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KIRKLEES COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE SCRUTINY PANEL

Wednesday 11th February 2026

Present: Councillor Andrew Cooper (Chair)
Councillor Musarrat Khan
Councillor David Longstaff
Councillor Matthew McLoughlin
Councillor John Taylor

In attendance: Joe Robertson, Woodland Development Manager
Illyas Ramjan, Head of Major Projects
Paul Thompson, Programme Manager (White Rose Forest)
Paul Farndale, Strategic Partnerships Lead
Jason Hanks, ER Project Officer
Martin Stepherson, Principal Flood Risk Planner

Apologies: Councillor Will Simpson

36 Membership of the Panel

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Will Simpson

37 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Panel considered the Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 7th January 2026.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 7th January 2026

38 Declaration of Interests

Councillor David Longstaff declared a 'other' interest in the agenda item as a resident of a flood zone (Minute No. 34 refers).

39 Admission of the Public

All agenda items were considered in public session.

40 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

41 Public Question Time

No public questions were received.

42 Annual Review of Flood Risk Management Activities

The Panel considered the report 'Annual Review of Flood Risk Management Activities' which was presented by Paul Farndale, Strategic Partnerships Lead. Illyas Ramjan, Head of Major Projects, Martin Stepherson, Principal Flood Risk Planner and Jason Hanks, ER Project officer were also in attendance. It was highlighted that:

- The annual update covered flood risk avoidance, asset management, natural flood management and community resilience and outlined progress on the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and how the approach linked to the Local Plan.
- Moving in the direction of integrated flood management was bringing changes for the authority.
- Trash Screens – Operational Issues and Improvements:
 - Trash screens were required to stop large objects getting lodged, and prevented risk from flooding, however, poorly maintained trash screens collected debris and posed a flood risk themselves.
 - The approach to maintenance of the Trash Screens utilised the principals of asset management to review trash screens based on the risk of blockages by location.
 - This involved balancing risk against budget and operational requirements.
 - It was noted that privately owned trash screens, particularly in new developments, could be neglected and created additional burdens.
 - Work was being undertaken to use section 106 agreements so that management companies were responsible for the maintenance.
 - Confirmation had been received that a funding bid for improving and redesigning trash screens had been passed to a regional stage.
 - Proposed upgrades addressed access issues and revised bar spacing, supported by a Grant in Aid bid of up to £670k alongside Council-funded schemes.
 - Future considerations included reassessing clearance frequency, exploring remote observation, reviewing whether to deliberately retain water in some circumstances, and integrating OSAMS (the new asset management system in Highways).
- Natural Flood Management (NFM) Activities:
 - NFM work including design and landowner engagement for schemes such as Ludhill Dike and various catchment clusters was ongoing.
 - Interventions under consideration included tree planting, hedgerows, attenuation basins, leaky dams and fascines.

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- Progress continued on Council-owned land, including works at Woods Mount, Mellor Woods and Rectory Park.
 - Partnership work progressed to secure further funding for several “spade-ready” schemes within the Honley area.
- Community Resilience and Mental Health:
 - The West Yorkshire Flood Innovation Programme’s work to improve mental health and wellbeing in flood-risk communities continued.
 - National evidence highlighted significantly higher rates of mental health issues among residents affected by flooding.
 - The programme aimed to strengthen resilience through improved mental health support and targeted interventions.
- Progress Since Previous Year:
 - Funding had been secured and initial scoping work had taken place to understand current conditions within flood-risk communities.
 - Partnership development work had continued, and Mental Health First Aid Training had begun.
- Mental Health First Aid Training:
 - A training programme had been developed in partnership with Emergency Planning and the Severe Weather Plan.
 - 100 frontline staff had been trained, improving awareness and daily wellbeing support for communities and staff.
 - ‘Green prescribing’ was a particularly helpful technique, and this could have dual -benefits of supporting tree planting.
- Academic Research Partnership:
 - A formal research partnership with the University of Huddersfield had been established to support research design, data analysis and evidence development.
 - A large-scale online survey was underway alongside 50 planned in-depth interviews with residents who had experienced flooding.
 - Early research findings indicated that residents experienced chronic anxiety and trauma linked to rain and repeated flooding, with long-term financial strain and ongoing disruption deepening emotional distress. Participants reported that preparedness had become an exhausting, largely self-funded burden, while perceived gaps in services and weak infrastructure heightened stress and frustration. Community support, however, emerged as a crucial emotional buffer, with informal networks offering reassurance and understanding.
- Planned Outputs:
 - The planned production of a concise report summarising the needs assessment and workshop findings.
 - A policy briefing and good-practice guide were to be developed.
 - Work was underway to establish an academic–policy network on climate-related mental health and resilience and develop a future funding bid.

