

LAND ACQUISITION

Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest



1. BACKGROUND

An opportunity on the open market has arisen to acquire strategic area of land in the city, providing potential for new publicly accessible greenspace and provide local carbon offsetting scheme and biodiversity net gain unit creation through woodland creation.

The Council has external funds for acquisition for this purpose available from DEFRA's Trees for Climate programme and its partnership with Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest and England's Community Forests network.

2. PROPOSED CHANGES AND REASONS

It is proposed that the Council acquires and plants this land with available external funds and utilises opportunity to generate Biodiversity Net Gain units and Woodland Carbon units to fund the longer term maintenance of the site – minimum 30 years.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Alternative options considered and rejected:

1. Do not engage with acquisition process. No risk to PCC but the Council misses low risk, low-cost generational opportunity to take ownership of strategic parcel of land. Rejected due to Climate Emergency – doing nothing not an option.
2. Engage with agent and express interest in being in contact with new landowner regarding Community Forest grant offer for woodland creation. Low risk to PCC, no cost but does not provide control over future land-use, delivering opportunity for carbon off-setting and potential revenues arising. Rejected due to lack of control over future land-use and ability to realise opportunities relative to preferred option.
3. Proceed with acquisition using PCC capital funds. Enables control of land and future use and associated revenues but creates budget pressure on PCC Corporate borrowing. Rejected because equally viable and lower risk to PCC option exists.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISK

It is proposed that the cost of acquisition is funded wholly through external DEFRA Trees for Climate funding which PCC can access as lead partner for Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest. A proposal for this funding has been submitted to the England Community Forest leadership team (decision made 25/07/2025) and will be presented to the Trees for Climate Programme Board following acquisition for final approval.

There is a low risk that the DEFRA funding does not come through to fund the acquisition, this can be mitigated by stopping the acquisition process or through re-sale of the land to recover the cost to PCC.

The cost of the planting will be supported through additional external funds and the habitat improvements generated will provide a range of Biodiversity Net Gain units which we have assessed as being in demand across the city. The revenues arising from the sale of these units will fund the long-term maintenance of the site.

5. TIMESCALES

The land is currently on the market so an offer will be made immediately following the approval and planting and habitat works on the site will take place from November 2025 – March 2027.