



Environment and Energy Board

Date	7 th December 2022
Report title	Emergency Tree Fund – Update
Portfolio Lead	Councillor Ian Courts – Leader of Solihull Council
Accountable Chief Executive	Laura Shoaf, Chief Executive, West Midlands Combined Authority email: laura.shoaf@wmca.org.uk
Accountable Employee	Ed Cox, Director of Public Service Reform email: ed.cox@wmca.org.uk Jackie Homan, Head of Environment Email: jacqueline.Homan@wmca.org.uk

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Environment Board is recommended to:

- 1) Note the recent success of the Environment Team in securing a significant grant of £300,000 from the Emergency Tree Fund.

1. Purpose

To provide an introduction to the Board on the Emergency Tree Fund grant awarded to the WMCA in the autumn of 2022.

2. Background

- 2.1 The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) published its Five Year Plan in 2021 to understand how the region can achieve net zero by 2041 as well as a Natural Environment Plan to restore, protect and enhance nature.
- 2.2 Both of these strategies outline action that we would like to take around forestry and tree planting. The evidence for the Five Year Plan indicates that forestry cover should be increased from approximately 1.5% today to 13%, aligning as much as possible with the long-term aims for England (this equates to planting an additional 5.7m trees by 2026 and 19m by 2041, the WMCA's target date for net zero). This will require significant coordination of all regional stakeholders from constituent and

non-constituent local authorities, which have their own forestry and woodland plans and targets, as well as environmental NGOs and private sector organisations.

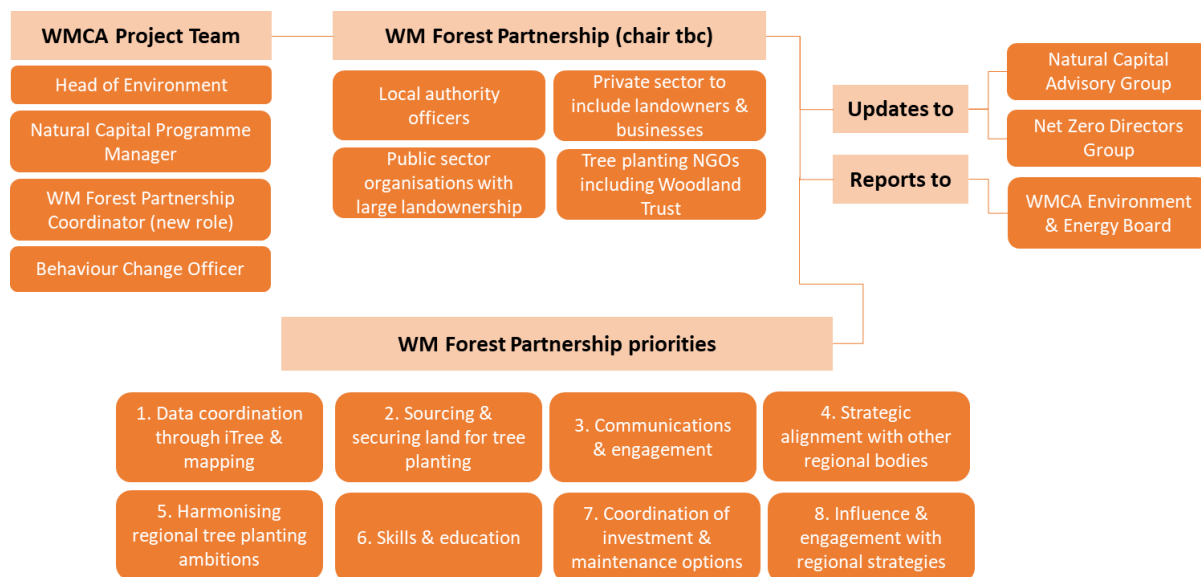
- 2.3 This cannot be delivered by the public sector alone, particularly with respect to the availability of land and financing for both planting and maintenance. The grant of £300,000 from the Emergency Tree Fund (ETF) allows us to set up a West Midlands Forest Partnership (WMFP), the aim being to bring together a collective to deliver against these ambitious targets. The membership would build on the existing relationships we have formed as part of delivering the West Midlands Virtual Forest platform.
- 2.4 The ETF is managed and given out by the Woodland Trust and in this current round of funding a total of £2.1m was awarded to six local and combined authorities.

