

**Title of meeting:** Cabinet

**Date of meeting:** 24th July 2019

**Subject:** Greening the city update

**Report by:** Assistant Director of Planning & Economic Growth

**Wards affected:** All

**Key decision:** No

**Full Council decision:** No

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## **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the progress that has been made on the 2018-19 Green Infrastructure delivery plan project. Six months on from the approval of the plan, it is a good time to provide an update on the progress that has been made with this project, and set out the further planned work that is in place to be taken forward over the remainder of the year. A number of proposals are also made with respect to how the project should progress in relation to several new opportunities that have been identified.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1. Note the progress and ongoing work as set out in this report.**
- 2. Endorse the proposals set out in the appendix project update summary table**

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 Green infrastructure such as trees, shrubs and greenspaces like parks, have an important role in providing the city with a range of valuable benefits beyond simply the aesthetic. Green infrastructure, is a key means of mitigating and building resilience to climate change helping to shade and cool the environment in high heat, as well as slowing water runoff, thus reducing the risk of flooding during heavy rainfall. Green infrastructure can also promote physical health and wellbeing through encouraging people to take up more active lifestyles, and has

been associated with better mental health including reductions in stress, anxiety and depression. Incorporating high quality green infrastructure within the public realm can also make a positive contribution to improving air quality through absorbing some of the harmful pollutants that contribute to poor quality air with subsequent health benefits for people as a result. Beyond health and wellbeing, greening urban areas can bring about gains in biodiversity and contribute to economic development by encouraging greater investment in an area.

- 3.2 There is a range of greening going on around the city and it is worthwhile noting that a significant amount of tree planting has occurred over the last year at various sites (figure 1 over the page demonstrates the spread of locations). To highlight a few examples of specific tree planting that has happened:
- More than 50,000 trees and shrubs have now been planted at Horsea Island Country Park, it should be noted that as with any planting, there may be some losses during establishment.
  - 20 elm trees on Ladies mile (including 9 large semi-mature trees); 15 Oaks on Pier Road and 19 Oaks around the D-Day landing craft project.
  - 45 native trees at Kingston Recreation Ground last year, and another 15 planted this spring at Fred Francis Close play area.
  - Up to 10 new semi-mature trees planted on Eastern Road housing land, and 10 on two small parking improvement projects in Somerstown and Fratton.
  - On the Tipner Lake coastal defences last year around 12 semi-mature specimens with more planned this winter.
  - 100 fruit trees in youth and adventure centres last season. 30 fruit trees in North Portsea and around the John Pounds Centre in Portsmouth and around 20 around Somerstown Hub. Over 30 around Landport and Buckland as part of the Charles Dickens community orchards.
- 3.3 To support the initiative of greening the city, the Cabinet Member for Planning, Regeneration and Economic Development (PRED) approved a short term green infrastructure delivery plan for the city on the 6th November 2018. The objective of this document was to set out a means for delivering new green infrastructure in the city over the short term alongside the longer term work of the Local Plan. The document set out several approaches to be pursued, including tree planting and enhancements to local green spaces, as well as a detailed street level analysis of tree cover in the city to get a better understanding of the spatial distribution of trees in Portsmouth and areas of greatest need to inform additional planting in the future.
- 3.4 The updates covered in the following report are summarised in the appendix table. In addition to achievements to date, the work on the project has continued to explore different means by which additional beneficial greening might be delivered around the city and as such this report makes a number of proposals for Members to consider.

