

North Yorkshire County Council
Business and Environmental Services

Executive Member

1 July 2022

**Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund – Approval for Submission of Bid for £150,000
Revenue Funding from the Forestry Commission**

Report of the Assistant Director – Growth, Planning and Trading Standards

1.0 Purpose Of Report

- 1.1 To seek approval for submission of an Expression of Interest by NYCC to bid for £150,000 of revenue grant funding from the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF); and
- 1.2 If that Expression of Interest is successful, to seek approval to delegate for to the Corporate Director, Strategic Resources to accept the WCAF grant ultimately offered as a result of the bid, subject to acceptable MoU and terms and conditions being received.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Local authorities across England have identified tree and woodland planting as a key part of their response to the climate change and biodiversity crises. A lack of capacity to develop and design planting proposals, to consult widely, apply for capital grants and organise planting has been identified as a key barrier to progress.
- 2.2 The Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF) is designed to support local authorities accelerate the delivery of tree planting and woodland creation commitments. All upper tier authorities (county councils, unitary councils, London boroughs, metropolitan boroughs, combined authorities) are eligible to apply.
- 2.3 It is expected that applications will seek funding for new posts such as woodland creation officers, community engagement posts, project officers, specialist consultants or a blend of these. A key aspect of the WCAF is the focus on funding of specific local needs – that will complement existing activity. For example, the proposed bid focuses on opportunities to add to the woodland creation activity already underway in North Yorkshire through the White Rose Forest community forest partnership and by the two National Park Authorities and three AONB's in the county.
- 2.4 The proposed NYCC bid seeks to secure additional officer and consultancy resources to help develop an overall tree planting strategy for North Yorkshire, to identify strategic opportunities and then develop specific projects to submit for grant funding to White Rose Forest partnership and other grant funding routes. This additional resource will identify, through a strategic approach/strategy, specific planting opportunities on NYCC and other publicly owned land. It will also help to bring forward planting projects on privately owned land – similar to the recent large scale woodland creation project undertaken by the Broughton Hall estate near Skipton.

2.5 Applicants to the WCAF are required to complete an Expression of Interest (EOI) with eleven questions that has to be submitted by Friday 8 July 2022. A Commercial Questionnaire and Application Form must also be submitted alongside the EOI.

2.6 Once all of the EOIs have been submitted, the Forestry Commission will lot applications into:

- i) rural
- ii) urban
- iii) mixed

The aim is to evenly allocate funding across the lots, though the Forestry Commission reserves the right to base the final allocation upon applications received to achieve the desired outcomes of this fund. NYCC clearly falls into the 'mixed' category for the purposes of WCAF.

2.7 An assessment will be made against the following three primary areas:

- Evidence of need
- Commitment to planting by 2025
- A deliverability assessment

2.8 An Advisory Board comprising subject matter experts will be involved in the final selection and assessment. This is a competitive bid process and the intention is to fund at least 50 local authorities. It is anticipated that the assessment process will take no more than two weeks.

2.9 Further information on the WCAF is provided in the 'Accompanying Notes for Applicants' appended to this Report.

2.10 Initial engagement with key stakeholders has indicated widespread support for the County Council to put in an expression of interest for this grant. Discussions have been held with external parties such as the York and North Yorkshire Local Nature Partnership, the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors National Parks and AONB teams. We have also discussed this with City of York Council to ensure WCAF bids submitted by the two councils are not in conflict and identify any cross boundary opportunities.

3.0 Finance

3.1 This is a revenue only fund (funding new staff and / or consultants) – made as a 'Section 31' grant to the local authority. As well as addressing the authority's own planting plans, consideration is to be given to ways to bring forward tree planting applications from others in the area – for example, how can the authority work with private sector land managers to help deliver woodland creation projects.

3.2 The ceiling for a single local authority grant is £150,000. The money will be spread over two financial years 22/23 and 23/24 typically split 50:50. If successful, it is planned that the first payment will be made in August 2022. At a webinar to provide information to WCAF applicants held on 21/6/22 it was emphasised that there will be no claw back provision for the first tranche of funding once this is awarded. The second payment will be made in April 2023, contingent on activity in 22/23.

