

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



## **ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT & SCRUTINY PANEL**

### **WEST LOTHIAN CLIMATE CHANGE EMERGENCY FUND – CARBON SEQUESTRATION PROJECTS**

#### **REPORT BY HEAD OF PLANNING, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION**

##### **A. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of the report is to make the panel aware of proposed 'Climate Emergency' projects and to consider the projects recommended for funding from the Council's Climate Emergency project fund. The report also details discussions with The Green Action Trust (GAT) and the Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust (E&LGT) about project delivery.

##### **B. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the panel notes and considers the following recommendations which are intended to be submitted to Council Executive for approval:

1. notes the contents of the report and agrees to progressing the list of projects outlined in Section D3;
2. delegates to the Head of Planning, Economic Development & Regeneration to progress delivery of the agreed projects including negotiation with the Green Action Trust and the Edinburgh & Lothian Greenspace Trust; and
3. notes that updates on delivery will be provided to the Environment PDSP on a regular basis as part of the wider Climate Emergency update reports to the panel.

##### **C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

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|---|---|
| <b>I Council Values</b>   | Focusing on our customers' needs; being honest, open and accountable; making best use of our resources; and working in partnership.   |
| <b>II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)</b> | Legal: The council is legally bound to comply with duties for public sector bodies within the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. The duties require that the council must, in exercising its functions, act:<br>(a) in the way best calculated to contribute to the delivery of the targets set in or under Part 1 of the Act;<br>(b) in the way best calculated to help deliver any programme laid before the Scottish Parliament under section 53; and |

(c) in a way that it considers is most sustainable.

West Lothian Local Development Plan (2018), policies NRG 1 - 5 relate to Climate Change and Renewable Energy.

There are no equality, health, SEA or risk assessment issues associated with this report.

<b>III</b>	<b>Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers</b>	None.
<b>IV</b>	<b>Impact on performance and performance Indicators</b>	There are a number of performance indicators related to climate change and emissions reduction. Emissions are reported to the Scottish Government in November each year.
<b>V</b>	<b>Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement</b>	Outcome 4 - We live in resilient, cohesive and safe communities.  Outcome 8 - We have the most efficient and effective use of resources by minimising our impact on the built and natural environment.
<b>VI</b>	<b>Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)</b>	One-off funding of £800,000 allocated over 2021/23 to support projects aimed at addressing climatic issues.
<b>VII</b>	<b>Consideration at PDSP</b>	This is the first time the PDSP has considered a report on this specific issue, although the panel did consider numerous Climate Change related reports in February 2021.
<b>VIII</b>	<b>Other consultations</b>	NETs & Land Services; Countryside Services (Parks & Woodland); Property Services & Climate Change & Energy Manager; Green Action Trust and Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust.

## **D. TERMS OF REPORT**

### **D.1 Background**

Following West Lothian Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency in September 2019, a short life Cross-Party Working Group was established to formulate a way forward which involves the wider public, business and other public bodies. The working group reported to council on 17 March 2020. In parallel, as part of its budget setting process, the council allocated £800,000 of one-off funding to support projects aimed at addressing climatic issues.

## **D.2 Identifying and Progressing Projects**

Officers from various services across the council have drawn together potential projects which focus on habitat restoration and tree planting. While the council continues to be focused on reducing its own emissions it is recognised that to achieve net carbon zero an element of carbon off-setting will be required. Habitat restoration and tree planting are widely recognised as key approaches to sequestering carbon.

To fully quantify the carbon and ecological benefits of the council's investment in these projects, a carbon baseline will be required and it is proposed to determine this through the appointment of specialist consultants. While not directly related to carbon sequestration, it is proposed that a study of the opportunities to create heat and power from the council's land and water assets is also undertaken to inform future actions and investments.

Given the scale of the potential projects over a two year period, external environmental organisations such as the Green Action Trust (GAT - former Central Scotland Green Network Trust – who the council already have a concordat to deliver environmental projects) and Edinburgh & Lothian Greenspace Trust (E&LGT), will be essential in assisting with the delivery of various projects that would be one part of addressing the Climate Change Emergency in West Lothian. Other partners may also be involved and appointment of external support will be in accordance with the council's procurement arrangements.

## **D.3 Potential Projects**

In establishing the list of projects an assessment has been made of those schemes most likely to deliver the greatest impact in terms of carbon reduction and carbon sequestration. Green Action Trust and Edinburgh & Lothian Greenspace Trust have provided this assessment on behalf of the council.

However, projects are not solely focused on carbon reduction. Consideration has also been given to a wide range of assessment criteria including improving biodiversity and matching with wider council priorities. Projects were assessed for deliverability in the short term and the longer term cost of maintaining projects. On the latter aspect, there may be opportunities for partnership working with private sector organisations who are facing similar challenges in carbon reduction and off-setting emissions.

The following criteria, ranked in order of priority, assessed all potential projects:

1. Deliverability in short timescale;
2. Carbon capture impact;
3. Impact on biodiversity;
4. Future Maintenance;
5. Ability to secure match funding;
6. Linkage other council priorities (including positive impact on areas of deprivation);
7. Option for commercialisation; and
8. Contributes to Climate Adaptation.

Following the assessment, the proposed projects are as follows. These are group under the main headings of research studies; habitat restoration projects and carbon sequestration projects.

