

QUESTION 5

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 17 MARCH 2022

Question to Cllr Tagg Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change

By Cllr Hussain

Question

To store carbon, trees are the best of all possible options. What more can the Council do to ensure that tree planting on the county's own land in Burton and the county as a whole is as simple and efficient as possible?

Reply

In our day-to-day services, the County Council actively manages or tenants nearly 8,000 hectares of land throughout Staffordshire, comprised of diverse habitats including woodland, heathland, country parks, county farms, regeneration sites, corporate estate and schools.

Notwithstanding the 3,800 miles of highway that we manage and its resource of an estimated 475,000 trees.

In the past few months, we have planted 17,500 trees over a couple of regeneration sites, making a valued contribution to reducing our carbon impact.

Staffordshire County Council has the expertise and opportunity to objectively identify areas within our portfolio, where we can have a positive effect with tree/woodland establishment.

Whether that be for carbon sequestration, nature recovery, air quality improvement, recreation, wellbeing or biodiversity, any strategy we undertake should realise as many benefits as possible, for any identified change in land use. Whilst maintaining the contribution that our rural portfolio adds to the communities and economy throughout our County.

With tree planting in mind, we should carefully consider the "right tree, for the right place"

All natural habitats can play a role in catching and storing carbon.

Woodlands achieve the highest rates of sequestration, but other habitats can store carbon that we need of offset, such as peat bogs, their improved condition can contribute to a vibrant and enhanced Countryside estate, as well as sequestering carbon.

For this reason, we are commissioning a study of county council land to understand its current carbon baseline (occupied or tenanted) to establish where, and how, we could increase carbon capture and storage. This might be by planting trees, but equally could be by restoring other habitats or other land management techniques.

The study will also look at additional benefits that such habitat enhancement could offer, such as natural flood management, wider biodiversity benefits, landscape enhancement, air quality and access improvements.

Through this we will be able to prioritise where we can achieve the greatest impact for both climate change mitigation, adaptation and nature recovery.