3.4 There is no requirement for match funding.

3.5 If approval is granted to proceed and NYCC are successful, the Corporate Director, Strategic Resources will be asked to accept the funding offered by the Forestry Commission subject to acceptable MoU and grant conditions being received.

4.0 Equalities

- 4.1 One of the selection criteria for this funding is a consideration of opportunities to deliver woodland creation and tree planting on land within Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) which are within the highest 25% most deprived according to the national Index of Multiple Deprivation. Additional weighting in the application process is given to proposals that have over three LSOAs that fall into this category – NYCC’s bid easily passes that threshold.
- 4.2 Another of the WCAF selection criteria affords extra weight to proposals that will increase public access to at least a proportion of newly created woodland/ tree planting. Areas have been identified that are likely to provide opportunities for public access as part of woodland creation.
- 4.3 An Equalities Impact Screening Statement has been completed and is appended to this report – it is concluded that a full Equalities Impact Assessment is not required. See Appendix A.

5.0 Legal

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising from the submission of an Expression of Interest for this grant.
- 5.2 If the bid is successful, acceptance of the funding will require NYCC to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Forestry Commission. This will be reviewed by legal services and if any of the terms and conditions present unacceptable risk for NYCC then the grant offer would be declined.

6.0 Climate Change

- 6.1 Delivery of this project will make a positive contribution to climate change mitigation and resilience across North Yorkshire by supporting woodland creation – with associated benefits for carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat creation and species conservation, and measures to reduce flooding impacts through nature based solutions.
- 6.2 A Climate Change Impact Assessment is appended to this Report. See Appendix B.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 It is recommended that the Executive Member for Open to Business:
- i. authorises the submission of an Expression of Interest for grant (revenue) funding of £150,000 from the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund - spread over two years 2022/23 and 2023/24.
 - ii. delegates the acceptance of any grant funding offered as a result of this expression of interest bid to the Corporate Director Strategic Resources following consultation with the Corporate Director Business and Environmental Services and the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services) subject to an acceptable MoU and terms and conditions being received.

DAVID CAULFIELD

Assistant Director – Growth, Planning and Trading Standards

Author of Report: Hugh Clear Hill, Principal Environmental Policy and Project Officer,

Background Documents: WCAF Announcement – published 13 June 2022
[Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund \(WCAF\) - GOV.UK
\(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/woodland-creation-accelerator-fund)
Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF) - Accompanying
Notes for Applicants (June 2022)

Initial equality impact assessment screening form			
This form records an equality screening process to determine the relevance of equality to a proposal, and a decision whether or not a full EIA would be appropriate or proportionate.			
Directorate	BES		
Service area	Growth, Planning and Trading Standards		
Proposal being screened	Approval of NYCC bid to Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF)		
Officer(s) carrying out screening	Hugh Clear Hill, Principal Environmental Policy and Projects Officer		
What are you proposing to do?	Apply for £150,000 of revenue funding from WCAF		
Why are you proposing this? What are the desired outcomes?	Secure additional staff / consultancy services to assist delivery of woodland creation and tree planting projects across North Yorkshire		
Does the proposal involve a significant commitment or removal of resources? Please give details.	Successful bid to WCAF will secure significant additional resource for NYCC.		
<p>Impact on people with any of the following protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010, or NYCC's additional agreed characteristics</p> <p>As part of this assessment, please consider the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent is this service used by particular groups of people with protected characteristics? Does the proposal relate to functions that previous consultation has identified as important? Do different groups have different needs or experiences in the area the proposal relates to? <p>If for any characteristic it is considered that there is likely to be an adverse impact or you have ticked 'Don't know/no info available', then a full EIA should be carried out where this is proportionate. You are advised to speak to your Equality rep for advice if you are in any doubt.</p>			
Protected characteristic	Potential for adverse impact		Don't know/No info available
	No	Yes	
Age	X		
Disability	X		
Sex	X		
Race	X		
Sexual orientation	X		
Gender reassignment	X		
Religion or belief	X		
Pregnancy or maternity	X		
Marriage or civil partnership	X		
NYCC additional characteristics			
People in rural areas	X		
People on a low income	X		
Carer (unpaid family or friend)	X		
Does the proposal relate to an area where there are known inequalities/probable impacts (e.g.	Funding will support woodland creation across North Yorkshire. Woodland creation may offer some opportunities to improve public access to the natural environment for all communities.		

