![Cyngor Sir y Fflint Flintshire County Council logo]

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	7th February 2023
Report Subject	Woodland Strategy Update
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economy
Report Author	Chief Officer for Planning, Environment and Economy
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report updates Members on the delivery of the Flintshire Urban Tree and Woodland Plan adopted by the Council in 2018 and seeks Members' views on developing a Flintshire Forest.

The overarching vision of the Urban Tree & Woodland Plan (2018) was to increase urban canopy cover to 18% by 2032. This report details the amount of progress in tree planting which has occurred in the last four years. Additionally, a Flintshire Forest has been proposed and Members are asked for their views on the scope for its delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS	
1	That Members note the content of this update and support the officers in their ongoing tree and woodland management work.
2	That Members support plans to develop the Flintshire Forest in accordance with the framework details provided.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE WOODLAND STRATEGY UPDATE
1.01	The benefits that trees provide to people and the environment are diverse and many-fold. As well as moderating air temperatures, reducing flooding,

	locking up carbon dioxide and improving air quality, trees have a positive effect on our mental and physical health. The Urban Tree and Woodland Strategy (2018) (FUTWP) examines the opportunities for tree planting, how this will be done and provides a best practice approach to the management of existing urban trees and woodland, including community and partnership working in its delivery. The Plan also sets out the Council's approach to the sustainable management of trees on its own land and how its local planning authority powers can be used to sustain and increase canopy.
1.02	The Strategy's vision: *'To have a diverse and resilient tree canopy cover throughout Flintshire's towns that is appreciated, managed sustainably, provides multiple benefits to people and the environment, and enhances biodiversity.'* To support this overarching vision the Strategy sets out the following target: *To increase urban canopy cover from 14.5% to 18% by 2033*
1.03	The plan uses the findings of research into urban trees carried out by Natural Resources Wales (NRW). This research provided the Council with invaluable baseline information about the nature and distribution of urban tree cover across various land uses and critically where tree cover is low and could be increased. Flintshire's canopy cover was 14.5%, the seventh lowest in Wales. NRW have not undertaken a subsequent survey and there for the current percentage of canopy cover is unknown.
1.04	New tree planting is the most direct way of increasing canopy cover to meet the canopy cover target set out in the FUTWP and can range from new woodland planting largely comprising of small 'whip' trees to the planting of a single 'standard' sized tree on area of open ground, such as a highway verge. Well planned and implemented schemes of tree planting are easier to maintain and less likely to fail. Tree species will be suitable for the soil type, drainage and position. In particular varieties of tree with tightly formed crowns will be used where there is limited space (e.g. pavements) and large spreading species (e.g. common beech) used in parks where they can grow unconstrained and afford the greatest benefits. Tree planting schemes will also take into account the likelihood of casual vandalism, specifying larger and more robust trees and/or tree guards where necessary. One aspect of delivery that has been challenging is negativism by some members of the public failing to recognise the benefits trees and woodlands provide to themselves and their environment. This has meant that community consultations for each project have taken longer to and in some cases tree planting has been amended or not undertaken at all.

1.05	Tree planting schemes across the county have been implemented with the following numbers of trees planted per year:

	No Standards	No Whips
2018	No Data	200
2019	129	6400
2020	193	2632
2021	391	7750
2022	69	5470
TOTALS	**782**	**22452**

1.06	As part of the work to engage people in tree planting and to extoll the benefits that trees provide, a 'storymap' web page is in development which highlights 15 recent tree planting schemes across the county. Link: https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/7eab40e4633346afb360cec8e04efc2a
1.07	The Flintshire Labour Manifesto 2022, 'securing Flintshire's Future' promises to create a Flintshire Forest. The development of a Flintshire Forest is included on the Council Plan 2022-2023
1.08	The words 'forest' and 'woodland' are frequently used interchangeably. The term forest can be used to describe an enclosed area of trees, but also can include a broader area of unenclosed land which has a significant tree coverage, for example an 'urban forest' or ancient royal hunting forest.
1.09	It is assumed that the Flintshire Forest would form part of Wales' National Forest first unveiled by the First Minister in 2020 promoted on the Welsh Government's web pages. According to the Welsh Government website the National Forest for Wales would: • create areas of new woodland • help to restore and maintain some of our irreplaceable ancient woodlands In time it will form a connected network of woodlands throughout Wales. This will bring social, economic and environmental benefits. New managed woodlands created for the National Forest will: • provide spaces for leisure and nature • help to capture and store carbon • provide timber - a sustainable resource for construction The Welsh Government have provided £5 million of additional funding to support the National Forest initiative. In 2021 the Council successfully applied for grant funding under the National Forest for Wales initiative and planted a new woodland extension at Wepre Park

