

North Yorkshire Council

Environment Executive Members

28 November 2025

Endorsement of White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-2050)

Report of the Assistant Director – Highways and Infrastructure

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To note that a new Strategic Plan has been developed and approved by the White Rose Forest partnership, and to seek North Yorkshire Council's endorsement of the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50).

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The White Rose Forest is the Community Forest for North and West Yorkshire. It is a partnership of local and combined authorities, national park authorities and national landscape organisations, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) organisations, alongside national, regional and local charities, businesses and community enterprises.
- 2.2 The White Rose Forest is not a single 'forest', but the network of all trees, woods and forests across North and West Yorkshire, including trees in gardens and on residential streets, in town and city centres, along transport routes, in parks and green spaces, by rivers, canals and lakes, on farmland and in the countryside.
- 2.3 The White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50), see Appendix 1, is the long-term strategic document governing development of the White Rose Forest, setting out the partnership's vision, aspirations and targets for tree and woodland establishment and management in North and West Yorkshire.
- 2.4 Its purpose is influencing/advocating, profile raising and securing commitment, plus being used as the basis for bidding for and directing the use of resources. Its principal audience is therefore local political/business leaders, funders (including government) and partners.
- 2.5 The partnership has progressed the development of a new Strategic Plan over the last 18 months, with the process now completed with the approval of the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50) by the partnership's Strategic Board on 26 March 2025.

3.0 THE WHITE ROSE FOREST STRATEGIC PLAN (2025-2050)

- 3.1 The White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50) builds on the foundations of the White Rose Forest Action Plan (2021-25) and experience and learning of the partnership over recent years. It creates an umbrella strategy for North and West Yorkshire, which accommodates more bespoke strategies, plans and actions at a local level, and establishes a structure for more detailed action planning.

- 3.2 The Strategic Plan articulates the broad and diverse benefits (environmental, economic & social) of trees and woodland and emphasises the concept of an extensive network of all trees and woodland across North and West Yorkshire (and wanting to expand, improve and better connect this – effectively the Lawton principles). It broadens the aims/objectives to reflect the current priorities, making these more obvious (e.g. nature recovery, woodland management, community engagement, accessibility, partnership).
- 3.3 The Strategic Plan demonstrates the level of ambition for the White Rose Forest area and what could be possible in 25 years and highlights that everyone has a part to play and how the partnership will work together to deliver on the ambition.
- 3.4 The Strategic Plan expresses the partnership’s long-term direction and level of ambition through a Vision:

“The White Rose Forest partnership is leading landscape transformation in North and West Yorkshire, creating a vast and varied treescape that connects and permeates our towns/cities and countryside. Our work has made our region more prosperous and resilient to a changing climate, improved health & wellbeing and supported nature recovery.”

- 3.4.1 and a set of Strategic Objectives (and associated targets):
- Expand the area of trees and woodland and improve connectivity.
 - Protect and restore more trees and woodland.
 - Engage more people, communities and businesses in the planning, designing, planting, management and use of trees and woodland.
 - Promote the transformative role of trees and woodland.
 - Grow the impact and sustainability of the White Rose Forest partnership.
- 3.5 The White Rose Forest Strategic Board is now seeking endorsement of the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50) from strategic partners, to raise the profile of the White Rose Forest and the partnership’s new Strategic Plan, and to demonstrate strategic partner support for its long-term direction and ambition.
- 3.6 Trees and woodland are one of the most effective nature-based solutions for adapting to climate change and providing habitat to protect and enhance biodiversity. Due to this and the societal benefits, there is also strong public support for more trees and woodland.
- 3.7 Successful delivery of the Strategic Plan will provide a wide range of direct and indirect (and often multiple) benefits for: business; the environment; nature; and communities.

4.0 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN AND RESPONSES

- 4.1 The White Rose Forest partnership has led on the development of the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50) and hence the engagement of stakeholders, which has taken place throughout the Strategic Plan development process, in many different ways, facilitating place and thematic input, including from:
- White Rose Forest District Groups
 - Catchment Partnership workshops
 - Green Streets workshop
 - Ancient Woodland sub-group
 - Local Nature Recovery Strategy (x2) involvement
 - Community Engagement project
 - Data and Mapping workshops

