

AMENITIES AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

3rd November 2021

Item 12. WBC'S 250,000 TREES PROJECT

Parish/Town clerks were invited to have a conversation with the new Wokingham Borough Council officer responsible for their 250,000 trees project, to find out more about the borough's plans.

The Deputy Town Clerk and I subsequently met with Laura Buck (via Teams) on 19th October 2021.

Laura introduced herself and explained that she started with WBC in September and is working on Wokingham Borough Council's plans to plant 250,000 trees over the next 5 years as part of their Climate Emergency, with the aim of being carbon neutral by 2030.

WBC estimate that approximately 250 hectares of land will be required in order to plant this number of trees and WBC are looking to find suitable available land.

There are 2 phases to the plan: -

Phase 1 – Years 1 and 2. A consultant will be appointed to conduct a **feasibility study** which will assess the viability of the plan and WBC will be approaching Town/Parish Councils and local residents to see what land could be available for tree planting. WBC will be considering turning green areas in to woodlands, introducing tree orchards and encouraging residents to plant trees in their gardens. The focus will be on smaller sites, up to 5 hectares in size.

This phase will also include the development of a **WBC Tree Strategy and Management Plan** to ensure that when trees are planted that they are established, maintained and consideration is given to their long-term maintenance. WBC intend to consult with Towns/Parishes and residents on the strategy, probably by way of questionnaire.

Phase 2 –Years 3 – 5. This will involve a '**Garden Forestry Scheme**'- local residents will be approached and encouraged to plant trees in their own garden, the hope is to create a community spirit around this scheme. WBC will consider having a supply of trees available for this or working with local nurseries on a possible voucher scheme where interested residents can obtain a suitable tree.

WBC will develop a '**Tree Palette**', a plan on which the borough will be broken up into areas to determine the best type(s) of tree for that area and soil type. This will consider which species should be used and whether the ground in that area will support growth. Laura said that she would be working closely with WBC's Tree & Landscape team on this.

With regards the role of Town/Parish Councils, WBC would be looking to see what land they have available to plant trees and would be asking for their help to get the word out to residents to encourage the Garden Forestry Scheme. WBC would also be looking at the future maintenance of the trees and any possible help that Town/Parish Councils could offer, along with recruiting volunteers or working with volunteer groups. There could also be an adopt a tree incentive.

Laura suggested that WBC contractors would initially deal with the tree establishment stage, which would then pass to WBC's internal team for grounds, but it could be the case that additional help is

required at these stages and again WBC would be possibly turning to Town/Parish Councils and volunteer groups.

Laura also said that WBC will be working towards 'Tree Cities of the World' status which is where a town is recognised for its tree maintenance and management.

We asked Laura if she was aware of Wokingham Veteran Tree Association and she confirmed she was and that she has attended one of their meetings. We also asked her if she had any knowledge of the individual town and parish councils, their roles and responsibilities and how different they were from each other. Laura explained that individual clerks had been providing that information which she was finding very useful.

We informed Laura that ETC had a long track record with regards experience and knowledge of trees, we employ our own grounds staff and already have responsibility for many trees, including those in the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve. In addition, we explained that ETC views the green agenda, including trees, as a priority and is actively working towards improving things in Earley, the Tree Register being one example. Laura said she was aware of ETC's 26 to COP26 project and had seen the Significant Tree Walk we have devised.

Emma questioned Laura about their Tree Strategy and told her that this has been an item discussed by ETC's Planning Committee in that they were aware of the strategy and had approached WBC. WBC had said that the Town/Parish Councils would be consulted once WBC had approved a draft strategy and that ETC's Planning Committee have requested that WBC consider consulting Town/Parish Councils before a draft has been produced. Laura said that a **pre-consultation questionnaire** would be going out at the beginning of November 2021 and that this was to "start a conversation" with Town/Parish Councils and residents and that feedback and additional views would be taken into consideration as part of the strategy. Laura believes the work on the Tree Strategy will take about 6 – 12 months and that there will be communication with Town/Parish Councils throughout.

We confirmed that, in principle, ETC would be willing to work with WBC on this project in whatever ways we could but we did make the point that, historically, there had been a tendency for initial contact to be made by WBC and then nothing materialised. Laura assured us that she wishes to work closely with Towns/Parishes and that she planned to continue communications with individual clerks as well as attending a future meeting of the clerks.

Jo Friend
Town Clerk