

Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 26 January 2021

Edinburgh Million Tree City

Executive/routine	Routine
Wards	All
Council Commitments	43

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Culture and Communities Committee:
 - 1.1.1 notes progress made in initiating the Edinburgh Million Tree City project, including a successful application to the Woodland Trust's Emergency Tree Fund for £298,055 to support project delivery; and
 - 1.1.2 receives annual updates on the project, including tree numbers and other monitoring data.

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Report

Edinburgh Million Tree City

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides an update on plans to ensure Edinburgh becomes a Million Tree City by 2030.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries service is leading a project to increase tree cover to help Edinburgh fulfil its Climate Emergency commitments and become a Million Tree City by 2030.
- 3.2 To achieve this, some 250,000 trees will need to be planted over the next decade across a wide range of public and private land:
- 3.2.1 in parks and other Council green spaces;
 - 3.2.2 along streets and roadsides;
 - 3.2.3 on golf-courses and university grounds; in residential gardens; and
 - 3.2.4 as part of new developments
- 3.3 Although a significant number of these can be planted and cared for at minimal cost to the Council, there will be a requirement for a sustained funding commitment over the ten-year lifetime of the project, from the Council, its project partners, grant-giving agencies and organisations, other landowners, donors, bond-holders and sponsors.
- 3.4 At its meeting of [28 January 2020](#) Committee recognised the value that urban trees play in addressing the Climate Emergency and global biodiversity losses, supporting an ambition for Edinburgh to be a “Million Tree City” by 2030.
- 3.5 Although the impact of Covid-19 measures has meant that officer time to support the initiative has been limited, progress has been made in determining existing tree numbers, identifying the means through which tree planting can be funded and encouraged across the city, and ascertaining how we can more effectively monitor, record and communicate tree data.
- 3.6 The Woodland Trust has begun this contribution by granting £298,055 from its Emergency Tree Fund to support project delivery. These funds will be used to appoint a Million Tree City Project Manager and catalyse tree planting, project

communication, project fundraising, public engagement and volunteer activity between 2021 and 2023.

- 3.7 Once appointed, the Project Manager will establish and support a Project Board and formalise the Million Tree Forum of supporting expert disciplines. A Project Delivery Plan will be produced and reported against, and a tree number accumulator established and communicated widely.

4. Main report

- 4.1 In 2017 an i-Tree Eco survey estimated that urban Edinburgh had in the region of 713,000 trees, 25% under the City Council's management and the remainder on public agency or privately-owned land.
- 4.2 Since then, the Council and its partners have planted a further 36,000 trees across a range of sites that are within its management, whilst around 5,000 trees have been removed by the Council for public safety reasons (usually the result of disease or storm damage) and active woodland management, bringing the estimated total to 744,000.
- 4.3 There is an unknown number of trees across the wider City of Edinburgh local authority area. However, the urban areas of Balerno/Currie/Juniper Green, Ratho Station, Ratho, Newbridge, Kirkliston, Dalmeny and South Queensferry are likely to collectively contain at least 56,000 additional trees in proximity to residents - bringing the overall total to around 800,000.
- 4.4 From 2021, the Council is to widen its tree condition survey activities to cover an additional 82,000 trees, which is anticipated to increase the annual number of trees requiring public safety removals to about 2,000 per year; an estimated 20,000 trees between 2020 and 2030.
- 4.5 It should be noted that the scale of Ash Dieback in Edinburgh is presently unquantified. The Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries service will produce an Ash Dieback Action Plan in 2021 that will include a city-wide condition survey of ash trees and an analysis of the number of trees needing to be removed as a public safety precaution.
- 4.6 A number of woodlands that were created as part of the Craigmillar/Millennium Tree Projects (1997-2001) are now at the stage where they require thinning in order to benefit the long-term health of the woodland habitat. This is likely to total approximately 14,000 removals by 2030.
- 4.7 As 75% of the city's trees are outside of the Council's direct management control, recent tree gains and losses across the wider city canopy are not known and a significant number of trees are potentially vulnerable to loss. It is known that 2% of Edinburgh's trees, about 16,000 in total, are on vacant brownfield land and may therefore be at risk from new, planned or future development.

