



**MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP -
DEVELOPING THE COUNCIL'S GREEN AGENDA**

MEETING DATE Thursday, 5 December 2019

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Steve Holgate (Chair), and Councillors Julia Berry, Mark Clifford, Gordon France, Alex Hilton and Laura Lennox

OFFICERS: Victoria Willett (Service Lead - Transformation and Partnerships), Ruth Rimmington (Democratic and Member Services Team Leader) and Lindsey Blackstock (Open Space Strategy Officer)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Paul Sloan, Val Counce and June Molyneaux

Two members of the public

19.OS.14 Minutes of meeting Thursday, 7 November 2019 of Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Developing the Council's Green Agenda

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2019 were approved as a correct record.

19.OS.15 Declarations of any Interests

Councillor Mark Clifford declared an interest in the Woodland Trust.

19.OS.16 Discussion with Lindsey Blackstock (Open Space Strategy Officer - Chorley Council)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Lindsey Blackstock, Open Space Strategy Officer.

Threats to woodland, wildlife and the wider environment are growing. Our trees and woods face a challenging combination of pressures, including:

- climate change
- inappropriate development
- pollution
- a growing population in a predominantly urban environment
- attack from deadly tree diseases and pests.

Ancient woods and trees in particular are some of our most valuable natural assets. They are irreplaceable and home to many vulnerable and threatened species. Trees bring nature to the heart of our communities, help clean and cool the air, reduce flooding, and improve people's physical and mental health. Urban trees in particular

play a pivotal role in creating healthy and economically successful communities and places for people and wildlife to live.

The Environment Bill was published by the Government in October 2019. This policy statement puts the environment at the centre of policy making. The Environment Bill engages and empowers citizens, local government and businesses to deliver environmental outcomes and create a positive legacy for future generations. The Bill has had its second reading in the House of Commons.

In recent years the Government have strengthened protections for ancient woodlands, veteran trees and other irreplaceable habitats in the revised national planning policy framework and provided almost £6 million to the new Northern Forest. In the 25 Year Environment Plan; Government pledged to plant 11 million new trees and one million urban trees. The Environment Bill introduces 'Duty to Consult' which will give the public the opportunity to understand why a street tree is being felled and express any concerns regarding this. The Bill also introduces Forestry Enforcement Measures which strengthens the Forestry Commission's power to clamp down on illegal tree felling across England, ensuring the Commission has the powers to continue to protect and maintain our forests.

The Woodland Trust, which planted half of the new broadleaf woodland for England last year, called for much greater government support for tree-planting. Local tree strategy guidance is to be published to help local authorities plan for the future. In Chorley planting more trees is at the heart of the Council's ambition to protect the environment for future generations.

Background about Chorley

Chorley Borough is semi-rural covering 80 square miles of land. In the past it was a mining and mill area and there are still remnants of the industrial heritage including chimneys, mill buildings, capped mine shafts and open quarries. Much of the Borough is wooded valley and farmland owing to the River Yarrow, Black Brook and River Chor along with other tributaries which also flow into the River Lostock and River Douglas.

Chorley has in fact got the greatest proportion of Ancient Woodland by area of any other Lancashire authority. These areas of flood plain and valleys are thankfully protected from development owing to their topography. In the 1970s through to the 1990s much of Chorley was developed as part of the New Town Commission and vast areas were planted with shelterbelts as new housing estates and roads were built.

The Council is the custodian of much of this land in the guise of Yarrow Valley Country Park, Astley Park, Clayton-le-Woods, Eaves Green and Astley Village to name just a few areas. The ancient woodlands, shelterbelts and hedgerows in Chorley need to be protected where possible and enhanced with new planting being undertaken in the appropriate locations.

Where should more trees be planted?

The location of tree planting needs to be carefully considered. For example; the soil type and hydrology dictate what tree species can be planted. Some areas do not lend themselves to tree planting owing to overhead power lines, ecological constraints owing to important wildflower meadow or wetland habitat that needs to be protected, visibility for vehicles, commercial value of the land, steep slopes for safe working, shading of ponds which need light etc.

Other habitats such as blanket bog and permeant grassland are just as important as locking in carbon as trees and they need to be protected from change. Trees in the wrong place can cause more damage than good!

