6 Despite the resource challenges presented by Covid-19, officers have worked collaboratively to create the proposed 'North Ayrshire's 2030 Woodland: A Tree Planting Strategy' document, which sets out a route map to delivering the ambitious tree planting commitment. The proposed strategy is provided at Appendix 1 and addresses the following considerations:
 - Policy context
 - Objectives
 - Funding
 - Community Engagement
 - Land identification and selection criteria for planting areas
 - Strategic planting sites
 - Potential delivery models
 - Governance and next steps
- 2.7 Alongside development of the strategy, officers have examined opportunities to expedite an initial phase of tree planting for the 2020/21 winter growing season. The objectives of the initial phase are to establish early progress to secure the sustainability and wider benefits as quickly as possible and to learn lessons from initial delivery models for application in future phases.
- 2.8 The recommended approach within the strategy therefore entails two phases; initial pilot projects (during the 2020/2021 tree planting season which runs until end March 2021,

and subject to sapling availability) followed by a larger scale, second phase programme in subsequent planting seasons. It is anticipated that all planting will be completed by the 2025/26 growing season to ensure planting is established well in advance of the net-zero target date of 2030.

- 2.9 Implementation of the first phase is anticipated to be delivered by a combination of projects; some community led, and some delivered by an identified Woodland Trust partner. An update on these two project streams is provided below.

Partnership with FRIENDS

- 2.10 A partnership between the Council and the locally based FRIENDS community environmental group is already well established and has delivered planting of 2,000 trees at Ardeer Quarry during the 2019/20 planting season, just prior to publication of the Council's tree planting commitment. Officers have invited additional proposals from FRIENDS for further planting projects, alongside the provision of advice and support to contribute to delivery. The following potential projects are currently being explored in conjunction with FRIENDS:

Location	Indicative number of trees
Holm Plantation, Saltcoats/Ardrossan	1,000
Elm Park, Ardrossan	500
Stevenston Muir, Stevenston	100
Rec Hill, Stevenston	200
Beach Park, Stevenston	450
Ardeer Quarry Phase 2, Stevenston	1,000
Bourtreehill Estate, Irvine	3,000
Total	6,250

- 2.11 It should be noted that the above proposals are subject to further assessment, funding and, where not already undertaken, public and ward member consultation.
- 2.12 A key benefit of this delivery model is FRIENDS' track record in community consultation, involving local volunteers, fostering civic pride and promoting physical activity and health and wellbeing benefits. The group share the Council's aspirations regarding dignified food provision and the provision of community orchard planting is a key feature of the wider planting proposals.

Partnership with East Ayrshire Woodlands Trust

- 2.13 East Ayrshire Woodlands Trust (EAW) is a long-established woodland creation and management organisation aligned to East Ayrshire Council. The Council has worked with EAW for a number of years on various environmental projects and officers are exploring the potential to work together to deliver an early phase of planting during the 2020/21 growing season.
- 2.14 A key strand of this model is the innovative training and employment opportunities that form part of its delivery. The planting works would be undertaken by local individuals

seeking employment, who benefit from paid employment and training opportunities for the duration of the planting project. EAW has an excellent track record of supporting individuals participating in their programmes into long-term, permanent employment positions in the land management sector.

- 2.15 The following locations are currently under consideration with EAW, one or more of which may be suitable for planting in the coming growing season pending further assessment:

Location	Indicative number of trees
Lochshore, Glengarnock	Up to 25,000
Irvine Enterprise Area	TBC
Upper Garnock Valley Area	TBC

- 2.16 Community engagement will be a central strand to the programme, and future projects will be co-developed with local communities to ensure local aspirations for planting are realised as far as possible. A Communications Plan will be created to help capture the imagination, through use of the '2030 Woodland' strapline, as well as the potential for creation of an online, interactive map to show where planting has taken place.
- 2.17 The strategy will ensure that the type of trees selected will be appropriate to the planting site, and consideration will be given to native species and the opportunity to increase biodiversity and create wildlife corridors, to enhance the green network. Officers will also explore the potential for cultivation of saplings for planting in the programme.
- 2.18 The tree planting programme will give careful consideration to the species, layout and spacing of trees to ensure they have sufficient room to grow and develop to minimise the requirements of future maintenance.
- 2.19 The strategy sets out a series of actions to build on the early progress to date and ensure a pipeline of projects are ready for implementation for subsequent growing seasons in 2021/22 and beyond. This will include further development of the established partnerships noted above as well as exploration of additional models, partners, external funding opportunities (including the potential to partner with other major landowners) and planting locations as outlined in the strategy. This work will be further underpinned by robust community consultation to ensure public involvement in the proposals.