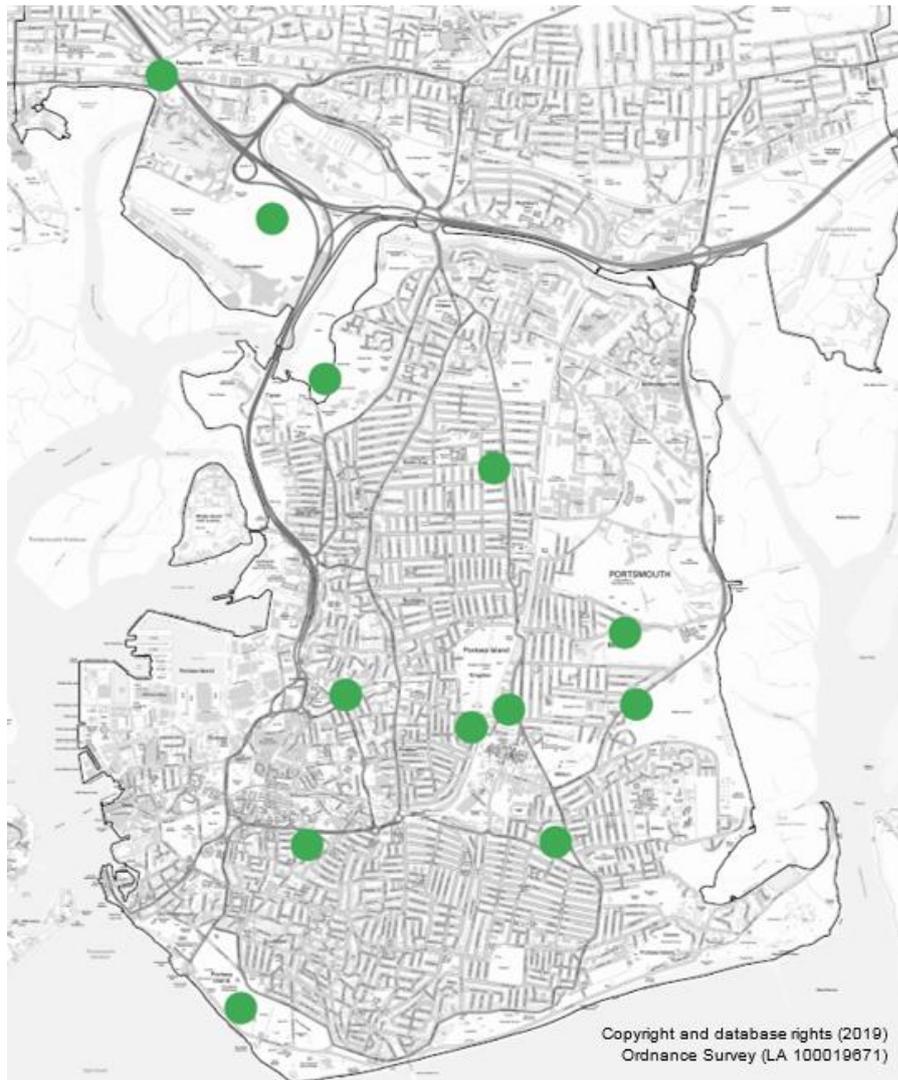


Figure 1 - Map displaying key locations of tree planting across the city in the last year, note that markers denote only broad locations, and this is only a selection of sites (other planting has occurred elsewhere around the city).

### Achievements to date

- 3.5 The project has achieved a number of worthwhile things in its first six months. A detailed piece of research into tree cover across the city has been undertaken using satellite imagery of tree canopy coverage for Portsmouth and analysed using GIS software. The findings from that research piece have been published for consultation as part of the evidence base underpinning the new Local Plan<sup>1</sup>.
- 3.6 To summarise the findings presented in the report, it was found that there were over 86,000 trees in the city but that canopy cover compares unfavourably with cities like Plymouth, Southampton and London at just 9.8%. There is a clear north-south differentiation in amount of trees, with wards in the north benefitting from highest numbers of trees per hectare and per head of the population, compared with those in the south. The wards with the lowest numbers of trees

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/development-and-planning/planning/new-local-plan-evidence>

per person were Central Southsea, Fratton and St Thomas. Apart from Southsea, many of the wards with the least amounts of trees also tended to be the most deprived wards in the city.

