

## **Bassetlaw District Council response to Inspectors Action**

### **List Action 70 - Matter 12 – ST50 Climate Change (BDC-33)**

BDC to produce a paper to explain the tree planting policy, with reference to national guidance and viability testing. Inspector to set out what needs to be included. BDC to liaise with Home Builders Federation on this.

#### **BDC Response (Inspector's questions in bold)**

- **Why did the Council decide to refine the policy to relate specifically to tree-planting ? How does this relate to other policy objectives in the Plan and how does this align with wider objectives of the Council and partner organisations ? How does this align with national policy ? Is it intended to reflect just the requirements of para 131 or are other requirements of the NPPF also relevant ?**

#### **Tree planting in Bassetlaw: background**

Historically Bassetlaw District has close ties with the Sherwood Forest. Today, the District supports the northernmost reach of the Sherwood Forest area: over 10,000 ha of woodland, including 600 ha of ancient woodland, almost double the average woodland coverage for England (paragraph 3.21 of SUB-010).

The Council has a longstanding objective to contribute to the ongoing rejuvenation of the Sherwood Forest area. This includes:

- In 2015, the Council's Cabinet endorsed the Vision and Purpose to establish the Sherwood Forest Regional Park. Whilst a Regional Park is no longer considered a priority the principles of using tree-planting to enhance the character and distinctiveness of the district and to deliver other wider economic, social and environmental improvements remain a thread of Council policy.
- In February 2019, Cabinet approved a financial investment to plant 400 legacy oaks grown from acorns from the Sherwood Forest in the District to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the journey of the Mayflower Pilgrims to America (known as the Mayflower 400 Legacy Oaks Project).
- In June 2019, Full Council committed to achieving carbon neutrality for Council operations within the emerging Council Plan. This led to Priority 10 in the Council Plan [BG-025]: 'Encourage local tree planting by developing a long-term strategy on trees and their maintenance. Through the use of the planning system and by encouraging others to plant more trees in the district, we will seek to rejuvenate the Sherwood Forest area.'
- In June 2020, a report to Cabinet informed by The Carbon Trust identified the district's carbon footprint figure as 2,382 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent (2018/19) and resolved to undertake initiatives to make ongoing and realistic reductions in the district's carbon footprint. Working with partners on tree planting initiatives was highlighted as important to achieve this ambition. These included the Mayflower 400 Legacy Oaks Project as well as other local planting schemes to be undertaken with the Sherwood Forest Trust.
- Most recently, in December 2022 the Council planted 2000 trees at Kilton Forest Golf Course to help mitigate the impacts of climate change and diversify habitats in the surrounding area.

#### **Policy context**

The requirement for tree planting sits within the Greening Bassetlaw section of the Plan because it is intended to help mitigate the impacts of climate change. This aligns with The Woodland Trust's view that 'planting native trees make woods more genetically diverse and

therefore more resilient against pests, diseases and the effects of climate change' (State of the UK's Woods and Trees, 2021).

Tree planting would make an important contribution to the national target to increase the UK's woodland cover from 13% to at least 17% by 2050 by planting around 30,000 hectares or more of broadleaf and conifer woodland each year. Together with improved woodland management this would deliver annual emissions sequestration by 2050 of 14 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e in forests (Land Use: Policies for a Net Zero UK, Committee on Climate Change, January 2020).

The approach also aligns with our partners' objectives (Natural England, The Wildlife Trust and The Woodland Trust) to promote tree planting to minimise the impacts of climate change:

