

**Report of** Director of Resources and Housing

**Report to** Executive Board

**Date:** 16 December 2020

**Subject: White Rose Forest Strategy for Leeds**

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary**

**1. Main issues**

- 1.1 The Committee for Climate Change (CCC) have advised government that in order to help achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions, the UK should plant at least 30,000 hectares per year up to 2050 to lock up the remaining residual atmospheric carbon once we have achieved all other possible reductions in emissions. To highlight the scale of this challenge, only 2,330 hectares were planted in England during 2019-2020 with a total of 13,460 hectares across the whole UK.
- 1.2 The Northern Forest which includes the White Rose Forest was announced by Government in 2018 as part of the Environment Bill and aims to plant more than 50 million trees in and around the cities of Leeds, Liverpool, Chester, Manchester, Sheffield and Hull. As well as the storage and capture of vast amounts of carbon it will provide immense health and environmental benefits for the 13 million people who live across the area. It is estimated that the Northern Forest will provide social, economic and environmental benefits of £2.5 billion.



due to the lack of pollinating insects – according to the [State of Nature Report](#) compiled by scientists from 25 British Wildlife organisations insects and invertebrates have halved since 1970.

- 1.8 The Council responded to its declaration of the Climate Emergency in 2019 by taking the bold step of committing to planting 50 hectares of woodland every year until 2045 on its own land. This will add 1250 hectares which is an impressive 5.6 million trees to the 1400 hectares of woodland that it already manages. A significant quantity of these trees will be grown at the Council's Arium nursery from seeds collected by the community and commercially sourced.
- 1.9 As well as planting on parks and open spaces the Council is incorporating extensive tree planting into many of its mainstream projects and programmes. The Flood Alleviation Scheme 2 incorporates proposals to plant up to 2 million trees in the upper Aire catchment as part of an extensive programme of natural flood management.
- 1.10 In addition, the design of the East Leeds Orbital Road has been fully developed in line with Green Streets principles with 5,000 trees already planted as part of the enabling works. The improvements to public realm in the city centre through the Our Spaces Strategy is also helping to green the city centre, whilst the £174m Leeds Public Transport Investment Programme also incorporates Green Street principles including substantial tree planting. The £100 million annual regeneration investment in Leeds also provides significant opportunities to encourage developers to plant trees which the council will continue to encourage and collaborate on.

## **2 Best Council Plan implications** (see the [latest version of the Best Council Plan](#))

- 2.1 The White Rose Forest strategy will help to deliver a number of council aims and objectives contained in the Best Council Plan which sets out 8 priorities for the district to reduce inequalities and tackle poverty. It will mainly address priorities around Sustainable Infrastructure and the Child Friendly City.

## **3 Resource implications**

- 3.1 The increased workload generated by the implementation of the strategy will be absorbed into current work streams across Parks and Countryside and the Sustainable Energy and Air Quality Team (SEAQ). Site and office based staff in Parks and Countryside are already committed to the Woodland Creation Scheme and will add sites to their programme put forward by the community. The SEAQ team has dedicated resources to progress opportunities with businesses and institutions and to implement a communications and engagement strategy. Workloads and performance will be monitored and if demand outstrips available resources funding for additional posts will be explored within emerging grant arrangements and through the WRF Joint Venture.
- 3.2 The Council will draw upon dedicated resources from the WRF Joint Venture including an existing project manager, a communications officer, a funding officer and a landowner engagement manager who is working on the Landscapes for water programme. Other posts are being explored through funding coming from the Trees4 Climate grant.

## Recommendations

Members of the Executive Board are recommended to:

- a) Note the content and endorse the White Rose Forest Strategy for Leeds.
- b) Note that the Chief Officer, Sustainable Energy and Air Quality will be responsible for progressing the implementation of the White Rose Forest Strategy for Leeds.
- c) Note that a professionally designed strategy document with the same content will be completed after Executive Board in January 2021.

### 1 Purpose of this report

This report sets out proposals on how the council can lead an ambitious initiative to increase tree planting throughout the district to capture and store carbon and improve the lives of residents through the benefits trees bring. This will be through tree planting on Council owned land and enabling and assisting partners and the wider community to plant trees on other land through the area.