- 4.8 Taking these anticipated future losses into account, and discounting natural regeneration, attaining one million trees by 2030 will require the planting and care of some 250,000 new trees across the urban environment.
- 4.9 Many of the most suitable public green spaces were planted up as Millennium Woodlands two decades ago, and since that time the Council has focused its tree planting resources in public parks and other green spaces. New parks established over the last twenty years have also already benefited from generous tree planting, notably Little France Park. However, it is estimated that the Council's public parks, recreation grounds, housing green space, golf courses and school grounds could readily accommodate a further 50,000 trees.
- 4.10 Because of the relatively high cost and complexity of establishing roadside trees, there has been a steady decline in the number of street trees across Edinburgh. This means that there is the potential to plant about 2,500 trees in streets that trees have been removed from, as well as in suitable road and highway verges and along central reservations.
- 4.11 Edinburgh is home to many government agencies, educational establishments, and environmental charities that collectively have responsibility for the care of substantial areas of green space. The National Health Service, Ministry of Defence, Historic Environment Scotland, environmental trusts, and the city's many universities and private schools can all play their part in increasing tree cover on their estates, perhaps up to 11,250 trees in total. There are also numerous private golf courses, private outdoor estates and urban-fringe farms that have extensive areas of managed green space. Again, some 11,250 trees could be planted in these locations, enhancing both their immediate landscape and the wider city environment.
- 4.12 Urban creep, the paving over and building on residential gardens, accounts for 6.4 hectares of vegetation loss in Edinburgh each year. There are 236,000 households in Edinburgh looking after private or residential green space totalling an estimated 2,500 hectares. Not all will have gardens, and for those that do a tree may not be desirable; but even if just a third of households with suitable space planted a tree to support the project then Edinburgh would gain around 55,000 trees.
- 4.13 The Edinburgh City Plan 2030 proposes that all new development include green infrastructure that provides a well-connected ecologically diverse landscape, including trees where appropriate. It commits to the building of 20,000 affordable and low-cost homes; recognises the need to supply land for 22,600 market houses; identifies the need for an additional 22 primary and secondary schools; and has an ambition to create significant new lengths of walking and cycling routes. With the inclusion of more robust planning policy and climate-adapted developments, there is the potential to introduce considerable new tree and woodland cover across the urban environment. Although it is not easy to be precise at this stage of the Plan process, it is anticipated that at least 120,000 new trees can be planted as part of planned development.