Appendix A

disabled people's access to public transport)? Please give details.					
Will the proposal have a significant effect on how other organisations operate? (e.g. partners, funding criteria, etc.). Do any of these organisations support people with protected characteristics? Please explain why you have reached this conclusion.	No				
Decision (Please tick one option)	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%;">EIA not relevant or proportionate:</td> <td style="width: 10%; text-align: center;">X</td> <td style="width: 33%;">Continue to full EIA:</td> <td style="width: 24%;"></td> </tr> </table>	EIA not relevant or proportionate:	X	Continue to full EIA:	
EIA not relevant or proportionate:	X	Continue to full EIA:			
Reason for decision	No significant equalities impacts identified				
Signed (Assistant Director or equivalent)	<i>Dave Caulfield</i> , Assistant Director – Growth, Planning and Trading Standards				
Date	23/6/22				



Climate change impact assessment

The purpose of this assessment is to help us understand the likely impacts of our decisions on the environment of North Yorkshire and on our aspiration to achieve net carbon neutrality by 2030, or as close to that date as possible. The intention is to mitigate negative effects and identify projects which will have positive effects.

This document should be completed in consultation with the supporting guidance. The final document will be published as part of the decision making process and should be written in Plain English.

If you have any additional queries which are not covered by the guidance please email climatechange@northyorks.gov.uk

Please note: You may not need to undertake this assessment if your proposal will be subject to any of the following:

Planning Permission
Environmental Impact Assessment
Strategic Environmental Assessment

However, you will still need to summarise your findings in in the summary section of the form below.

Please contact climatechange@northyorks.gov.uk for advice.

Title of proposal	Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF)
Brief description of proposal	Approval for NYCC to submit a funding bid to the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund
Directorate	BES
Service area	Growth, Planning and Trading Standards
Lead officer	Hugh Clear Hill, Principal Environmental Policy and Projects Officer
Names and roles of other people involved in carrying out the impact assessment	n/a
Date impact assessment started	22/6/22

Options appraisal

Were any other options considered in trying to achieve the aim of this project? If so, please give brief details and explain why alternative options were not progressed.

This is response to a revenue funding opportunity announced by the Forestry Commission on 13 June 2022 – with Expressions of Interest to be submitted by 8 July 2022. After consideration by officers and discussions with other key stakeholders, the WCAF is seen as a good funding opportunity for NYCC. Authorisation is now sought to submit a bid. If the bid is successful, this will provide additional staff/ consultancy resources to complement the Councils existing woodland creation / tree planting activity.

What impact will this proposal have on council budgets? Will it be cost neutral, have increased cost or reduce costs?

Please explain briefly why this will be the result, detailing estimated savings or costs where this is possible.

It is proposed that an Expression of Interest should be submitted for the maximum revenue funding available to each higher tier local authority - £150,000. No match funding is required, The money would be paid to NYCC as Section 31 grant, payable in two equal amounts in autumn 2022 and April 2023 and covering work in financial years 2022/23 and 2023/24.

How will this proposal impact on the environment?		Positive impact (Place a X in the box below where	No impact (Place a X in the box below where	Negative impact (Place a X in the box below where	Explain why will it have this effect and over what timescale? Where possible/relevant please include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes over and above business as usual • Evidence or measurement of effect • Figures for CO₂e • Links to relevant documents 	Explain how you plan to mitigate any negative impacts.	Explain how you plan to improve any positive outcomes as far as possible.
Minimise greenhouse gas emissions e.g. reducing emissions from travel, increasing energy efficiencies etc.	Emissions from travel		X				
	Emissions from construction		X				
	Emissions from running of buildings		X				
	Other						
Minimise waste : Reduce, reuse, recycle and compost e.g. reducing use of single use plastic		X					
Reduce water consumption	X				Depending on location, woodland creation – the key objective of the WCAF – can provide substantial benefits in terms of water retention in aquifers and ‘slowing the flow’ by reducing fast run off from land.		A key focus of the woodland creation approach in North Yorkshire s ‘right tree, right place’ – thus maximising opportunities and avoiding adverse impacts.