### 2 Background information

- 2.1 The Parks and Countryside Service manage the city's open spaces, parks, woodland and outdoor recreation and includes a Natural Environment team that manages 1400 ha of Council owned woodlands and tens of thousands of Trees Outside Woodlands (e.g. street trees, parkland trees). As such a large proportion of their work is around tree management and planting and therefore contributes positively to the quality of the environment, carbon storage and capture. The service also engage with the community through commercial sponsorship and organising volunteer days for staff.
- 2.2 Planning Services carry out a number of statutory functions both through policy and development management, which includes managing Tree Preservation Orders, and consideration of schemes where trees are integral to designs of new developments.
- 2.3 Many large scale regeneration schemes also include extensive tree planting. The Council are also carrying out a major project to identify land it owns over and above parks and open space which can be reserved for tree planting.
- 2.4 As well as reducing carbon the improvement of biodiversity is critical in the Climate Emergency, The extent of the loss of biodiversity in the UK has been highlighted by the 2013 [State of Nature Report](#) compiled by scientists from 25 British Wildlife organisations. Since 1970 they found that:
  - Insects and invertebrates have halved
  - Butterflies declined by 76%

According to the RSPB there are 40 million less birds in the UK than there were in 1966.

The [2016 State of Nature report](#) compiled by scientists from 50 conservation organisations stated that the UK has lost significantly more biodiversity over the long term than the world average. Indeed it is ranked 29<sup>th</sup> lowest out of 218 countries world-wide for depletion of biodiversity.

- 2.5 Tree planting in areas of low biodiversity will greatly increase the potential for the generation of new habitats for wildlife throughout the District and increase levels of wildlife into both the rural and urban landscape.

### **3 Main issues**

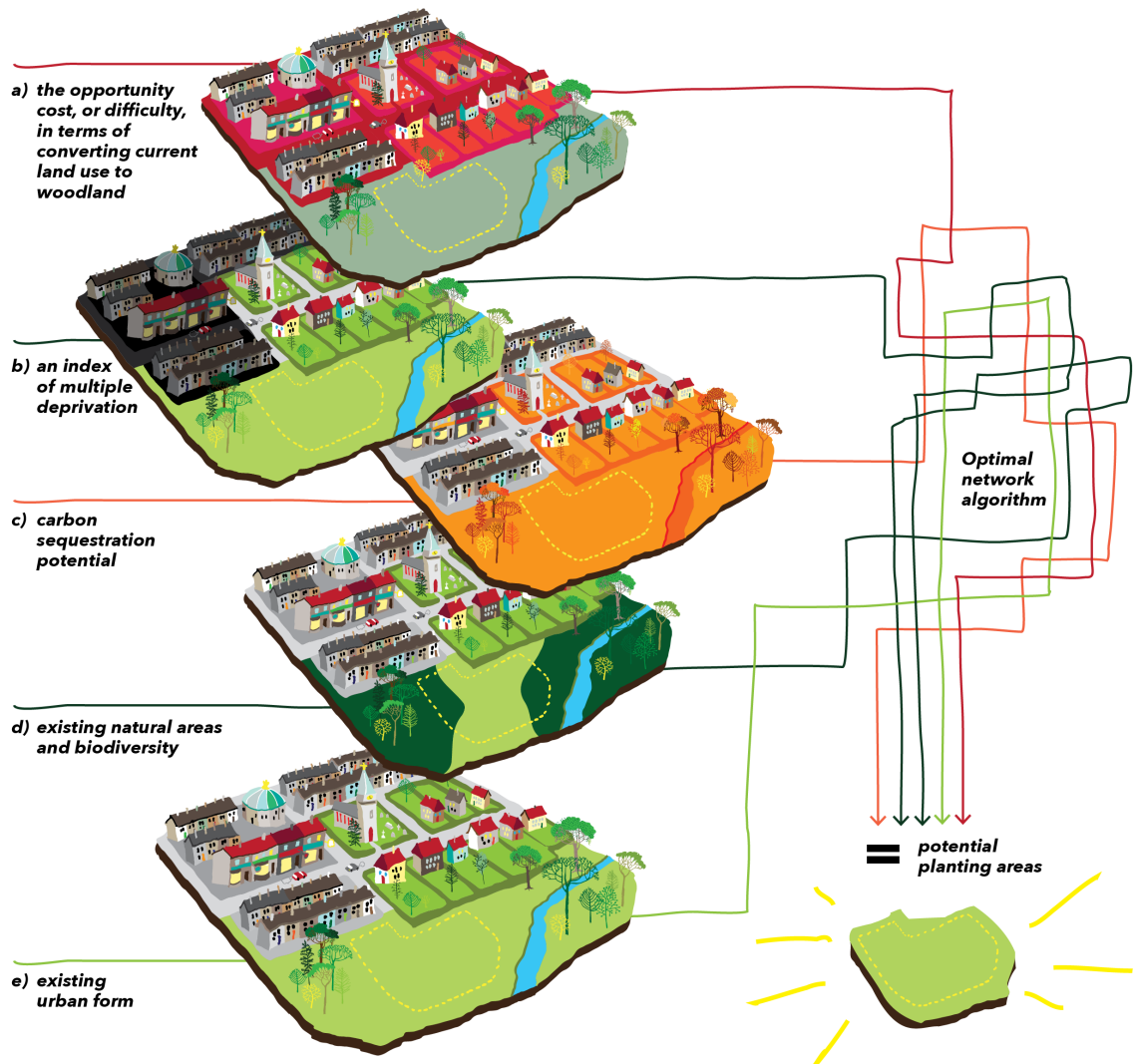
- 3.1 The White Rose Forest (WRF) is the Community Forest covering West and North Yorkshire. It is managed as a Local Authority joint venture agreement with Kirklees Council becoming the accountable body in 2002, hosting the WRF Project Manager. There are currently over 30 signatories to this agreement including Leeds and other local authorities namely: Bradford, Calderdale, Craven, Harrogate, Kirklees, Selby, Wakefield and York and the authorities of North Yorkshire. Each of these authorities will produce their own WRF specific strategy which will then feed into the overall WRF Plan which will be published in 2021. By being a part of the WRF the Council has more effective access to funds and resources which flow through the community forests and enjoys further resources provided by the WRF Joint Venture.