The Council support and encourage tree planting in the right locations with the appropriate permissions and future maintenance plan in place. Examples of suitable locations are along the banks of a river which is invaded by Himalayan Balsam - the trees help to shade and weaken the balsam; to plant back native trees into Ancient Woodlands to maintain succession. Also, to plant trees into the corners of school grounds to create nature areas, plant into old quarries, industrial or landfill sites (subject to H&S checks) to create natural habitat and plant hedgerows around fenced fields.

The key is to strategically plan long term tree planting locations. The map at Appendix A is a map of the Borough showing ecological networks for woodland. This map can be used to indicate areas for woodland conservation, management, expansion and re-creation. Similarly, there is also a map showing ecological networks for grassland for which tree planting would be avoided. The Central Lancashire Sustainability Appraisal further expands on the cohesive habitat theory, where green networks are identified to link existing pockets of isolated trees and scrub through urban roads and paths. This theory can provide a basis for identifying which routes, roads or sites are most beneficial for new planting schemes.

Woodlands, especially ancient woodlands, have the benefit of natural regeneration. Trees are capable of seeding and planting themselves and these are often much better than anything planted by man. Trees are best planted between October and March when they are dormant and when the ground is damp and cold.

South Ribble organise an annual tree give away with trees suitable for gardens and give advice on how to care for the trees.

Work to date

Chorley Council are often approached by community groups and individuals who want to plant trees on Council land or have saplings that need a place to be planted.

- In 2015 the Friends of Astley Park in partnership with Buckshaw Primary School collected acorns from Astley Park and each child planted the seed and nurtured the saplings for two years before carefully planting the trees back into the woods. This ensures that trees of local provenance are retained.
- In 2016 and 2017 20 Native Elm trees were planted in Astley Park and Yarrow Valley Country Park by Lower Burgh Meadows Conservation Group.
- In 2018 new trees were planted in Harpers, Tatton, Coronation and Rangletts Rec Grounds.
- In February and November 2019 hundreds of saplings and a community orchard were planted at Yarrow Meadows, in partnership with the Environment Agency and LWT My Place Project.
- In March 2019 a community orchard and native hedgerow was created at Blainscough Wood Nature Reserve.
- Primrose Gardens – Planting of semi mature trees around the site and within the gardens.
- Strawberry Fields Development - planting of trees and hedgerow around the development.

- Parklands High School planted over 100 saplings in the school grounds Eco Garden.
- Astley Park school have planted saplings in their school grounds in partnership with Chorley in Bloom.
- A native hornbeam hedge and three Mountain Ash trees were planted at Abbey Village Play Area in November by the Probation Service.
- Lancashire Wildlife Trust My Place project have planted 400 of new hedgerow whips on The Willows, Eaves Green and 150 whips in Astley Park – oak, hazel, blackthorn, hawthorn, birch and chestnut.
- 23 Semi Mature trees planted around the Market Walk development in November and December.

Work with Partners

United Utilities (UU)

There is currently a drive at UU to look at planting new trees. Water companies in England jointly announced a commitment to plant 11 million trees to improve the natural environment and to support our goal to be carbon neutral by 2030. UU are also supporting the wider government targets to increase woodland cover as part of the 25-year environment plan.

UU have identified a number of potential areas for tree planting to achieve these targets at a local level. The landholdings within the West Pennie Moors are currently being assessed to understand the requirements of the land and formulate a catchment tree planting plan so that a public planting campaign can be organized. More detail will be shared in the New Year.

UU are also undertaking peat restoration in the West Pennines, but where and when will largely be dictated by the restoration plan that's produced in 2020 (though we are likely to have an initial focus in Winter Hill), and funding availability. UU will be able to fund and deliver some of the smaller projects, but for the larger projects they would look to work in partnership with others, as they currently do with a range of partners in the Pennine Peat LIFE and Moor LIFE projects.

Withnell Parish Council

The Parish Council are planting 15 semi mature trees suited to conditions on Railway Park in Brinscall, along with these they are also planting 420 small saplings.

FCC Waste

FCC committed as part of the new Chorley waste contract to plant 500 tree saplings per year at schools and community projects within Chorley and local area. The Council are working with FCC to formulate a 10-year planting plan.