The Panel noted the presentation and, during the subsequent discussion, raised the following questions and points.

- The Panel welcomed the mental health work and noted that colleagues had highlighted the mental health training as very positive. Congratulations were expressed for this progress.

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- In response to questions from the Panel in relation to the responsibilities of the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Water and Kirklees Council, it was advised that the Environment Agency acted as the enforcement body for main rivers due to their cross-district nature, while Kirklees was responsible for smaller watercourses and for managing surface water flood risk under legislation. Yorkshire Water were described as asset managers rather than flood-risk managers. Officers noted strong working relationships with the Environment Agency, including through joint bid work. Opportunity mapping and bringing together expertise were identified as key elements of the future approach.
- In response to questions from the Panel in relation to the long-term effectiveness of attenuation systems on new developments, officers expressed confidence that adoption and management processes would address end-of-life risks, noting that the intention was to avoid households having to manage these systems themselves. Developers were required to design attenuation tanks appropriately, and once adopted, had statutory responsibilities to maintain them. Challenges included the possibility of developers ceasing to trade; therefore, Section 106 agreements were being developed on major sites to include provisions for management companies to ensure a fallback mechanism that protected residents.
- In response to questions from the Panel in relation to measuring the success of the mental health work, it was explained that the project was in its initial research phase. At this stage, success was measured through completion of questionnaires and interviews, with 12 out of 30 interviews completed and 300 out of 500 questionnaires returned. The priority was collecting sufficient data to enable meaningful change. Success in the second stage would involve assessing whether the information gathered was adequate to deliver an effective intervention, with findings informing an initial funding bid. The final phase would evaluate whether the project achieved its intended impact, which might evolve from initial aspirations. Measures would include wellbeing indicators and service uptake. Huddersfield University intended to continue supporting research during delivery and evaluation phases.
- In response to questions from the Panel in relation to operational collaboration with Yorkshire Water, officers confirmed that issues were raised through normal reporting processes and discussed at monthly meetings to ensure progress.
- In response to questions from the Panel in relation to partnership working with the National Trust, officers explained that this differed from working with delivery partners and linked to opportunity mapping to ensure that all parties were aware of ongoing work across the landscape.
- In response to questions from the Panel in relation to the Mirfield scheme, it was advised that cuts had resulted from a shift in Grant-in-Aid funding priorities towards maintaining existing defence assets. It was noted that Grant-in-Aid funding was shifting towards developing rolling projects focused on slowing the flow in upland areas, though this represented decades of work.

RESOLVED:

The Panel noted the report and expressed appreciation for the focus on identifying opportunities alongside a traditional risk-based methodology.

43 White Rose Forest Delivery and Kirklees Woodland Creation Update

The Panel considered presentations in respect of Woodland Creation which were presented by Paul Thompson, Programme Manager (White Rose Forest) and Joe Robertson, Woodland Development Manager. The Panel were advised that:

White Rose Forest – Programme Delivery and Context

- Monitoring of delivery figures for the 2020–2028 programme had demonstrated consistent annual planting contributions.
- Benefits were reported across accessible woodland provision, carbon capture and flood mitigation.
- Financial valuations of these benefits had been provided both for the wider White Rose Forest area and specifically for Kirklees.
- Total programme investments and expenditure distributions across outturn grants, asset development, legacy team costs and revenue/capital allocations had been presented.
- The expected TfC allocations for 2026/27 to 2029/30 had been outlined, including reduced revenue availability.
- increased capital funding would require a capitalisation approach to sustain team costs.
- WRF were working with the Woodland Trust and National Trust and awaited a new grant funding agreement in March/April 2026.
- The 2025–2050 White Rose Forest Strategic Plan had been shared, outlining long-term woodland creation ambitions.
- The programme was currently mainly funded by DEFRA but work was being undertaken to diversify funding streams.
- A new programme, RESTORE, had been proposed to bring more woodlands into long-term management, although funding was not yet in place.
- It was noted that TfC funding would reduce team capacity for the next 15–20 years.
- Key outcomes included;
 - The success of the Trees for Climate programme and the establishment of a stronger national profile for WRF.
 - Benefits to communities across Kirklees and wider Yorkshire had been emphasised.
 - Work was underway to broaden funding sources and maintain a sustainable partnership model.