- Natural England (June 2022): 'Poorly targeted tree planting and woodland establishment can damage existing wildlife and carbon-rich habitats. Conversely, targeting new native woodland creation to locations where ancient woodland ground flora survives can help enable recovery of plant communities as a whole' <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2022/06/15/taking-an-evidence-led-approach-to-delivery-of-the-governments-tree-target/>. As the district has above national average woodland cover, Bassetlaw is ideally placed to respond positively to this ambition.
- In response to the November 2020 Local Plan Natural England [REF153] welcomed the tree planting requirement adding that 'tree planting projects should consider the "right trees in the right places", i.e. that appropriate native tree species need to be selected that enhance existing habitats.'
- The Woodland Trust: 'We urgently need to scale up the many inspiring initiatives to date. Tree cover in the UK is increasing, but nowhere near fast enough, particularly native tree cover. Over the last five years, the rate of woodland expansion has been on average just under 10,000ha per year – with 45% comprising broadleaved trees. The UK is failing to reach anywhere close to the target of around 30,000ha per year that is estimated to be needed to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050.' (State of the UK's Woods and Trees 2021)
- The Wildlife Trust: 'planting more woods could lock up more carbon, but this must be carefully planned to maximise benefits and avoid harming other habitats. This can be achieved by a diversity of species in every location in order to ensure the best chance of survival in unpredictable and changing conditions as well as natural regeneration encouraged' (Let Nature Help, October 2021). This approach is underway in the District, with positive results. Examples include Treswell Wood and Eaton and Gamston Woods Nature Reserves near Retford. A combination of enhancing ancient woodland and new native, semi natural woodland planting have maximised potential to make a local contribution to minimising the impacts of climate change.

The Council therefore consider that the approach taken by the Local Plan aligns with partners' priority actions to help minimise the impacts of climate change, and will contribute to their ongoing delivery.

However, the Council consider that tree planting can also make a direct and indirect contribution to the delivery of other policy objectives in the Local Plan. These include: promoting design and landscape quality; securing environmental enhancements and regeneration; reinforcing local character and distinctiveness; promoting biodiversity and ecological connectivity; improving soil and air quality; helping to manage flood risk; and delivering recreational and health and well-being benefits to our communities.

As such, our view is that tree planting is an effective way of positively contributing to the delivery of Local Plan Objectives 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 and the overarching vision.

## National policy

We consider that the approach taken by the Plan is directly aligned with the NPPF paragraph 131, in that tree planting would be expected to make an important contribution to addressing climate change mitigation and resilience by providing shading, contributing to air quality and helping manage the heat island effect but also would contribute to quality place-making. This is important in Bassetlaw where design quality has been inconsistent over the last 10 years or so.

The Plan is also aligned with the NPPF paragraph 174 (parts a, b, d, e), and, also contributes to taking a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure and plans for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries (NPPF paragraph 175).

Tree planting also contributes to a range of biodiversity objectives including those identified by the NPPF paragraph 179. This includes, though not exclusively, part b) which requires Local Plans to promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.

By aligning with the NPPF, the Plan also aligns with the National Design Guide 2019 which highlights the different ways trees can contribute to enhancing the quality of development, such as; street trees can create attractive public spaces and soften the impact of hard landscaping, but also help improve air quality and contribute to biodiversity.

**- The original supporting text to the policy suggested that carbon-offsetting was a mechanism to secure mitigation for development where it is not feasible or practical to achieve carbon emission savings at the site. The proposed modifications no longer suggest this but instead places an additional requirement on major development in relation to tree-planting**

Some Local Plans include a zero carbon standard requiring new development to achieve significant carbon reductions on site, so new development is zero carbon or as close to zero carbon as possible. If the development is not able to achieve net zero on site the developer would be expected to make a financial contribution equivalent to the shortfall to contribute to carbon reductions off site. This is known as carbon offsetting.

In Bassetlaw, the Whole Plan Viability Assessment 2022 [PUB-028] makes an allowance for the Part L (Conservation of Fuel and Power) uplift in Building Regulations (June 2022) which looks to achieve higher performance targets – CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are reduced by 31% for dwellings for example – and an emphasis on fabric first approach and low carbon heating systems.

It was evident that including a zero carbon standard would adversely impact the viability of development in the district, taken with affordable housing and developer contributions. However, the allowance for tree planting could be achieved.

Whilst Policy ST50 of the submitted Plan made reference to carbon offsetting, on balance, the Council considers that the use of the term was misleading. Whilst in our view tree planting can help offset carbon emissions, without the appropriate policy framework that includes a zero carbon standard for example, developers will not be able to 'offset' carbon emissions from a development.

