

NON-CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting	Community Services Committee
Date	13 January 2020
Report by	Julie Rees – Commons and Greens Officer Phil Wright – Projects & Community Manager
Report Title	Tree Planting and Natural Woodland Cover
Business Plan Objective	Conserve and improve our parks, green spaces and other assets so they offer a natural haven for residents' use and enjoyment.

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide an update on the work to identify sites for tree planting and to seek agreement from the Committee on the way forward.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

2.1.1. Note the progress made in identifying sites for tree planting set out in Appendices A – D and agree for this to be further considered at the next meeting.

2.1.2. Approve the principle of delivering a mixed approach to carbon capture by carrying out tree planting and natural woodland regeneration as set out in Section 4.

2.1.3. Approve the production of a draft 'residents' guide to tree planting' to be considered at the next meeting as set out in paragraph 4.6.

3. Background Information

- 3.1 One of the strategic objectives of the Harpenden Town Council 2020 Business Plan is to conserve and improve the towns parks, green spaces and other assets so they offer a natural haven for residents use and enjoy.

- 3.2 To help deliver the objective, we have an initiative to proactively manage the Council's existing tree stock and promote tree and vegetation planting across the Council's open spaces and Town in general.
- 3.3 Trees and hedgerows are essential to life and have many positive impacts on our lives and on the environment, including:
- Contributing to and improving the amenity value and appearance of our Town, contributing to residents' quality of life and sense of well-being
 - Reducing air pollution and releasing oxygen for us to breathe
 - Reducing wind speed
 - Providing shelter and a haven for all sorts of wildlife, including birds, bats and insects
 - Reducing noise levels
 - Providing shade
 - Reducing flooding

Benefits of Tree Planting

- 3.4 Nationally, there has been a lot of publicity around tree planting and the benefits of offsetting climate change. The UK is the first major economy to legislate for net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Trees are a vital component in reaching this target as they capture and store carbon naturally as they grow. The target is to plant 11 million trees by 2022.
- 3.5 In May 2019, Government announced that the Urban Tree Challenge Fund would offer grants over two years to plant 1 million trees by 2022 in urban areas and in November a £50m scheme was also launched. Called the Woodland Carbon Guarantee, financial incentives are available to land owners and managers to plant trees and create new woodlands.
- 3.6 As part of the Climate Coalition Movement, organisations such as the Woodland Trust are also highlighting the importance of planting more trees to offset climate change.
- 3.7 The best trees to offset the most carbon are those that grow the biggest and live the longest for example, beech, oak and hornbeam. Shorter lived species such as birch and cherry will have a more instant effect, but they will need to be replaced several times during an oak's lifetime.
- 3.8 The arboricultural industry would suggest planting a mix of UK native species as well as ornamental species as a diverse mix is paramount to cope with climate change that is already apparent and help to prevent the threat of pests and disease which is often genus specific.

Alternatives to Tree Planting

- 3.9 There is a growing view that questions whether mass tree planting now will have the positive effect that is suggested. In considering how carbon is captured as part of a strategy to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, it is vital that the role of all soils and the habitats they support, including grasslands and wetlands, is acknowledged and included in planning.
- 3.10 In developing our approach to tree planting, we have consulted with the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. The Trust suggests that increasing the area of woodland is an important element of carbon capture and natural regeneration of woodland through the process of ecological succession should be embraced as a key contributor to that goal.
- 3.11 Allowing nature to progress through the natural wilding of land will achieve a much more balanced and natural habitat than creation of woodland through tree planting schemes. As the land moves through succession from grassland to scrub and then woodland, it will attract and support a huge diversity of wildlife along the way.
- 3.12 We already have a good example of natural regeneration of woodland in Harpenden which is St John's Wood. This was open grassland in the 1960s but in the 50 years since sheep grazing came to an end, it has developed naturally into a diverse, attractive and valued oak woodland. The activities of jays and wood mice burying acorns every autumn requires no human intervention other than taking a hands-off approach and allowing those young trees to grow.
- 3.13 Wider afield in the Lea and Colne valleys, wetlands created through the gravel extraction process during the 1960s have succeeded into diverse willow and alder woodlands purely through seeds falling on damp ground and being allowed to prosper.
- 3.14 HMWT suggests that a natural regeneration approach to woodland creation has several advantages over planting. Proposals for increasing woodland cover should consider the following:
- By its very nature, the provenance of the trees in natural regeneration is guaranteed. There are significant risks to planting trees sourced from outside the UK. For example, both ash dieback and the oak processionary moth have been brought to the UK on imported tree stock, both of which now pose a significant threat to native trees and biodiversity. Natural regeneration does not carry this risk.
 - Growing saplings for tree planting may well involve the use of peat - a significant natural bank of carbon which supports habitats and a unique and threatened biodiversity.

