

8. COLLABORATIVE NATURE FOR CLIMATE WOODLAND CREATION PROJECT (RJT)

1. Purpose of the report

To seek approval for acceptance of external funding over £200,000 and expenditure over £150,000 for a 4-year collaborative woodland creation project with the Woodland Trust, funded through DEFRA's Nature for Climate fund, as part of the Northern Forest.

Key Issues

- **Ensuring full cost recovery**

2. Recommendation

- 1. That Programmes & Resources Committee supports the acceptance of funds from the Woodland Trust (WT) to deliver a project to create approximately 105 hectares of native woodland, these being:**
 - i. Funding from the WT of up to £189,000 staffing costs over 4 financial years (2021/22 to 2024/25) on a full cost recovery basis;**
 - ii. To finance the capital cost of individual agreements up to a maximum total of £913,500 (average cost per scheme, based on existing project, of around £8,700).**
- 2. That the collaboration agreement with the Woodland Trust will be finalised by the Head of Landscape in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and the Head of Law**
- 3. That the Authority may, subject to compliance with its procurement standing orders, enter into contracts for the delivery of the project.**

How does this contribute to our policies and legal obligations?

- 3.** This project will deliver over 25% of the Authority's Corporate Strategy 2019-24 target of creating 400 hectares of new native woodland by 2024, complementing other woodland creation schemes. In doing so it will also contribute to landscape, biodiversity, carbon capture and engaging with residents. It will contribute to delivery of the recently adopted Wooded Landscapes Plan and enable the Authority, as the key delivery partner, to ensure that the principles of right tree, right place, right reason are implemented.

Background Information

- 4.** The Authority has a history of successful collaboration with the Woodland Trust to deliver woodland creation in the Peak District. Over the last 6 years, the Authority has delivered an average of 15ha of woodland creation each year through the joint Small Woodland Creation Scheme, with funding made available by the Woodland Trust and in-house staffing resources from the Authority.
- 5.** In 2020 the Woodland Trust successfully bid for funding from Defra's Nature for Climate Fund to create new native woodland as part of the Northern Forest. The Trust expressed their wish to expand on the existing collaborative agreement with the Authority to increase the native woodland creation targets and to increase the role of the Authority in delivering those targets.
- 6.** The project is aimed particularly at the creation of small farm woodlands, complementing other woodland creation schemes such as the Countryside Stewardship Woodland Creation Scheme and the recently launched England Woodland Creation Offer Scheme, both of which are more suitable for larger woodland creation. The project area covers the majority of the Peak District National Park, with the area roughly south of Matlock-Grindon excluded (please see the plan at Appendix 1). Provisional targets and costings have been

agreed with the Trust based on past experience, aiming to create 105 ha of new woodland by March 2025.

Proposals

7. The Woodland Trust are proposing to provide £189,000 funding to the Authority for the identification, planning, negotiation and overseeing delivery of 105 hectares of new native woodland by the end of March 2025, as follows:

- 2021/22- £5,400
- 2022/23-2024/25- £61,200/yr. for each of the three years

The proposal is to use the funding, which would be payable to the Authority annually in advance, for the equivalent of a Natural Environment & Rural Economy Farm Adviser post (Scale G/H, Job Description and Person Specification similar to existing Farm Adviser posts), and/or equivalent fixed-term contract or consultancy work, to provide staff capacity to deliver the woodland creation outcomes.

Existing Farm Advisers currently deliver Corporate Strategy outcomes, particularly for A Sustainable Landscape that is Conserved and Enhanced, through key activities including encouraging uptake of and facilitating agri-environment schemes and the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme (key mechanisms for delivering National Park objectives); responding to land management enquiries; regulatory work; promoting National Park objectives through farmer facilitation groups; and monitoring and liaison to ensure effective delivery of National Park Authority Land Management Grant agreements. The proposed post-holder would lead on the woodland creation work, with existing Farm Advisers supporting that work where appropriate. As with the collaborative work with the Woodland Trust to date, storage requirement for trees, guards and stakes on a seasonal basis at the Ashford store will be necessary and availability of space has been confirmed with the Head of Asset Management.

