

Agenda Item No: 12

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 24th June 2021

Report Title: Ashford's Living Legacy for the Queen's Jubilee

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Portfolio Holder Cllr Clarkson, Leader
Portfolio Holder for: Cllr Andrew Buchanan, Portfolio Holder for Environment & Land Management
Cllr Neil Shorter, Portfolio Holder for Planning



Summary: The Queen's Green Canopy (QGC) is a unique tree planting initiative created to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee in 2022 which invites people from across the United Kingdom to "**Plant a Tree for the Jubilee.**"

The government has also recently (May 2021) launched The England Trees Action Plan (2021 – 2024).

As part of our carbon reduction plan, Ashford Borough Council is acting boldly and decisively to increase our opportunities to sequester / capture carbon in the longer term whilst developing our short and medium term measures to reduce our carbon output.

Over the next 3 winters we are aiming to plant one tree representing each resident who will be living in the borough in 2022. This will be almost 135,500 trees. We will be calling on everyone in the borough to help with this ambitious plan, providing the opportunity to not only grow trees but to grow communities, together.

Key Decision: YES

Significantly Affected Wards: all

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- I. Endorse this plan**
- II. Delegate to the Head of Environment and Land Management in association with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Land Management and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and**

Development, the power to decide upon the most suitable sites and species to take this project forward.

III. Allocate £318,000 from the project fund to ensure the delivery of this project.

Policy Overview:

In May 2021, alongside the Queens Green Canopy Initiative, the government launched their England Trees Action Plan (2021 – 2024). Both these initiatives provide the opportunity to support our draft Carbon Neutral Action Plan. Adopted at May Cabinet, the plan highlights the importance of first reducing carbon production and then sequester it. This project offers the opportunity to develop and mature that longer term carbon sequestration whilst carbon output reduction work is undertaken.

Financial Implications:

The cost of one small tree (termed a “whip” at a height of 50cm to 1 metre tall) is approximately £2 including a stake and guard (not plastic). Consequently the cost of a tree for everyone in the borough in 2022 will be approximately £271,000. That said, we have already been successful in our first round of funding in the Urban Tree Challenge bid. This allowed us to plant 6,666 tree at Discovery Park. We currently have a bid in for the Treescapes fund (being led by KCC) for 30,000 trees and will be making a bid in the second round of the Urban Tree Challenge (although this will be for mature trees in an area of the borough restricted by the bid criteria).

The government have stated in The England Trees Action Plan that they are intending to spend over £500 million of the £640 million Nature for Climate Fund on trees and woodlands in England between 2020 and 2025 to support their ambition. The full report indicates there should be more funding available to landowners, including local authorities in the coming years. Therefore it is anticipated that funding opportunities will arise and be applied for in the course of this project, to help to meet the cost.

To ensure there is sufficient promotion of this project to draw in the required volunteers for planting and land provision, it is suggested there is a communications budget of £10,000.

To enable all this work to be co-ordinated, planned and delivered by a suitably knowledgeable member of staff, it is proposed that we employ an officer to manage this project on a fixed term contract for 2 years. The approximate cost of this is likely to be £37,000 with on costs.

Legal Implications:

When planting on land not in our ownership, the Council will need agreement with landowners or custodians, who volunteer their land to take the trees.