- Planting trees usually requires the use of a rabbit or deer guard, made of plastic with plastic ties. Natural regeneration requires none of these.
- With the drier climate in the south-east, planted trees will often die in their first few years unless watered – a very considerable percentage of trees planted through the HS2 scheme are known to have died due to drought. Given Hertfordshire is a county where over abstraction of water for public supply is a significant environmental issue, watering of trees is not sustainable. Natural regeneration does not require watering.
- Newly planted trees will require some form of maintenance, usually up to five years and may involve mowing competitive vegetation, possibly with fossil-fuelled mowers or through weed control using herbicides. Natural regeneration requires none of these.
- There have been many instances where trees have been planted into grasslands of significant ecological value, resulting in the drying and shading out of the grasslands and loss of important diversity. To ensure that this doesn't happen, any proposals for tree planting should be subject to ecological survey to inform proposals.

4. Town Council Approach

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Town Council adopts an approach which includes a mix of tree planting and natural woodland regeneration. We have begun to identify sites where it is possible to plant trees and encourage natural woodlands. Our work so far is set out in Appendices A and B. In Appendices C and D, we have some further useful information relating to our draft plans.
- 4.2 All the tree species that are proposed in the planting plans are a mixture of native and non-native dependant upon the location of the planting (urban vs rural), soil conditions (dry,wet), overall outcome (shading, colour, height, succession). All the species can be sourced in the UK, but should alternative species be preferred, or they are unavailable, others can be chosen.
- 4.3 If the Committee approves the mixed approach we will further develop the details set out in Appendices A and B and bring back clear site-specific recommendations and action plans to the next meeting. This will include proposed timescales for delivering the plan for each site.
- 4.4 By revisiting the plans at the next meeting in March we will also be in a better position to understand the latest regarding water shortages. The Hertfordshire region is currently in a drought as advised by Affinity Water which could present challenges for tree watering. A hosepipe ban is being considered.
- 4.5 Should this come into force in Hertfordshire in 2020 then the use of hydration bags such as gatorbags would be suggested. These bags release a slow trickle of water like that of rainfall into the ground around a newly planted tree. The Town Council has been using them around the new trees planted by Pizza Express.

Supporting Residents to Plant Trees

4.6 As well as the Town Council planting trees, there is the opportunity for residents to play their part by planting trees on their own land. To assist residents in doing so, it is recommended that the Town Council produce a 'residents' guide to tree planting'. If this idea is approved, a draft version of the guide will be presented to the next meeting of this Committee.

5. Resource Implications

5.1 The Town Council has an annual budget for tree management and a new budget line in 2020/21 for tree planting. All site recommendations will be costed in the March report.

6. Other Implications

Other Implications	Comment
Legal	None
Environment and biodiversity	Hosepipe ban could have an impact on the management of new trees. Trees are considered to have positive benefits for mental health and well-being. Impact of tree planting upon other important habitats should be taken account of.
Crime and Disorder	New or young trees can be vandalised.
Risk/Health & Safety	Ongoing duty of care for establishment and maintenance of trees, H & S surveys, recommended works etc.

7. Appendices

Appendix A – Proposed tree planting locations

Appendix B – Planting proposals

Appendix C – Tree species guide

Appendix D – Estimated life expectancy of trees