

From: **Susan Carey, Cabinet Member for Environment**

Simon Jones, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport

To: **Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee, 8th September 2022**

Subject: **Adoption of Kent Plan Tree - Kent County Council's Tree Establishment Strategy**

Key decision: **22/00089**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of report: n/a

Future Pathway of report: For Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: Kent wide

Summary: Plan Tree is Kent County Council's Strategy for tree establishment. This Strategy sets out an ambition for the county's tree cover to be extended by 1.5 million by 2030 and that by 2050, Kent will have an average tree canopy cover of 19%. Working in partnership across the county, we will not only increase our tree canopy cover but protect and restore existing trees, hedgerow and woodland and, in turn, support the recovery of wildlife, provide natural climate solutions and enrich people's lives. This report provides summary of the public consultation findings, an overview of the changes made in the document's finalisation and presents the final version of the Strategy ahead of its adoption.

Recommendation(s):

The Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations in relation to the proposed decision to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Environment, to adopt Plan Tree as the Council's Tree Establishment Strategy as shown at Appendix A.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In November 2021, Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee endorsed for public consultation the draft Kent Plan Tree, Kent County Council's Tree Establishment Strategy. This Strategy set out an ambition for the county's tree cover to be extended by 1.5 million by 2030 and that by 2050, Kent will have an average tree canopy cover of 19% (an increase from the current 17%). The delivery of these new trees, alongside the protection and restoration of existing trees, hedgerow, and woodland, will support the recovery of wildlife, provide natural climate solutions and enrich people's lives. These new trees will be delivered by working in partnership.
- 1.2 The Strategy also sets out Kent County Council's commitment to delivering against this target, by establishing, at a very minimum, 28,600 trees on land we

own, manage or influence, representing a tree for every person in our own workforce. Further, Kent County Council members will have the opportunity to contribute by establishing trees within their own divisions. Based on a target of 350 trees per division, this will account for another 28,350 trees within the county. It is hoped that the scheme can be launched in time for members to have the opportunity to undertake tree planting in the 2022/23 planting season.

- 1.3 We will endeavour to deliver more trees than this by applying for government grants for tree establishment, to supplement our own resources dedicated to this agenda. Applications have once again been made, in 2022, to the Local Authority Treescapes Fund and Urban Tree Challenge Fund, where we hope to replicate last year's bidding successes. We will continue to make applications to these, and other funds as they arise, to ensure we access all available resources to support our tree ambitions.
- 1.4 In March 2022, Kent County Council launched an eight-week public consultation on the draft Plan Tree to seek the public and stakeholder's views on the Strategy.

2. Summary of the public consultation findings

- 2.1 The consultation, which ran for eight weeks between 8 March and 2 May 2022, had a good response rate, with a total of 569 responses, 561 of which were received online, the others as direct emails or letters. During the consultation period, the draft Tree Establishment Strategy was downloaded 1,742 times and the consultation webpage was visited 5,018 times by 4,568 visitors. 90% of those reviewing the draft Strategy found it easy to understand.
- 2.2 The consultation showed strong support for, and agreement with, the Strategy's ambition of extending tree cover by 1.5 million and a target of achieving an average tree canopy cover of 19% by 2050. The consultation illustrated that the protection and restoration of existing trees and woodland, and improving the condition of native and ancient woodland, were of primary importance to many. Whilst this was inherent throughout the Strategy, this strong feedback suggested that it should be more strongly reflected alongside the high-level ambitions of extending tree cover and increasing the canopy cover.
- 2.3 The consultation also showed that the Strategy's objectives were extremely popular and well supported and that there was strong support for all four of the Strategy's tree establishment principles.

Kent Plan Tree Objectives

- Contribute to Kent County Council's, and the county's, net zero targets.
- Reduce and reverse the trend of decline in nature and loss of trees.
- Tackle the multiple threats to our trees.
- Deliver nature-based solutions to some of the county's challenges.
- Provide enhanced and improved recreation and amenity.
- Address the decline in trees outside woodland and decline in urban trees.
- Realise the economic benefits.
- Increase our knowledge and provide better protection.

Kent Plan Tree four principles for tree establishment

1. Better management and protection of existing stock
2. The right tree, in the right place, for the right reason, with the right management.
3. Deliver multiple benefits.
4. Ensure the biosecurity of new tree stock through application of strict standards.

- 2.4 Within the feedback, there were calls for the principles to ensure that any new trees delivered under the Strategy would have appropriate maintenance, management, and protection, suggesting that the current management element of the “right tree in the right place” principle was not sufficiently detailed.
- 2.5 A large majority of respondents considered the Strategy’s high-level actions were appropriate and believed they would deliver “to some extent” the Strategy’s ambitions and targets. But it was clear that respondents wanted to see clearly defined targets, with a rigorous monitoring process in place.