<b>Project</b>	<b>Year 1 – 2021/22</b>	<b>Year 2 – 2022/23</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Research &amp; Studies</b>			
Natural Capital Audit & Local Biodiversity Action Plan Review	£60,000		Baseline carbon sequestration of WLC landholdings requires to be established.
Future Farm Carbon Plan	£15,000		Relates to Beecraigs Farm.
Opportunities to Generate Heat and Power from WLC Land and Water Asset	£10,000		Follow-up on initial Greenspace Scotland study.

<b>Habitat Restoration (WLC Peatland &amp; Bogland restoration)</b>			
Easter Inch Moss between Blackburn and Seafield	£30,000		Scope to lever out further Nature Scot Peatland grant
Black Moss, Armadale.	£20,000		Scope to lever out further Nature Scot Peatland grant

<b>Carbon Sequestration Projects</b>			
WL 'Climate Forest'	£200,000	£100,000	40 WLC sites covering 350ha+ under assessment by GAT(though not all will progress).
Urban Community micro-forests ('Wee Forests')	£20,000		2 sites at £20,000 each subject to match funding. Scope for Nature Scot match grant of £20,000.
Urban Tree Canopy	£10,000		Contribution to East Central Scotland project involving 3 other local authorities.
Ash Dieback Roadside Tree Replacement project	£50,000		Survey and replacement work already underway by NETS, Land and Countryside Services.
Support for WL Food Growing Strategy	£60,000		Fund to support the council's food growing strategy.
Livingston North Blue / Green Network	£50,000	£50,000	Various sites along River Almond, Lochshot Burn, Nell Burn & Folly Burn with tree planting and works in riparian corridor.
Greening the Shale Trail	£10,000	£50,000	From 21 sites, 4 main sites: Broxburn, Uphall, Uphall Station, Kirkton & scope to involve community volunteers.

<b>Other Projects</b>			
Free Trees in and Around Gardens	£50,000		Option to look at supporting individual planting or group planting in areas of underused garden ground to create micro forests in the council estate.
'Tree time' Donation scheme via Edinburgh & Lothian Greenspace Trust	£15,000		Option for small scale sponsored tree planting which could generate a modest income to support maintenance.
<b>Total</b>	<b>£600,000</b>	<b>£200,000</b>	

#### **D.4 External Grant Funding**

With the majority of these projects, there is the ability to apply for external grant funding from various sources to increase the budget. A focus of any such support will be the maintenance of planting and habitat restoration projects in the future. Officers are aware that a number of businesses operating in and around West Lothian, including Edinburgh Airport have a significant requirement for offsetting their carbon impacts and officers will continue to work with external organisations to look at options for partnership approaches which would support further projects in West Lothian.

However, as external funding is secured there will also be the opportunity to bring further projects onto the list of agreed projects. A regular review of project implementation, external funding support and options for the inclusion of additional projects will be reported to the panel.

#### **D.5 Carbon Offsetting and Emissions Reduction**

The panel considered a report on carbon off-setting in February 2021. Carbon off-setting is defined as an action or activity (such as the planting of trees or carbon sequestration), that compensates for the emission of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases to the atmosphere.

The council owns and manages significant land assets including agricultural land managed in-house and leased out to farmers, circa 1,000 hectares of woodland, other semi-natural habitats such as grassland and peatland bogs (including at Easter Inch Moss at Blackburn and Black Moss, Armadale) as well as thousands of individual trees and shrubs within more formal park areas and along roads and streets.

These features are already sequestering (locking-up) atmospheric CO<sup>2</sup>. As this is a relatively new area of focus, the scale of current sequestration and the potential for future enhancement and expansion of off-setting will be assessed by the proposed Natural Capital Audit for West Lothian. The audit will then be maintained going forward to provide a 'live' picture of sequestration capability in West Lothian recognising the significant level of development led tree planting which is taking place in West Lothian. A sequestration baseline, will be part of the forthcoming West Lothian Climate Change Strategy review.

## **D.6 Outline Costs, Deliverability and Timescales**

The actual project delivery costs will only be fully established when projects are fully designed. That will commence when the list of projects to be taken forward has been agreed.

It is proposed that the Head of Planning, Economic Development & Regulatory Services be given delegated authority to negotiate with the two charitable environmental trusts, GAT and E&LGT, on the delivery of projects. The council's normal procurement rules will however apply to the procurement of any delivery partners and the Environment PDSP and Council Executive will be kept up to date on the outcomes and progress over the next two years.

Through the involvement of both these environmental trusts referred to above there is the scope to involve volunteers, schools and West Lothian College, as well as community councils and other interested organisations in several of the identified carbon sequestration projects through tree planting and related environmental improvements.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The West Lothian Climate Change Emergency Fund gives the council the ability to target various environmental projects on public land that will allow for carbon sequestration through habitat restoration as well as tree planting. Help in delivering these projects on the ground over the next two years, via organisations such as the Green Action Trust, along with Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust, will be essential to their success.

## **F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES**

None

Appendices / Attachments: None

Contact Person: Chris Alcorn, Principal Planner, 01506-282428: [chris.alcorn@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:chris.alcorn@westlothian.gov.uk)

**Craig McCorriston**  
**Head of Planning, Economic Development & Regeneration**

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