



ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 1 March 2022

REPORT TITLE:	COVID-19 MEMORIAL WOODLAND
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

This report sets out a proposal for a COVID-19 memorial woodland in Arrowe Country Park.

RECOMMENDATION

The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee is recommended to approve the proposal for a COVID-19 memorial woodland in Arrowe Country Park.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 The Council has been approached by some families of bereaved Wirral residents, regarding the establishment of a memorial in Wirral as a dedication to those lost through COVID-19. It is proposed that a memorial woodland is planted in recognition of pandemic deaths. Such woodland areas are being established in other parts of the City Region and across the country. It is therefore proposed to establish such a memorial woodland for Wirral at Arrowse Country Park.
- 1.2 The woodland would also assist in tackling the environment and climate emergency, helping to meet the objectives of the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy, enhancing biodiversity, and contributing to the Pollinator Action Plan.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Other options considered were a formal statue/sculpture, garden areas and some form of artwork. It was felt a woodland was the most appropriate in a park setting.
- 2.2 Funding has been secured through the Mersey Forest which will provide the resource to create two hectares of woodland, (around the size of two football pitches) which will contribute towards the council's target of doubling Wirral's tree canopy by 2030. The option of planting the woodland but not dedicating it as a memorial woodland has been considered but has been discounted as it would not address the request made by communities for a lasting natural legacy to honour those lost through COVID-19.
- 2.3 Alternative locations were considered for the proposed memorial woodland, but no other site provides sufficient space to support over two hectares of new woodland and/or do not provide suitable parking or footpath provision. Arrowse Country Park has been selected as the location for the woodland due to the park's ability to support two hectares of new standalone woodland, its facilities including parking, good transport links, its relatively central position within the Borough and its proximity to Arrowse Park Hospital which has played a fundamental role during the pandemic.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 At the time of writing, the total deaths from COVID-19 in Wirral are 1,115. This living memorial will provide a lasting natural legacy that allows those lost to be commemorated in perpetuity. It can be added to and enhanced as required. The intention is to plant at least one tree for each life lost to COVID-19 on Wirral.
- 3.2 A template has been produced for smaller planted and seating areas which could be of help to any parks groups who wish to develop local memorials to those who lost their lives to COVID-19.
- 3.3 Wirral Council declared an Environment and Climate Emergency in July 2019 and in doing so, committed to protect and enhance biodiversity. A ten-year Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy was approved in May 2020 which aims to plant and grow

over 210,000 trees by 2030 to improve the environmental quality of the borough, mitigate climate change and increase biodiversity. To help meet the planting target, Wirral Council joined Mersey Forest in 2021. This partnership allows the council to apply for grants and funding that are only available through England's Community Forest partnerships.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The woodland planting and establishment will be funded by a grant obtained from the Mersey Forest through the Trees for Climate programme which is funded by the Government's £500m Nature for Climate Fund. Additional funding for other features such as benches and memorial stone/plaque will be costed and be the subject of internal capital bids on a phased basis.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 All assets will remain the property of Wirral Council, but a grant agreement would be required with Mersey Forest and therefore the council would be subject to the terms and conditions of funding set out within an Agreement Document.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 Existing staff resources will be used for the supervision and delivery of this project.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 Failure to develop a memorial woodland would give no recognition to the loss of lives to COVID-19.

7.2 Failure to undertake the identified recommendation would result in a missed opportunity to support the objectives of the Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan and contribute to the Tree Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 An objective of the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy is to establish a robust partnership and community engagement programme. To ensure quality and consistent engagement, a community engagement policy and action plan has been created which includes the provision of community planting events. Since the start of the current planting season (between November 2021 and March 2022) a total of fifteen community planting events have been held. Communities will be invited to take part and assist in planting the woodland at Arrowse Country Park. The event will be advertised on the council website, Wirral View, the council's e-newsletter and via partners and key stakeholders.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

9.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy and details the potential positive impacts arising.

9.3 The Equality Impact Assessment is available via this link:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 As trees grow, they absorb atmospheric carbon dioxide through photosynthesis, releasing oxygen and locking up carbon. Carbon from falling leaves and deadwood enters the surrounding soil and is stored there making the entire woodland habitat a vital store which can hold carbon for centuries. Therefore, the proposed woodland at Arrowe Country Park will play a key role in tackling the climate emergency in Wirral helping to achieve 'net zero' carbon emissions by 2030. Alongside carbon sequestration, this woodland will help provide a nature-based solution to build resilience against storm water management and air pollution. In addition, woodlands support an abundance of wildlife including mammals, birds, amphibians, flora, and pollinators. As such, the woodland will help towards the target of a 20% 'net gain' in biodiversity across all council land.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 It is well documented that involvement with, and the provision of natural habitats has a positive effect on individuals and communities. This proposal will not only create opportunities for Wirral's communities to take part in tree planting, but it will offer a place of tranquillity, reflection, and peace for people of Wirral to visit, and the ecosystem services it will provide will help to improve environmental and social wellbeing across the borough.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Woodland Planting Plan
Appendix 2 Template for Local Park Memorial Areas

