



Department for

Infrastructure

An Roinn

Bonneagair

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**From the office of the Minister for Infrastructure
Nichola Mallon MLA**

Mrs Sara Steele

steelesara@belfastcity.gov.uk

Room 708
Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
BELFAST
BT2 8GB
Telephone: (028) 9054 0105
Email: Private.office@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

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10 February 2022

Dear Mrs Steele,

RE: - NOTICE OF MOTION - STREET TREE PLANTING

Thank you for your letter of 20 January 2022, regarding the above.

The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) welcomes Belfast City Council's (BCC) Notice of Motion to plant one million trees in the city by 2035, and as part of our 'Green initiatives,' fully supports policies such as the '*One Million Trees Initiative*', to help implement sustainable infrastructure for the future.

Your letter refers in particular to '*increase street tree planting across the City*' through partnering. To avoid any misunderstandings, I will clarify what signifies a Street Tree under current departmental policies and legislation.

The Department defines a Street Tree as a tree planted in an area of paved surface, which is adopted for maintenance purposes by DfI Roads & Rivers. The Department's public roads, known as 'adopted surfaces,' are defined under the terms of the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980. The Department's statutory duty to maintain the adopted public road network is subsequently set out within the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993. Any other trees that are located within DfI owned land and road verges, that are the responsibility of the Department, are therefore defined as 'Roadside Trees'.

In relation to Street Trees, DfI currently has responsibility for the management and maintenance of over 11,000 Street Trees that are located on adopted roads and pavements within the Belfast City Council (BCC) area. The Department has an ongoing Project Management Agreement / Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with BCC for Street Tree planting and maintenance. This agreement has been in place since 1983, and any Street Tree planting or maintenance is completed in collaboration with our Arboricultural partners at BCC. The current value of this work is over £400k/year.

When selecting a location for planting Street Trees, a number of factors need to be considered to make a scheme viable. This would include issues concerning road

safety; such as sight-lines for road users, existing street furniture, footway widths, services and utilities, carriageway access/egress, traffic management required during future maintenance, possible localised flooding from leaf fall and potential long-term damage to DfI structures/Utility company assets due to root damage. Other unforeseen consequences may include potential anti-social issues and vandalism, as well as the unintended creation of concealed areas for criminality or drug taking etc., which also need to be considered.

It must therefore be noted that '*increased Street Tree planting across the City,*' and setting Street Tree targets within particular Wards, may have limitations due to the limited availability of viable locations within the adopted road network, as most of these areas have already been utilised with Street Trees planted during the last 40 years.

The Department, in collaboration with our Arboricultural partners at BCC, has identified sites for 70 new or replacement semi-mature Street Trees within the Belfast area this financial year.

Further co-operation with our Arboricultural partners at BCC has included maintenance of 'Roadside Trees' on lands owned by DfI, as well as other horticultural planting that is sometimes undertaken on departmental lands.

On a positive note, in 2020, NI Water identified an opportunity to plant trees to contribute to their 'Nature' and 'Water' Strategic Priorities. NIW started an initial 10 year tree planting programme in 2021/22, building on the already 150,000 trees planted to protect water quality via their Catchment Management work prior to 2021. So far, NIW has completed native, deciduous and appropriate tree planting at Fofanny in the Mourne and Dunore Point in Antrim amounting to approximately 100,000 trees. In the 2022 planting season, NIW is planning large planting schemes in further areas of the Mourne. Working with the Woodland Trust, NIW avail of their technical expertise and DAERA Forestry Expansion Scheme funding, to increase tree cover in NI. Through building networks with neighbouring land managers like BCC and M&EABC, NIW hope to identify areas where they can collaborate and join up nature corridors and improve NI's tree cover together.

In addition to street tree planting, the railway network, which provides a green corridor, linking our towns and cities already contains around 256,000 trees, and Translink plans to enhance this number. As part of Translink's Climate Positive Strategy a Biodiversity Working Group has been established to explore opportunities across the public transport estate to be nature positive. An initial review of the Translink estate in response to its participation in the Belfast One Million Trees Project found limited opportunities for tree planting specifically within the Belfast City Council area. Much of its land is compact within the urban environment. However, recognising the importance to our environment, it is a requirement for future projects to incorporate tree planting as part of the design, for example within Weavers Cross, the Belfast Transport Hub and Yorkgate Station

The Department has also been fully supportive and is an active participant in the Belfast One Million Trees (BMT) project, since its inception by Belfast Metropolitan Residents Group. DfI officials attend BMT meetings and seminars in partnership with the other

BMT stakeholders, which is now chaired by Belfast City Council (BCC) under the '*One Million Trees Initiative*.'

As part of this initiative, departmental officials have been proactively identifying sites that may be feasible for tree planting to help meet the 2035 target date and have also been funding additional 'roadside' tree planting. An example of this was the recent planting of 3000 new trees on the Comber Greenway, which was funded by DfI and managed by the Council's Arboriculturalists.

In liaison with BCC, officials have also scoped a number of sites for additional tree planting. These included DfI owned or adopted lands at A12 Westlink, Middlepath Street, Bridge End, M2 Foreshore, Antrim Road, Stewartstown Road, Arosa Parade/Glasgow Street, Denmark Street (Bullring), Skegoniell Avenue, Knockbreda Drive and Lagan Walkways. Unfortunately after assessment, these locations were found to be unsuitable for planting for various reasons, as mentioned above.

Nevertheless, in addition to Comber Greenway, 'roadside' tree planting of 1400 tree whips was recently completed at Ballymacarrett Walkway. Work at other locations that have been identified as viable is currently being progressed and includes proposed tree planting at Ligoniel Bus Terminus (800 tree whips), Armitage Close embankment (low-level bushes and shrubbery), plus an additional 550 tree whips at Comber Greenway. It is hoped these schemes will be completed this financial year.

Going forward, the Department fully supports the '*One Million Trees Initiative*' and officials will continue to proactively identify sites on DfI land that may be suitable for tree planting as part of any future strategy and delivery plan for increased tree planting across the city.

Finally, in relation to the Council's commitment to planting a number of living Christmas Trees in publicly accessible locations. Should any proposed sites, identified by the Council, be located on DfI owned or adopted land, officials are willing to help to assess the viability of such trees against the Roads related factors previously mentioned, and provide the necessary feedback.

I hope this information is helpful.



KATHRYN MCFERRAN
Private Secretary to the Minister