Kent Plan Tree action plan focuses on:

1. Delivering against the tree establishment target.
2. Exemplar provision for trees on our own estate.
3. Improving protection to trees in Kent.
4. Improving our understanding of Kent’s trees.
5. Developing the Kent carbon offset market for unavoidable emissions.

- 2.6 The consultation showed that 45% of respondents had limited confidence that the Strategy would deliver the ambitions for Kent, with a number of concerns relating to Kent County Council’s long-term commitment to, and resourcing of, this agenda. Feedback also demonstrated concerns over the challenges to tree establishment and how this could impact of the delivery of increased tree cover in the county.
- 2.7 The full Plan Tree Consultation report is appended to this report for Cabinet Committee’s consideration.

3. Finalisation of Kent Plan Tree

- 3.1 The public consultation did not suggest that any fundamental changes were required in respect of the Strategy’s ambitions and objectives, nor to the way in which the ambitions will be delivered.
- 3.2 However, in light of feedback from the consultation, some aspects of the draft were revised in the finalisation of Kent Plan Tree, to address some of the considerations raised.
- 3.3 An executive summary, in accessible language and format, has now been added and this will be further developed, with design, to provide a standalone summary of Kent Plan Tree.
- 3.4 To ensure sufficient attention is given to, and therefore importance is placed on, protecting our existing tree stock, a new high level ambition has been added to the beginning of the Strategy which states:

"In addition to increasing the extent of trees in the county, the ecological condition of the county's native woodland and ancient and veteran trees will be restored. And our existing trees will be afforded better recognition for the vital role they play and, consequently, better protection from loss, so that there is a genuine and significant gain of tree stock within Kent".

- 3.5 Further, the principles and actions have had minor amendments to more clearly set out what is meant by "protection" and how this might be achieved.
- 3.6 It was considered that the limited confidence in the Strategy delivering, and the concerns relating to Kent County Council's long-term commitment to, and resourcing of, this agenda may, in part, stem from the lack of a detailed delivery plan. Consequently, the Strategy now makes clear that sitting alongside the Strategy will be an associated implementation plan, which will, amongst other things, more clearly define:
 - Specific targets for extending canopy in rural, agroforestry and urban settings.
 - Targets for delivery through assisted natural regeneration.
 - Targets for improving the ecological condition of native and ancient woodland and associated priority species.
 - A tree establishment plan, associated resources and a comprehensive monitoring and reporting process.
- 3.7 To further emphasise Kent County Council's commitment to this agenda, the authority's action to date has also been updated in the Strategy to not only include the further trees planted in the interim since the draft Strategy was developed, but also include the current planting pipeline. This shows that the County Council has enabled or been directly responsible for the delivery of 111,921 trees and 6,032m² of natural regeneration since 2019 and up to the end of the 2021/22 planting season. And further, has a minimum of another 76,493 new trees through projects already in the pipeline. And more tree establishment projects are still to be developed.
- 3.8 To provide reassurance of the long-term security of new trees delivered under the strategy, the right tree in the right place principle has been amended to show what specifically is meant by "right management". This now states that the right management will ensure that any new tree or woodland receives what it needs to reach maturity. Following from this, the tree or woodland then continues to be maintained, so that it is productive and fully functioning in terms of the many services it may provide. And, where relevant, management mechanisms may be introduced, such as conservation covenants, so that the long-term security of our gained trees is ensured.
- 3.9 In addition, the principles now also state that any tree establishment work, whether through assisted natural regeneration or planting, must be accompanied by appropriate monitoring so that we know not only what we're gaining but where and to what effect, and the benefits that are being derived.
- 3.10 Further, an additional action has been added to the plan that makes clear that delivery will involve establishing maintenance, management and monitoring

plans for newly established trees and developing mechanisms that ensure the long-term security of this new tree cover.