1.10	Taking into account the adopted FUTWP, the concept of the National Forest for Wales it is necessary to consider what the vision is for the Flintshire Forest, its objective and how it will be achieved. To a significant degree the three initiatives will overlap, clearly the initiative will contribute significantly to our tree planting target in the FUTWP and contribute towards our Climate Change Carbon Reduction Strategy, however larger areas of new woodland may lie outside of the urban area and there may be limited availability of public land to deliver this initiative and consideration needs to be given to working in partnership with private landowners and the general public.
1.11	To take the concept forward Members are asked to consider the following framework for a Flintshire Forest:- • <u>Located within the County of Flintshire</u> Notwithstanding, the initiative could link with woodlands and forests in adjacent counties as promoted by the National Forest for Wales • <u>Not a single forest or woodland</u> Instead, comprising of a network of urban and rural woodlands across the County in accordance with National Forest for Wales vision. • <u>Including trees and small groups of trees in settlements</u> In accordance with the urban forest and canopy cover definitions. • <u>Comprising of Council, other public and private land</u> Whilst it is necessary to explore all the opportunities on Council land, private landowners and other organisations may wish to participate in the initiative • <u>Focused on delivering the greatest public benefits</u> These benefits will be greatest where a tree or woodland planting is within or adjacent to main settlements. • <u>Promoting biodiversity</u> The Council has a duty to safeguard and where possible enhance biodiversity • <u>Contributing to mitigating climate change impacts</u> In summer trees provide shade reducing high temperatures, they intercept rain reducing flooding and provide shelter from cold winds in winter. Trees also have lesser role in sequestration carbon. • <u>Engages with communities</u> • <u>Includes working in partnership with other organisations</u>
1.12	It is expected that a Flintshire Forest initiative would significantly contribute to the momentum required to increase the level of tree planting in the County to meet the existing commitment achieving an increase in urban canopy cover. In rural areas NRW and the Woodland Trust offer grants to landowners wanting to carry out woodland planting on their own land and it is not

	considered to be the Council's role, or affordable, to duplicate the grants on offer.
	At this time, to deliver the aspirations of a Flintshire Forest, similar to the National Forest for Wales, land will need to be made available and secured for woodland planting. Most realistically this will be on land already owned by the Council that us available and suitable for that purpose.
	Currently, Officers are interrogating Flintshire's database of landholdings to scope a number of potential sites which have good connectivity to other woodland areas and communities.
	Once suitable land is identified that could meet the criteria for a Flintshire Forest site there will need to be a focus on delivery, maintenance and ongoing management.
1.13	The development of a Flintshire Forest as outlined in the framework would be an initiative that meets many of the objectives of the Council and would benefit communities where located adjacent to urban areas.
	It should be recognised that there will be areas of overlap with existing activities and woodland planting in rural areas might occur regardless of a Flintshire Forest initiative.
	At this time it is considered that the main benefits of having a Flintshire Forest would be to create a shared vision for tree planting in Flintshire building on the urban tree and woodland plan to provide an overarching framework for tree planting in the county it would support community engagement and outline a sustainable funding model for tree planting and the required resources into the future and support local economies by creating a greener setting for local residents and businesses
2.00	**RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**
2.01	The resources to deliver tree planting schemes in Flintshire to support the Urban Tree and Woodland Plan or Flintshire Forest are currently being provided for through external grant and delivered by staff within the Access & Natural Environment Service. However this staff resource is at capacity which will limit the scope of additional tree planting schemes.
2.02	Additional woodland areas and trees require additional maintenance requirements which have yet to be identified.
3.00	**CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT**
3.01	Communities and residents adjacent to each new tree planting scheme are consulted.
4.00	**RISK MANAGEMENT**

4.01	Available land shortage and the lack of additional revenue funding are risks for delivering a Flintshire forest or meeting our canopy cover target.
4.02	The disease Ash dieback (reported to Environment Overview and Scrutiny committee in November 2022), presents a challenge in meeting our tree planting target with hundreds of tree being felled. Depending on resources there should be a recovery phase where efforts are made to replace felled trees in the rural landscape. Currently ash dieback is considered to be a major factor reducing urban canopy cover, although it is probably too early to say whether it will have a long term effect on urban canopy cover and whether the 18% target will be achieved. The long term effect will also dependent upon the amount of replacement planting and degree of success.
5.00	**APPENDICES**
5.01	None
6.00	**LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**
6.01	**Contact Officer: Tom Woodall, Access & Natural Environment Manager** **Telephone: 01352 703902** **E-mail: tom.woodall@flintshire.gov.uk**
7.00	**GLOSSARY OF TERMS**
7.01	**NRW** Natural Resources Wales is the largest Welsh Government Sponsored Body. NRW were formed in April 2013, largely taking over the functions of the Countryside Council for Wales, Forestry Commission Wales and the Environment Agency in Wales, as well as certain Welsh Government functions. **Forest or Woodland** An area of land densely covered with trees and frequently used to mean the same. Slight differences might be inferred with the word 'forest' reflecting land covered with commercially planted trees of the same species (more likely to be evergreen) and age. Whilst a 'woodland' is more likely to have existed largely unchanged for many years and contain trees of different species (more likely native) and ages, and is less likely to be managed commercially. **Standard Tree** Refers to a range of size between 2m and 4.5m tall with a clean stem universally used by the tree nurseries. **Urban Canopy Cover**

The amount and distribution of urban land under tree or woodland cover when assessed using aerial photographs denoting the geographical extent of the urban forest apart from the youngest trees.

Urban Forest
A modern term used to collectively refer to all the trees and woodlands in urban and peri-urban areas, recognising that the combined benefits of the urban forest is much greater than the sum of its parts. Urban forestry advocates the strategic management of trees and woodland because it is a valuable resource.

Whip
Refers to a young tree 40-120cm tall