Equalities Impact Assessment:	Not applicable at this stage, however a screening tool will be completed when the delivery pathways for this project have been established because the ambition is that this project is inclusive to all residents and has the potential to foster good relations and encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life.
Data Protection Impact Assessment:	A data protection impact assessment is not required as large scale data processing or surveillance do not form part of the project. Any processing of personal data will comply with the council's data protection policy.
Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):	<p>The main risks to the project are sourcing enough trees to plant and to secure land to plant them on. In addition we need to have sufficient volunteers to help to plant these trees and to maintain them as they mature. The likelihood of these risks being realised will be reduced through the Recruitment of a project officer who will help ensure the project is well co-ordinated and promoted. The risks fall within the council's risk appetite for a project of this scale and financial commitment.</p> <p>Individual risk assessments for tree planning activity will be completed at the appropriate stages.</p>
Sustainability Implications:	<p>Trees will play an important role in helping us adapt to a warmer world: near rivers to help manage water quality and flood risk, and in our towns to provide shade. More tree establishment and better management of existing woodlands will restore degraded landscapes, create new habitats, provide more and better quality timber and wood products, and enable more people to have access to the benefits of trees and woodlands.</p> <p>Woodlands will be better connected with each other, as well as with other priority habitats. Woodland management practices will have evolved to respond to the climate emergency, helping our trees and woodlands adapt. Well-designed and diverse woodlands will be more resilient to pests and diseases and climate change, as well as natural hazards such as wildfire and storms. Ecologically important woodlands will be better protected. All trees in this project will be sourced from UK nurseries, and all trees will be introduced in a way which is consistent with maintaining very high standards of biosecurity and biodiversity.</p>
Other Material Implications:	none
Exempt from Publication:	No

**Background
Papers:** none

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Report Title: Ashford's Living Legacy for the Queens Jubilee

Introduction and Background

1. The Queen's Green Canopy (QGC) is a unique tree planting initiative created to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee in 2022 which invites people from across the United Kingdom to "Plant a Tree for the Jubilee."



2. This is an opportunity to thank Her Majesty for her service, celebrate Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee and promote the importance of trees. There will be a particular focus on supporting urban and the most disadvantaged communities to plant trees.
3. Everyone from individuals to Scout and Girl guiding groups, villages, cities, counties, schools and corporates will be encouraged to play their part to enhance our environment by planting trees from October, when the tree planting season begins, through to the end of the Jubilee year in 2022 and beyond.
4. In our case it is proposed that we will be planting trees across the entire borough, but there will be a focus on the urban areas as far as possible.
5. There will be an emphasis on planting the right trees in the right place, to plant healthy stock and to source that stock in the UK.
6. There will be an opportunity to upload details of all trees planted onto a mapping system that will show all trees planted across the country.



7. There will also be the opportunity to either purchase plaques or download templates to create plaques locally, to install at larger sites.



8. In addition (also announced in May 2021) the government have published The England Trees Action Plan 2021 – 2024. The Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs states;

“Climate change and biodiversity loss now require our generation to respond more boldly, taking us far beyond where we are today. Planting vastly more trees in England, and protecting and improving our existing woodlands, will be key to the Government’s plan to achieve net zero and to create a Nature Recovery Network across the length of England.

This is why the Government has committed to increasing tree planting rates across the UK to 30,000 hectares per year by the end of this Parliament. To

achieve this we are intending to spend over £500 million of the £640 million Nature for Climate Fund on trees and woodlands in England between 2020 and 2025 to support this ambition. And by planting the right trees in the right places for the right reasons, we can do so much more than just sequester carbon.”

9. Our draft Carbon Neutral Action plan (currently out to consultation following its adoption at May Cabinet) highlights the importance of first tackling the sources of carbon production and then looking to sequester / capture the remaining carbon that cannot be reduced. This project offers the opportunity to develop and mature that longer term carbon sequestration, whilst carbon reduction work is undertaken.

