

PLYMOUTH & SOUTH DEVON COMMUNITY FOREST BRIEFING PAPER



Background

In May 2020 Plymouth City Council (PCC) was approached by England's Community Forests (ECF) team with an offer of producing a proposal for a Plymouth Community Forest and being able to access a 'Trees for Climate' Funding package from DEFRA.

PCC conducted an initial scoping exercise alongside existing policy and engaged with local stakeholders to assess the viability of a proposal. An initial partnership formed around the project consisting of PCC, South Hams and West Devon, National Trust and Woodland Trust. A Council project mandate was signed and the partnership submitted an Expression of Interest to the ECF in March 2021. After consideration ECF and DEFRA both accepted the proposal and invited PSDCF to become England's 11th Community Forest with the vision:

A new 21st century woodland network created by young people to inspire and support future generations of Plymouth and SW Devon. PCF will create space for nature, encourage enterprise, deliver a positive transition to net zero and enable young people to influence their futures.

The proposal for the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest will stretch from the heart of the city to the edge of the moor. It will encompass 1,900 hectares of tree planting amongst a much wider landscape to form a mosaic of different forest habitats within the urban and rural areas. It is a long-term project with 30-40 year objectives with an ambition to deliver 500 hectares of new forest creation in the first 5 years. The new planting will be on both public and private land, with a landowner offer formed to provide the Community Forest to act as a grant awarding body under landowner agreements.

Delivery against the ambition of 500 hectares of planting will see the project secure up to £8.830m from the Trees for Climate Fund for this and the next three financial years.

It accesses a significant and unrivalled source of funding for PCC and its partners to achieve objectives set out in the Joint Local Plan, Corporate Plan, Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) and Plymouth's Plan for Trees.

Benefits and risks

Many of the benefits of the Community Forest have been modelled and are significant, especially in terms of health and wellbeing value to local communities. This is shown in Figure 1 below.

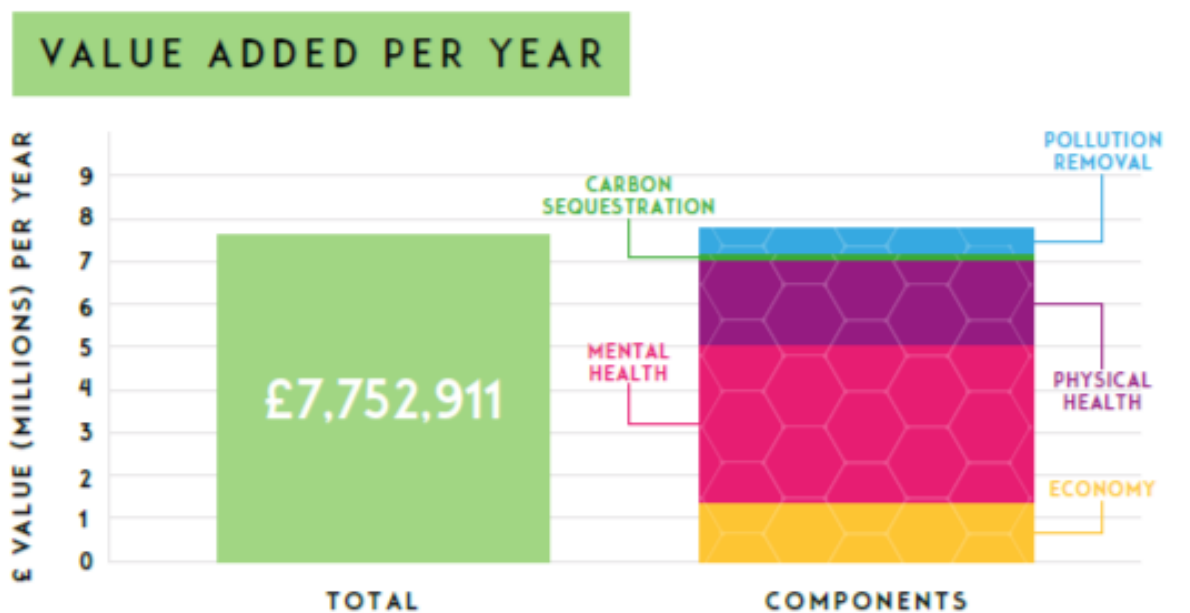


Fig 1. Monetary value added per year from PSDCF (Vivid Economics, 2021)

The objectives of the project are wide-ranging and capture social, economic and environmental outcomes. These are set out in Table I below.

