

Decision Report - Executive Decision

Forward Plan Reference: FP/23/05/13

Decision Date – 06/06/2023

Key Decision – No

Somerset Tree Strategy

Executive Member(s): Cllr Sarah Dyke – Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change

Local Member(s) and Division: n/a

Lead Officer and author: Jacob Hall – Climate Change and Resilience Officer

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Summary / Background

1. A wide range of Stakeholders from across Somerset have come together over the last ten months to create the Somerset Tree Strategy. The strategy provides a holistic and joined up approach to Somerset's Treescapes with shared objectives and actions to coordinate a universal approach towards Trees across the county.
2. The strategy has been developed in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders involved in shaping the future of Somerset's Treescapes. A collective approach towards this will help deliver an increase in tree cover at scale and help increase the many benefits offered by trees to communities across the county.

Recommendations

3. The Executive agrees to
 - a. Adopt the Somerset Tree Strategy with Somerset Council as the responsible body for delivery
 - b. Somerset Council Executive takes the appropriate action to develop and adopt a council wide policy to implement and guide everyone on the

objectives of the strategy, and reports back to Scrutiny Committee in 6 months time – Climate and Place

Reasons for recommendations

4. Somerset's tree cover sits at around 8%, well below the national average of 13% and far short of the national target of 14%. The Somerset Tree Strategy brings together all those working across the county around Treescapes to create a coordinated and collaborative approach to increasing our county's tree coverage.

The strategy will also sit within the upcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy. A statutory responsibility for local authorities to map their local area to aid nature recovery under the Environment Act 2021.

5. The Strategy is split across three documents contained within the appendices:
 - Somerset Tree Strategy 2023-2033
 - Somerset Actions & Objectives 2023-2033
 - Somerset Tree Strategy Evidence Document

Other options considered

7. Should Somerset not have a Tree Strategy the approach towards Treescapes across the county would be disjointed and uncoordinated which would be detrimental to the county being net zero by 2030.

Links to Council Vision, Business Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy

8. One of the council's priorities is to create "A Greener, more Sustainable Somerset". Trees provide a wide variety of benefits that fall under this priority including alleviating flooding, increasing biodiversity and sequestering carbon. There is also a clear link between our interaction with nature and how this benefits our mental health contributing towards another of the council's priorities. "A Healthy and Caring Somerset".

This administration has also committed to planting 150,000 trees per year. The Tree Strategy will support this objective.

9. 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 focused around 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.

Financial and Risk Implications

10. The purpose of this strategy is to detail a high-level overarching list of objectives and actions. Understanding the funding required is the next step in how we deliver the actions set out, therefore this report deliberately does not cover funding. At present there no request for funding from Somerset Council. The Strategy has been developed in partnership and will be delivered in partnership. Therefore, the actions, objectives and funding do not fall solely upon Somerset Council.
11. Somerset Council has successfully received grant funding from The Forestry Commission of £300,000 over the next two financial years (2023/24 and 2024/25). The funding will be used to cover the full cost of employing three officers dedicated to the delivery of the Somerset Tree Strategy.
12. The three posts which are currently being recruited are:
 - Tree Project Officer responsible for partnering and implementing tree planting across Somerset along with sourcing additional funding through grants
 - 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

13. There are several regular funding streams available for the Council to apply for funding from, organisations such as the Forest Commissions Treescapes and Urban Tree Cover. The previous Somerset Councils have experience in successfully bidding for funding. Therefore, we are confident we can identify sources of funding for the strategy.

14. The risk identified for this report is a failure for the strategy to be adopted by executive. This has been rated as 1 (unlikely) due to the widespread input and support from stakeholders across Somerset as well as support from the policy and environment committee. It is therefore felt that the strategy is strongly endorsed.

The impact of the strategy of not being adopted has been rated as 3 (significant) as the strategy will bring together all those involved in Treescapes into a coordinated approach, therefore by not adopting the strategy work around Treescapes could remain isolated and less impactful.

Likelihood	1	Impact	3	Risk Score	3 - Low
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Legal Implications

15. There are no legal implications as a result of this strategy.
16. There is no current plans to commission or procure third party resources for the strategy.

HR Implications

17. There are no HR implications as a result of this strategy.

Other Implications:

Equalities Implications

18. There are no equalities implications as a result of this strategy. Treescapes and the benefits they bring benefit all communities and residents of Somerset.

Community Safety Implications

19. There are no community safety implications as a result of this strategy.

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

20. There are a wide range of benefits the strategy will bring towards our climate and sustainability objectives including:

- Purification of water sources
- Increased production of sustainable building materials
- Increased air quality
- Climate Change adaptation such as shade for people and livestock during hotter summers
- Increased biodiversity
- Reducing the impacts of surface water runoff and flooding

Health and Safety Implications

21. There are no health and safety implications as a result of this strategy.

Health and Wellbeing Implications

22. The link between health and wellbeing and our interaction with nature is well documented. There are a number of actions and objectives within the strategy that will benefit the residents of Somerset's health and wellbeing.

Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

23. Feedback was provided by the Policies Environmental Scrutiny Committee and incorporated into the Strategy.

An additional recommendation was added to the Executive Committee.

“Somerset Council Executive takes the appropriate action to develop and adopt a council wide policy to implement and guide everyone on the objectives of the strategy, and reports back to Scrutiny Committee every six months – Climate and Place”

Next steps and Governance

24. The strategy will be resourced through the three officers employed through The Forestry Commission funding. These officers will work with stakeholders both in Somerset Council and externally across the county to implement the actions set out in the Actions & Objectives document. Six monthly updates will be presented to the Environment and Place Scrutiny board. The strategy contains short, medium and long term priorities which will be reported on through these updates.

Background

25. The development of the Somerset Tree Strategy came about through the collaboration of members of the Somerset Local Nature Partnership (LNP). 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 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.

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.

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.

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. This was presented to the Policies, Environmental Scrutiny Committee in March 2023 with the final document completed for adoption in April 2023.

Background Papers

26. The three documents that form the Somerset Tree Strategy are attached

Appendices

- Appendix A Somerset Tree Strategy 2023-2033
- Appendix B Somerset Actions & Objectives 2023-2033
- Appendix C Somerset Tree Strategy Evidence Document

Report Sign-Off (if appropriate)

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	David Clark/Scott Wooldridge	24/05/2023 25/05/2023
Communications	Chris Palmer	22/05/2023
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	22/05/2023
Workforce	Chris Squire	16/05/2023
Asset Management	Oliver Woodhams	10/05/2023
Executive Director / Senior Manager	Mickey Green	23/05/2023
Strategy & Performance	Alyn Jones	22/05/2023
Executive Lead Member	Cllr Sarah Dyke	24/05/2023
Consulted:	Councillor Name	
Local Division Members	n/a	
Opposition Spokesperson		
Scrutiny Chair	Cllr Martin Dimery	29/03/2023