- 3.2 The White Rose Forest Strategy for Leeds is attached at Appendix A and is split into eight sections which are briefly described below:

- *Introduction* – this outlines the context to the White Rose Forest and where it fits as part of the wider Northern Forest. It also highlights the importance of partnership working.
- *What are the benefits of trees?*– the benefits of tree planting are wide ranging and include carbon capture and storage which is particularly pertinent in the Climate Emergency and is one of the main driving forces for planting. This is closely allied to the need to improve biodiversity which tree planting can contribute to. Trees will also be planted in river catchment areas to reduce flooding as part of Natural Flood Management scheme. On a more human scale trees also benefit people by contributing to physical and mental wellbeing. Finally it also discusses the role that tree planting plays in providing an attractive environment to business, helping to attract and retain businesses.
- *Where are we going to plant trees and woodlands?* In many cases landowners will decide particular areas of their land on which they intend to plant and will proceed with minimal input from the Council. There will be times when the council will look to guide where tree planting should go which is influenced by planning, constraints, WRF themes, communities identifying land.

When looking at potential planting areas the Systematic Conservation Planning Tool which is currently under development by Leeds University will

be used to give an overall planting approach to an area. It combines different data stored on map layers such as land ownership, biodiversity and open space, areas of multiple deprivation and uses an algorithm to provide a map of potential optimal planting sites.