Kirklees Woodland Creation Programme 2021–2026

- A review of the 2021–2025 planting seasons including Volunteer engagement figures, including numbers of volunteers, schools (including Huddersfield University), scouts, community groups and public sessions, had been presented for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 seasons.
- 2025–2026 planting season (in progress)
 - Data up to January 2026 showed continued strong volunteer participation, particularly from schools, scout groups and community groups.

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- Public sessions and delivery partner engagement remained consistent with previous years.
- Aftercare approach
 - All woodland creation sites were funded for 15 years of aftercare.
 - This included alternating annual condition checks, restocking activities and planned thinning between years 10–15, subject to growth conditions.
 - Work was underway to expand volunteer involvement in aftercare activities.

The Panel noted the presentation and, during the subsequent discussion, raised the following questions and points.

- In response to questions from the Panel in relation to failure rates, it was explained that different sites experienced varying levels of tree loss. They reported that the programme worked on the basis that 10–20% losses were considered acceptable and expected, but restocking continued up to year five when tree guards were removed. Officers confirmed that reasons for failure were assessed on a site-by-site basis.
- In response to questions from the Panel in relation to the aftercare period, officers confirmed that a 15-year aftercare programme was in place and that the Council was working with the White Rose Forest to further develop a woodland maintenance programme thereafter.
- In response to questions from the Panel in relation to the use of different types of tree guards, it was advised that sheep-sized guards were used rather than deer guards. They highlighted that the guards functioned not only as protection but also as shelters to support biodiversity. Deer guards were significantly more expensive and had a high failure rate due to blowing over, and so their use was balanced against deer-grazing risk and monitored regularly. The use of wool and wood-resin guards was also highlighted, which were more costly but avoided plastic waste.
- In response to questions from the Panel in relation to asset protection and vandalism risks, officers acknowledged that vandalism was difficult to manage but confirmed their commitment to improving prevention measures. They emphasised that long-term community involvement could help address these challenges and that the team continued to learn and take a balanced approach.
- In response to questions from the Panel in relation to the Local Plan and pressures on land, officers confirmed that they were working closely alongside colleagues developing the Local Plan and within the wider assets service. They added that work was also linked to ongoing conversations relating to ward reviews and asset ownership. Officers noted that there were limitations in determining priorities until the Local Plan process had concluded.
- In response to questions from the Panel in relation to the use of Section 106 agreements to support small-scale woodland creation, it was advised that landscaping conditions, including requirements around canopy cover, were being incorporated where appropriate. It was further explained that landscape architects were aware of these priorities and that these considerations were being embedded in Local Plan policy development. Officers also referenced the White Rose Forest ‘Green Streets’ programme,

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which brought together Highways and Planning colleagues to align shared objectives, supported by strategic principles for decision-making.

- In response to questions from the Panel in relation to the use of Council volunteer days for tree planting, officers confirmed that staff volunteer days could be used for this purpose. They reported that opportunities were regularly promoted through intranet bulletins and that some teams used planting days as team-building activities. However, they noted that participation had declined despite ongoing promotion.
- In response to questions from the Panel in relation to community views towards tree planting, officers stated that objections typically came from a small number of individuals, often one or two per scheme, whereas broader resistance tended to appear only around larger-scale proposals. Officers emphasised the importance of acknowledging both support and objections when engaging with communities.

The Panel noted the presentations, and it was recommended that;

1. Conversations continue around the use of wording in section 106 agreements to support small woodland creation where possible.

44 Work Programme 2025/2026

The Panel reviewed its Work Programme for 2025/26 and the following items were put forward for inclusion.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the Work programme.