Project Overview

- 2.5 The project objective is to support the activities of all partners of the WMCA in reaching their tree planting targets through identifying a way to coordinate the different projects and programmes required to meet the strategic objectives. The project will run over two years, commencing in January 2023.
- 2.6 The outputs include:
- 1) Establish a West Midlands Forest Partnership to work towards the regional tree planting target outlined above.
 - 2) Build engagement through extending the WMCA's Virtual Forest. This platform was set up to engage citizens and organisations more widely around the regional tree planting targets. We would like to grow support and membership, through private sector engagement as well, particularly working with landowners to maximise space for tree planting.
 - 3) Mapping current trees across Coventry, Solihull and Birmingham. This will extend the work initially undertaken through the Black Country Consortium's i-Tree survey, making it the largest study of its type in the UK. Completing this study will provide baseline data on tree species diversity, size and condition as well as the value of ecosystem services delivered.

West Midlands Forest Partnership

- 2.7 The WMFP itself will comprise the stakeholders identified in the diagram below. We feel that it is essential to get a spread of stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors to enable us to deliver the tree planting target we have for the region. This cannot be delivered by the public sector alone, particularly with respect to the availability of land and financing for both planting and maintenance. We will be clear, in the Terms of Reference for the WMFP, that the aim is to bring together a collective to deliver against ambitious targets. The membership would build on the existing relationships we have formed as part of delivering the West Midlands Virtual Forest platform.



Governance structure of the WMFP

- 2.8 In terms of the remit, we have identified 8 key priorities. These are outlined in the subsequent paragraphs (2.9 – 2.16).
- 2.9 **Data coordination.** Local authorities, and other bodies, hold different data around tree planting, and have taken different approaches. We will be looking to see how the WMFP can help coordinate some of that to support lobbying with central government or delivery of wider activity, such as the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The data from the i-Tree survey will form an important part of this wider data story and we will have comparable data from across the WMCA geography.
- 2.10 **Sourcing and securing land for tree planting.** This will be one of the hardest elements of delivering the regional target for tree planting. Local authorities, and the WMCA, are limited in terms of the availability of land for planting trees and this is why we are also looking for private sector representation on the WMFP. The ETF will also provide funds to run a landowners' summit to identify new areas of land, as well as running an ongoing campaign to identify and secure land for planting.
- 2.11 **Communications and engagement.** Reaching out to people across the West Midlands is a really important part of the tree planting effort. We have begun to do this through our Virtual Forest platform, but also through in-person events. We want to explore how we can deliver more outreach activity to enlist support from people in West Midlands communities to deliver the tree planting target. The key will be to link people and community groups who want to plant trees, with the available land identified.
- 2.12 **Strategic alignment with other regional bodies.** The WMCA is not the only organisation working to increase tree planting. We want to make sure that we are

coordinating with Local Enterprise Partnerships and the work of the Midlands Engine on tree planting and wider natural environment issues.

- 2.13 **Harmonising regional tree planting ambitions.** The local authorities and WMCA have different ways of articulating their tree planting targets. These range from actual numbers of trees to be planted through to ambitions for canopy cover on a ward-by-ward basis. The plan is not to change the way local authorities undertake their work on tree planting, but to understand what this means in terms of total numbers of trees/ canopy cover and how we can provide the most effective social and environmental outcomes from the tree planting that is done. It will also support other elements of work, for example the ambition to establish a West Midlands tree nursery/ tree nurseries as we will have more clarity on numbers of trees required.
- 2.14 **Skills and education with communities.** The communications and engagement piece provides one level at which we want to reach out to people, but there are also other opportunities that might exist around citizen science, engagement through schools and employment opportunities, for example. We have committed to scope opportunities for Natural Capital Apprenticeships in the Natural Environment Plan – some regional organisations are already working on this (Birmingham City Council, linked to the Future Parks Accelerator programme and the Wildlife Trusts, which have a traineeship programme).
- 2.15 **Co-ordination of options for investment into tree planting and maintenance of trees.** We want to work with the WMFP stakeholders to understand the range of investment and funding mechanisms that can be brought into delivering the regional tree planting ambitions. These fall into opportunities around:
- 1) agro-forestry;
 - 2) investment and revenue for nature-based services; and
 - 3) private sector ESG and understanding how we can align this with opportunities identified through data and mapping.
- 2.16 **Influencing and engaging with other regional strategies.** The WMFP can support the input/ influence into other regional strategies where appropriate, providing opportunities to include tree planting as part of the wider narrative.

i-Tree Survey

- 2.18 The i-Tree survey is seen as an essential element for the long-term strategic planning for management of urban forests; it has already been completed in the four Black Country authorities. Planning for urban forest management requires knowledge and understanding of the broader composition and condition of all trees within a geographic boundary so includes those both on public and private landholdings. The proposed i-Tree survey will deliver the data for the remaining WMCA constituent authorities of Birmingham, Solihull and Coventry and, when added to the survey already undertaken for the Black Country local authorities, will



provide a comprehensive picture for the WMCA region to inform tree management decisions and ambitions.