- 3.7 The project began at a relatively advanced stage in the tree planting season last year (which typically runs from around September to March), this made identifying and planting during that first season challenging. Whilst discussions were initiated with a range of stakeholders in the Council as soon as possible, it was determined that it would not be feasible to achieve tree planting within the highways before the end of the current season due to the variety of obstacles and complexity of planting trees successfully in the urban areas of the city, (due to matters such as the presence of services etc.).
- 3.8 Nevertheless, in conjunction with members of the Parks team, a number of opportunity locations were identified within council owned green spaces that would benefit from additional tree planting to help improve the quality of these areas and that could be delivered before the end of the planting season. The Parks team planted a total of 68 trees across four parks in the city at: Kingston Rec in Fratton Ward, College Park in Copnor Ward, Milton Park in Milton Ward and Watersedge Park in Paulsgrove Ward. These trees were all native species and have included species of Lime, Flowering Cherry and Field Maple. Amongst various environmental benefits, the trees have particular value for supporting local wildlife including birds, bees and other insects thus are hoped to contribute to biodiversity in these areas.
- 3.9 In addition to the above, a social media campaign was initiated across the Council's social media channels and went on for a number of weeks with several objectives.
- First to highlight what green infrastructure the city currently benefits from and touch upon some of the multiple benefits that this infrastructure provides in support of people's health and wellbeing.
  - Second to draw people's attention to some of the city's green spaces including lesser known areas that they might want to visit - this was considered beneficial because anecdotal evidence suggests many residents are not aware of the whole range of greenspaces that are nearby to where they live, and can help to draw their attention to these areas as places to visit in the future.
  - Finally the social media posts included a call for feedback on places that residents considered might benefit from tree planting in the future and a summary of these is included in the appendix. These help to demonstrate that there is an ongoing potential for greening the city which is likely to require a sustained commitment from the Council to achieve change. It will be for the Council to consider the rate of investment in green infrastructure it can accommodate as and when opportunities arise.

#### **Further work ongoing and/or proposed**

- 3.10 Work has been ongoing investigating the process for planting street trees with a view to getting trees in the ground for the upcoming season. The intention is that

this exercise will be recorded in detail to serve us to inform future discussion and delivery of future plans, so that further rounds of planting can be put into place more efficiently in the future.

- 3.11 A number of locations have been selected in the city to be explored as part of an initial tranche of street planting. These locations have been guided by the tree analysis set out in paras 3.3 and 3.4, as well as other factors including data on deprivation, access to available green space and physical site visits. A range of physically different sites have been selected which will serve as case studies to better understand the challenges of planting in Portsmouth's urban environment, from vacant tree pits where the pit has since been filled in, to pockets of amenity green space, road buildouts and areas of particularly wide pavement where it is considered that there are opportunities for trees to be supported. A council landscape architect has been enlisted to progress detailed feasibility studies of each site which includes investigations into services below the ground; liaison with key services (including the PFI team and Highways Contractor, arboriculture officers, transport); and produce landscaping designs and this should confirm which sites are deliverable and which are not (and the reasons why), before progressing to an initial consideration of sites for final feasibility and planting.
- 3.12 In conjunction with the above, officers have liaised with the parks team's Arboricultural Officer and members of the HRA team in order to identify a number of opportunities for further rounds of tree planting that can be undertaken to enhance existing council green spaces such as parks and housing land, over the next planting season (2019-20). The result of these discussions has been the identification of a host of locations around the city with some initial thoughts on scope of tree planting that could be accommodated in each place subject to funding being found.
- 3.13 The research and feasibility work set out in paras 3.9 and 3.10 above have highlighted a range of tree planting opportunities across the city which can deliver new green infrastructure for the benefit of local residents. The relative merits need to be considered before final feasibility work is undertaken. This is envisaged in the first instance to be undertaken by the Cabinet Member for Culture and City Development.
- 3.14 Furthermore, it was previously communicated that officers should create a resource that addresses common points a local resident might want to know about trees in Portsmouth. This has led to the production of a concise resource which can be published on the website and which is coming to a point where it is ready to publish online.

### **Green corridors**

- 3.15 In addition to the above, in the interests of pursuing a range of opportunities for greening the city, a separate project has been identified along the north of Copnor Road for trialling the creation of a 'pollinator friendly corridor' which if successful could be replicated in other parts of the city. A pollinator friendly

corridor would tie into several sustainability benefits for the city. The project offers the opportunity to encourage active travel through attracting additional pedestrians and cyclists through the environmental enhancements it could offer. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, it would create a length of new habitat for pollinator species and better encourage movement between several greenspaces with benefits for biodiversity in the middle of the city.