Governance & Next Steps

- 2.20 The strategy sets out the establishment of a programme board chaired by the Head of Commercial Services, supported by three specific task force groups for project delivery, community engagement, and financial management of the programme.
- 2.21 The programme board will consist of officers from Council services including Streetscene, Sustainability, Planning, Regeneration, and Active Travel and Transport, and the Communities Directorate, along with other stakeholders. It is anticipated that over time membership will be expanded to include other CPP partners and community groups.

2.22 Early outputs from the task force groups will be preparation of a programme delivery plan, community engagement plan, and budget plan for implementation of the project from growing season 2021/22 and beyond.

2.23 The projects noted above at paragraphs 2.10 to 2.15 will continue to be developed to identify any candidate site(s) suitable for the first pilot phase of delivery in the 2020/21 growing season.

3. Proposals

3.1 It is proposed that the Cabinet approves the attached Tree Planting Strategy to support the tree planting commitment within North Ayrshire.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

4.1 The sum of £0.500m has been allocated from the Council's approved £8.8m Investment Fund to support delivery of the tree planting programme. This will be supplemented by the leveraging in of external grants where possible.

Human Resources

4.2 None.

Legal

4.3 The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 places climate change duties on Scottish public bodies, including Councils, and sets targets to reduce Scotland's emissions of all greenhouse gases to net zero by 2045 at the latest. The implementation of the tree planting programme will assist in achieving the statutory targets in abating carbon emissions at a national and local level.

Equality/Socio-economic

4.4 The Tree Planting Strategy assists in meeting our socio-economic duty as set out in the Fairer Scotland Duty. The proposed increase in provision of woodland areas will create employment and training opportunities and provide community access to new open spaces which provide local amenities and opportunities to exercise for health and wellbeing benefits.

4.4.1 This strategy also considers opportunities to plant fruit trees to create orchards, in suitable locations, for community benefit, as part of this commitment.

Environmental and Sustainability

4.5 The Tree Planting Strategy makes a direct contribution to the Council's environmental and sustainability aspirations by providing the framework for sequestration of carbon emissions. In addition, the Council has a duty through the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 to further the conservation of biodiversity, and the objectives of the

Tree Planting Strategy align with the North Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2019 - 2031.

4.5.1 As per the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005, local authorities are required to undertake and consult on a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), when a qualifying plan, programme or strategy is likely to have significant environmental effects.

4.5.2 The Council will therefore submit a screening report summarising the tree planting strategy proposals to the national SEA Gateway to request the views of the statutory consultees on whether a full SEA is required.

Key Priorities

4.6 The Tree Planting Strategy aims to support the Council Plan's Fair For All Strategy and deliver against the key priority in Inspiring Place.

4.6.1 One of the key performance indicators of the Council Plan priority of 'a sustainable environment' is the level of carbon emissions. The proposed large-scale tree planting programme will significantly contribute to achieving this outcome.

4.6.2 The Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and aims to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2030 as set out in the Environmental Sustainability & Climate Change Strategy. A key mechanism for achieving this status is through absorbing emissions, and the tree planting programme will be vital in helping deliver this commitment.

4.6.3 The Tree Planting Strategy will support the aims of the North Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2019 - 2031 to help deliver the priorities of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.

Community Wealth Building

4.7 The Tree Planting Strategy aligns with the Council's Community Wealth Building (CWB) overall mission and fair employment pillar through the creation of employment and training opportunities for local people as part of the programme.

4.7.1 The Tree Planting Strategy will also clearly support delivery of the CWB Land and Assets pillar of 'supporting the wider regeneration of our communities by maximising all of our land and assets including through alternative uses for community and business benefit.'

4.7.2 The Economic Recovery and Renewal Approach and North Ayrshire Green New Deal prioritises building back better, fairer and greener. The Tree Planting Strategy will help to meet the priority of a green economic recovery focused on achieving our net zero carbon ambitions through the creation of environmental regeneration projects and creating fair jobs.

5. Consultation

5.1 Consultation has taken place internally between relevant Council Services including Streetscene, Sustainability, Planning, Employability, Economic Development and

Regeneration. Public consultation has already been undertaken on several of the specific projects noted at paragraph 2.10. Further engagement will take place as projects continue to be developed, particularly with local partners, schools and local communities.

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For further information please contact **David Hammond, Interim Head of Commercial Services**, on **01294 324570**.

Background Papers

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Appendix 1

North Ayrshire's 2030 Woodland: A Tree Planting Strategy

1.0 Executive Summary

North Ayrshire Council has made excellent progress in reducing carbon emissions, with reductions in emissions from the Council's estate of over 28% in the last five years alone. The Council raised its ambitions further through the declaration of a climate change emergency in 2019, along with the announcement of a 2030 target date to achieve 'net-zero' carbon emissions.