Planning Policy

A new local plan for Central Lancashire is due to be adopted 2022-2036. Part of this plan focuses on the environment and climate change. Policies are being developed to support biodiversity, the carbon neutral agenda and tree planting. Developments of a certain size now have to include a % of net gain for biodiversity, this brings an opportunity for tree planting on developments in Chorley.

Members discussed the challenges with planning applications and the need to base the reasons to refuse an application on material planning considerations. A health

impact assessment could be developed as part of the evidence base for planning applications.

The possibility of extending Chorley Cemetery to develop a green burial site was noted. This could be suggested as part of the call for sites.

Cuerden Valley Trust

The Trust has an emerging vision to address environmental (climate change), education and a mass tree planting project involving the community. They have identified two areas of land that were tenanted grazing land. This land has never been in public amenity use but could be enhanced for recreation by connecting to existing path networks. This is an opportunity for woodland creation and partnership working.

National Farmers Union

There has been a call out for suggestions from farmers to plant new and enhance existing hedgerows and also plant specimen trees in the fields.

LCC Highways

The county council's Highways Management Plan (January 2019) recognises in Part 11 that the 'highway green estate makes a very significant contribution to Lancashire's landscape character, providing both visual amenity and helping to mitigate the environmental impacts of the highway'. It goes on to say that 'wherever possible, the county council will manage its green estate so that there is no net loss of habitat or ecological value, and subject to available resources, seek opportunities to enhance biodiversity'.

The Management Plan also states that objectives for maintaining the green estate include:

- 'to support parish and district councils who wish to implement initiatives that will enhance the visual, amenity or biodiversity of their local estate' and,
- 'to create a high-quality green estate that makes space for trees and maximises the opportunities to enhance biodiversity by incorporating the planting of appropriate varieties of trees'.

Seemingly at odds with the above objectives the Plan also states that the county council will not replace any trees they have been felled for whatever reason. The authority will however allow a district council to fund a replacement tree of a suitable species and will adopt and maintain such trees. The Plan appears to distinguish between these replacement trees and 'new' trees planted in highway verges 'by others' (such as a district council) saying that for these latter 'consent' trees the county council will not maintain or accept liability for them.

Therefore, in cases where the trees replace those that have been felled by the county council there is no requirement for the party (district council) planting the replacements to accept liability for them. This section of the Plan also advises that for replacement planting along avenues or at focal points, their character should be retained wherever possible.

Members noted several cases where this is an issue, in Astley Village and within the town centre. There are also cases where there are maintenance issues with existing trees.

Diseases

Biosecurity of trees is becoming stricter. Dutch Elm Disease and now Ash Die Back has reinforced the lessons of biosecurity and the importance of local provenance for tree whips and seeds.

- In Chorley, Ash Die Back is gradually spreading through young ash trees. At the moment very few larger trees are affected but we could lose many of our ash trees in Chorley in the coming years.
- Phytophthora ramorum, an algae like organism is currently present at Healey Nab and is causing Sudden Larch Death. Larch is covering about one fifth of the site at Healey Nab.

As yet LCC have not been issued with an Order from the Forestry Commission, but when this is issued LCC will be instructed to fell approximately 3.5ha of larch trees via a Statutory Plant Health Notice. The reason for clearing the trees is to stop the spores of the algae spreading to other trees and infecting other woodlands – this is part of a national approach to managing the disease.

Whilst this is bad news, and the short-term impacts will be seen, there are some longer-term benefits;

- This is part of a wider strategy to protect other woodlands and trees in the area
- LCC plan to allow the site to regenerate naturally which will see a move away from conifer woodlands to a more mixed native broadleaf wood with wild heather & bilberry, of greater value to local wildlife
- LCC expect to be able to sell the felled timber (it has to be handled slightly differently) and the income will be used to invest in this and other county sites upon completion of works.

Vandalism and Failures

Tree planting on public open space runs the risk of vandalism and trees being snapped. This has occurred on Harpers and Coronation Rec. The trees have successfully been planted back and retained.

Also, in any large-scale tree planting scheme, not all trees will survive the first few years and some will die and require to be replaced. Trees, especially large specimens, need watering over the summer months in the first few years of planting if the weather is very dry.