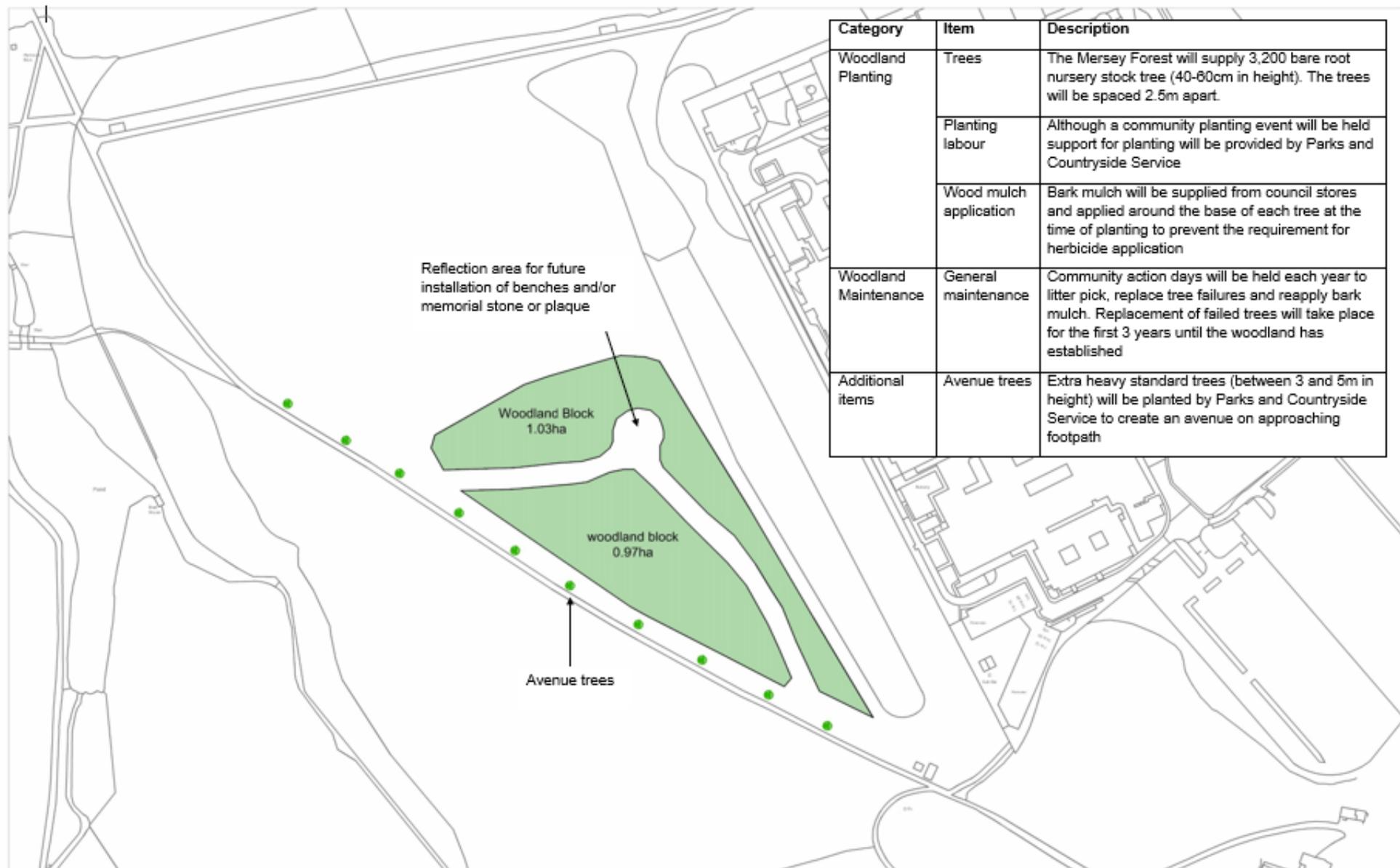
BACKGROUND PAPERS

Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy 2020-2030
Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Community Engagement Policy 2021-2030

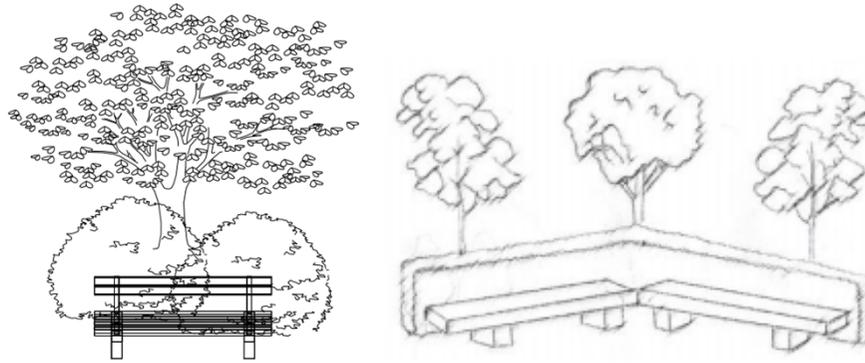
SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy 2020-2030 - Cabinet	June 2020

Appendix 1: Woodland Planting Plan



Appendix 2: Template for Local Park Memorial Areas



Satellite reflection areas, comprising one or two benches framed by Yew (*Taxus*) with three standard trees providing canopy cover and an optional memorial plaque.



Standard tree options: *Amelanchier arborea*, *Cornus florida* or *Betula utilis* subsp. *jacquemontii*



Potential seating options: Slatted hardwood bench with steel supports; curved/straight timber bench with back supports; backless timber or log bench