A key element of meeting that target is the strategy for absorption of any residual carbon emissions to achieve net-zero status. Tree planting is a tried and tested, effective carbon sequestration method that brings a multitude of wider social and economic benefits.

At a meeting on 5 March 2020, the Council approved a £500,000 fund to support tree planting across North Ayrshire with a view to creating a 2030 woodland resource that, together with carbon reduction actions within the wider Environmental Sustainability & Climate Change Strategy, achieves our net-zero ambitions.

This strategy sets out the key considerations and a route map for planting of the 108,000 trees that require to be planted to meet the net-zero goal. The strategy considers the national and local policy context, planting objectives, funding arrangements, community engagement approach, site selection criteria and potential delivery models to provide a comprehensive delivery framework. The strategy will be implemented through a programme board with individual project plans developed and delivered through three specific task forces.

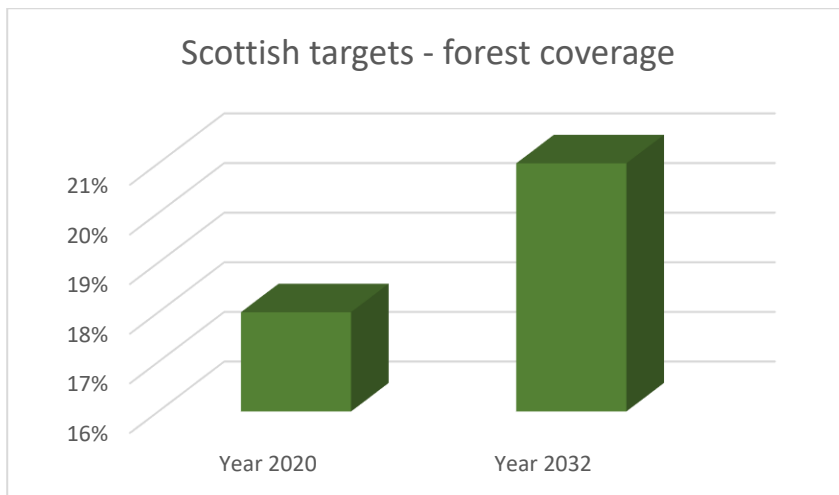
Our ambition is to complete all the tree planting activities by the 2025/26 growing season to ensure that saplings are well on their way to maturity by the 2030 target.

2.0 Policy Context

2.1 National Level

In 2009, the Scottish Government set out its rationale to encourage the creation of an additional 10,000 hectares of new woodland in Scotland every year. This planting target has been increased to 15,000 hectares of new woodland to take effect from 2024/25. Forestry is a national priority and is part of Scotland's climate change commitments.

Scotland's forests cover 18.7% of the total land mass area and the ambition contained in the national forestry strategy is to increase this to 21 % by 2032.



Across Ayrshire as a whole, it is estimated that around 23% of Ayrshire's land mass comprises of trees and woodland, therefore this region is already making a significant contribution to national aspirations.

2.1.1 The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019

National legislation around climate change is a key driver to reduce carbon emissions at a national level.

The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 amends the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and sets targets to reduce Scotland's emissions of all greenhouse gases to net-zero by 2045 at the latest, with interim targets for reductions of at least 56% by 2020, 75% by 2030, 90% by 2040, from a 1990 baseline. The Act places climate change duties on Scottish public bodies, including Councils.

2.1.2 Forest Strategy 2019 - 2029

In April 2019, the devolution of forestry to Scottish ministers was concluded. The existing Forestry Commission Scotland was replaced by the new Scottish Forestry body.

Scotland's Forest Strategy sets out the 50-year vision for Scotland's forests and woodlands and is supplemented by a framework for action and implementation plan over a 10 year timescale.

This long-term Strategy lays out Scottish Forestry's approach to protecting, enhancing and expanding the forests and woodlands across Scotland to help deliver greater social, economic and environmental benefits.

As Scotland recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic, priority will be given to the actions that support the forestry sector to restart and respond through a Covid-19 Forestry Sector Restart and Resilience Plan. This plan will cover a timeline of two years and will be periodically reviewed through the recovery process.

2.1.3 Scotland's Biodiversity Route Map

The 2020 challenge for Scotland's biodiversity sets out the targets and actions required to improve nature and increase biodiversity in Scotland.

Within the route map, there are commitments for new native woodland creation, with the aim of further increasing new woodland planting through priority projects.

2.2 *Local Level*

2.2.1 North Ayrshire Council Plan

North Ayrshire Council's Plan for 2019 – 2024 sets out the vision that North Ayrshire is a Council that is 'Fair for All'.