Finance

Buying, planting and managing trees all costs money. The financing of this needs to be carefully considered. There are various options for funding:

- Chorley Council have a one-off pot of money for tree planting in the Borough which has come from a S106 agreement. There is £6000 remaining.
- FCC Waste are offering to provide and plant 500 trees per year over the next 10 years.
- Chorley Council can apply to the Countryside Stewardship Scheme for woodland creation, management plan and tree health grants through DEFRA.
- Woodland Trust offer free trees each year that can be applied for.
- External grants can be applied for delivery of specific projects.

Looking forward

Chorley Council are continually reviewing and identifying locations for tree planting or enhancement of existing Council owned land. When sites are adopted, they will be assessed for the opportunity to plant trees.

There are opportunities in the pipeline at Rivington View, Yarrow Meadows and Harpers Lane Rec.

The need to engage with families and enable the correct planting in built up areas was discussed.

Members discussed several potential recommendations:

1. To co-ordinate and support the planting of trees and hedgerows across the Borough in identified locations through a partnership approach.
2. To work with the Woodland Trust and community groups to offer tree planting workshops to teach about how to identify an appropriate location to plant, how to design the tree planting area, how to know what species to plant where, how to plant trees and how to maintain trees etc.
3. To work with landowners and partners in Chorley to identify and facilitate new locations for tree and hedgerow planting.
4. To work with landowners and partners in Chorley to identify and facilitate locations of exiting tree planting, hedgerow and shelterbelt that can be enhanced.
5. To write a 10-year Tree Planting Strategy. A large number of partners will need to be involved in the formulation of the Strategy.
6. To create a new role, jointly with South Ribble Council, to co-ordinate how the Council's will achieve the target of becoming carbon neutral by 2030.

19.OS.17 Feedback on Findings

Meeting with officers regarding Town Centre/Markets (Tuesday, 19 November)

There is more that the Council can do to encourage independent traders and market stall holders to engage with the green agenda, although there are examples of good practice already. Many of the larger companies are already engaging on a national footprint.

It was suggested that the Council could introduce a green accreditation scheme to highlight to shoppers where traders are engaged.

Site Visit to Lancaster City Council (Thursday, 21 November)

The City Council began their efforts with their leisure centres. They highlighted the need to work in partnership to achieve significant reductions in the carbon footprint.

Site Visit to GA Pet Food Partners Manufacturing site (Monday, 25 November)

GA have won a regional award for their environmental work. They have used innovative methods to dispose of their waste and are aiming to become self-sufficient. A visitor's centre is currently under construction to share their expertise with others.

Meeting with Parklands High School students (Friday, 29 November)

It is encouraging to see young people with aspirations and expectations. The meeting highlighted the need for the Council to communicate with the community about the work it is doing on the green agenda.

19.OS.18 Draft Recommendations

Vicky Willett, Service Lead for Transformation and Partnerships, explained that in order for the initial recommendations to be fed into the budget cycle it is proposed that an interim report be presented.

The recommendations so far include:

1. To identify dedicated officer resource to coordinate development of the council's green agenda and roadmap to becoming carbon neutral.
2. To consider the additional resources needed to deliver the action plan which could include funding for specialist knowledge, additional expertise or specific projects.
3. To embed green considerations in all decision making by including a space for an environmental impact comment on all committee reports. Also review the sustainability element of the existing Integrated Impact Assessment.
4. To write to the Executive Member responsible and to LCC to request that greater clarity be provided on recycling, advising further on what can be recycled and how.
5. To develop a campaign and action plan to raise awareness of the council's current climate change activity and educate residents on what they can do, as well as sources of support.

Members noted that Chorley Green Living have been successful in taking forward a pop-up shop in Market Walk following their meeting with the Task Group.

Other suggestions for future recommendations included

- A green hack event within the Lancastrian
- An event to encourage businesses to engage with the green agenda
- The development of a green app

19.OS.19 Date of the Next Meeting

Thursday, 9 January 2020 at 6pm.

It was agreed to invite Councillor Susan Jones – Cabinet Member (Environment) at South Ribble to attend a future meeting.

Chair

Date