



Subject:	Belfast One Million Trees Programme
Date:	8 th September 2020
Reporting Officer:	Ryan Black, Director of Neighbourhood Services.
Contact Officer:	Grainia Long, Belfast Commissioner for Resilience

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	In March 2019, Belfast City Council referred to Committee a motion by Cllr Heading (appendix 1) with an ambition to plant one million trees in Belfast. In June, the People and Communities Committee received a proposal from the Belfast Metropolitan Residents Group seeking Council support in coordinating an initiative, which would see one million trees planted over a 15-year period. The committee agreed to be lead partnership facilitator for the project, working with key stakeholders with a report to be brought back to a future Committee regarding next steps.
1.2	Separately, following citywide engagement on possible opportunities to build climate resilience across Belfast, the draft Resilience Strategy includes a recommendation to plant one million trees and for growth in afforestation and urban tree cover, over time. This

	reflects the Committee on Climate Change recommendation that afforestation must play a critical role in building climate resilience across Northern Ireland.
1.3	Following the committee’s decision that BCC acts as a convenor, a steering group for the programme was established, with meetings chaired by the Commissioner for Resilience. Coordination is undertaken jointly by officers from the Resilience Team, and officers from City and Neighbourhood Services Department. The coordinating officers have also convened internal discussions with colleagues in the Planning Service, City Regeneration, the Strategic Hub and Physical Programmes to raise awareness of the proposal.
1.4	To date, officer involvement has focused on steering group coordination, acting as a broker between all stakeholders. We have made good progress, and have arrived at a point where tree planning at scale can commence shortly, and Committee agreement on next steps is necessary. This paper sets out this update, and makes a number of recommendations.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>Committee are asked to review progress to date and consider the recommended next steps, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree to continue Council coordination of the Belfast One Million Trees Programme with a progress report and next steps plan to be provided on a regular basis. • Authorise Council officers to review BCC sites with the aim of providing a number of pilot sites for tree planting using the process agreed by the One Million Trees Steering Group. • Endorse the principle of integrating the One Million Trees Programme into current, planned, and forthcoming BCC projects, including capture of data on previous planting. • Note that the Belfast One Million Trees Programme will deliver on aspects of the Council Climate Plan, in particular relating to adaptation planning which is ongoing through an adaptation subgroup of the Council Climate Plan Programme Board.
3.0	Main report
3.1	There are multiple objectives associated with a tree-planting programme at scale. It will contribute to several Belfast Agenda priorities on sustainability, liveability and inclusive growth. The Mini Stern, undertaken to inform a roadmap to decarbonise the city, concluded that Belfast will use up its carbon budget in nine years. Tree planning at scale

provides a cheap and safe approach to carbon capture and storage within a city, and to boost biodiversity. Furthermore, designed in the right way, using the right land, tree planting at scale can support sustainable urban drainage, reduce flooding through rainwater capture and protect the city from the impacts of climate change, as rainfall increases. Afforestation in cities is increasingly accepted as an economic driver – boosting property values and contributing to place-making and tourism. Several cities in Europe are citing tree planting as core to their economic recovery post-Covid 19, and we understand DAERA is considering afforestation as a core pillar of a future approach to ‘green growth’ in the region. While more trees in Belfast will improve air quality overall, we are not proposing that this programme will be a major contributor to better air quality, due to the number of trees which would need to be planted in particular locations, to have a material impact on air quality. The programme helps to deliver the Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan, the Open Spaces Strategy, the Resilience Strategy, and the Belfast Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Plan as it progresses.

3.2 Since establishing the steering group, Minister Poots has announced a significant tree-planting programme for Northern Ireland, with an intention to fund the planting of £18m trees in a decade. This would amount to a major increase in forest cover across Northern Ireland, and would meet the recommendations of the Committee on Climate Change, when it prioritised tree planting as a way to reduce Northern Ireland’s CO2 emissions. BCC officers have met the Deputy Permanent Secretary at DAERA and the Chief Executive of the Forest Service to ensure alignment between both programmes and mutual support and has encouraged DAERA to adapt funding streams to support urban tree planting. Two BCC officers will sit on the recently established DAERA Forests for the Future Forum, which brings together delivery partners for the project.

3.3 It should be noted that the One Million Trees programme proposed for Belfast will overwhelmingly consist of tree-planting at scale on strategic sites (e.g. woodland), and is not a ‘street tree’ planting initiative. However, we are keen to encourage DAERA to fund tree planting to support greater city liveability by making communities, arterial routes and the city centre more attractive, and healthier places for people, encouraging mobility and the positive use of public space. The Steering Group is seeking creative ways to green the city such as green roofs, wildflower meadows, rewilding derelict areas and will approach this on a site-by-site basis.