Proposal

10. In Ashford we want to create a living legacy for the QGC that represents everyone living in Ashford in 2022. Ashford is the largest land mass borough in Kent and we are the very heart of the Garden of England.
11. We will be calling on everyone; all of our residents, Members, land owners, businesses, transport providers, schools, social housing providers, care homes, developers, probationers, parishes and community groups to work together to plant 135,500 trees, one for each resident of the borough in 2022.
12. If planted in one place, 135,500 trees would cover 30 hectares. This is not feasible on land we own. We will need to call upon the resources of everyone in the borough to come forward with sites where trees can be planted and nurtured. We will need a community “**Tree-army**” to plant and nurture these trees, encouraging communities to come together to improve and emotionally invest in their environmental futures and our borough in the heart of the garden of England.
13. Tree planting needs to be carried out when it is most beneficial for the trees, giving them the greatest opportunity to grow to maturity and flourish. The trees will need to be planted across 3 winter periods (October to March), beginning this year. It is envisaged that the majority of the trees will be planted in the Platinum Jubilee year of 2022.
14. The council will procure these trees (to achieve best value) but everyone will be encouraged to plant and nurture these trees. The trees will mostly be “whips” (50 cm to 1 m tall with stake and guard). The cost per “whip” will be approximately £2.

Whips and saplings in
schools and communities



15. Therefore, the cost of 135,500 trees will be £271,000. However, we have already been successful in our first bid to the Urban Tree Challenge Fund, which culminated in the planting of 6,666 trees at Discovery Park. We currently have a bid in for the Treescapes fund (being led by KCC) for 30,000 trees and will be making a bid in the second round of the Urban Tree Challenge (although this will be for mature trees in an area of the borough restricted by the bid criteria). There will be a further cost of a suitably qualified officer to plan the design and delivery of this project, working with all external parties and internal staff and Members, on a fixed term basis for two years. There will also be a need for a communications budget to advertise the opportunities in the places the volunteer tree planters and land holders are most likely to take advantage of the offer. Total project cost estimated to be £318,000.
16. The government have stated in The England Trees Action Plan that they are intending to spend over £500 million of the £640 million Nature for Climate Fund on trees and woodlands in England between 2020 and 2025 to support their ambition. The full report indicates there should be more funding available to landowners, including local authorities in the coming years. Therefore it is anticipated that funding opportunities will arise and be applied for in the course of this project, to help to meet the cost.
17. To ensure we are planting the right trees in the right places, we are undertaking work on what the baseline tree canopy coverage of the borough is currently. We will use this, alongside the Kent Biodiversity Strategy and our Local Plan, to ensure we are planting native trees in sympathy with our current environment and ensuring the greatest opportunity for increased biodiversity.
18. We will also draw on the knowledge of colleagues at KCC, the Kent Nature Partnership, Kent Wildlife Trust and Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership to support us in this work.
19. All councillors will be involved in engaging with their local communities to feedback on local possible sites and planting activity. Whilst it is accepted that the trees we are proposing to procure will take time to mature and capture

substantial quantities of carbon dioxide, this is a legacy project that will help support the borough for years to come.

Equalities Impact Assessment

20. This is an inclusive event for all the community to participate in but there will need to be more detailed EIA's for individual events and initiatives as the project evolves.

Other Options Considered

21. We could just publicise the "**Plant a Tree for the Jubilee**" initiative. However, residents will have to source and fund their own trees, making this opportunity less likely to be taken up.

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

22. We need to do everything we can to support this initiative to ensure we have the greatest opportunity to capture carbon in the future, alongside the measures we will be taking to reduce our carbon output.
23. This initiative is a fitting tribute to Her Majesty and has her full support. We will be creating a legacy for her and for the borough, for generations to come.
24. This is not just about growing trees, this is about growing communities who will come together to plant and nurture these trees. This is also about the opportunity to work with our residents to nurture our borough and engage them in our carbon reduction plan, enabling and empowering them to make a contribution to reduce our impact on climate change and safeguarding our borough for future generations.

Next Steps in Process

25. There will be an extensive communications plan explaining the project and calling for everyone to become involved. We will also be engaging directly with groups and individuals to draw them into the project.
26. Most specifically for schools we have our eco-schools champion in the form of our education and recycling officer who will be working with schools on this project, one of whom has expressed an interest in creating a small woodland at their school.

