

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE

6TH DECEMBER 2022

RCT TREE, WOODLANDS AND HEDGEROW STRATEGY

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROSPERITY & DEVELOPMENT IN
DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE &
CORPORATE SERVICES**

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1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is for Members to consider the responses to the consultation on the draft RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that Members:

- (1) Consider the information contained within this report and the consultation report attached at Appendix 1.
- (2) Endorse the report and agree to adopt the RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy as set out at Appendix 2.

3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Trees have featured prominently in climate change considerations in global, UK and Welsh policy. We are also recognising that trees, vegetation and soils have an important carbon storing role in the 'carbon cycle'.

3.2 A tree strategy is necessary to ensure that we value, promote and protect the significant extent of existing woodlands in Rhondda Cynon Taf (about a third of the County Borough), recognising the importance of our semi-natural woodland habitats and especially our ancient woodlands. It is also important that a strategy is in place that recognises the importance of protecting semi-natural habitats and undisturbed soils from inappropriate tree planting.

3.3 A tree strategy will also provide the foundation of the Council's ambition to deliver

RCT's largest tree planting programme in a generation and will promote the principles of 'right tree – right place'.

- 3.4 Finally a tree strategy will provide a robust framework for all tree related decisions and activity in RCT over the next 10 years.
- 3.5 The consultation exercise has identified a significant majority of support amongst respondents for the aims and objectives of the Strategy.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The focus of this strategy is to actively protect Rhondda Cynon Taf's Trees and Woodland – the green infrastructure of parks, gardens, woods, trees in streets, footpaths, green spaces, trees and hedges that all benefit our environment so significantly. The strategy also sets the framework for the Council's commitment to the largest tree planting programme in a generation adopting the right tree, right place, right reason approach.
- 4.2 Cabinet considered the draft Strategy in June 2022 and agreed to extensive public consultation, the results of which are the subject of this report.

5.0 RESPONSES TO THE DRAFT RCT TREE, WOODLAND AND HEDGEROW STRATEGY

- 5.1 The strategy was subject to an eight-week period of public consultation. The consultation utilised the Council's 'Let's Talk Trees' platform which provides a user friendly and interactive form of engagement with the public and ran from the 1st September to 27th October 2022.
- 5.2 Social media and the Council's consultation webpage were utilised in order to communicate with the public and encourage engagement and feedback regarding the Strategy. An email was sent to a range of key stakeholders to promote the consultation and encourage participation on the Let's Talk site and the Snap XMP survey. We also continued to consider those having reduced or no access to the internet and those who prefer to engage through traditional methods. A telephone consultation option was in place for all Council consultations, through the Council's contact centre. This option allows people to discuss their views or request consultation materials.
- 5.3 A total of 68 responses were received from residents in regard to the Council's Executive Summary and Draft Tree Strategy survey. 94% of residents agreed that the Council should focus on protecting and managing existing trees, especially the older and larger trees which store more carbon and provide the greatest climate mitigation benefits.
- 5.4 98.5% of respondents agreed that the Council should consider the long-term benefits of trees and other natural habitats in tackling the Nature and Climate emergencies.

- 5.5 96.9% of respondents agreed that the Council should focus on tree planting in areas where people live and work especially where there are not many trees already.
- 5.6 Within the Draft Tree and Woodland Strategy there are 6 overarching aims, these are:
- To protect, regenerate and care for Rhondda Cynon Taf's existing trees and woodlands.
 - To encourage the natural regeneration and colonisation of trees as the most sustainable way of increasing canopy cover.
 - Encourage new tree and hedgerow planting in appropriate areas to benefit well-being, pollution, climate change and pride in our surroundings.
 - Where urban tree cover is below 10% to plant more trees on the principle of the 'right tree in the right place'.
 - To recognise the ancient hedgerow heritage of RCT, to restore and maintain the valuable ecological and historic asset, and where new hedges are planted ensure, they do not compromise this heritage.
 - To provide a framework for decision making and establishing a prioritised action plan for 2023 – 2033.
- 5.7 A high majority of respondents agreed with each of the overarching aims, with 100% agreeing with protecting, regenerating and care for Rhondda Cynon Taf's existing trees and woodlands.
- 5.8 In conclusion, despite a relatively low response rate, the feedback to the strategy has been overwhelmingly positive

6.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS/ SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 6.1 None as a direct result of this strategy.

7.0 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no Welsh language implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

8.0 CONSULTATION/ INVOLVEMENT

- 8.1 As set out in the Consultation Report at Appendix 1.

8.2 This report was also presented to the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee on the 15th November 2022 in order for Scrutiny Members to pre-scrutinise the consultation responses to the draft RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy.

9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None directly related to this strategy but there will be additional staff, capital and revenue impacts as plans under the strategy area developed.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

10.1 The enhancement of trees, woodlands and hedgerows in the County Borough is directly related to the goals of the Well Being of Future Generations Act. The Council also has specific responsibilities in terms of tree/public safety and Tree Preservation Orders.

11.0 LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

11.1 The proposed Tree Strategy contributes to the Council's priorities as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan. Specifically, it contributes to 'People' by creating more natural communities that promote and maintain mental wellbeing and to 'Places' by getting the best out of our environment by looking after and investing in our greenspaces and specifically delivering natural carbon storage solutions across the County Borough to enhance air quality and reduce the impact of greenhouse gasses. It also reflects the five ways of working in the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Sustainable management is based on long-term considerations and is focused on preventative and precautionary action. The strategy aims to involve all the relevant stakeholders and to integrate tree activity into the wider operations of the Council. It will contribute specifically to the Resilience and Global Responsibility goals of the Act, but in the longer term it could have implications for all the goals

12.0 STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS

12.1 Successful implementation of the Council's draft RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy will be of significant strategic importance.

13.0 CONCLUSION

13.1 It is recommended that Members:

- (1) Consider the information contained within this report and the consultation report attached at Appendix 1.

- (2) Endorse the report and agree to adopt the RCT Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy as set out at Appendix 2.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

Climate Change, Frontline Services and Prosperity

Contact Officer: *Simon Gale 01443 281114*



LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

A DISCUSSION PAPER FOR A PRIVATE MEETING OF THE CABINET

28 NOVEMBER 2022

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Background Papers

None.

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