3.4	<p>Furthermore, a forthcoming review by City and Neighbourhood Services of our existing assets, and future maintenance obligations needs to be complete before BCC could commit additional resources to tree planting and maintenance in our own parks and other assets.</p>
3.5	<p>Progress to date:</p> <p>BCC officers have convened a number of meetings with project partners (see Appendix 2) to discuss the One Million Trees programme and how best to proceed.</p> <p>The Steering Group has engaged in a series of positive discussions, agreeing a phased approach to the programme, and that planting would be recorded and collated by partners as of January 2020 onwards.</p> <p>The Steering Group agreed that site selection should be guided by a set of principles including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air quality management areas • Flood risk areas (pluvial and fluvial) • Nature conservation sites/wildlife corridors/watercourses • Areas lacking green assets (e.g.: city centre/inner urban) – consider pocket parks with trees (maybe in large planters) in prominent city centre and local/district areas • Opportunities for more street trees • Vacant/derelict sites, including ‘rewilding’ opportunities • Repurposing of part of areas of extensive cut grass open space (e.g. BCC parks, NIHE amenity grassed areas, roadside verges, etc) • the countryside/hills around the city (including upland water management measures) • sites that buffer and connect to existing woodland
3.6	<p>Planting one million trees in Belfast over 15 years requires approximately 30 hectares of land per year - equivalent to approximately 30 football pitches. The cost has been estimated by the Belfast Metropolitan Residents Group as £100,000 per year for planting (£3,000 per hectare, 2000 trees per hectare).</p>
3.7	<p>On this basis, the Steering Group has agreed to work according to four phases:</p>

	<p>Stage 1 – Site identification (May 2020 – June 2020);</p> <p>Stage 2 – Site assessment (July 2020 – September 2020);</p> <p>Stage 3 – Planting (November 2020 – March 2021);</p> <p>Stage 4 – ongoing site identification, assessment and planting</p>
3.8	<p>A site assessment team has been established which is coordinated by the Resilience Unit with support from CNS, and includes the Woodland Trust, Belfast Hills Partnership, Conservation Volunteers and QUB.</p>
3.9	<p>The above process is a rolling programme, which delivers a pipeline of projects for consideration. Where a site is not suitable for woodland creation the team consider alternative options that will enhance green and blue infrastructure, biodiversity and liaise with landowners accordingly. Work is ongoing to develop design principles and a framework for sites that are not suitable for woodland creation but which could support our targets in relation to carbon reduction, enhanced biodiversity, flood alleviation, urban cooling, and improved health among others. Sites could also be utilised as tree nurseries to support the objectives of the project and a request has been made to BCC regarding this from the Conservation Volunteers which is currently under consideration. Sites received and assessed to date include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belfast Harbour/Titanic Quarter • Department for Communities – 7 sites in the Poleglass area, 1 site in the Ligoniel area • Education Authority – 1 secondary school in East Belfast, 3 primary schools in N&W Belfast • Belfast Trust – Forster Green Hospital • Woodland Trust – potential site acquisition at Cavehill • National Trust – Lisnabreeny
3.10	<p>Discussions are ongoing with other landowners at present regarding potential sites and it is proposed that we undertake a scan of BCC land for suitable sites for inclusion. Initial discussions have taken place with Peace IV team, CNS Parks, City Centre Regen Team, and Planning, placing this initiative firmly in the context of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan and Belfast Open Spaces Strategy, whilst delivering on the aims of the Belfast Resilience Strategy and the Belfast Climate Plan, which sit within the Belfast Agenda.</p>

3.11	<p>A number of workstreams are in development through the Programme including communications and marketing, mapping and research, community, public and business engagement.</p> <p>Finance and Resource Implications</p>
3.12	<p>At this stage, it is not anticipated that Council is required to commit financial resources however, a budget of 40k has been allocated within the Resilience Team to support part funding of a woodland creation post, a data/research workstream, and design activity. It is proposed that BCC undertake a site scan utilising Million Trees site identification and assessment process that partners are undertaking. Options for site use include additional tree planting, nursery provision (as mentioned above), enhanced maintenance and upkeep of existing woodland, as well as other potential site uses such as the development of green infrastructure, biodiversity and other uses as determined through the assessment process. One of the key principles we are promoting is integration of the initiative within existing and future programmes and projects.</p>
3.13	<p>It is anticipated that landowners who submit sites for consideration will retain ownership of the site and responsibility for costs attributed to planting and maintenance. However, resources are available to support woodland creation namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• DAERA provide grant aid for woodland expansion on sites 5 hectares and above (opens in June 2020) This grant does not provide a set amount for establishment costs and is a competitive scheme where projects bid for the funding required against eligible costs i.e ground preparation, plant supply, labour for planting, maintenance etc. Projects tend to be somewhere in the range of £3,500 to £5,000 per hectare depending on the amount of new fencing and how much ground preparation is needed. This will be open to Council.• DAERA are working at present to create a new small woodland grant scheme for sites of 0.2 hectares to 3 hectares (opening in September 2020) The new small scale grant scheme will be a fixed payment of about £3,000 per hectare to plant trees at 2.5m spacing. 80% of the £3,000 payment will be made after planting and the remaining 20% in year 5. This will be open to Council.

3.14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFI are currently developing funding streams that support green and blue infrastructure – BCC submission on greenways includes reference to the One Million Trees Programme. • The Woodland Trust provide tree packs for schools and community groups which provide up to 1000 trees. • In addition The Woodland Trust provide an option for landowners to transfer sites 3 hectares and above, or groups of smaller sites to the Woodland Trust for a 20 year period during which WT would undertake grant aid applications and maintenance. • There is the potential to lever private finance and sponsorship through businesses for tree planting initiatives, conversations that have been delayed due to the pandemic and impact on businesses. • The Woodland Carbon Code is a verification scheme whereby carbon capture can be authenticated to support the sale of carbon to investors. DAERA are currently working with us to explore options to expand this in Northern Ireland. • The Woodland Trust have nominated Belfast through an internal process to be one of a number of UK cities eligible to draw down funding for woodland creation, potentially creating a local fund of between 50k and 300k. <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no equality, good relations or rural needs issues.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 – March 2019, Motion submitted to Council by Cllr Heading</p> <p>Appendix 2 – List of Project Partners</p>