The proposed modifications recognised this and proposed maintaining the requirement for tree planting as a means of development contributing to carbon neutrality in the district. It

should be noted that tree planting has been a requirement of the Local Plan since January 2020, so is not considered to be an additional requirement.

- **How did the Council arrive at the requirement of 5 trees per dwelling or per 1000sqm of non-residential floorspace ? What assumptions were made in relation to the size/standard of trees/costs ?**

Through discussions with The Woodland Trust and The Wildlife Trust we established that in general, woodlands in Bassetlaw are mixed native species, varying by location and soil type. For example, Treswell Wood (in the east) is one of the best examples of an ash/oak/maple wood in Nottinghamshire, whereas Dyscarr Wood (towards the west) is predominantly ash and wych elm.

The Woodland Trust's advice was that more trees can be secured if they are smaller in size, they would require less maintenance and will mature more naturally over time. However, we recognise the value of providing mixed native woodland, appropriate to the location in the district (urban or rural) and soil conditions.

We looked to strike an appropriate balance between the number of trees, carbon savings and development viability. To provide a reasonable level of trees we looked at the average cost of a native tree (up to 100cm as a sapling) costed at £10.95 by the Woodland Trust's website <https://shop.woodlandtrust.org.uk/single-trees> . This would enable a mix of different size native trees to be provided when grown to full height (small, medium and large), appropriate to location.

5 trees equated to c £55; we included a reasonable allowance for management which equated to £100 per dwelling.

Once matured, on average, a single tree absorbs around 24kg of CO<sub>2</sub> annually. It therefore takes around 31 trees to absorb a tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> per year. Figure 8 of the Local Plan shows that 3377 dwellings are proposed on Local Plan site allocations and through the Workshop Central DPD. Of those, 3501 dwellings constitute major development. Overall, a contribution of 17,505 trees is expected from these dwellings. In terms of carbon savings, the trees planted would save around 560 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year (<https://www.encon.eu/en/calculation-co2-offsetting-trees>)

Other options were considered. For example 1 tree/per dwelling (3501 trees overall) would reduce costs but would only achieve 113 tonnes in carbon savings annually, and 10 trees/per dwelling (35,010 trees overall) would secure more carbon savings (1129 tonnes annually) but would increase costs to development.

On balance, the policy approach for major development to make provision of 5 trees per dwelling/per 1000sqm floorspace is considered reasonable and justified.

The policy requires provision in the first instance on site, and then if that is not practicable through an equivalent financial contribution to support tree planting off-site.

The original intention was that tree planting would take place on urban extensions and at the Garden Village to provide for a strong urban-rural interface. The Garden Village was seen as essential; the policy required 40% of the site area to make provision for green infrastructure and 20% of the site area was to provide for tree canopy cover.

Council owned land and other publicly owned land was also expected to make a contribution, particularly land that is publicly accessible so that communities could also get recreational/well-being benefits.

The Garden Village was withdrawn from the Local Plan in 2022. The Council consider that securing the amount of land required to accommodate 17,505 trees without the Garden Village may be challenging. Additionally, the benefits of tree planting will not necessarily be experienced District-wide.

As discussed above, the District contains above national average levels of woodland, including ancient woodland. Partners promote a combination of tree planting and the protection and management of ancient woodland to maximise carbon sequestration. The Council therefore intends that in addition to providing new native trees, where considered necessary to maximise carbon sequestration, financial contributions could be used to protect and enhance ancient and veteran woodland in the District. To ensure transparency of process, financial contributions will only be used to support projects that are undertaken with partners from which occupiers of new development could reasonably be expected to benefit.

**- The extent to which carbon off-setting has been tested in the Whole Plan Viability Assessment - what assumptions have been made ?**

The Strategic Site Assessment Assumptions (section 4 of the Whole Plan Viability Assessment, 2022 [PUB-028]) set out the key assumptions tested. This includes an assumption for tree planting, of £100 per dwelling (as detailed above) for each of the strategic sites.