- 4.14 A city-wide Ecological Coherence Plan is presently being produced as part of the Thriving Green Spaces project. This will help identify opportunity areas for tree planting, as well as those locations ecologically sensitive to new trees. Research is also underway to masterplan Edinburgh's future green-blue network. This will opportunity map potential woodland planting locations that strengthen the network and help realise its myriad ecosystem services.
- 4.15 In short, it is possible for Edinburgh to be a Million Tree City by 2030, but this ambition will only be attained if all sectors of Edinburgh society do their bit. To be successful the Council needs the full commitment and ongoing support of other landowners, government agencies, charities, residents, and developers.
- 4.16 Programmes of this scale and longevity demand appropriate and ongoing levels of project management and partner support if they are to be successful. A Project Board supported by a dedicated Project Manager will therefore be established, along with formalisation of the Million Tree Forum of supporting expert disciplines.
- 4.17 This will initially consist of representatives from various Council services (Parks, Planning, Housing, Roads, Strategy and Communications), Edinburgh Greenspace Forum, Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust, Forest Research, Forestry Commission Scotland, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, NatureScot, Scottish Wildlife Trust, The Conservation Volunteers, Trees of Edinburgh, and the Woodland Trust Scotland. This grouping will vary and grow as demands on the programme change over time.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The ambition for Edinburgh to be a city of one million trees by 2030 has been set and the Million Tree starting gun has effectively been fired. Although relatively few trees have been planted during 2020 due to the impact of Covid-19 control measures, there are plans to "catch up" during the 2021-22 planting season. Subject to the provisions of Covid-19 controls the following actions will be initiated during 2021 to support this:
- 5.1.1 February: Appoint Project Manager;
 - 5.1.2 March: Establish Project Board and re-host Million Tree Forum;
 - 5.1.3 April: Complete analysis of potential woodland planting locations;
 - 5.1.4 May: Finalise Delivery Plan and formally launch Edinburgh Million Tree City;
 - 5.1.5 May-September: Plan tree planting programme for Autumn-Winter, including community and volunteer activities; and
 - 5.1.6 From October: Undertake tree planting across the city.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The Woodland Trust has granted £298,055 from its Emergency Tree Fund to support the initial phases of project delivery.
- 6.2 Given the current uncertainties around available land for tree planting, the relative willingness of key landowners to plant trees on their land, and the specific times for delivering additional trees over ten years, either directly, through partners, or via new development, it is difficult to accurately determine the financial cost of establishing 250,000 additional trees across the city.
- 6.3 However, experience suggests that there is usually positive engagement from funders and other organisations for tree planting. Indeed, demands for tree planting action are likely to increasingly resonate with potential funders as the need to address the challenges of the Climate Emergency become ever more urgent.
- 6.4 In recent financial years the Council has provided an annual tree planting budget for its public spaces, which if continued over the ten years of the project should provide sufficient resource to cover the cost of establishing the requisite number of additional Council parks and recreational land trees.
- 6.5 The Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust and Woodland Trust Scotland have been working alongside the Council to develop the Edinburgh TreeTime initiative, a vehicle to raise tree planting funds through public donation and sponsorship. A review of the scheme is currently underway, the recommendations from which will inform the required steps needed to increase generated revenues further.
- 6.6 Golf clubs, government agencies and environmental charities would be expected to meet the costs of establishing trees on their properties. These costs should be relatively small given the likelihood that young trees planted as woodland or groups would be favoured over more expensive forms of establishment. The national Forestry Grant Scheme offers financial support for the creation of new woodland and the sustainable management of existing woodland. Within the scheme's eight categories there are a range of support options covering tree planting, protection, and on-going maintenance. It may be possible to offer "Million Tree" incentives for these owners to encourage additional planting.
- 6.7 Similarly, developers would be expected to meet the cost of tree planting and woodland planting as part of the conditions of planning permission. Responsibility for on-going maintenance would differ from site to site, but would likely be a mixture of resident managed, factor managed, or Council adopted land. Developers may also be able to fund tree planting beyond their immediate development as part of a "developer contribution".
- 6.8 Tree establishment grants and materials for communities, schools and other volunteers are available from Reforesting Scotland, The Woodland Trust and other charities.

- 6.9 Encouraging householders to plant trees in their gardens could take the form of a discount scheme with local plant nurseries or, if financial support/sponsorship could be secured, a tree “giveaway” scheme could be operated.
- 6.10 In addition to the Council, there are many companies, business and other organisations in Edinburgh that are developing or implementing plans to become carbon neutral. The Million Tree programme would help them to achieve this by paying funds directly into the scheme to offset their emissions. The i-Tree Eco analysis estimated that Edinburgh’s existing trees store an estimated 179,237 tonnes of carbon, worth £39.8m, and remove 4,885 tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere each year, worth £1m. An alternative to direct payments would be to work with existing charities that provide carbon offsetting to business by arranging tree planting. These include Trees for Cities, Trees for Life, Ecologi, Carbon Footprint, Forest Carbon, Carbon Managers and the Woodland Trust.
- 6.11 The Scottish Government’s draft infrastructure investment plan 2021-2026 seeks to enable the transition of Scotland to net zero emissions and environmental sustainability. Amongst its planned investments is a £350m programme to create 18,000 hectares of new woodland.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 Engaging individuals, families and communities in the project will be critical to its long-term success, either as supporters, donors, planters or counters. There will therefore be an increasing emphasis on communication, consultation and engagement as it develops, and much of the tree planting will incorporate a role for volunteers to help foster citizen care for trees.
- 7.2 It is important that tree planting and loss over the decade is recorded, and that progress to the one million tree target is regularly monitored and reported. Recent technological development will enable Edinburgh citizens to play an active role in counting and recording trees via the on-line tree recording platform Treezilla. It can be used by individuals (from novice to expert), Tree Wardens, Friends of Parks groups, and by secondary school and tertiary students. A manual is also being produced so that non-professional volunteers can undertake i-Tree Eco compliant surveying, which will assist with data collection when updated i-Tree Eco assessments are undertaken, probably at the mid-point and towards the end of the project.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/news/article/12729/edinburgh-2030-a-million-tree-city>
- 8.2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Million_Tree_Initiative

9. Appendices

9.1 None.