

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

6 November 2023

Report of the Climate Change Working Group on Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation

Recommendation(s)

I recommend that the Committee:

1. Consider the draft report of the Climate Change Working Group.
2. Refer the final report and the following recommendations to Cabinet:
 - a. That the Cabinet be requested to consider the amount of carbon sequestration that can be achieved on SCC land to mitigate residual carbon emissions from SCC's carbon footprint that will be present in 2050.
 - b. That the Cabinet undertake to develop a delivery model to plant a Staffordshire Forest, not only to mitigate our carbon emissions but also to realise the wider benefits of woodland creation, such as, green economy, rural diversification, rural employment, tourism growth, landscape protection, biodiversity enhancement and provision of a local timber resource. To do this explore the wider benefits and partnership opportunities with organisations like Forestry Commission and National Forest Company (FC/NFC).
 - c. That the Cabinet take advantage of Forestry Commission Funding identified by the working group which is available until March 2024 and apply for the planning, funding, establishing, growing and management of Woodlands at the earliest opportunity.
 - d. That Cabinet consider how to progress planning for tree planting, woodland creation and to shape the concept model to plant a Staffordshire Forest, we recommend:
 - i. Identify land in the SCC rural portfolio that sits within the Forestry Commission low sensitivity areas of Staffordshire and
 - ii. Complete an options appraisal for a given area of land use change, exploring options through agricultural diversification, woodland creation, and other alternatives to include financial value through carbon sequestration.
 - iii. All benefits to be identified to give a balanced financial appraisal over a timeframe 2030-2070.
 - e. That Cabinet be requested to consider cessation of disposal of Council owned land /Country farms on the asset disposal list until it has been considered for inclusion in the concept model.

- f. That the Leader and Cabinet Members be requested to engage with the District and Borough Councils at the Leaders Board and Sustainability Board to consider the concept model for a Staffordshire Forest, to invest in woodlands as a way to tackle the dual crisis of climate change and biodiversity, and how woodlands offer multiple sustainable benefits (social, environmental, and economic) to Staffordshire residents and businesses.

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Climate Change Working Group

Summary

What is the Overview and Scrutiny Committee being asked to do and why?

1. The Climate Change Working Group has investigated carbon capture and offsetting residual carbon in Staffordshire County Council to meet its Climate Change commitment to Net Zero by 2025.
2. The Working Group has completed its work and has prepared a report of findings and recommendations for Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) to consider and comment on.
3. Corporate OSC is requested to refer the final report and recommendations to Cabinet to receive the report. Cabinet shall consider the report and provide an executive response to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee within two months of it being submitted.

Background

4. The Climate Change Working Group was established by Corporate OSC. When scoping its work, the Working Group looked at the carbon footprint for Staffordshire County Council, the operations covered by the Council, the Climate Change action plan 2021-25, and the roadmap to net zero
5. The Working Group agreed to investigate carbon capture and offsetting residual carbon in Staffordshire County Council. It considered how the Council could offset 10,000 tonnes of residual carbon to balance its carbon emissions by 2050.
6. The Working Group has taken evidence from Council officers, the Forestry Commission, The National Forest Company and Norbury Park Estate.

7. The Working Group visited Norbury Park Estate and Birmingham Institute of Forest Research (BIFOR) Free Air Carbon Dioxide Enrichment experiment to see woodland management in action and the experiment to investigate tree health and the impact of climate change on trees and woodland.
8. The Working Group report (Appendix 1) focus is on carbon sequestration and woodland creation, it provides a summary of the evidence gathered, conclusions and recommendations to Cabinet.

Link to Strategic Plan

9. The information in this report links to the Council's Strategic Plan as Climate Change is one of the four core principles which help shape all that we do.

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity

10. The Working Group reports to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee which also receives the Climate Change Annual Report and monitors the Climate Change Action Plan.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

11. [Climate change - Staffordshire County Council](#)
12. Appendix 1 – Climate Change Working Group report – Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation.

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