



Individual Executive Decision Notice

Report title	Tiny Forests	
Decision designation	GREEN	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Steve Evans Cabinet Member for City Environment	
Wards affected	(All Wards);	
Accountable Director	Ross Cook, Director of City Environment	
Originating service	Planning/ Public Health/ Environmental Services	
Accountable employee	Ric Bravery Tel Email	Strategic Health Lead (City Planning) 01902 552177 ric.bravery@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by		

Summary

The Council has been offered the opportunity to plant two ‘Tiny Forests’ in partnership with the environmental charity Earthwatch.

Recommendations for decision:

That the Cabinet Member for City Environment, in consultation with the Director of City Environment:

1. Approves the Council entering into Agreements and Licenses to permit two Tiny Forests to be planted.
2. Approves provision of match funding of £12,500 for one scheme, subject to approval of the budget by Cabinet (Resources) Panel.

This report is PUBLIC
[NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]

Signature

Date:

Signature

Date:

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Tree planting initiatives in the City support the aims of both Wolverhampton's Tree and Woodland Strategy, approved January 2020, and Climate Emergency Declaration, July 2019. Trees provide a broad range of health, environmental and other benefits including helping to combat climate change.
- 1.2 Employees have been in discussion with an environmental charity called Earthwatch which is promoting in the UK an initiative called Tiny Forests. The concept of Tiny Forests was first developed in Japan in the 1970s and around 3,000 have been planted globally. They involve planting a dense native woodland the size of a tennis court, containing around 600 trees. Tiny Forests are up to 30 times better than other plantation types at absorbing carbon-dioxide and at reducing particulates and noise. They also can help cooling in summer, by shading and transpiration of water, and can reduce flooding by absorbing rainwater. They support local biodiversity, can provide an outdoor classroom for people to connect with nature and support health and wellbeing through improving the local area and providing opportunities to participate in the project.
- 1.3 Tiny Forests are up to 30 times more dense than conventional tree plantings, grow five to 10 times faster than regular forests, due to the innovative planting and management methodology, and have low management requirements, becoming maintenance free after three years.
- 1.4 Each Tiny Forest costs £25,000 to prepare the ground and plant. The process involves excavating to a one metre depth, adding nutrients and compost to the soil and planting around 600 trees, preferably with the involvement of the local community.

2.0 Proposal

- 2.1 Earthwatch have secured 50% funding, from the energy company, Ovo, to plant a number of Tiny Forests and have offered The City of Wolverhampton Council the opportunity to plant one of these in March 2021. Match funding of £12,500 has been identified from S106 money and other existing capital budgets and a possible site has been identified at Oak Street Open Space in Graiseley Ward.
- 2.2 Following on from this offer, Earthwatch has also offered The City of Wolverhampton Council the opportunity to plant a Tiny Forest 100% funded by Defra in the 2021/2022 planting season. A possible site has been identified at Moseley Road Open Space in Bilston North Ward.
- 2.3 Work has been undertaken to ensure the suitability of the ground for excavation and planting. Discussions have also been taking place on Landowner Agreements and licenses for Earthwatch to operate on the Council's open spaces.

- 2.4 Agreement is sought to enter into the relevant agreements with Earthwatch, subject to any final issues being resolved and the approval of the relevant capital budget for the 50%-funded site by Cabinet (Resources) Panel, currently expected on 17 February 2021.

3.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 3.1 The alternative option is to not participate in the project. This would incur no costs and provide no benefits to the City. It would also not progress the aims and action plans of the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy and Climate Emergency Declaration.

4.0 Reasons for decision

- 4.1 The benefits to the Council of participating in the project are:
- Climate change adaption and mitigation
 - Improved health and wellbeing of participants and local residents
 - Potential reduction in surface water flooding, noise and air pollution in the areas of planting
 - Reputational gain from taking part in an innovative pilot project
 - Being the first local authority in the West Midlands to have a Tiny Forest
- 4.2 The proposal would also progress the Council Plan's proposed outcomes of providing Wulfrunians with longer, healthier lives and its aims of creating healthier communities and a vibrant, green city of which we can be proud.

5.0 Financial implications

- 5.1 The match funding of £12,500 for the Ovo-funded project has been identified from S106 and existing capital budgets which will be monitored as part of the Council's routine quarterly financial monitoring and reporting. The funding for both schemes includes an element of maintenance for the first three years, after which the Tiny Forests will be maintenance free.

[SB/16122020/W]

6.0 Legal implications

- 6.1 Discussions are ongoing between Legal Services, City Assets and Earthwatch about the signing of an Agreement and a licence for Earthwatch to undertake the work. Relevant Legal advice will be obtained before any such document is signed.
- 6.2 The proposed agreements would require the Council to not change the use of the premises for a period of 10 years.

[Legal Code: TS/16122020/W]

7.0 Equalities implications

- 7.1 Ovo specifically requires that they fund schemes in areas of high levels of deprivation as indicated by high levels of take-up of free school meals. This requirement is met by the schools in the vicinity of Oak Street. Bilston North also experiences high levels of deprivation. The projects will therefore provide the benefits outlined to some of the most disadvantaged groups in our community, including people with protected characteristics.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental implications

- 8.1 As outlined, the project will bring numerous environmental benefits including; climate change adaption and mitigation, flood alleviation, reduced noise and air pollution and supporting biodiversity.

9.0 Human resources implications

- 9.1 Participation in the project will require some staff time which can be accommodated within existing work programmes.

10.0 Corporate Landlord implications

- 10.1 Licenses will be required to allow Earthwatch to carry out the work on the open spaces mentioned. Land Agreements will also commit the Council to protection of the open spaces where the planting will take place for a period of 10 years.

11.0 Health and Wellbeing implications

- 11.1 Trees and woodland are known to contribute to health and wellbeing through encouraging physical activity and promoting mental health. Opportunities for the local community to contribute to planting and maintaining the Tiny Forests in early years will also contribute to health and wellbeing.

12.0 Covid implications

- 12.1 Community involvement in planning and planting the Tiny Forest in March 2021 will be influenced by the COVID-19 guidance and regulations in operation at the time. Contractors working on the site will also be subject to the guidance and regulations applicable at the relevant time. Given that the work will be taking place in the open air it will be possible to complete the project. Similarly, the planting of the second Tiny Forest in the 2021/22 planting season will be carried out in accordance with any remaining regulations and guidance in operation at the time.

13.0 Schedule of background papers

- 13.1 Wolverhampton Tree and Woodland Strategy approved by Cabinet 22 January 2020.