**- The requirements of the policy do not appear to align with the supporting text with regard to on-site provision. How can this be addressed ?**

To provide alignment the Council propose the following changes to Part 4 of Policy ST50 and the supporting text and to better address the points identified above.

**Carbon Offsetting Tree Planting**

- 10.1.12 The Council recognise the importance of reducing the District's carbon footprint and carbon emissions ~~by from~~ new development. However, the Whole Plan Viability Assessment 2024<sup>26</sup> indicates that securing local building or renewable energy requirements above that required by the Building Regulations is financially challenging for new development in the District. To enable the Council to take a proactive approach to mitigating the impacts of climate change, a carbon offsetting fund will be established. tree planting is seen as an efficient and effective way of managing carbon emissions, whilst enhancing quality of place, reinforcing the landscape character of the Sherwood Forest and North Nottinghamshire and contributing to other environmental benefits such as managing air and soil quality.
- 10.1.13 ~~Carbon offsetting Tree planting~~ allows new developments to make a meaningful contribution ~~comply with local planning policy where it is not feasible or practical to achieve carbon emissions savings within the District at the development site.~~ Major development will be expected to make provision for 5 trees per dwelling or per 1,000sqm non residential floorspace. In the first instance, planting should take place on site to maximise carbon savings for new occupiers. The planting of trees on site should incorporate a native species mix that is best able to adapt to climate change.
- 10.1.14 Where on site provision ~~this is not practicable in full,~~ an equivalent financial contribution will be ~~used~~ sought to maximise the contribution the District's woodland cover makes to carbon sequestration. This could be through a range of measures including new native tree planting and/or enhancement of publicly accessible ancient and veteran woodland in the locality. New planting will be promoted in strategic locations within the District, including at HS1: Peaks Hill Farm and HS13: Ordsall South and at other

publicly accessible locations across the District, such as nature reserves where the benefits to the environment and to the public can be maximised. enable tree planting in the District. Financial contributions will be used to contribute to 'offsetting' the carbon footprint of new development by funding carbon saving projects elsewhere in the District. This would thereby supporting Council Plan<sup>1</sup> ambitions to move towards carbon neutrality and contributing contribute to national greenhouse gas reduction targets<sup>3</sup>.

10.1.15 ~~In the short term, and to reflect Council Plan priorities<sup>4</sup>, Policy ST50 will use the financial contribution to deliver tree planting — based on 5 trees per new dwelling or per 1000sqm of non-residential floorspace — for the first 5 years of the Plan, as identified by the Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2021<sup>7</sup>. The Local Plan and Worksop Central DPD are expected to provide for approximately 17,505 trees from major development site allocations. this equates to approximately 38,552 trees or 192,760 560 carbon tonnes saved absorbed a year once complete mature. This thereby providing provides a reasonable balance between making a meaningful contribution towards achieving the Government's target 'to increase tree planting in the UK to 30,000 ha per year by 2025 and maintain these to 2050 to reach net zero emissions'<sup>18</sup> and maintain development viability. Further details on implementation will be set out in the Greening Bassetlaw SPD.~~

10.1.15 ~~Through the review of the Local Plan, carbon offsetting priorities will be reviewed, to reflect national legislation, national planning guidance and local priorities. Further detail will be set out in the Greening Bassetlaw SPD.~~

~~The planting of trees should incorporate a species mix that is best able to adapt to climate change. These trees will form new woodlands in strategic locations within the District, notably at HS1: Peaks Hill Farm and HS13: Ordsall South, and at the Bassetlaw Garden Village (see Policy ST4), where the benefits to the environment can be maximised.~~

#### **POLICY ST50: Reducing Carbon Emissions, Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation**

4. Major development will be required to make provision for 5 trees per dwelling or per 1,000 sqm of non residential floorspace on site, or if on site provision is not practicable then an equivalent financial contribution will be sought to enable provision of new native trees and/or the protection and enhancement of ancient and veteran woodland within the District.