- 3.11 Feedback suggested that the Strategy needed more detail on how it would deliver targeted action for biodiversity. As a result, the founding principle of better management and protection of existing stock now goes further to state that this must enable restoration of our native woodland's ecological condition and improves the connectivity of the wooded landscape, so that woodland biodiversity is recovered and resilient.
- 3.12 The Strategy also makes reference to how Plan Tree will be intrinsically linked with existing and emerging biodiversity strategies, including the adopted Kent's Plan Bee and the Kent Biodiversity Strategy and the forthcoming Kent Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The action plan now notes that Plan Tree will establish priorities for ecological condition recovery, responses to tree disease and woodland connectivity, and develop targeted action for important and/or threatened woodland species. And that the forthcoming Kent Local Nature Recovery Strategy can not only assist in the development of these but also enable their delivery.
- 3.13 The Strategy now also features a new chapter, which considers the number of challenges facing tree establishment. Whilst many of these exist outside the direct influence of Kent County Council, it is important to reflect on these and set the ambitions within the context of them.
- 3.14 Although not identified through the consultation, the chapter outlining the importance of trees to Kent has been updated to note in detail the importance of our wooded habitats to rare and nationally threatened species, using the recently published State of Nature in Kent report.
- 3.15 The final version of Plan Tree – Kent County Council's Tree Establishment Strategy 2022-2032 – is appended to this report for Cabinet Committee's consideration.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 As reported to Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee in November 2021, tree establishment will, in the main, be funded through central government grants.
- 4.2 Where match funding is needed, or funds are required to support tree establishment that falls outside the criteria of available funding, applications may be made to the Strategic Priorities reserve. £300k per annum for the next three years is required to fund the Members Tree Scheme and Kent County Council's 28,600 tree establishment commitment (as detailed under paragraph 1.2).
- 4.3 Consideration will need to be given to the financial burdens as a result of new trees and their ongoing maintenance and management cost. This will be built into project design costings.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications in relation to the draft Kent Tree Establishment Strategy.

6. Equalities implications

- 6.1 An equalities impact assessment (EqIA) was presented alongside the draft Plan Tree to Cabinet Committee in November 2021. This EqIA was made available with the consultation documents on the public consultation webpage and was also available on request.
- 6.2 Within the consultation questionnaire, respondents were given the opportunity to feedback on the EqIA. There were 25 responses to this question (from a total of 569 responses) and this feedback was used to review the EqIA.
- 6.3 None of the comments received suggested further needed to be done to the current EqIA. As previously noted in the EqIA, the Strategy's principle of the right tree in the right place will ensure that any tree planting does not have unintended consequences, including impacting access or causing obstacles. Likewise, it will be directed to where planting is needed, such as socio-economic and greenspace deprived areas and urban areas; therefore, the positive benefits of tree planting to protected groups can also be realised.
- 6.4 Consequently, no amendments have been made to the EqIA as a result of the consultation but specific EqIAs will be undertaken, as appropriate, when elements of the Strategy are implemented, such as planting plans.

7. Other corporate implications

- 7.1 The Kent tree establishment strategy supports the ambitions of the Kent Biodiversity Strategy, the Kent Environment Strategy, the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy and the management plans of the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. By considered planting and natural regeneration projects, it also has the potential to support the Council's pollinator action plan, Kent's Plan Bee. In time Plan Tree will also be linked to the Kent Local Nature Recovery Strategy, required under the Environment Act, which will map priority areas for nature and recovery actions.
- 7.2 It has been prepared in reference to the Government's England Trees Action Plan 2021-2024 (May 2021) and the Woodland Trust's Emergency Tree Plan for the UK (January 2020).

8. Governance

- 8.1 There are no governance issues in relation to the draft Kent Tree Establishment Strategy.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 Plan Tree received a positive response in its public consultation, with broad support for its ambitions for tree establishment, the objectives it would deliver,

the principles for tree establishment and the high-level actions required to achieve all this.

- 9.2 The final Strategy has taken into account the comments made and sought to address these, but the consultation did not result in the need for any fundamental changes to be made.
- 9.3 Consequently, the finalised Plan Tree provides a strong framework for tree establishment in the county and the collaborative delivery of the ambitions of 1.5 million new trees and 19% tree canopy cover. And, as a Kent County Council Strategy, it clearly sets out the county council's intention to deliver against ambitious targets and realise the full benefits of increased tree cover and improved protection in Kent.

10. Recommendation(s)

Recommendation(s): The Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations in relation to the proposed decision to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Environment, to adopt Plan Tree as the Council's Tree Establishment Strategy as shown at Appendix A.

11. Background Documents

11.1 Appendix A – Proposed Record of Decision

11.2 Plan Tree - Kent County Council's Tree Establishment Strategy 2022-2032 is provided as an appendix to this report, as is the Plan Tree consultation report.

11.3 Relevant background documents include:

- The England Trees Action Plan 2021-2024
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/987432/england-trees-action-plan.pdf
- Woodland Trust Emergency Tree Plan for the UK
<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/47692/emergency-tree-plan.pdf>
- Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy
<https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/environment-waste-and-planning-policies/environmental-policies/kent-and-medway-energy-and-low-emissions-strategy>
- Kent Biodiversity Strategy <http://www.kentnature.org.uk/uploads/files/Nat-Env/Kent%20Biodiversity%20Strategy%202020.pdf>
- State of Nature in Kent:
<https://kentnature.org.uk/state-of-nature/>

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