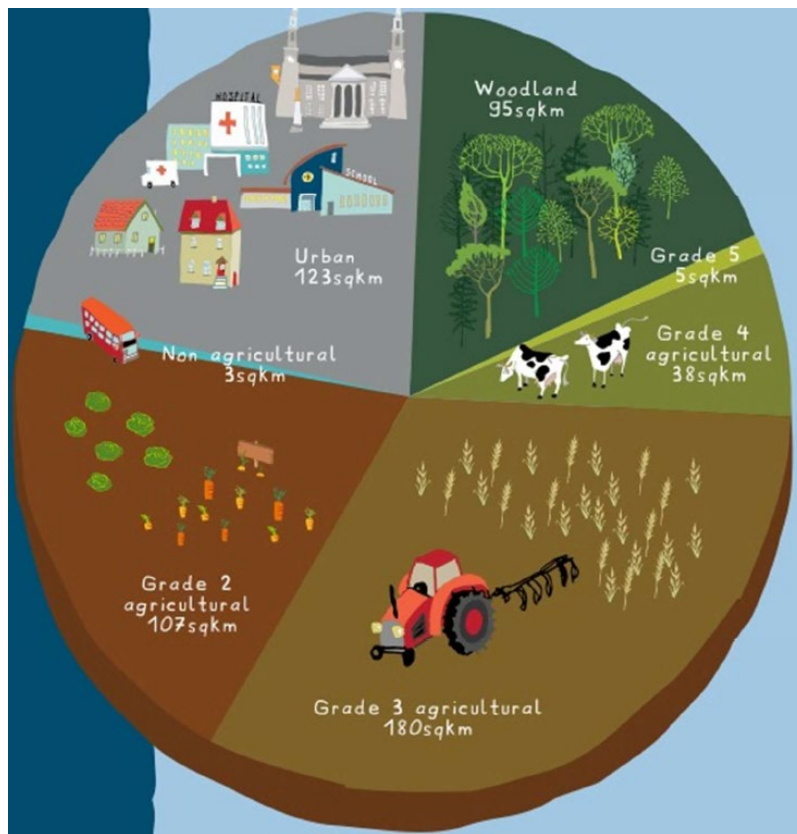


### Systematic Conservation Planning Tool

This will be used in combination with planning policy which provides guidance as to where planting is required to maximise benefits. Core Strategy Policy G2 gives the aspiration to have a woodland within 500 metres of every resident and to improve green infrastructure to form wildlife corridors.

Planting trees is subject to a variety of constraints including land ownership and land use with proportions shown below of the proportion different types throughout the District.





#### ***Land use in Leeds***

- *How do we protect trees* – as well as planting more trees measures are in place to protect trees from felling where they are not dead, dying or dangerous which includes Tree Preservation Orders managed by the Council, the developing Agriculture and Environment Bills and the Forestry Act.
- *How are we going to deliver* – describes existing council resources which are used to plan and plant trees on council owned land. The Parks and Countryside Service have staff dedicated to planning planting sites, community engagement including rangers who organise planting days, business engagement and the Natural Environment team includes Forestry and Natural Habitats Sections – the former maintain trees outside woodlands and the latter manage woodlands.

The work of planning services and the use of planning policy and TPOs where appropriate to protect and encourage the planting of trees and long term status is outlined. The section also describes the sources of funding available for tree planting and subsequent management. As well as donations it describes the WRF Funders Group which will provide access to a range of funding particular to a potential site. Finally broad level woodland management design factors are described.

- *How are we going to tell people and get them involved?* – describes how the Council will engage with businesses, community and residents through various tools such as social media, face to face meetings developing existing

networks and attendance at events. The Council will also be re-introducing tree wardens through the Leeds Park Forum which will mobilise volunteers in the community to monitor trees in their area and organise planting. Faith groups will also be engaged fully as care for the environment is embedded in the ethos of many world religions.

- *What do we do next?* – the actions which will take place after Executive Board to ensure that all processes are in place to ensure the strategy is implemented smoothly. An outline of performance management is highlighted.
- *Conclusion* – section summarising the strategy

3.3 Scientists from the University of Leeds have used the CCC's methodology to calculate the increase in Leeds' tree canopy cover that is required for Leeds to make a contribution to the national tree planting effort in proportion to its greenhouse gas emissions. The table below shows that Leeds has the highest contribution to emissions of all the authorities in the White Rose Forest and has a canopy cover of 17% of its land area. As a District we need to create between 338 and 564 hectares of new woodland each year from 2020 to 2050. According to Leeds University using CCC methodology this represents an increase from the current 17% tree canopy cover to 33% tree canopy cover in 30 years.

