

Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 17 January 2024

Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation

Report of the Climate Change Working Group on behalf of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Simon Tagg, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change

“Although this authority has taken steps towards its target of reaching net zero by 2050 by cutting carbon emissions by 50 per cent since 2019, there is still more to be done.

This working party report suggests possible ways that the Council can meet its commitment to the environment and support Staffordshire’s economy, while also enhancing the county’s quality of life.

At this stage we are being asked to consider the report and respond in due course.”

Report Summary:

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a Climate Change Working Group to investigate carbon capture and offsetting residual carbon in Staffordshire County Council to meet its Climate Change commitment to achieve Net Zero by 2050.

The Working Group gathered evidence from a range of sources during its review and presents a report (Appendix 1) to summarise what it found, what needs to be done and six recommendations to consider how to offset residual carbon through carbon sequestration and woodland creation in Staffordshire.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the report on 6 November 2023 and referred it to Cabinet to receive the report and to request Cabinet to consider the content and prepare an executive response to the six recommendations in the report within two months of its receipt.

Recommendations

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Receive the report of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Climate Change Working Group on Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation.
- b. Provide an executive response to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the recommendation(s) of the Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation report (Appendix 1) within two months of receipt of the report.

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Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation

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Recommendations of the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Receive the report of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Climate Change Working Group on Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation.
- b. Provide an executive response to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the recommendation(s) of the Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation report within two months of receipt of the report.

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of the Climate Change Working Group on behalf of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Reasons for Recommendations:

1. The Climate Change Working Group focussed on carbon capture and offsetting residual carbon in Staffordshire County Council. The Council is required to remove as much carbon from the atmosphere as it emits. The Council's Climate Change Action Plan shows that the Council is working well to reduce its carbon emissions, but we found that there would still be a need to offset 7,000-10,000 tonnes of residual carbon to balance its carbon emissions by 2050. The working group focussed on what more could be done to achieve this.
2. The Working Group found that carbon capture and storage through technology was not an option at this time and identified that the sustainable way to capture carbon emissions is to plant and grow trees and to store carbon in trees and wood.
3. The Working Group gathered evidence from Council officers, the Forestry Commission, The National Forest Company, Norbury Park Estate and Birmingham Institute of Forest Research (BIFOR).

4. Members visited Norbury Park Estate and the 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.
5. The Working Group identified that carbon sequestration could not be looked at in isolation amidst a dual crisis of climate change and biodiversity. There were many benefits of new woodland for Climate Change and Nature recovery including: Carbon sequestration, reduced emission, air quality improvements, climate resilience, temperature resilience, soil health, recreational health and education, and economic benefits.
6. Members determined to broaden their approach and consider how to join up some of the individual strands of work in Staffordshire to make advantage of the benefits of woodland. Members considered what is working well, the County Council rural portfolio and the wider benefits of woodland creation.
7. Members understood that woodlands can also bring multiple sustainable benefits (social, environmental, and economic) and the Forestry Commission identified funding and support to develop a plan and actively manage woodlands using the UK Forestry Standard.
8. The report (Appendix 1) provides a summary of the evidence gathered by the Working Group relating to carbon sequestration and woodland creation, the conclusions and recommendations are presented to Cabinet for information and further investigation as a positive step forward to meet the council's commitment to achieve Net Zero by 2050.
9. The recommendations in the report are bold and ambitious, to plan a concept forest that will help deliver our commitments for climate change and nature, improve our environment, develop the green economy and enhance green skills plus many more benefits for the residents of Staffordshire. The challenge is to plan for action and commit to a greener future.

Legal Implications

10. Climate Change Act 2008, amendment (May 2019), requiring the country to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2050. England Trees Action Plan 2021 to 2024, increase tree and woodland cover requirements.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

11. Forestry Commission Funding has been identified for the planning, funding, establishing, growing and management of Woodland and is available until March 2024. The details of further resource impacts / implications have not yet been identified but will be reported in future reports to Cabinet.

Climate Change Implications

12. One of the key priorities in the Staffordshire County Council Strategic Plan is to tackle climate change, enhance our environment, and make Staffordshire more sustainable.

13. In the absence of engineered long term carbon storage, carbon sequestration by natural means seems to be the only option available to the Council in the near future to mitigate its residual carbon emissions.

14. If a "Staffordshire Forest" is not established by 2030 as part of our climate change mitigation, it will be too late to sequester the amount of carbon we need to annually by our 2050 target.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

[Climate change - Staffordshire County Council](#)

Appendix 1 – Climate Change Working Group report – Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation

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