Creating woodlands across North Ayrshire links into the Council Plan's aims of Aspiring Communities and Inspiring Places through the following Council priorities:

- Active and strong communities
- Inclusive, growing and enterprising local economy
- People enjoy good life-long health and well-being
- Vibrant, welcoming and attractive places
- A sustainable environment

2.2.2 Environmental Sustainability & Climate Change Strategy

Key policies within the Council link directly to the objectives of tree planting including North Ayrshire Council's Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy. This Strategy supports action on the Council's Climate Emergency declaration and ambition to achieve net zero carbon status by 2030. It contains a specific action to investigate ways to absorb carbon emissions from the atmosphere through tree planting, which is fulfilled by this Tree Planting Strategy document.

The Council's Tree and Woodland Management Policy is currently being updated for 2020 onwards. The aim of this policy to set out how the Council will effectively manage trees and woodlands for which it is responsible ensuring that they positively contribute to the area and achievement of the corporate priorities of the Council whilst meeting legal obligations.

2.2.3 Community Wealth Building

Community Wealth Building is a key strategic priority for North Ayrshire Council and a commitment within the Council Plan. The Council launched Scotland's first Community Wealth Building Strategy in May 2020.

The tree planting programme aligns with the overall CWB mission and specific fair employment and land and asset pillars through the creation of forestry related employment and training opportunities for local people and bringing vacant and derelict land assets back into productive use and making a positive environmental, social and in some cases economic benefit to communities. There is scope under the strategy for the establishment of a community co-operative in relation to commercial forestry opportunities.

2.2.4 Ayrshire and Arran Forestry and Woodland Strategy 2014

This Strategy brought together a range of organisations across Ayrshire to develop a plan of action to enable the Ayrshire Councils, landowners, communities and forest bodies to unlock the potential for woodland creation, development, design and management across the Ayrshire region.

2.2.5 North Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) 2019 - 2031

The Council recently published a North Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) for 2019 – 2031.

One of the key actions identified in the LBAP is to implement priority actions from the Ayrshire and Arran Forestry and Woodland Strategy 2014 (see paragraph 2.2.3), ensuring that woodland expansion proposals are appropriate, with reference to the policy document, The Right Tree in the Right Place (Forestry Commission Scotland, 2010).

3.0 Tree Planting Strategy Objectives

In 2019, new climate change legislation was introduced which updated Scotland's Climate Change Plan to reflect the new targets set in the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019.

The new target to be achieved across Scotland is to move to net zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045.

North Ayrshire has set an ambitious target of becoming net zero carbon by 2030. In principle, this means that the Council aims to reduce as much carbon as possible by this date, and to implement a large-scale woodland tree planting programme under this strategy to sequester residual carbon emissions.

The afforestation programme aims to plant 108,000 trees which will cover over 40 hectares of North Ayrshire (or around 60 football pitches). This represents the indicative number of trees required to absorb any residual carbon emissions by 2030.

Planting trees helps to sequester carbon emissions. The increase in planting will therefore help fight climate change as the trees absorb substantial amounts of carbon. Through photosynthesis, trees absorb carbon dioxide, water and light to produce oxygen which is released into the atmosphere. By ensuring that the trees planted are mostly native species will help to protect and preserve the local environment and biodiversity.

Along with the Council's aspirations of planting trees to help support the net zero carbon aspirations, it is important to recognise the wider reaching and longer-term benefits of trees and woodlands.

What is best for the land will vary greatly from place to place, and it is vital that along with the reduction in carbon emissions, other benefits are factored in to the tree planting process such as the production of food or timber or biomass, and the role trees play in biodiversity, water quality, flood management, air quality, health and wellbeing, recreation and public health.

The following sections outline the wider objectives of the tree planting beyond carbon sequestration.

3.1 Community Wealth Building

The tree planting programme aligns with the overall CWB mission and specific fair employment and land and asset pillars through the creation of forestry related employment and training opportunities for local people and bringing vacant and derelict land assets back into productive use and making a positive environmental, social and in some cases economic benefit to communities. There is scope under the strategy for the establishment of a community co-operative in relation to commercial forestry opportunities.

The Council's Economic Recovery and Renewal Approach outlines our proposals to build back the local economy better, fairer and greener. As part of the economic recovery plan from the Covid-19 pandemic, there is an opportunity to create new green jobs to stimulate the economy and enable people to live sustainably whilst reducing carbon emissions.

Youth employment and the new Kickstart schemes available also provide a platform for the Council to create forestry job placements and training opportunities for young people as part of the implementation of the tree planting strategy.