27. Our Mayor and Deputy Mayor will be the Civic Leads of this campaign through to May next year and will be the first to plant trees in our first winter season, this year. Thereafter, the incoming Mayor and Deputy Mayor will continue with this tree planting campaign.
28. We have set up a webpage. If this proposal is agreed, the page will “go-live”. It will give volunteers the opportunity to sign up to the planting project which will begin in October this year. It will also give landowners the opportunity to offer their land for the planting of trees. They will be able to specify where their land is and how much space they have to offer.
29. The greatest opportunity for trees to grow to maturity is for them to grow together, in a multiple setting as a stand alone or in woodland extensions. At this stage, it is envisaged that most trees will be planted in this way rather than the trees being donated in singles to be planted.
30. We need to find sites to accommodate all these trees. We will need to ask our civic ambassadors to work with officers to identify suitable sites. We will be approaching large land owners about the use of their land where the sites are in the right location to increase the tree canopy alongside the opportunity to increase connectivity for biodiversity, and sites that support native trees to flourish.
31. We will be also seeking a site where we can potentially create a new woodland. Whilst we are blessed to have ancient woodland in the borough (and there are likely to be future funding opportunities in the England Trees Action Plan directly associated with the renewal and support of ancient woodland), it is considered important that we establish new woodland as a part of this project. This may incur a cost to purchase the land. In such circumstances, the opportunity would be reported back to Members for consideration and approval via the Economic Regeneration and Investment Board (ERIB).
32. Not all of the planting will be immediately obvious, particularly where we undertake some woodland renewal work. Therefore, the creation of a new woodland will be a visible appreciation of this piece of work and a visible legacy. There are various definitions of legacy but in essence it is a tangible gift, handed down from the past by an ancestor or predecessor. To leave an entirely new woodland for future generations to enjoy, providing shade, amenity space, helping to combat climate change and improve air quality is a gift indeed.
33. It has been suggested that as part of the school engagement work noted above, we develop a schools competition to create an innovative time capsule to bury in the new woodland. It would typify life in Ashford in 2022, explaining the work we are doing to combat climate change and leave a better environment for coming generations. The most outstanding entries from school / schools would be invited to the site to engage in the tree planting and bury their capsule with a dedication to future generations. There may be the opportunity for further civic inclusions.
34. Some people may not be able to dedicate their time to this project but may want to make a small donation (equivalent to one or more trees) to help

support the project. We may also find that businesses may wish to make donations to the project.

35. We have the opportunity to offer our staff a “volunteering day” to plant on the project and some other businesses have similar arrangements whereby staff are released to work on a project for the benefit of the community.
36. We will be approaching all groups who have shown an interest to discuss how they can become a part of our “**Tree-army**”, involved in the project. We will also be approaching groups and organisations directly with whom we have regular contact and the probation service have already expressed an interest in becoming involved in this project.
37. Internally, we will have a small working group that sets out the objectives for each planting season, collates the offers of volunteers with the offers of land to plant the trees and creates a timetable to achieve the work. This will be led by a suitably qualified officer who plans the design and delivery of the entire project.

Conclusion

38. This project offers us a unique opportunity to create a Living Legacy for Ashford, to mark the Queens Platinum Jubilee.
39. Based on the government’s commitment to funding trees in their “England Trees Action Plan” it is envisaged that there are likely to be many more funding opportunities to support this work.
40. Tree planting will continue in the borough in the future, where our in house grounds maintenance service (Aspire) already plant 2 trees for every 1 they need to fell. However, this project is aimed to inspire our residents to take a greater interest in their local surroundings and engage in our carbon reduction agenda as well nurture the future of our borough.

Portfolio Holder’s Views

41. This ambitious project is not only a fitting gift to mark Her Majesty’s platinum jubilee, marking her ascension to the throne and giving a lifetime of dedicated service to the nation, but will also be a legacy gift to future generations of the borough. It will be an opportunity to bring the borough together around our draft carbon action plan and to engage in activity that will aid the capture of carbon as the project matures.

Contact and Email

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