- 4.2 A formal Stakeholder Engagement survey ran from 4 December to 17 January 2025, comprising a small number of open questions to provide a high-level structure for free text feedback on a Summary White Rose Forest Strategic Plan produced as the basis for engagement, with responses received from a good range of stakeholders.
- 4.3 Considerable support for the Summary White Rose Forest Strategic Plan was expressed, with it aligning well the stakeholder policies, strategies and plans. Stakeholders raised many useful suggestions for how the strategic plan could be further developed / enhanced, which have all been considered in finalising the Strategic Plan.
- All respondents confirmed they felt a degree of alignment between the Summary White Rose Forest Strategic Plan and their policies, strategies and plans, with almost half indicating full alignment.
 - All respondents confirmed support for the long-term direction and level of ambition, as articulated in the vision and targets, with over 70% indicating full support.
- 4.4 A Public Engagement survey ran from 6 to 28 January 2025, comprising a number of multiple choice or rating / ranking type questions, with just over 300 responses received.
- 4.5 This has helped raise the profile of the White Rose Forest and confirmed public support for the proposed long-term direction, level of ambition and approach outlined in the Summary White Rose Forest Strategic Plan. In addition, it has provided some useful input on the value the public place on trees and woodland and what they would like to see prioritised in the future. Finally, contact details have been provided by 153 respondents who would like to be contacted regarding the work of the White Rose Forest and the opportunities to get involved in the future, supporting ongoing community engagement. Some key findings were:
- Respondents overwhelmingly agreed (93% Strongly agree or Agree) that we need more trees and woodland in North and West Yorkshire.
 - Many more respondents thought that trees and woodland close to where they live had declined (40%) rather than improved (25%) in the last 5 years.
 - Respondents overwhelmingly supported the long-term direction and level of ambition outlined in the Summary White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (91% Strongly support or Support).
- 4.6 Prior to local government reorganisation, the predecessor authorities of Harrogate Borough Council, Craven District Council and North Yorkshire County Council were active participants in WRF activities and delivery. Internal consultation with stakeholders throughout the recent organisational restructures has supported the handover of information, resources and legacy work. The lead service area going forwards has been agreed as Parks and Grounds.

5.0 CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES

- 5.1 As a member of the White Rose Forest Partnership, NYC will be better placed to deliver against Council priorities as set out in the Council Plan, in particular around our ambitions to:
- Develop more sustainable and connected places across North Yorkshire.
 - Ensure the people of North Yorkshire are safe, healthy and live well.
- 5.2 The delivery of additional tree planting and being able to access the network of professional expertise will assist the Council to increase tree canopy cover and the wide ranging environmental and wellbeing benefits that trees can provide.

6.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 The option to not endorse the White Rose Strategic Plan (2025-2050) was considered. It is recommended that this option is rejected as by endorsing the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50), North Yorkshire Council will be demonstrating our support for the White Rose Forest partnership and the long-term direction and level of ambition of its Strategic Plan.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no direct financial implications of endorsing the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50) for the Council. The White Rose Forest Agreement, of which it is proposed that North Yorkshire Council be a signatory, is clear that there will be no obligation on any signatory to make an annual financial contribution, although voluntary contributions can be made.

7.2 The White Rose Forest Agreement signatories have committed to working collectively, collaboratively and in good faith towards securing and accessing funds for the delivery of the Strategic Plan and associated 5 yearly Action Plans.

7.3 For North Yorkshire Council to effectively support the delivery of the Strategic Plan existing staff time resource will be required which will be met from existing budgets. There is no funding included in the budget for any additional financial support to the Partnership.

7.4 The White Rose Forest partnership delivers significant financial benefits, enabling the council to access external funding to deliver local priorities, reducing the burden on resources.

7.5 The White Rose Forest partnership will take a proactive approach to securing funding, exploring and developing a broad range of options and will do so in a co-ordinated manner to optimise outcomes. The Strategic Plan will help coordinate and prioritise resources to maximise resource efficiency.

7.6 The aspirations of the Strategic Plan require significant land for tree planting and woodland creation, far beyond that owned or managed by North Yorkshire Council, therefore the Council will work with the White Rose Forest partnership to engage with landowners and managers across our area to identify and utilise sites.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no direct legal implications of endorsing the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50). It is proposed that North Yorkshire Council be a signatory to the White Rose Forest Partnership Agreement, subject to the relevant authority being obtained and, as such, will formally be a member of the Strategic Board which approved the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50), on behalf of the partnership.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Equalities Impact Assessment has identified that by endorsing the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-2050) there would be no adverse impacts anticipated from the proposal. Delivery of the Partnership's work will be via a 5-year delivery plan that will be reviewed regularly.

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 This assessment highlights the positive impact on the environment from endorsing the White Rose Forest Strategy (2025-2050). These include reducing pollution, increasing areas of shade and cooling in a warmer climate, and the creation or enhancement of habitats for biodiversity. Young trees will be planted using good practice methods to give them the best possible start in getting established.

11.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 Endorsement of the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-2050) in support of delivering the partnership's vision, aspirations and targets for tree and woodland establishment and management in North Yorkshire will signal the Council's intent to lead and deliver across the largest council (by geography) in England. This will also consolidate the various activities previously undertaken prior to local government reorganisation and emerging policy and strategy work within the Tree & Woodland team.

12.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 It is asked that the Corporate Director of Environment, in consultation with the Executive Member for Highways and Transportation:
- i) Note that a new White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50) has been developed and approved by the White Rose Forest partnership.
 - ii) Endorse the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50), demonstrating North Yorkshire Council's support.
 - iii) Note how the council can play its part in successful delivery of the Strategic Plan.
 - iv) Note the district priorities and targets included in the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50) for North Yorkshire Council.
 - v) Note the strong link between the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-2050) and North Yorkshire Council's emerging work on Tree & Woodland Policy and Strategy.
 - vi) Note that there is no funding included in the Council's budget and there are no additional financial commitments for North Yorkshire Council as a result of endorsement of the Strategic Plan.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – White Rose Forest Strategic Plan – Summary (2025-50)
Appendix B – Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix C – Climate Change Impact Assessment

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

N/A

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14 November 2025

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Presenter of Report – Jon Clubb, Head of Parks & Grounds

Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.