3.2 Physical activity, health and wellbeing

Scottish Forestry research has shown that regular contact with trees and woodland spaces is linked to better health, reduced levels of chronic stress, reductions in obesity and improved concentration.

Being connected with nature and the environment through woodland areas can have a positive impact on the overall public health of our communities.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, people were utilising their local woodland and greenspace areas for a range of health and wellbeing reasons. It is hoped that communities will continue to embrace the positive impact that this connection with trees has on their health and wellbeing.

Woodlands provide the ideal setting to promote health and physical activity. These outdoor settings are conducive to people leading more healthy lifestyles. By being more physically active through activities such as walking, running and cycling, overall physical health can improve and reduces the risk of serious health conditions.

Woodlands enable people to connect with nature and can enhance mental health by creating a positive mood and having a restorative and calming effect from stress and mental fatigue. Some of the areas planted under the strategy will therefore include clearings for seating to allow people to rest and enjoy the surroundings.

Local woodlands provide social benefits by providing a focal point for people to meet leading to increased social interaction. A strong sense of place and improved perception of a local area can also reduce inequalities within communities.

3.3 Biodiversity

Biodiversity is a shortened form of the term 'biological diversity', as defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity. Biodiversity means the richness and variety of all forms of life on Earth and includes plant life such as trees, amongst many other forms of nature.

Trees are a vital landscape and habitat resource by providing carbon storage, air purification, protection against river erosion, ecological niches for a wide range of species, shelter as well as providing wood fuel and building materials. New woodland creation can also help create 'green corridors'.

A change of land use to woodland areas may have an impact on biodiversity. It is therefore important that the tree planting project actively seeks to achieve biodiversity net gain through forest plans along with optimal carbon sequestration.

3.4 Sustainable Flood Risk Management

Climate projections suggest that there will be greater frequency of extreme weather events, with more frequent and severe flooding. Trees and woodland can form a vital role in flood protection through natural processes.

In the Woodland Trust's 2014 'Stemming the flow' paper, natural approaches to flood risk are outlined and can offer significant benefits to those seeking to manage flood risk and the communities they are trying to protect. It is therefore important that the right type of trees are planted in the most beneficial riparian locations, to help with flooding before it happens.

Planting trees can be effective in increasing water infiltration, reducing local peak flows and slowing runoff further down in the catchment area. Woodland located on floodplains can mitigate large flood events by absorbing and delaying the water's progress as it travels downstream.

Trees can also play an important role in lowering the risk of surface water flooding caused by extreme rainfall amounts. Trees intercept the rain and help alleviate the capacity of water flowing into the drainage system.

3.5 Air quality

Trees can directly and indirectly improve local and regional air quality by altering the atmospheric environment. Some ways in which trees affect air quality are through removal of air pollutants, temperature reduction and other microclimatic effects. The Cleaner Air for Scotland Strategy 2015 encourages mitigation measures, such as planting blocks of trees to create microclimates that would allow vehicle fumes to dissipate.

3.6 Food Growing

The provision of community food opportunities, in a dignified way, is a central underlying tenet of the Council Plan. The Tree Planting Strategy offers opportunity for areas of orchard planting to provide seasonal fresh fruit for community picking in the right locations.

Already, an orchard plantation at Ardeer Quarry is well used by local community members who are able to take advantage of the annual fruit crop. The strategy will help build on such successful examples and widen the availability of produce to more people.

3.7 *Regeneration*

Tree planting schemes delivered under this strategy will be provided in a variety of formats from large to small scale plantations, which comprise different species for different purposes.

A further opportunity is the contribution planting schemes could have to the built environment, including through:

- Greening of vacant and derelict land
- Planting schemes forming part of new private and affordable housing projects, including via the Council's own Strategic Housing Investment Plan
- Structure planting for new Local Development Plan housing allocations

The Tree Planting Strategy will therefore be an essential consideration in the implementation of the Council's Land & Assets Renewal programme to ensure planting schemes are considered in any land and property decisions.

4.0 Funding

This programme has £500,000 earmarked from the Council's new Investment Fund to tree planting in recognition of the importance of this as part of the Council's overall approach to becoming net zero.

A task force will be established to oversee the budget and consider project funding opportunity business cases, including any long-term maintenance costs associated with the new areas of woodland created.

This task force will also be responsible for considering further options for accessing other external grant and funding streams. Depending on the capital and maintenance costs for the tree planting programme it may be necessary to leverage the allocated £500,000 and apply for match funding and/or grants to enhance this programme and further the aims.

There are various financial mechanisms available to the Council to plant trees, with national funds to support delivery of the strategic targets.

National organisations such as Scottish Forestry and the Woodland Trust not only have funding streams available but also a wealth of knowledge, expertise and advice to assist in the process.