- 2.19 Birmingham, Solihull and Coventry all currently have data around their own publicly held tree stock in relation to species and, to some extent, around quality but know very little about other trees within their respective authority boundaries. This gap in knowledge is recognised by their respective Urban Forest Managers and is a priority action for these local authorities, such as referenced in the Birmingham Urban Forest Master Plan 2021 – 2051, but all lack the financial resource to individually commission this research.
- 2.20 The data arising from the i-Tree survey will provide data on:
1. The wider tree species composition.
 2. The current structure and condition of the urban forest
 3. Mortality rates
 4. Delivery of essential ecosystem services – function analysis
- 2.22 Understanding the **species composition** will allow Urban Forest Managers to make long term plans for how they need to build resilience into the urban forest through diversification of tree species. This will allow longer term planting plans to include forecasts of future tree species requirements allowing this in turn to be passed on to tree nurseries. By giving advanced notice growers will allow them to take a more informed approach to stock production and meet the growing need from the local authorities and other landowners.
- 2.23 Understanding the **current structure and condition** will be essential to inform where potential issues may arise. We are all aware of the changes in climate and this is being most felt in urban centres. Understanding that some tree species will struggle to cope with changing temperatures and fluctuating water availability (and where these are) will allow us to identify areas where trees may be lost in the medium to long term. In addition, the work will allow us to identify risks from new pests and diseases as a result of climate change.
- 2.24 i-Tree records data on all trees within the sample plots to better understand the **natural mortality rate** of trees, which allows the Urban Forest Managers to more accurately determine what planting rates are required for long term sustained growth of canopy cover.
- 2.25 Expressing the **ecosystem services functionality** of trees in terms that wider stakeholders understand is crucial in developing appreciation of trees and acceptance of the need for increased tree cover in urban locations. For many it is only the disbenefits they see: leaf fall, shading, sticky deposits and messy fruit. Being able to express in financial and quantitative terms such as volume of water intercepted, amount of particulate matter captured or carbon sequestered brings a tangible and easily communicated element to messaging around tree planting activity. Being able to quantify the benefits of tree planting in measurable terms



adds an essential element to grant applications that funders are increasingly looking for.

- 2.26 Delivering the i-Tree survey will allow the WMCA to actively share data with local authorities and to work jointly in a comprehensive and informed manner through the WMFP to deliver tree planting plans and targets.

Next Steps

- 2.27 The project will begin in January 2023. Immediate next steps will include:
- Advertising for the West Midlands Forest Partnership Manager post. This is a two year post, funded through the Emergency Tree Fund grant. The job description has been approved and is ready for advert.
 - Prepare the 'request for quotes' to procure the i-Tree survey. This will build on the work that has already been undertaken across the four Black Country authorities.
 - Decide the membership of the WMFP, establish the terms of reference and hold the first meeting.
- 2.29 The Environment Team will bring regular updates on the progress of the WMFP work programme as it develops.

5. Financial Implications

There are no immediate finance implications arising from this paper. The work outlined will be supported through the grants provided by the Woodland Trust Emergency Tree Fund.

6. Legal Implications

None from this report.

7. Equalities Implications (*)

The project will include engagement with a range of communities across the region with a particular focus on enhancing the environment of those areas of greatest deprivation where feasible. We will also make sure that the recruitment process for the Forest Partnership Lead follows HR equalities guidance.

8. Inclusive Growth Implications

The project will include engagement with a range of communities across the region allowing for opportunities for involvement in tree planting and aftercare activities, which promote engagement with the outdoors which is beneficial to health and wellbeing. Increased tree canopy cover can also improve air quality at a local level and it can help to reduce the ambient air temperature which may become increasingly important as extreme weather events become more frequent.



**West Midlands
Combined Authority**

9. Geographical Area of Report's Implications

Though the project will concentrate upon the 7 met geography of the WMCA is it proposed that we engage with stakeholders from the wider non constituent geography of the WMCA to achieve greatest impact.

10. Other Implications

None.

11. Schedule of Background Papers

None.

Note; (*) denotes mandatory field