The greatest risks/ challenges for the project now are:

1. to ensure that it generates genuine community buy-in to the proposal, the funding has been secured but now this needs to be invested to ensure that the benefits that we know can be realised, are realised and the Community Forest genuinely emerges as a project with community value for many generations
2. to build a credible strategy and pipeline of planting sites to form the basis for the Community Forest, this will need to include some key public sites that people can engage and interact with to bring the project to life and build momentum
3. utilising the initial round of funding to ensure a sustainable financial plan beyond this phase to realise the benefits of the Community Forest

Links to other areas of work

The PSDCF supports the delivery of a number of projects and areas of work including:

- **Habitat Banking** – linked to the new approach to biodiversity net gain required by the Environment Act. Funding secured through the sale of ‘biodiversity units’ as part of a developing habitat banking market linked to the new requirements of the Environment Act 2021.
- **Woodland Carbon Credits** – established scheme where carbon credits from woodlands is traded and could form part of the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest model.
- **National Marine Park** – the Community Forest is the green arc of the strategic natural space space encircling the city and complements the ambition of the NMP to have people at its heart.
- **Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDs)** – potential payment scheme linked to a new approach to surface water management, delivering new SUDs features throughout the City.

| 5 year priorities | Target Year 2025 (500 hectares) | Full establishment 2034 (1600ha) | Activities - how we will achieve the targets |
|--|---|---|--|
| Urban & rural regeneration | Local economy uplift: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Operational business model for PCF ▪ Estimated creation of 64.7 job years in forestry and 16.8 job years in services to building and landscape including 5 apprentices ▪ Business case for sawmill/firewood ▪ Included in 'Destination Plymouth' visitor strategy ▪ Recognisable branding of PCF as tourism destination | Local economy uplift: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 200 green jobs created ▪ £1,384,111 local property value uplift per year ▪ Destination for ecotourism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training and education programmes targeted at local residents. ▪ Create high quality community forest which attracts inward investment. ▪ Sawmill/firewood Community Interest Company (CIC) ▪ Future Forester Apprenticeship programme in place ▪ Agroforestry enterprises ▪ Branding and marketing strategy developed ▪ Reintroduction of beavers and red squirrels ▪ Creation of suitable nesting sites for white-tailed eagle and osprey |
| Supporting local communities (Engagement & involvement & access) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 320ha publicly accessible woodland ▪ Intergenerational participation with emphasis on young people ▪ Reduced health inequalities across the city | Health uplift Value: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mental health value £3,685,801 per year ▪ Physical health value £2,018,627 per year ▪ Projected 300,000 recreational visits per year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Network of cycle and walking paths ▪ Designated areas for recreation such as mountain biking ▪ Youth Panel steering creation and management of PCF ▪ Promotion/marketing of PCF and ways to use it through |

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|---------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| | | | <p>comms strategy coordinated with partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Innovative interpretation and creation of art and culture trails |
| Carbon | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local carbon sequestration monitoring framework in place ▪ PCF approved as seller of carbon credits ▪ Established and enacted impact monitoring programme | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase of 10,000 tons of carbon sequestered per year through PCF | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Defined areas left to naturally regenerate to maximize carbon sequestration ▪ Increase in local goods and services to enhance the development of a low carbon circular economy for Plymouth |
| Improved habitats for wildlife | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 320 ha community woodland planted ▪ 110ha private woodland ▪ 70 ha urban woodland/street trees ▪ 2.5km hedgerow ▪ Improved connectivity between existing woodland habitats ▪ Enhancements to 100% existing woodland blocks ▪ Riparian buffer strips enhanced ▪ Improved water quality demonstrated by monitoring ▪ Establishment of priority habitat ▪ Established and enacted impact monitoring programme | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1100 hectares of additional native broadleaf woodland, orchards and hedgerow ▪ Rewilding principles being applied ▪ Species reintroduction programmes in place including Eurasian beavers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Combination of re-wilding, enhancing existing woodlands and tree planting ▪ Focus on enhancing riparian corridors |
| Investment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fund attracting investment of targeted £100k per year through sale of carbon and biodiversity credits | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Investment fund attracting ongoing and increased investment to sustain growth and management of PCF | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PCF investment fund and strategy established |

Table 1 – Objectives for PSDCF

Summary and Recommendations

The opportunities presented by the partnership being able to access the Trees for Climate funding are significant and provide dedicated resource to meet a range of Corporate objectives linked to social, economic and environmental outcomes. There is a recognised need and ambition to achieve and this provides opportunity to realise this.

It is therefore recommended that the Leader of the Council:

1. Approves the Business Case for the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest and to allocate £8.651m into the Capital Programme, to be funded by Trees for Climate Funding £8.630m and Local Councillor Grant Contributions of £0.021m

Reason: To enable the Council and its partners to access the funding available from Trees for Climate Fund and the support of the national Community Forest network.

2. Approves the procurement process and award of any contracts or land acquisitions to the Strategic Director of Place

Reason: In line with standard Council Contract Standing Order