Scottish Forestry is responsible for delivering the government's forestry policy, legislation, technical advice on forestry issues along with grants.

The Forestry Grant Scheme offers financial support for the creation of new woodland and the sustainable management of existing woodland. Full scheme guidance is available on the complex process and covers aspects such as how to apply, scoring requirements, criteria, inspections and contractual obligations.

Forestry agents provide services across Scotland and can assist in undertaking grant applications and/or implement the programme.

The 'Woodlands in and Around Towns' (WIAT) grant is also administered by Scottish Forestry can be incorporated along with woodland creation grants. This grant scheme is designed

specifically for urban woodlands to increase access and amenity value to high population areas.

The Woodland Trust provides a range of advisors to assist organisations achieve large scale planting goals, by providing trees, grants and funding schemes.

The vacant and derelict land fund is currently available for five local authorities (one of which is North Ayrshire) across Scotland to access. For 2020/21, North Ayrshire Council was allocated £1.3 million and future year allocations present opportunities to undertake regeneration projects using this fund which incorporate tree planting.

The Green Action Trust presents an opportunity to support projects that enhance the natural environment and improve access to high quality green space.

Lastly, there is also the potential for local transport funds to support large scale tree planting along key routes to promote active travel to employment.

5.0 Community Engagement

At the heart of the tree planting programme is a desire to collaborate with local communities so that they are co-partners in the identification, development and delivery of as many planting schemes as possible.

Community involvement helps to achieve the Council's mission 'to improve the lives of North Ayrshire people and develop stronger communities' and the approach to community wealth building links communities with the benefits of local economic development.

It is imperative that a wide range of engagement methods are utilised, including both traditional and more modern, digital engagement methods to ensure many people are reached.

We also recognise the contribution which volunteers make in complementing the work of Council employees within North Ayrshire Council. A significant opportunity is presented by the strategy to engage both existing and new community volunteers to help with planting efforts- either as part of a planned scheme or through their own individual planting efforts which can all count to meeting our 2030 net-zero ambitions.

A community engagement plan will be prepared as an early action of the Community Engagement Task Force established to deliver the Tree Planting Strategy (see Section 8). This will include the potential to create an interactive online map to record where planting has taken place which can be promoted via social media platforms in order to get as many people involved as possible.

There is a particular opportunity to involve young people, including via the eco-schools programme, to get involved in planting schemes and potentially plant trees in suitable parts of the school estate which would also deliver outdoor learning opportunities.

The programme will require a framework in place to support the current network of volunteers and grow and expand the network of volunteers in a sustainable way.

6.0 Land Identification and selection criteria for planting

As stated in Scottish Forestry's Strategy, it is imperative that the right tree is planted in the right place.

To assist in the land identification and selection criteria for the new areas of woodland, close reference should be made to the Ayrshire and Arran Forest and Woodland Strategy 2014. A task force will be established to oversee the decision-making process on identifying and selecting appropriate land and projects to contribute to this initiative. This group will have responsibility for seeking specialist external advice from relevant consultants, in fields such as soil science and land contamination, if required.

A range of considerations such as ownership agreements, ground conditions, existing and current land use must be thoroughly assessed to ensure that the locations identified for this tree planting programme results in sustainable and healthy woodland areas.

Land ownership and competing land use are often barriers to woodland creation, however a better understanding of forest and land economics should enable productive areas to be secured for this programme.

As well as the overall aim of absorbing carbon from the atmosphere, the planting of trees in each location must also incorporate future associated aims at each site, such as the potential for providing amenity value for local communities or timber production to yield future economic return.

Within North Ayrshire Council's land ownership portfolio, areas should be selected in conjunction with land and property renewal workstreams.

At this stage, from an initial review of Council land assets, it is anticipated that an indicative target of 80% of planting would take place on Council owned land, with around 20% on privately owned land or other public agency land subject to landowner and any other permissions required.

It is therefore likely that the majority of tree planting sites will be located on existing open space owned by the Council. North Ayrshire Council's Open Space Strategy and Asset Management Plan sets out the Council's approach for the management and maintenance of all open space assets, and aims to ensure that 'any open space which provides, or has the potential to provide, environmental, social and/or economic benefits to communities, whether direct or indirect, within and around urban areas.'

The tree planting programme will give careful consideration to the species, layout and spacing of trees to ensure they have sufficient room to grow and develop to minimise the requirements of future maintenance, and opportunities for local sapling cultivation will be explored.

In addition, the Vacant and Derelict Land Strategy will influence the areas in North Ayrshire that can be planted upon open space. As stated in Action 2 of the Strategy, any new investment proposals will first consider vacant and derelict land. The strategy has been developed alongside an online 'story map' that provides information on each site for potential regeneration.

Alongside North Ayrshire Council's land and open space assets, as noted above, there is also scope to partner with other public sector landowners, via the CPP, to encourage planting on their estate.

Private estate owners may also be interested in utilising part of their land to create a woodland area. There are benefits of tree planting for farm managers and private landowners as they can work alongside existing forms of production by increasing biodiversity, preventing soil erosion, flood protection and providing shelter.

Volunteering groups and community organisations interested in planting trees will also be a valuable resource in providing areas suitable for tree planting across North Ayrshire. Local communities have important local knowledge.

A task force will be established to take forward land assessment and selection work to deliver the planting programme.

6.1 Key Sites

There are several key sites across North Ayrshire that have already been earmarked for wider regeneration or other development projects which could incorporate a significant volume of tree planting. These sites are detailed below and if approved, could together account for around 45% of the target planting area under the programme. It must be recognised that a tree planting programme of this scale will require several larger planting sites to fulfil the requirement along with smaller planting locations. The benefit of these key sites is that they have detailed design proposals and could deliver a large part of this planting commitment in the early part of the implementation period.

The land use task force will review all sites currently in the development stage across Council services to ensure that all relevant sites are given due consideration.

6.1.1 Irvine Enterprise Area

North Ayrshire Council has ownership of land at the strategic investment campus at Irvine's i3 Enterprise Area. There is the potential for up to 10 hectares of land at this site to be developed through this tree planting project. A masterplan for the area is in development and will highlight the potential area of land available for tree planting proposals. Any identified opportunity will be fully appraised to determine its appropriateness in terms of land use and net zero contributions and in the context of other development opportunities for the site.

6.1.2 Lochshore, Kilbirnie

The current masterplan at the Lochshore development in Kilbirnie includes extensive tree planting proposals. Site investigations were conducted during 2019 to inform suitable planting locations.

There is the potential to create up to 10 hectares of broadleaf and conifer woodland areas as part of the Lochshore development.

6.1.3 Upper Garnock Natural Flood Management Study

To further reduce flood risk to the Upper Garnock catchments, the Council commissioned a Natural Flood Management Study for the catchments. This is ongoing and aims to reduce

the flood risk to Kilbirnie and Glengarnock by identifying mitigation measures which hold back surface water to the upper catchments. This can be potentially achieved with improving land and soil management practices, woodland creations, non-flood plain wetland creations and overland sediment traps.

7.0 Delivery Models

A tree planting programme of this scale needs to consider how the target of planting 108,000 trees can be successfully achieved and by the desired timescale and within budget using a variety of delivery models.

To give an indication of scale, as per North Ayrshire Council's Tree and Woodland Management Policy, the Council is responsible for and currently occupies approximately 275 hectares of woodlands, comprising of many thousands of trees.

Therefore, the target of 44 hectares is a further 16% increase on the current amount of Council woodland, if all the new trees as part of this woodland creation programme were planted on North Ayrshire Council owned land. This increase will have an impact on the current level of staff resource and time required for the ongoing maintenance and inspections of woodland areas and should be considered accordingly as part of this proposal.

7.1 *Options Appraisal*

With regards to the actual delivery and implementation of the tree planting programme, an initial four different types of delivery models have been presented that are available to the Council. It is likely that the most sustainable and efficient method will be a blend of the different models identified as each has different strengths.

For each individual delivery model, an options appraisal has been carried out and presented in a series of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analyses below.

The options have been considered in relation to the objectives and capacity of the programme.

Option 1: NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL (in-house)

Approach: Cross-service working across North Ayrshire Council to manage, co-ordinate and plant the trees using in-house resources.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Single point of delivery ➤ All trees planted on North Ayrshire Council land ➤ Interconnect various North Ayrshire Council services ➤ Best practice shared 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impact on resources ▪ Access expertise, knowledge and information from other organisations ▪ Limits land selection for planting as only North Ayrshire Council owned sites utilised
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Future income generation of end product e.g. timber / biomass ○ Link to North Ayrshire Council's Volunteering Policy ○ Creation of jobs/apprenticeships/work experience ○ Reduction in overall areas of vacant and derelict land sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limited community involvement unless blended with Option 4
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Option 2: CONTRACTORS (North Ayrshire Council Arboricultural Framework)

Approach: Utilise the services of professional Arboricultural contractors. The contractors identified are all on the current Council framework to ensure the procurement of these services offers best value, reliability and high standard of work.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Contractors identified through the Corporate Procurement Unit ➤ High level of expertise ➤ Professional organisations covering insurance and risk assessments ➤ Established and experienced in specific arboricultural services ➤ Ability to plant large number of trees over a shorter period of time ➤ Results on the ground quicker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potentially higher cost than other models
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maintenance and reporting included as part of the contract agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conflicting timescales ● Availability of contractors ● Impact on resources through contract management

Option 3: CO-OPERATIVES/TRUSTS (local enterprises)

Approach: Delivery through co-operatives and trusts such as the Woodland Trust and East Ayrshire Woodlands or establishment of a new/linked co-operative.

