

Chichester District Council

CABINET

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Project Extension – Trees Outside Woodlands

1. Contacts

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2. Recommendation

2.1 That Cabinet recommend to Council:

2.1.1 The acceptance of funding from Defra for the extension of the Trees Outside Woodlands Project of £120,000 for 2023/2024 and £120,000 for 2024/2025.

2.1.2 That a budget of £120,000 is set for 2023/2024 and 2024/2025, to cover staff costs and expenditure on tree planting pilot projects.

2.1.3 That authority is delegated to the Director of Planning and Environment to accept any additional funding offered by Defra, should such funding be offered as part of the project, and to increase budgets accordingly.

2.2 That authority is delegated to the Divisional Manager for Environment and Health Protection, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environmental Strategy, to award funding to tree planting pilot participants in the District.

3. Background

3.1 The council has been one of the five local authority participants in this project since 2020. The project aims to pilot innovative means of planting trees outside of existing woodlands and test their cost effectiveness. The scheme is funded from HM Treasury administered through Defra and includes the costs of employing one full-time project officer. The project was due to finish in September 2023, but the project partners have secured extension funding from the Treasury and Defra to continue through to March 2025.

3.2 The other project partners are The Tree Council, Natural England, Norfolk County Council, Kent County Council, Shropshire Council and Cornwall Council. For the first phase of the project (up until March 2023) five pilot schemes were run, and for the second phase (up until March 2025) four pilot schemes will be run, with ongoing

monitoring of existing schemes. One local authority leads on each pilot and 2 or 3 others participate in those pilots through replicating the methodology and funding model in their own local authority areas.

4. Outcomes to be Achieved

- 4.1 The main outcome from the District Council's perspective is increased tree planting in the district with benefits for biodiversity, landscape and carbon storage.
- 4.2 Other outcomes are additional learning on incentivising tree planting outside of the forestry sector, knowledge sharing with experts and other local authorities which will put us in good stead to prepare future bids to other (capital only) funding sources.
- 4.3 Tree planting outside woodlands can also lead (once trees are established) to climate adaptation benefits such as control of water runoff, shading and wind shelter belts.
- 4.4 As part of the central government funding a considerable part of the project officer's time is spent on monitoring outcomes (particularly take up and survival rates of trees) and also on cost analysis. This level of monitoring is above what we would require on CDC grant funding but is used to inform future funding models to be implemented nationally.

5. Proposal

- 5.1 Approval is sought to accept the project extension funding and to set budgets for its expenditure. This will allow the council to continue as a participant in the project.
- 5.2 Across the pilot schemes some of the participating authorities sometimes have underspends, whilst others have strong demand from landowners and community groups. HM Treasury rules are strict on not carrying over any underspend at the end of the financial year. This is managed by the partners offering additional funds to those project partners that are likely to be able to spend them before the end of the financial year. Defra themselves may be able to allocate additional funds to the pilots from within their departmental budgets. Should additional funds be offered to the council this would take us over the authorised budget, so this report also recommends delegating authority to the Director of Planning and Environment to accept such funds if offered and to increase budgets accordingly.
- 5.3 Three of the pilots in phase 2 are an extension of the pilots in phase 1. Grants are given to landowners or groups who have landowner's permission to plant trees. Applications for funding are assessed by the project officer against criteria set by the lead authority for that pilot and agreed by the project partners. The project officer makes a recommendation on the application to the Director of Planning and Environment in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environmental Strategy who makes the decision under the delegated authority (as recommended in para 2.2 above, albeit as now proposed to the Divisional Manager for Environment and Health Protection). A grant agreement is then put in place with the recipient.
- 5.4 For the project extension, it is proposed that CDC is joint lead (with Cornwall Council) on a new pilot focusing on targeting tree planting in certain areas to improve connectivity and continue to participate in the Urban Tree Establishment pilot and

Trees on Farms pilot. The fourth pilot is the Community Tree Nursery pilot. In addition, CDC will oversee a research study on Community Orchards. This will allow us to have a range of offers to farmers, landowners and community groups across urban and rural areas.

6. Alternatives Considered

- 6.1 As an externally funded project under the supervision of a partnership (via a Steering Group) the only realistic alternative to continued participation through agreeing to the extension would be to withdraw from the project. This would curtail opportunities for tree planting whilst not resulting in any financial savings to the Council.

7. Resource and Legal Implications

- 7.1 As an extension of an existing project, the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) already in place between Defra and the council will continue in an updated form to reflect the new end date and budgets.
- 7.2 Most of the costs incurred on this project will be recoverable from Defra under the MoA. However, redundancy and maternity cover costs are not recoverable. Redundancy costs may be avoided if the project officer can be redeployed to another post, but the current contract is fixed term until March 2025.
- 7.3 There are no IT or property implications above and beyond those entailed in hosting the current project officer post.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 The project to date has been communicated via media releases, social media and updates have been given to the Environment Panel and via the Members' Bulletin. Feedback from participants has been fed back to the project steering group to improve pilot design for the extension.

9. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

10. The range of funding offers available through the project has proved popular with residents, farmers and also larger landowners. The Subsidised Tree Scheme pilot that we led on will not continue, but under the new pilots the majority of landowners, residents, farmers and other groups will be eligible to apply for funding, however there may be a small minority who are outside of the scope for applications. As research pilots, schemes are trialling new approaches not all of which may be totally successful. The monitoring requirements are also more extensive than many grant schemes, but this is mainly carried out by the project officer and has not proved onerous for participants.

11. Other Implications

	Yes	No
Crime and Disorder		X
Biodiversity and Climate Change Mitigation An extension of the project would have positive impacts for biodiversity through providing	X	

additional habitats and for climate change through carbon sequestration		
Human Rights and Equality Impact		X
Safeguarding and Early Help		X
General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)		X
Health and Wellbeing		X

12. Appendices

13.1 None

13. Background Papers

13.1 Planting Trees Outside Woodlands Project, Defra funding, Cabinet Report, Jan 22