- 3.16 The project would involve changing the management of a number of sections of the grass verges either side of the Copnor Road between John Wesley Gardens and College Park (also linking up Gatcombe Gardens in the process). Rather than the current management practice of mowing the grass short, areas would be reseeded with a mix of native wildflower seedlings at regular intervals in order to create a corridor. The route is considered a good opportunity for this trial due to the spread of green verges already present down the road and the chance to link up several green spaces in the north of the city.
- 3.17 The suggestion is that this is initially managed as a trial for 12 months with the opportunity to extend based upon feedback from how the project is received. The reason for this suggestion is that there is the potential that outside of flowering seasons the way the pollinator habitat is necessarily managed (only intermittent cutting) could lend to the verges looking 'untidy' compared with the surrounding grass verges, and this could draw negative responses. It is suggested that a programme of awareness raising and education, perhaps via informative signposting and social media, would be helpful in explaining the reasoning and potential benefits for the change of management. A trial period would allow for a timely assessment as to how successful the project has been and for consideration as to whether the trial should continue and/or be extended to other parts of the city.

### **Additional considerations of greening the city**

- 3.18 There is a growing motivation to develop new green infrastructure such as planting trees, and this can have a wide range of benefits for the city and its residents (as detailed in background papers on green infrastructure published on the Council's local plan webpage<sup>2</sup>). Whilst officers consider this to have significant benefits, it is considered prudent to highlight that to ensure the high quality and ongoing benefits from such greening, there is a financial implication beyond that of the initial planting of each new tree. Each new tree that is planted requires an initial period of regular watering for the first few years to ensure its establishment (particularly during the summer months). Further into a tree's life, it is necessary to undertake regular inspections, and maintenance/management to ensure the tree remains healthy and safe. It has been estimated that each new tree in a greenspace can impose an additional lifetime cost (in addition to the planting costs) of between £800 - £1,500 to the Council, depending on its location and consequent average life expectancy. Whilst this point is in no way intended as a deterrent to further tree planting, it is considered useful to highlight

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/development-and-planning/planning-policy/new-local-plan-evidence>

here as it will naturally have a long term implication for funding these areas of the Council into the future.

- 3.19 The work summarised in this report has identified a range of greening opportunities at a variety of scales and contexts. Some of these opportunities will be lower cost and able to be met within existing budgets, whilst others will require funding potentially from a range of sources (such as neighbourhood CIL, a capital bid, or external funding). Appropriate mechanisms for funding will be used and approval will be sought as appropriate.
- 3.20 It should be stressed that this report focusses on short term greening opportunities. For the longer term, the measures included in the new Local Plan will secure local benefits such as new tree planting and other forms of greening from developers.

### **Concluding remarks**

- 3.21 This document has provided an update on the progress of the 2018-19 Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan as approved by the Member for PRED in November 2018. It has highlighted the achievements made to date and framed the ongoing and future work planned. The document alongside the attached appendix has also made a number of proposals that would further support the development of short term, targeted green infrastructure delivery around Portsmouth. A further project update is planned to be given to Members towards the end of the year as the original schedule for the delivery plan comes to an end.

## **4. Equality impact assessment**

- 4.1 An equality impact assessment is not required as the recommendations do not have a disproportionately negative impact on any of the protected characteristics as described in the Equality Act 2010. However, once specific locations have been identified for significant new planting (such as locations for new street trees) the need for an EIA is planned to be revisited, though the position is not expected to change as any measures proposed will be designed to avoid negative impacts.

## **5. Legal implications**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report. Site-specific legal issues may need to be considered once details of specific improvements are identified and further advice will be sought when this is necessary.

**6. Director of Finance's comments**

- 6.1 There are no financial implications as a result of approving the recommendation within this report.
- 6.2 If the approach is approved a funding source will need to be identified in order to deliver any measures that contribute to this initiative.

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Signed by:

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1: Summary table of progress to date and proposals for ongoing work

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by ..... on .....

.....  
Signed by: