

Agenda item 4

For Decision: Wild about Trees - a tree planting project across the town

Author: Chris Stringer, Environment Manager

Introduction

This report proposes a tree policy for the Council that confirms the importance of trees in the town and describes why we should value them. This is at [appendix 4.1](#)

And – following on from this – the report proposes Wild about Trees - a new project founded on the ambition to plant more trees and hedges in Frome; in the parks and green spaces that we look after and how we will support other people and other organisations to do the same across the town.

By doing this, we hope to plant thousands of trees in Frome over the term of the current Council and to continue planting trees into the future.

In part, this is an evolution of what we've been doing in recent years. However, much of our tree planting in the last decade has been designed to add colour and character to the town and to landscapes by adding specimen trees or replacing those which have come to the end of their lives.

Wild about Trees will continue to do this but we will also be aiming to many more trees with the more specific aims of helping to fight climate change and responding to changes in our natural and urban environments.

Wild about Trees

Complementing our Wild about Frome campaign, **Wild about Trees** is proposed as an ongoing project to showcase the Council's commitment to planting trees and hedgerows in Frome.

This is an important commitment and genuinely one for future generations.

This report proposes an overview of the next three planting seasons for the project; including all of the planning and follow-up work that will necessarily take place before and after those seasons.

The report also identifies FTC's role (and ambition) in respect of the following:

- Tree planting on land that we're responsible for
- Tree planting on land looked after by Mendip District Council (MDC)
- Tree planting on land looked after by Somerset County Council (SCC)
- FTC's offer to residents and homeowners
- FTC's offer to businesses in Frome

We need trees

There are numerous well-documented and overlapping benefits to come from tree planting and hedge planting. For the purposes of Wild about Trees, the following reasons for planting have been identified and coded:

Planting for	Code
Increased biodiversity, creating habitats for wildlife	B
Greater resilience to climate change	C
Landscape benefits, including seasonal interest and visual and sensory impacts	L
Foraging. Trees and hedges that produce fruit and nuts for people and wildlife	F
Productive forestry: trees managed for timber to be used for burning and making things	P
Shade (especially in play areas and public places)	S
Offsetting carbon (and carbon sequestration)	O
Trees as part of our history and culture	H
General wellbeing; and community responsibility and engagement	W

Right tree; right place

Throughout the project, choosing the right trees for the right places will be an essential starting point. The reasons for planting in different places and spaces will vary and these reasons will naturally inform decisions about which trees to plant, numbers, locations and future care. The reasons for planting will also influence the size of the trees sourced. Because of this, we will clearly identify the main reasons for planting in the spaces that we look after.

For example, we might be looking to add shade to a play area. This would be reflected by the letter S (as shown in the table above). In adding trees for shade, we'd also expect them to add to the landscape and hope that people like and enjoy them too. So, we'd also have the letters L & W.

These reasons would inform what sort of trees we identify for planting and where they're planted. In this scenario, we'd likely be planting a smaller number of trees and we might be looking at buying in larger (more mature) trees and specific species.

In another example, we might be looking to plant a much larger number of trees to create a woodland area with the main aims to fight climate change. This would then be reflected with many more of the letters. And again, the main reasons for planting would inform our decisions and this time, we'd almost certainly be planting whips (saplings usually about 1m high) at a greater density.

Project overview

Season one

Planting: Between September 2019 and March 2020

Financial year: up to 31 March 2020

Costs for buying trees met from this year's trees budget of £12,000

- **Planting on Mary Baily (L, S & W)**
Focused along paths and around the edges of the space, leaving the main grassed area for play and recreation
- **Planting on Weylands (B, C & O)**
Creating one or two new woodland areas extended from the existing edges of the space at the same retaining grassed areas alongside the main path for play and recreation

