

Briefing Note

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Title: 2018 budget funding - £60m 'greenery drive' to plant 10 million trees in England

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Job Title: Head of Environmental Services

Intended Audience:

Internal

Partner organisation

Public

Confidential

Purpose or recommendation

To advise on the funding proposal announced following the Government's 2018 budget for more than 10 million trees to be planted across England with the injection of £60m of new funding over five years, as part of what the government billed as its "drive to preserve the country's greenery".

Overview

£60m will be spent on planting millions more trees across England, including a project to plant new street and urban trees set to receive £10m, to be matched by contributions of funding and assistance from local authorities, community groups and charities. A further £50m goes to buy carbon credits from landowners who plant qualifying woodland. The Treasury said the latter would provide for an estimated 10 million new trees over the next 30 years.

As a key part of biodiversity and ecosystems, trees provide vital habitats for birds and other small wildlife, and in towns and cities have been shown to help residents' mental health.

England's tree-planting record is poor compared with other European countries. About 1.6 million trees were planted in England with government support in the 2017-2018 financial year, covering 895 hectares. By comparison, Scotland planted 7,100 hectares in the same period.

Conservationists have pointed out that because England's 120 million ash trees are threatened by ash dieback, a deadly fungus that arrived in 2012, the country is on track to suffer a net loss of trees over the next five years. The mix of species proposed to be planted under the government's new funding announcement will be decided later.

The bulk of the money, £50m, will pay landowners for planting trees that lock up carbon, which observers said raised questions over how accessible those woodlands would be to the public. That fund, the Woodland Carbon Guarantee scheme, should pay for 10 million new trees.

The other £10m will be targeted at planting in cities and towns and should fund at least 100,000 more trees.

The Woodland Trust, a conservation charity, said the money was a step in the right direction in terms of tackling climate change and wildlife losses, but not enough in total. "The problem is greater than just having the funds to deliver increased tree-planting.

RHS chief horticulturist Guy Barter commented on £10 million funding between 2019-20 and 2022-23 for local community street trees and urban trees announced in the Budget: "The £10 million for local authorities to plant more trees is a good first step towards greening grey Britain but it might only mean 25,000 are planted in towns and cities as a result of the scheme – just third of the number Manchester City Council already maintains.

"Trees not only hold pollutants, mitigate against noise and provide an invaluable home for wildlife, they can also capture up to 40% from a single rainfall event, reducing runoff and alleviating pressure on drainage systems that can result in localised flooding. However, it is important to consider the right tree for the right place and for councils to choose future-proof varieties – those best equipped to survive increasingly drier summers and wetter winters - work the RHS is already undertaking in its gardens."

Proposal/Options

The £10m going towards planting urban trees is to be matched by contributions of funding and assistance from local authorities, community groups and charities.

Trees in urban environments provide valuable environmental services and enhance cities' green infrastructure. Urban trees can also improve amenity and property values, slow surface water run-off, and can help absorb air pollutants.

Environmental Services has a tree replacement budget of £10,000, mainly for street tree replacements however this will be offered up as part of agreed council savings.

Details about bidding for the funding as part of this initiative is not currently available and is yet to be formulated by the relevant Government department. We are, therefore, awaiting further information about how funding can be accessed.