Local Authority	Carbon dioxide (CO <sub>2</sub> ) emissions <sup>8</sup> in 2018 (ktCO <sub>2</sub> )	Percentage of UK CO <sub>2</sub> emissions in 2018 (%)	Total area (hectares)	Tree canopy cover in 2018 (hectares)	Tree canopy cover in 2018 (%)
Bradford	2,036	0.6	36,642	4,647	12.7
Calderdale	1,039	0.3	36,392	4,336	11.9
Craven	349	0.1	117,881	6,327	5.4
Harrogate	1,081	0.3	130,913	13,797	10.5
Kirklees	1,910	0.6	40,860	6,199	15.2
Leeds	3,905	1.1	55,172	9,468	17.2
Selby	930	0.3	60,222	5,988	9.9
Wakefield	2,073	0.6	33,861	4,778	14.1
York	821	0.2	27,201	2,926	10.8
Total WRF (West Yorks)	10,962	3.2	202,927	29,428	14.5
Total WRF (North Yorks)	3,181	0.9	336,217	29,039	8.6
Total WRF	14,143	4.1	539,145	58,466	10.8

3.4 It is anticipated that the White Rose Forest Plan which will cover the whole forest area will be completed in March 2021 by the WRF Joint Venture and will provide an overall strategic approach to the identification of woodland and tree planting sites and



implementation. It will combine the carbon targets of each local authority to give an overall projected carbon saving.

3.5 The Council will work in partnership with businesses, institutions third sector organisations and government departments to increase planting in the District to best effect. This will take many forms and will be dependent on the nature of the partner organisation and the attributes that it can bring to bear. Major landholding institutions such as the NHS, universities, development companies and major rural landowning companies will be approached to discuss how tree planting can be increased and how the Council can bring additional benefits of community engagement and through the WRF Joint Venture additional funds to schemes.

3.6 Along with the WRF Joint Venture the Council have been supporting and commissioning work at the School of Earth & Environment at the University of Leeds and the United Bank of Carbon which is a research organisation based at the university. These include:

- The Systematic Conservation Planning Tool – to assist in the identification of areas of tree planting
- The Carbon based approach to tree planting – to determine tree planting targets across the WRF in response to carbon capture needs across the region.
- Replacement tree strategy – evidence based approach to determining quantity and size of trees to replace mature trees lost to development.

Outcomes from these studies have been included in the document and will be used in its implementation.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

4.1.1 The findings of the University of Leeds Carbon based tree planting strategy was presented to the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee's Food and Biodiversity working group in October 2020 and a summary of the completed strategy was presented to the same working group on 11 November 2020.

4.1.2 Planning Services have been consulted during the preparation of the strategy and the document was presented to Planning Board in October 2020.

4.1.3 Asset Management have been consulted during the course of preparing the document and a presentation was made to the Estate Management Group on 30 September 2020.

4.1.4 Given the importance of the work that Parks and Countryside carry out on the Woodland Creation project officers from the service have been consulted regularly with regards to processes, tree planting and all other existing services related to trees.

- 4.1.5 Officers from the WRF Project Team meeting have been consulted on the strategy as it has developed which includes representation from Planning, Parks and Countryside, Highways, Asset Management, Regeneration and Adults and Health.
- 4.1.6 Initial engagement with key stakeholders has commenced. Following the approval of the strategy there will be wider engagement across all stakeholders.
- 4.1.7 The Council are planning to report back on the strategy annually and to update the strategy in response to changing opportunities, challenges and priorities.

## **4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

- 4.2.1 A screening report has been completed and is attached in Appendix B. Some details from the report are expressed below:
- 4.2.2 Woodland and tree planting will be as accessible as possible within the constraints of topography, location and funding. Wherever possible planting will include access via hard surfaced paths.
- 4.2.3 The strategy will be produced in several different forms to ensure that all have access to it:
- Full version with all graphics and some technical language included
  - A text summary version in Plain English with main points outlined
  - A text and graphics version for those relying more on visual imagery for understanding.

## **4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan**

- 4.3.1 The implementation of the White Rose Forest Strategy will contribute to the following Best Council Plan objectives:

### ***Sustainable Infrastructure***

- Improving the resilience of the city's infrastructure and the natural environment.
- Reducing flooding and other risks from future climate change.
- Promoting a more competitive, less wasteful, more resource efficient, low carbon economy.

### ***Child Friendly City***

- Improving social, emotional and mental health and wellbeing.
- Enhancing the city now and for future generations.

