

Somerset County Council
Scrutiny Committee
– 29/03/2023 Scrutiny for Policies & Environmental
Committee

Somerset Tree Strategy

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Cabinet Member: Cllr Sarah Dyke

Division and Local Member: n/a

1. Summary

1.1. This report details the Somerset Tree Strategy which has developed over the last 9 months. The strategy consists of three documents.

- A high-level strategy that sets out five themes with high level objectives under each
- An objectives and actions document breaking these down into further detail on how each theme will be delivered
- A longer evidence-based document with further background and information on the strategy

A film is also being created about the strategy and current treescapes across Somerset to compliment the strategy and help engage more people.

The aim of the creation of the strategy was to produce something short, succinct and engaging to encourage ownership and use across Somerset. We wanted to avoid a long document that would end up sitting on a shelf and never get used.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

2.1. Members are asked to

- Provide any feedback they may have on the strategy
- Support and recommend the strategy be adopted by Somerset County Council's Executive Committee

3. Background

3.1. The development of the Somerset Tree Strategy came about through the collaboration of members of the Somerset Local Nature Partnership.

In December 2021. The Heritage Fund released the Tree's Call to Action (TCTA) fund a £6 million fund which awarded between £250,000 - £500,000 to

partnerships to deliver large scale tree and woodland planting in response to the the UK Governments England Trees Action Plan.

A Somerset wide bid led by Somerset Wildlife Trust on behalf of the LNP was submitted which required £25,000 match funding. This was agreed to be met by the five Somerset Council's split evenly five ways as active delivery partners should we be successful. One of the main objectives of the bid was to use part of the funding to develop a Somerset Wide Tree Strategy which could then be delivered with the remaining funding.

Currently there are a number of groups, individuals, landowners and organisations carrying out fantastic work across Somerset when it comes to tree planting and maintenance with the idea of the strategy being to help coordinate and bring everyone together with a clear vision and implementation plan for trees and treescapes in Somerset moving forward.

Unfortunately, due to the highly competitive nature of the TCTA fund with over £26 million worth of funding requested across 64 applications, Somerset was unsuccessful. However, the commitment for funding was still there from the five councils and therefore the decision was made to press on with developing the strategy and look for future funding opportunities for delivery.

Additional funding was provided by The Woodland Trust, LNP, Forestry Commission, Quantock Hills AONB, Exmoor National Park & The Environment Agency. Procurement for the consultant to write the strategy took place in June & July 2022 led by Somerset Wildlife Trust in partnership with the five Somerset Council's. Evolving Forests were appointed in August 2022 to write the strategy and a wider steering group comprising of members of the LNP along with other interested parties across Somerset formed to guide the development of the Strategy, including The Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, FWAG SW, AONB's, Reimagining the Levels, Exmoor National Park and The Environment Agency amongst others.

A public consultation was run in Autumn 2022 and widely circulated by the steering group on what residents, businesses and other interested parties would like to see from the strategy and how they would use it. There was a fantastic response rate with 752 responses submitted to the consultation.

A final draft was then circulated at the end of December across all members of the steering group for comments for before being finalised at the end of January 2023.

The Strategy is split across three documents

- Somerset Tree Strategy 2023-2033
- Somerset Actions & Objectives 2023-2033
- Somerset Tree Strategy Evidence Document

The Tree Strategy 2023-2033 is a short sharp punchy document that sets out where Somerset currently is and where we want to go with five themes

- Create a woodland culture
- Resilient and Adaptable Trees
- Expanding Tree Cover
- Woodland Services
- Governance

The Actions & Objectives document expands on the five-theme breaking down each objective into a series of actions over the next ten years.

Finally, the evidence document contains further detail and data on Somersets Treescapes, the development of the strategy and information on the consultation responses. The idea being this information is readily available but doesn't detract from the short, sharp impactful strategy document itself.

As an additional note The Forestry Commission released the Trees Call to Action fund in June 2022 which again a joint Somerset wide group submitted a bid led by Somerset Wildlife Trust. We were successful with an application for £300,000 over a 2-year period which will employ three officers who will take responsibility for the delivery of the Somerset Tree Strategy. The three posts are

- Tree Project Officer responsible for partnering and implementing tree planting across Somerset along with sourcing additional funding through grants etc
- Community Empowerment Officer responsible for engaging and supporting existing tree planting communities across Somerset
- Technical Officer responsible for providing technical advice and support for planting and maintaining trees across Somerset

These officers should be in place in April/May 2023 providing the resources to take the Strategy forward.

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1.** A public consultation was run in September / October to guide the initial strategy. 752 responses were submitted to this consultation with their feed invaluable in helping create the initial draft of the document. A final draft consultation was run across the five Somerset councils and wider Tree Strategy Steering Group in December 2022 / January 2023
- 4.2.** A final review of the actions and objectives was undertaken by core members of the steering group (Somerset Wildlife Trust, The Forestry Commissions, The Woodland Trust and members from the Climate and Water sub workstream

5. Implications

- 5.1.** The Tree Strategy will be adopted by Somerset Council as the responsible delivery body and will also sit within the wider Somerset Local Nature Recovery Strategy and form an important part of how Somerset's Treescapes are focused on moving forward allowing for protection, enhancement and expansion of existing and new treescapes across the County.

6. Background papers

- 6.1.** Appendix A – Somerset Tree Strategy 2023-2033
Appendix B – Somerset Objectives & Actions 2023-2033
Appendix C – Somerset Tree Strategy Evidence Document

Note For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author