

<b>CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL</b>	<b>Cabinet</b> <b>8 September 2021</b>
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<b>Report title</b>	Severn Trent Water's Commonwealth Legacy Forest	
<b>Decision designation</b>	AMBER	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Steve Evans City Environment and Climate Change	
<b>Key decision</b>	Yes	
<b>In forward plan</b>	Yes	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All Wards	
<b>Accountable Director</b>	Ross Cook, Director of City Housing and Environment	
<b>Originating service</b>	Planning	
<b>Accountable employee</b>	Ric Bravery Tel Email	Strategic Health Lead 07773 189238 ric.bravery@wolverhampton.gov.uk
<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>	City Environment & Housing Leadership Team City Environment and Climate Change Cabinet Member briefing	6 July 2021  27 August 2021

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**Recommendations for decision:**

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the Council supporting the principle of the Severn Trent Commonwealth Legacy Forest and proposing sites for both the Legacy Forest and Tiny Forests on land owned or managed by the Council.
2. Delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for City Environment and Climate Change, in consultation with the Director of Governance, to sign any relevant agreements to enable planting to take place on the proposed sites, should they be accepted and the terms of planting be considered acceptable to the Council.

**Recommendation for noting:**

The Cabinet is asked to note:

1. That this report seeks delegated authority in the case of sites being proposed and accepted but does not commit to Council to providing sites for the Commonwealth Legacy Forest or Tiny Forests, should sites not be identified and selected or should the terms of planting not be acceptable to the Council.

## **1.0 Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek support for the principle of the Council supporting the Severn Trent Commonwealth Legacy Forest, including Tiny Forests, and delegated approval to enter into any relevant agreements, should proposed sites be accepted and the terms of planting be considered acceptable to the Council.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 Tree planting in the City supports the aims of both Wolverhampton's Tree and Woodland Strategy, approved in January 2020, and Climate Emergency Declaration, July 2019. It also supports the aims of the Council's Open Spaces Strategy and Action Plan, 2018. Trees provide a broad range of health, environmental and other benefits including helping to combat climate change.
- 2.2 The Council's tree planting programme has involved the planting of over 2,000 trees in the City, mainly in parks and open spaces, in the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 planting seasons. This includes the first Tiny Forest in the Black Country, planted at Oak Street Open Space, Merridale, in March 2021. This was sponsored by the Council and the OVO Foundation (the charitable arm of OVO Energy) and developed in partnership with the environmental charity Earthwatch.
- 2.3 Earthwatch have proved an excellent partner in planning, developing and managing the Tiny Forest. The first monitoring event took place on 14 July and they have made significant efforts to engage with local schools, despite the coronavirus pandemic. The Tiny Forest has involved a significant commitment for the Council, however, such as in liaising with Earthwatch, managing the volunteers in the Keeper Team which maintains the site and dealing with incidents of vandalism.
- 2.4 The Council's tree planting programme for 2021/2022 includes the planting of 10 hectares of trees (around 20,000) in a number of open spaces across the City, funded by the Woodland Trust's Emergency Tree Fund. The sites are being finalised but are likely to include Bee Lane Playing Fields, Bushbury Hill, East Park, Eastfield Park, Stowheath Lane Open Space, Taylor Road Open Space, Springvale Park and Woodcross Park.
- 2.5 The programme for 2021/2022 also includes the planting of the Black Country's second Tiny Forest at Moseley Road Open Space in Bilston. This will be fund wholly by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (Defra) and again delivered in partnership with Earthwatch. Other community tree planting initiatives are proposed along with planting of sites in Bilston North Ward by staff from Lloyds Banking Group, working with the Woodland Trust.
- 2.6 The Council is also seeking to support the Queen's Green Canopy to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022 and has agreement from the Woodland Trust to badge the 10 hectares funded by their Emergency Tree Fund as part of this initiative. The Council is also promoting the three million free trees available to schools and community groups through the Queen's Green Canopy initiative.

### **3.0 The Severn Trent Commonwealth Legacy Forest**

- 3.1 Severn Trent Water are sponsoring 2022 acres (818 hectares) of woodland across the Midlands as part of the sustainability legacy of the 2022 Commonwealth Games, to be planted over three planting seasons from 2021/2022 to 2023/2024 and to be known as the Severn Trent Legacy Forest.
- 3.2 As part of the same initiative, Severn Trent are also looking to sponsor 72 Tiny Forests, one for every nation and territory taking part in the Commonwealth Games, around the urban West Midlands. They are planning to plant all of these in the 2021/2022 planting season, in partnership with Earthwatch, and to engage with schools and local communities.
- 3.3 Discussions on details are taking place with Severn Trent and Earthwatch, over both the Legacy Forest and the Tiny Forests. Early indications are that Severn Trent are seeking sites of a minimum size of 20 acres (eight hectares) for the Legacy Forest, significantly larger than any which the Council is able to offer. Employees have, however, identified a number of smaller sites which could be available, subject to finalisation of those required for the Council's Emergency Tree Fund planting. There are also details to be agreed over areas such as site surveys, the planning and maintenance of planting, the length of any agreements and the claiming of carbon credits.
- 3.4 For the Tiny Forests there are further details to be resolved over community and school engagement in planting, looking after and monitoring the forests. Information has been sent to schools and community contacts seeking nominations for Tiny Forest sites, either within schools or on public open spaces. Responses are being considered and discussed both internally and with Earthwatch and Severn Trent.
- 3.5 The principle of the Commonwealth Legacy Forest and Tiny Forests is supported by the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy, Climate Emergency Declaration and Open Space Strategy and Action Plan. It is therefore proposed that the Council supports the principle of the project and propose sites where they can be identified.
- 3.6 Details of the terms and site selection process are still being discussed and there is no certainty that the City will have sites selected or that the Council would agree to the terms of any agreements. Given the tight timescales to start planting the Legacy Forest and plant all of the Tiny Forests in the 2021/2022 planting season, however, delegated authority is sought to agree sites and enter into agreements, should sites be proposed and accepted and the terms of planting be acceptable to the Council.