It will also contribute to the delivery of the following strategies:

- Health and Wellbeing – health benefits of trees.
- Inclusive Growth Strategy – encouraging investment by a natural environment

## **Climate Emergency**

- 4.3.2 The Council has responded to the climate emergency by embedding carbon reduction measures through its governance and decision making across all its services. This was outlined in the report that the Director of Resources and Housing took to Executive Board in January 2020. One of the measures proposed was to increase tree planting across the District as they have the capacity to remove and store carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- 4.3.3 The Director of Communities and Environment proposed an ambitious programme to Executive Board on 7th January 2020 of planting 50 hectares of woodland per year until 2045 on council owned land. The Woodland Creation project includes extensive engagement with schools including a seed collection campaign with the seeds including horse chestnuts being raised along with commercially sourced seeds at the Arium which is the largest local authority plant nursery in the country.
- 4.3.4 One of the key drivers for completing the Strategy has been the urgency to address carbon reduction through tree planting across the District, not just on council owned land. By 2050 the additional woodland planting carried out by the Council and its partners across the area will capture and store around 215,000 tonnes of carbon.

### **4.4 Resources procurement and value for money**

- 4.4.1 The council has already committed £1.4m (£350k year on year for first five years) to the Woodland Creation scheme which aims to plant 50 hectares of woodland on Council Land each year from 2020 to 2045.
- 4.4.2 Funding for tree planting will be sought by the Council and other landowning organisations through the WRF Funders Group hosted by the WRF Joint Venture. This provides access to a host of woodland and tree planting grants which are assessed and an appropriate funding package built up for each planting site. Other funding sources include donations and resources such as voluntary work forces will be managed by the Council.
- 4.4.3 Trees for planting on publicly owned land as part of the Woodland Creation project will be sourced from the Arium which is growing on plants specifically for this project. Any additional planting which the Council manages will involve the tender for plants from commercial nurseries and in line with Corporate Procurement Rules any site works required will be offered to in-house service providers before tendering is considered.
- 4.4.4 The Chief Officer of Sustainable Energy and Air Quality will continue the role of chairing the regional WRF group meetings between the Local Authority Chairs and continue to liaise with the WRF Project Manager. She will steer and guide the development of the strategy implementation.

### **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 4.5.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations set out in this report and it is eligible for Call In.

## **4.6. Risk management**

- 4.6.1 To achieve a step change in woodland planting the Council is dependent on a number of key policy areas outside of the council's control, for example, the provision of grants which offset long term financial losses by farmers and landowners. The terms of the Trees4Climate and Environment Land Management Scheme grants will be critical in encouraging farmers and landowners to plant trees. The simplicity of the new grants will be critical to attracting landowners to plant trees as a barrier in the past to grant uptake has been the overly complicated grant regimes with onerous compliance requirements.
- 4.6.2 If as hoped the applications for tree planting grants increases dramatically the ability of grant making bodies to respond may be seriously curtailed leading to delays in approvals with applicants losing enthusiasm.
- 4.6.3 The Council will use existing resources to implement the strategy however if demand is high for assistance from the community and business, without additional grant funding for extra resources it may undermine the level of ambition within the strategy.
- 4.6.4 When designing woodlands the importance of avoiding the creation of liabilities and the correct management and consideration of legal charges on land has been acknowledged in the strategy. To ensure compliance with government funding requirements all woodland planting will be planned to align with the UK Forestry Standard. Legal and land use advice will be sought from within the Council as appropriate.
- 4.6.5 There may be insufficient land available for tree planting if there is unprecedented demand to donate trees by organisations and individuals. Tree planting in the inner city built up areas is compromised by a lack of space.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

- 5.1 The Council will drive the increased tree and woodland planting throughout the District. It has already made a firm commitment to rapidly increase planting on its own land with a substantial capital investment. It now looks to encourage all sectors of the district to support the ambition to increase tree planting. It has set out a framework as to where the trees should be planted and the resources required to achieve those aims.
- 5.2 There are funding decisions at a national level which will affect the level of planting but the Council will work to maximise investment from both government grants and other funding streams within the district by increasing communications and engagement with all partners to encourage them to plant trees or provide financial support.

## **6. Recommendations**

Members of the Executive Board are recommended to:-

- a) Note the content and endorse the White Rose Forest Strategy for Leeds.

- b) Note that the Chief Officer, Sustainable Energy and Air Quality will be responsible for progressing the implementation of the White Rose Forest Strategy.
- c) Note that a professionally designed strategy document with the same content will be completed after Executive Board in January 2021.

**Background documents**

7. None