

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Cabinet **DATE:** 1 February 2021

**CONTACT OFFICER:** Richard West, Executive Director Customer & Community  
**(For all enquiries)** (01753) 690965

**WARD(S):** ALL

**PORTFOLIO:** Transport & Environmental Services – Cllr Rob Anderson

### **PART I** **NON-KEY DECISION**

#### **URBAN FOREST (URBAN TREE CHALLENGE FUND)**

##### **1 Purpose of Report**

To update on the implementation of the c£1m Urban Tree Challenge Fund and to recommend the development of policies to ensure the future maintenance and development of our Urban Forest and the naming of trees/woodland to commemorate loved ones.

##### **2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

- 2.1 To note the contents of this report including that the project is on target, within budget and in compliance with the match funding conditions of the Urban Tree Challenge Fund (Forestry Commission).
- 2.2 To delegate authority to the Executive Director Customer and Community and the Portfolio Holder for Transport & Environmental Services to review and update the Council's policy on commemorative trees to include opportunities for businesses, organisations and residents to sponsor woodland to commemorate loved ones.

##### **3. The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

###### **3a. Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

The planting of trees improves visual amenity, air quality and the quality of our public realm. The health and wellbeing of residents improves where they interact with the natural world contributing to Priority 3: Improving mental health and well being.

###### **3b Five Year Plan Outcomes**

Provision of urban woodland assists in the delivery of our Five Year Plan in that it contributes to ensuring Outcome 3: Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and stay. It also assists in improving air quality in the borough and contributes positively to our carbon agenda.

#### 4 **Other Implications**

(a) **Financial**

The scheme is funded 51% (£521,954.02) by SBC from P165 Leisure Centre Farnham Road and 49% (£501,409.16) by the Forestry Commission and is on budget

(b) **Risk Management**

Recommendation from section 2 above	Risks/Threats/ Opportunities	Current Controls	Using the Risk Management Matrix Score the risk	Future Controls
The Cabinet is requested to note that the project is on target, within budget and in compliance with the match funding conditions of the Urban Tree Challenge Fund grant	If we don't satisfy the conditions of the grant during the project then grant funding could be withheld.	As part of the grant we will employ a Project Officer to manage the delivery of the 31 projects within the agreed parameters	Negligible	Continual monitoring and monthly review at Divisional SMT

(c) **Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications**

There are no Human Rights Implications for this proposal.

Under Rule 7.23 of the Council's Financial Procedure Rules in Part 4.6 of the Constitution any in year re-profiling of capital schemes will be reported to cabinet for consideration on the basis that the overall revenue cost of the capital programme is not exceeded. Any revenue increase in the Capital programme or the underlying borrowing requirement must be considered by the full Council.

(d) **Equalities Impact Assessment**

There is no identified need for the completion of an Equalities Impact Assessment.

(f) **Carbon Emissions and Energy Costs**

This project will provide carbon offset.

#### 5 **Supporting Information**

5.1 The Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCF) has been developed by the Forestry Commission to contribute towards meeting the Government's manifesto commitment to plant one million urban trees across the Country by 2022.

5.2 We secured a Forestry Commission grant of £501,409.16 (49%) in November 2019 to which SBC match funded £521,945.02 (51%)

5.3 Our proposals committed to the completion of:-

- The design and physical works to plant a total of 1,200 standard & small trees and 6,000 whips at 31 different sites across the borough over two planting seasons - 2019/20 November to March and 2020/21 November to March
- A maintenance programme to ensure the trees become established and self sustaining - March 2023 – Final Grant Payment

5.4 The Agreement with the Forestry Commission remains in place for 5 years after the Final Grant Payment is made so until March 2028. SBC are required to fund the maintenance of the trees planted during this “Maintenance Period” as part of the Agreement. This will be done from within existing budgets.

5.5 Some trees do fail to grow and of course trees do die from time to time. For instance 21 of the 153 trees planted in parks in 2019/2020 have failed and have needed to be replaced. In addition, our experience over the last 5 years is that around 10% of our established tree stock (77 trees in parks but many more when we include highway verges and housing land) need replacing each year either due to vandalism, drought or just dying. The more trees that we plant the greater the ongoing budget that we will need if we are to sustain all trees.

5.6 There is the opportunity to develop our Commemorative Tree Application Form to include the opportunity for businesses, organisations and residents to sponsor woodland to commemorate loved ones. Monies obtained from this would help fund the future planting and ongoing maintenance of trees as part of our Urban Forest. Plaques on individual trees are problematic since they can't be mounted on the tree and where placed on posts adjacent to a tree in a public area (particularly a park) become an obstacle for mowing around and a trip hazard. We intend to move to issuing a Commemorative Certificate and a QR Code Locating the tree as an alternative. The current application form to obtain a commemorative tree is provided as Annex 2 for reference and needs to be developed. There is also the opportunity for corporate sponsorship of a copse of trees or an area of woodland.

5.7 This is a fast delivered project which has and will positively change the appearance of Slough now and in years to come. The urban woodlands will be supported by monitoring technology to collect data on soil moisture, the health of the trees and improvements to air quality. This data will inform the maintenance regime of the trees and demonstrate the environmental benefit of their presence. Once systems are in place, the data will be made available to residents through “Smart City” applications.

5.8 Collaboration with our Regeneration Officers means that the 31 projects will bring environment and public realm benefits to our Regeneration Strategy - enhancing the quality of the built environment and contributing to the current issues related to climate change adaptation.

5.9 Annex 1 sets out the outcomes of the project to date, the remaining planting schemes to be completed by end of March 2021 and our next steps.

## **6 Comments of Other Committees**

No other committees have been involved in this proposal.

7 **Conclusion**

Our collaboration with the Forestry Commission to develop an Urban Forest within Slough has positively changed the appearance of Slough and will make a significant contribution to carbon offset.

8 **Background Papers**

Annex 1 – Urban Forest Outcomes Presentation

Annex 2 – Application for the Planting of a Commemorative Tree