### **4.0 Evaluation of alternative options**

- 4.1 Option 1 is to approve the report, support the initiative and seek to engage with Severn Trent and Earthwatch to identify sites. This will further the aims of the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy, Climate Emergency Declaration and Open Space Strategy and Action Plan. It will also promote community engagement in planting and maintaining the

forests, in particular the Tiny Forests, as well as supporting the wider benefits to the City of the Commonwealth Games.

- 4.2 Option 2 is to do nothing. This will bring no benefit to the City, reduce wider engagement with the Commonwealth Games and will bring about possible reputational harm with existing and future partners and with the public.
- 4.3 The recommendation is to follow Option 1.
- 4.4 Information on the Council's wider tree planting programme has been shared through the Council's networks along with an invitation to put forward sites for Tiny Forests. This specific invitation has also been sent directly to schools. Community involvement in planting, maintaining and monitoring Tiny Forests is key to their success.

## **5.0 Reasons for decision**

- 5.1 It is recommended that support for the principal of the Commonwealth Legacy Forest is given to complement the Council's wider support for the Commonwealth Games and the benefits which they will bring to the City and region. Such support is also in line with the Council's existing Tree and Woodland Strategy, Climate Emergency Declaration and Open Space Strategy and Action Plan.
- 5.2 Planting of sites as part of the Commonwealth Legacy Forest, either the main forest or Tiny Forests, would further the aims of the Tree and Woodland Strategy, Climate Emergency Declaration and Open Space Strategy and Action Plan. This would include wider benefits of social inclusion and promoting public health, in addition to the direct environmental benefits such as tackling climate change and supporting biodiversity. Tiny Forests, with the aim of community involvement in planting, maintenance and monitoring, would have additional benefits.

## **6.0 Financial implications**

- 6.1 Full details of what funding Severn Trent Water will provide are under discussion. It is, however, understood that they will fund planting of both the main Legacy Forest and the Tiny Forests plus maintenance of the Legacy Forest for a period of 35 years. It is also understood that they will support the Keeper Teams which will manage the Tiny Forests.
- 6.2 The recommendation does not commit the Council to supporting the projects if the terms on offer are not considered acceptable. Those terms include the financial implications for the Council. Any financial implications for the Council which cannot be supported from within existing budgets will be the subject of further reports.

[SB/23082021/R]

## **7.0 Legal implications**

- 7.1 Details of what agreements will be required by Severn Trent Water are not available at present. It is understood that they are offering to maintain the Legacy Forest for 35 years, which would require an agreement for that length of time. The recommendation does not

commit the Council to supporting the projects if the terms on offer are not considered acceptable. Those terms include the legal implications for the Council.

[SZ/25082021/P]

## **8.0 Equalities implications**

- 8.1 There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report. Any tree planting which may arise from this report will be enhance the local environment and benefit residents of the area in which they are planted in times of visual amenity, recreational value, urban cooling, access to nature and both physical and mental wellbeing. The opportunity to get involved in planting, maintaining and monitoring the Tiny Forests will also benefit the health and wellbeing of participants. This project will benefit most those who do not currently have access to woodland, including people with protected characteristics. Planting schemes will be designed so they do not restrict access to greenspace for those with disabilities or create unsafe environments for women or other vulnerable groups.

## **9.0 All other implications**

- 9.1 Any tree planting arising from this report on land which is managed by the Council will take place on designated open spaces that are for the long-term health and wellbeing of the City's residents. Other planting may take place in school or other grounds which are managed by the relevant organisation. There is likely to be a restriction placed on any site(s) where the tree planting might take place and consideration of the costs and benefits of such restrictions will be made when deciding whether to progress with any projects.
- 9.2 Any tree planting arising from this report will provide a range of health, environmental and climate change benefits as indicated in the strategies referenced.

## **10.0 Schedule of background papers**

- 10.1 [Wolverhampton Tree and Woodland Strategy](#) - Cabinet - 22 January 2020.
- 10.2 <https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/environment-and-climate/climate-change-and-sustainability/climate-emergency-declaration> - Council - July 2019
- 10.3 [https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/sites/default/files/pdf/Wolverhampton\\_OSSAP\\_Update\\_June\\_2018.pdf](https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/sites/default/files/pdf/Wolverhampton_OSSAP_Update_June_2018.pdf) – Cabinet - July 2018