<p>How will this proposal impact on the environment?</p> <p>N.B. There may be short term negative impact and longer term positive impact. Please include all potential impacts over the lifetime of a project and provide an explanation.</p>	<p>Positive impact (Place a X in the box below where</p>	<p>No impact (Place a X in the box below where</p>	<p>Negative impact (Place a X in the box below where</p>	<p>Explain why will it have this effect and over what timescale?</p> <p>Where possible/relevant please include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes over and above business as usual • Evidence or measurement of effect • Figures for CO₂e • Links to relevant documents 	<p>Explain how you plan to mitigate any negative impacts.</p>	<p>Explain how you plan to improve any positive outcomes as far as possible.</p>
<p>Minimise pollution (including air, land, water, light and noise)</p>	<p>X</p>			<p>Depending on location, woodland creation – the key objective of the WCAF – can provide substantial benefits for pollution mitigation (air/ land / water / noise)</p>		<p>A key focus of the woodland creation approach in North Yorkshire s ‘right tree, right place’ – thus maximising opportunities and avoiding adverse impacts.</p>
<p>Ensure resilience to the effects of climate change e.g. reducing flood risk, mitigating effects of drier, hotter summers</p>	<p>X</p>			<p>Depending on location, woodland creation – the key objective of the WCAF – can provide substantial benefits in terms of increasing climate change resilience – (e.g. mitigating flood risk; providing shade and hence temperature reduction in urban areas and along watercourses with wildlife benefits.</p>		<p>A key focus of the woodland creation approach in North Yorkshire s ‘right tree, right place’ – thus maximising opportunities and avoiding adverse impacts.</p>
<p>Enhance conservation and wildlife</p>				<p>Depending on location, woodland creation – the key objective of the WCAF – can provide substantial benefits for conservation of habitats and wildlife.</p>		<p>A key focus of the woodland creation approach in North Yorkshire s ‘right tree, right place’ – thus maximising opportunities and avoiding adverse impacts.</p>

<p>How will this proposal impact on the environment?</p> <p>N.B. There may be short term negative impact and longer term positive impact. Please include all potential impacts over the lifetime of a project and provide an explanation.</p>	<p>Positive impact (Place a X in the box below where</p>	<p>No impact (Place a X in the box below where</p>	<p>Negative impact (Place a X in the box below where</p>	<p>Explain why will it have this effect and over what timescale?</p> <p>Where possible/relevant please include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes over and above business as usual • Evidence or measurement of effect • Figures for CO₂e • Links to relevant documents 	<p>Explain how you plan to mitigate any negative impacts.</p>	<p>Explain how you plan to improve any positive outcomes as far as possible.</p>
<p>Safeguard the distinctive characteristics, features and special qualities of North Yorkshire's landscape</p>				<p>Depending on location, woodland creation – the key objective of the WCAF – can provide substantial benefits in terms of enhancing and adding to the diversity of North Yorkshire's landscape.</p>		<p>A key focus of the woodland creation approach in North Yorkshire s 'right tree, right place' – thus maximising opportunities and avoiding adverse impacts.</p>
<p>Other (please state below)</p>						

Are there any recognised good practice environmental standards in relation to this proposal? If so, please detail how this proposal meets those standards.

A key focus of the woodland creation approach in North Yorkshire is 'right tree, right place' – thus maximising opportunities and avoiding adverse impacts. Recognised good practice includes adherence to the UK Forestry Standards and compliance with a wide range of established approaches both to the selection of sites for woodland creation and planting / site management.

Summary Summarise the findings of your impact assessment, including impacts, the recommendation in relation to addressing impacts, including any legal advice, and next steps. This summary should be used as part of the report to the decision maker.

Submission of an Expression of Interest to the WCAF will not have any direct climate change impacts. However, if the bid is successful and funding is awarded to NYCC, that will provide significant revenue funding to support work leading to woodland creation activity that has the potential to bring substantial benefits as outlined in this assessment.

Sign off section

This climate change impact assessment was completed by:

Name	Hugh CLEAR HILL
Job title	Principal Environmental Policy and Projects Officer
Service area	Growth, Planning and Trading Standards
Directorate	BES
Signature	Hugh Clear Hill
Completion date	23/06/2022

Authorised by relevant Assistant Director (signature): Dave Caulfield, Assistant Director – Growth, Planning and Trading Standards

Date: 23/06/2022