Greater Manchester Low Carbon Hub Board

Date: Friday 12th October 2018
Subject: All Our Trees – The Tree and Woodland Strategy for GM
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PURPOSE OF REPORT

The paper introduces the emerging GM Tree and Woodland Strategy (or All Our Trees), that is being developed by City of Trees on behalf of the GM Forests Partnership, and sets out its proposed structure as well as timescales for its production and approval. Advice and support is sought from the group on structure, consultation and approvals.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Board is requested to:
- Note and comment on the proposed structure, development and approvals steps.
- Advise City of Trees on consultees.
- Recognise that the development of All Our Trees is a significant step for Greater Manchester and that if possible it should feature at the Green Summit in March and subsequent actions.

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1. BACKGROUND

Trees and woods are one of Greater Manchester’s critical infrastructures and they are essential for its future health, prosperity and resilience. As such it is essential we gather more information on the trees and woods that we already have and how we can best maximise the public benefits that they provide. In addition to this we need to better understand and map out the need and opportunity to plant additional trees and woods to ensure we have the right tree interventions in the right place to deliver key ecosystem services that Greater Manchester needs including water management, improving air quality, place making and reducing environmental inequity.

The City of Trees movement has a target to plant at least 3 million trees in Greater Manchester over the next 25 years as well as bringing existing woodlands into management. This will be GM’s contribution to the Northern Forest, as featured in the Govt’s 25 Year Environment Plan. GM’s Metro Mayor, Andy Burnham, strongly supports this ambition as referenced in both his election manifesto and as referenced in the more recent “Greater Manchester’s Springboard to a Green City region”.

The production of a Tree and Woodland Strategy for Greater Manchester is strongly supported by both Salford’s City Mayor, Paul Dennett, in his capacity as Planning, Housing and Homelessness portfolio holder for GMCA, and Cllr Alex Ganotis, GMCA Green City Lead. The intention is that it will feed into GMSF to help inform its development and implementation as well as likely being referenced within GMSF as an underpinning and complementary strategy. There is also the intention to have the GM Tree and Woodland Strategy adopted by the GMCA as a free standing strategy.

The strategy is being developed by City of Trees, on behalf of and, in partnership with the GM Forests Partnership (which comprises elected members and officers from each of the 10 GM Districts, and Natural England, the Woodland Trust and the Forestry Commission).

Financial support for All Our Trees has kindly been provided from a range of funders including; United Utilities, GMCA, Viridor, Salford City Council, Woodland Trust, HLF, Forestry Commission and EA.

4.1 Why do we need a Tree and Woodland Strategy for Greater Manchester?

A Tree and Woodland Strategy for GM will enable us to take a more strategic view of what is needed and where, to achieve a more sustainable and vibrant region in terms of climate change resilience, health, economy and biodiversity.

One of the biggest threats to our existing tree stock is the range of pests and diseases such as Ash Dieback and other potential threats such as Oak Processionary Moth. We therefore, need to have a shared understanding of how we can limit their spread within the local authorities and across shared borders and what form new / replacement planting should take to improve resilience.
It is important that we have shared standards and approaches for the management of our new and existing tree stock to ensure that we maximise and prolong the benefits that trees can provide for society. This is particularly important for cross boundary working for existing trees and woods but also more generally for new trees that are being established as part of the planning and development process. A collective strategy for the 10 GM authorities will present opportunities for sharing / pooling operational management resources to achieve efficiencies / economies of scale for cross boundary sites and for developing funding bids.

This strategy and action plan will
- Identify priority areas for planting trees as measured against a number of indicators including air quality, flood risk, IMD, existing tree cover.
- Help ensure all trees and woods reach their maximum potential in providing benefits for GM’s communities and businesses: environment, health, biodiversity, aesthetics and quality of life.
- Provide guidance / best practise/ policy for managing existing trees and woodlands including how best to deal with the threats from tree diseases.
- Present opportunities for pooling operational management resources to achieve efficiencies for tree and woodland management.

4.2 Proposed Structure

The following chapter headings were developed by the GM Forests Partnership:
- **The Importance of Trees** – Setting out the key benefits and ecosystem services of GM’s trees.
- **The Policy Context** – How the strategy responds to key local and national policies.
- **The Current Tree Resource** – Detailed assessment of what we already have (species, number, size, condition), how it’s distributed, and what functions it’s providing, and where we have gaps. This will be underpinned by the outputs from the ongoing extensive iTREE survey work.
- **Geographical Need / Opportunity** – Bringing together existing work on Northern Forest, GMEU’s “Priority GI”, and GM’s Natural Capital ESS prioritisation. This section will set out clear targets and broad geographic prioritisation for new planting and management of existing woodland.
- **Management of Existing Tree Stock** – Management standards for clusters of woods and key types of GM woodland.
- **New Planting** – Standards for planting in different land cover types (from city centre to upland clough).
- **Threats, Opportunities & Constraints** – this section will also examine mechanisms and opportunities for delivery of targets.

4.3 Evidence Base

This strategy and action plan requires a good evidence base, as we need to know:
- Where are our existing tree and woods in GM (so we know where more are needed).
- What species they are (this helps to determine risk from tree diseases
- How old / big they are (so we know when they need replacing)
- What condition are they in?
- What benefits are they providing for people: carbon sequestration, alleviating flood risk, absorbing pollutants etc.

This evidence base is being developed by CoT managing a large scale citizen science survey project that started during summer 2018. It is i-Tree Eco, which
- is a state-of-the-art, peer reviewed software suite from the USDA Forest Service. i-Tree Eco quantifies the structure and functions of community trees & urban forests.
- provides a monetary value of the annual air quality improvement, carbon dioxide reduction, and stormwater control benefits that trees provide.
- involves the recruitment and training of surveyor teams by the City of Trees team and partners who are identifying and measuring the trees in random plots across GM and submit their results into the i-Tree software.

This is thought to be the largest ever i-Tree survey carried out outside the USA (likely to be three times the size of Greater London’s).

4.4 Approval and adoption

It is our intention that All Our Trees will be adopted by the GMCA and for it also to be referenced in the GMSF, ideally within Policy GMENV9.

We are currently seeking clarity from GMCA Planning colleagues regarding the most appropriate route for final sign off and incorporation into GMSF.

In addition to the Natural Capital Group and now LCH, it is our intention to submit papers setting out the purpose, structure, timescales, endorsement and advice on conducting the most appropriate consultation go to Planning Officers Group, Planning and Housing Commission.

There will be ongoing consultation on specific elements of the plan with members of the GM Forests Partnership, as well as the various groups responsible for looking at health, and transport, with a wide consultation on a coherent draft in winter/spring 2019.

4.5 Timescales

- June-July 2018 Initial work to help ensure alignment with GMSF and emerging work on natural capital – fundraising to secure c £230k – Complete.
- July 2018 – October 2018– i-Tree Eco surveying ongoing- writing key sections, Needs/Opportunity analysis and targets, alignment with GMSF.
- September – Update to Planning Officers Group and Natural Capital Group.
- October – Update to Low Carbon Hub and Planning and Housing Commission- for consultation in outline.
- October-Dec – analysis of iTree results and writing assessment of tree stock – threats.
- Jan 2019 – Apr 2019– Presentation to Low Carbon Hub and start of Formal Consultation and redrafting.
- April onwards – development of 10 District specific action plans.
- May 2019 - Sign off and adoption of Strategy.
- Ongoing – embedding strategy in other key documents and joint working across GM to deliver the strategy.