8. In line with the previous collaboration project with the Woodland Trust, woodland planting/establishment schemes will be offered to landowners at 100% of the cost. Trees, guards and stakes will be provided by the Authority. Other associated costs (e.g. contractor time, fencing) will either be met by the landowner who will then claim the grant from the Authority, or will be met directly by the Authority, depending on the circumstances for individual schemes. All of these costs will be reclaimed by the Authority from the Woodland Trust.
9. It is proposed that Authority Farm Advisers would continue to liaise with the landowner to ensure successful establishment of the trees, build trusted relationships and explore other opportunities to deliver National Park objectives.

Are there any corporate implications members should be concerned about?

Financial:

10. There are two elements to financial arrangements for this work:

Staffing costs

Income from the Woodland Trust for this element comprises £5,400 in the current financial year and £61,200/year for the next 3 years. The cost of a Farm Adviser post, inclusive of on costs and overheads, is currently £46,971/yr. (reduced pro rata in the current financial year, and rising to £49,846/yr. in year 4 assuming 2% p.a. increase). As the proposed additional post is for more than two years, the Authority may need to fund a redundancy payment at the end of the project. Indicative costs, based on similar posts, are likely to be

in the order of a minimum of £2,500-£3,000. The remaining funds would cover monitoring costs and specialist staff input (archaeology, access, ecology and landscape officers) to support the work.

Capital costs

The Authority would be responsible for the purchase of materials (trees, guards, stakes) and for either reimbursing the landowner for contractor and fencing costs for individual planting schemes, or meeting these costs directly. The average cost of a scheme, based on existing project, is estimated to be around £8,700. The full cost will be reimbursed by the Woodland Trust following completion of each scheme, with payment made within 30 days from receipt of invoice from the Authority.

Summary of Total Costs

Annual Period	New native woodland creation Target Area (Hectares)	Annual Payment Indicative Value - covering the full cost of Authority staff. Payment to the Authority yearly in advance	Indicative Maximum Capital Cost (based on ave. £8,700 scheme) - Payment in arrears within 30 days of invoicing	Total Maximum Payments over the full period of the collaboration
2021/22	3	£5,400	£26,100	£31,500
2022/23	34	£61,200	£295,800	£357,000
2023/24	34	£61,200	£295,800	£357,000
2024/25	34	£61,200	£295,800	£357,000
Totals	105	£189,000	£913,500	£1,102,500

Risk Management:

11. The following risks and mitigation measures have been identified: -
- Not meeting annual target - The Woodland Trust reserve the right to vary the annual payment either up or down depending on achievement of the target for the previous year(s). In mitigation the targets have been set based on similar work over the last 6 years, and the agreement allows for a carry-forward of the annual target by mutual agreement with the Woodland Trust.
 - Non-reimbursement of capital costs - the agreement includes an advance consultation arrangement for each costed scheme with the Woodland Trust, so there would be advance approval of costs to be reclaimed.
 - Failure of planting schemes - maintenance of individual schemes would be subject to an agreement directly between the Woodland Trust and the landowner.

Sustainability:

12. Each woodland creation scheme will be subject to a 5-year post-establishment maintenance and monitoring programme. A maintenance payment of £3,000/ha will be made directly to the land manager by the Woodland Trust, with 30% of the payment reserved until confirmation of successful establishment after 5 years. The Woodland Trust will put in place a legal agreement with the landowner to ensure the new trees planted / established under the Project are maintained for a period of fifteen years.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

13. There are no significant equality issues.

14. Climate Change

Woodland creation will benefit carbon capture and provide individual landowners with an opportunity to contribute towards climate change mitigation. Checks by Authority staff will ensure that the proposals will not impinge on existing high carbon capture habitats such as semi-natural grassland.

15. Background papers (not previously published)

16. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Map of Northern Forest area

Report Author, Job Title and Publication Date

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