East Ayrshire Woodlands was set up over 20 years ago as a co-operative arrangement. This local initiative operates as a partnership programme to support landowners and communities to enhance and expand the woodland network across Ayrshire.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Strongest alignment with CWB objectives ➤ High level of expertise ➤ Area based with local geographical knowledge ➤ Focussed on social outcomes as well as economic and environmental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resource ▪ Availability ▪ Cross management

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Professional organisations covering insurance and risk assessments ➤ Access to funding streams ➤ Established and experienced ➤ Provide advisers 	
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ability to plant in quicker time ○ Potential to unlock other areas to plant ○ Employment and training opportunities ○ Community involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conflicting timescales ● Impact on resources through contract management

Option 4: VOLUNTEERING COMMUNITIES (Organisations and Individuals)

Approach: Community led approach to tree planting relying on existing groups to undertake planting as part of wider environmental improvement projects.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Community involvement and empowerment – strong links to Council Plan and aims ➤ Volunteer workforce reduces staff cost and time ➤ Volunteer Engagement Strategy fulfilled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scale of project and numbers of volunteers required ▪ Organisation ▪ Training ▪ Monitoring of trees planted due to high number of different volunteers / individuals
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Community engagement and empowerment ○ Formation of Community Woodlands ○ The transfer of local authority woodlands will provide new opportunities for social enterprises, including co-operatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Availability of volunteers ● Risk and insurance considerations ● Future maintenance

7.2 Pilot Phase

Alongside consideration and development of the above delivery models, it is recognised that there is an opportunity to progress some early pilot project work in the forthcoming 2020/21 planting season which runs from November- March 2021.

This would provide welcome early progress in meeting the target, as well as provide learning for the task force groups to use to develop further schemes for planting season 21/22 and beyond.

Officers are currently working with both community groups and a trusted woodland delivery partner to identify several pilot sites for potential planting on Council owned land by end March 2021.

8.0 Governance and Next Steps

The successful implementation of this tree planting programme requires the options for delivery to be assessed and analysed, consulted upon, and planting schemes to be delivered with appropriate maintenance, monitoring and reporting methods in place.

The approach to delivery should capitalise on the strengths and opportunities created by each delivery model, therefore a co-ordinated approach and partnership working is essential for the success of this programme.

In terms of programme management and governance, a Programme Board will be established to oversee implementation and drive forward identification, development, funding and delivery of individual planting schemes.

This group will comprise officers from relevant Council services, including Streetscene, Sustainability, Communities, Planning, Regeneration, and Active Travel and Transport, along with other stakeholders. It is anticipated that over time membership may be expanded to include other CPP partners and community groups.

Three key task forces will also be established alongside the Programme Board to provide pace to the key delivery considerations as follows:

Task force – Project Delivery

A task force will be set up to oversee the decision-making process on identifying and selecting appropriate land and projects to contribute to this initiative.

This group will prioritise land use opportunities and select areas that are suitable for planting. This group would carry out desk-based exercises and follow up with site visits to analyse key sites to determine high quality planting and design works, scope out appropriate tree species and suppliers, preparatory land works, engineering and landscaping works required.

This group will also have responsibility for ensuring the objectives of each scheme developed are optimised in accordance with the objectives identified at Section 3.0 of this document.

An early output of this task force will be preparation of a detailed action plan for planting scheme delivery for the 21/22 and subsequent growing seasons.

Task force – Funding

This task force will monitor the financial elements of the programme, including analysis of scheme business cases, identification of, and application to, external grant funding sources, as well as budgetary control monitoring of the £500,000 fund itself.

This task force will include representatives with expertise in procurement, finance and experience of applying for grants and funding schemes available to support the core funding of £500,000 allocated by the Council.

An early output of this task force will be the preparation of a detailed action plan for expenditure and leveraging of match funded external grant.

Task force – Community Engagement

Co-development with local communities is an essential strand of the programme. A task force will be set up to establish a community engagement and communications strategy, oversee community consultations, empower communities, scope out volunteering opportunities and generally support local groups who wish to participate.

An early output of this task force will be preparation of a community engagement and wider communications plan for programme delivery.

The final element of governance will be annual reporting to the Council's Cabinet regarding progress on implementation of the strategy.