- **Planting at Birchill Lane (B, C & O)**
Planting a native woodland copse below the allotments site with species suitable for a riverside field
- Design simple **tree planting** and **tree care** sheets for people to download and print
- Offer smaller trees to residents, homeowners and businesses
- Talk to businesses to find out if they have land that they would like to see planted
- Talk to the managing committee about possible tree planting at Whatcombe Fields
- Talk to Mendip District Council about tree planting on their land, including closed churchyards, but focusing initially on the green spaces and verges off Brunel Way on Stonebridge
- Talk to Somerset County Council about planting street trees. Streets
- Talk to local churches about opportunities for tree planting in Frome's churchyards
- The possibility of tree planting as part of the Schools Travel Challenge
- Developing a scheme whereby businesses (and potentially residents) can make financial contributions or donations to offset their carbon - including quantifiable measures. For instance: £25 buys 10 trees with biodegradable protective cases, supports and mulch, which will offset your carbon to this degree

Season two

Planting: Between October 2020 and March 2021

Financial year 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

Indicative budget for buying trees: £18,000 (an increase of £6,000 on this year's budget)

- **Planting at Egford Lane (L, F & W)**
- **Planting at Tower View (L, S & W)**
- **Planting in Rodden Meadow (L, H & W)**
- Continuing to offer smaller trees to residents, homeowners and businesses
- Follow-up planting and projects from season one. Hopefully including planting on MDC land, SCC land and elsewhere

Season three

Planting: Between October 2021 and March 2022

Financial year: 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

Indicative budget for buying tree: £24,000 (an increase of £6,000 on this year's budget)

- **Planting at North Parade (B, L & W)**
- **Planting at the Old Showfield (B, L & S)**
- **Planting in Victoria Park (L, H & W)**
- Continuing to offer smaller trees to residents, homeowners and businesses
- Follow-up planting and projects from seasons one and two

Happily, the Woodland Trust has already said that it should be in a position to supply whips for the project although this should be caveated at this stage because of the sheer number of local authorities interested in sourcing plants from the Woodland Trust.

More mature trees and specific species of tree will still invariably need to be sourced from dedicated, local nurseries.

Please also note that our annual tree budgets listed above includes tree works when these aren't completed by our Rangers and things like tree surveys. And naturally, planting more trees will also likely result in more tree works and more tree surveys.

Costs & Practicalities

Naturally, it's not as simple as buying and planting 100s or 1,000s of trees and then leaving them. There will be additional direct costs associated with this project.

These include:

- Additional time allocation primarily from the Marketing & Communications team but also from the Finance and HR, Community and Resilience teams
- Soil tests
- Transport and travel
- Tools
- Expert time and consultants' fees (potentially arborists and landscape architects)
- Service (utility) checks
- Time on site checking for utilities and cabling
- Engaging with communities and their representatives to develop volunteer planting and tree care events (including food & drinks)
- Design time (and printing costs) for a **plant your tree** guide and kit
And the same for a **care for your tree** guide and kit

Most significantly, for the project to be as successful an allocation of new staff time is proposed from the new financial year starting in April 2020: a new part-time Wild about Trees Project Officer.

A new Project Officer

This person:

- Would manage the project, co-ordinate actions, liaise with the community and work with other parts of FTC
- Would enable regular catch-ups with residents and businesses planting trees and be able to talk to people and groups interested in planting trees
- Would lead on agreeing and formalising any permissions needed for planting on land looked after by other people and organisations (potentially including MDC and SCC)
- Would be the point of contact for distributing free trees to residents and businesses
- Would naturally take pressure off the existing Ranger team and would support tasks that would still need to be delivered by the Marketing and Comms team, for example.

A new FTC vehicle

An additional electric vehicle or adapted load carrying electric tricycle will be essential as the project takes shape (circa £10k). It should be noted that a new vehicle/tricycle would be shared across the organisation, rather than just being for this person.

Conclusions

The first season of the project – effectively to the end of the current financial year – will be delivered using the existing Trees budget and will be delivered by the existing Staff body.

The new member of staff, the additional resources needed for core services such as Marketing and Comms, on-costs from employing staff such as laptops, phones, desk space, will need to be calculated in time for the upcoming discussion on FTC's work programme and budget and it is proposed that a more detailed and costed project plan is presented at the next Council Matters meeting on 5 November.

Recommendations

1. Agree and adopt the proposed Tree Policy
2. Agree, in principle, a new Wild about Trees project
3. Engage with the community and plant more trees during this coming winter, as described in this report
4. Delegate responsibility to the Environment Manager to work up a detailed and costed project plan to be tabled for discussion at the Council Matters meeting on 5 November.