

**WHITE ROSE FOREST STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2050**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Date</b>	<b>8<sup>th</sup> July 2025</b>
<b>Cabinet Member</b> (if applicable)	<b>Cllr Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Regeneration</b>
<b>Key Decision Eligible for Call In</b>	<b>Yes Yes</b>
<p><b>Purpose of Report</b></p> <p>As a member of the White Rose Forest (WRF) Partnership, Kirklees Cabinet, along with all members of the partnership, is being asked to consider and adopt the White Rose Forest (WRF) Strategic Plan 2025-50 (see Appendix 1).</p>	
<p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kirklees Council’s Cabinet notes the contents of the report and adopts the White Rose Forest (WRF) Strategic Plan 2025-50.set out at Appendix 1 to this report</li> <li>• Cabinet is requested to note the contents of the Integrated Impact Assessment at paragraph 3.5.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Reasons for Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The WRF is made up of 11 partner organisations across North and West Yorkshire, in which Kirklees has played a leading role as Accountable Body.</li> <li>• The WRF Strategic Plan (2025-50) has been produced after an extensive engagement with constituent members and wider stakeholders over the last eighteen months. The plan has been overseen by the WRF Strategic Board which Kirklees chairs.</li> <li>• The WRF Strategic Board is now seeking adoption the WRF Strategic Plan 2025-2050 from all members of the partnership.</li> <li>• The previous full WRF strategy was launched in 2000. As part of the national Trees for Climate Programme, Community Forests including the White Rose Forest are expected to refresh or re write their existing Community Forest Plan in light of the declarations of climate emergencies and need for continued economic growth with nature recovery.</li> <li>• The need for a WRF Strategic Plan with targets to 2050 was referenced in the June 2020 Kirklees Cabinet WRF report.</li> <li>• The WRF Strategic Plan will provide the framework to secure future DEFRA (Department of the Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs) funding.</li> </ul>	

**Resource Implication:**

There are no direct financial implications for adoption of the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50). There is no obligation on any WRF partner to make an annual financial contribution, although voluntary contributions can be made. All capital and revenue funding is fully funded from external DEFRA grant. The WRF Strategic Plan 2025-2050 aligns with the Government's statutory target for increasing tree cover to 16.5% by 2050 and therefore effectively provides the strategic case to secure further resources from Government and other funders This includes the anticipated Trees for Climate 2 programme, which is currently part of the Government Spending Review process.

**Date signed off by Executive Director & name**

David Shepherd, Executive Director, Place **25.6.25**

**Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance?**

Kevin Mulvaney (Service Director, Finance) **26.6.25**

**Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning (Monitoring Officer)?**

Samantha Lawton (Service Director Legal, Governance and Commissioning) **26.6.25**

**Electoral wards affected:** List details

All wards (The WRF Agreement covers North and West Yorkshire)

**Ward councillors consulted:**

No not formally -All WRF partners including the Local Authorities were involved in a formal stakeholder consultation process which included use of social media. Given the nature of the WRF Strategic Plan 2025-2050 and the area it covers full 1-1 consultation with all Ward councillors across North and West Yorkshire not deemed appropriate

**Public or private:**

Public

**Has GDPR been considered? Yes**

## 1. Executive Summary

The White Rose Forest (WRF) is the community forest for North and West Yorkshire. Its core partners are the local authorities, combined authorities and national park authorities of that geography. Kirklees Council is the accountable body. As part of DEFRA's Trees for Climate programme, each of the 15 community forests in England are required to write or renew their respective community forest plans to 2050.

In line with this national approach, the White Rose Forest has, through a process of stakeholder engagement, community consultation and data analysis over the last 18 months, written a WRF Strategic Plan 2025-2050. The White Rose Forest Strategic Board, operating under a new WRF Agreement, finalised the Plan in March 2025 and are now asking each of the 11 core WRF partners to adopt this Plan.

The Plan in summary represents the overriding forestry strategy and vision for the North and West Yorkshire with 5 strategic objectives:

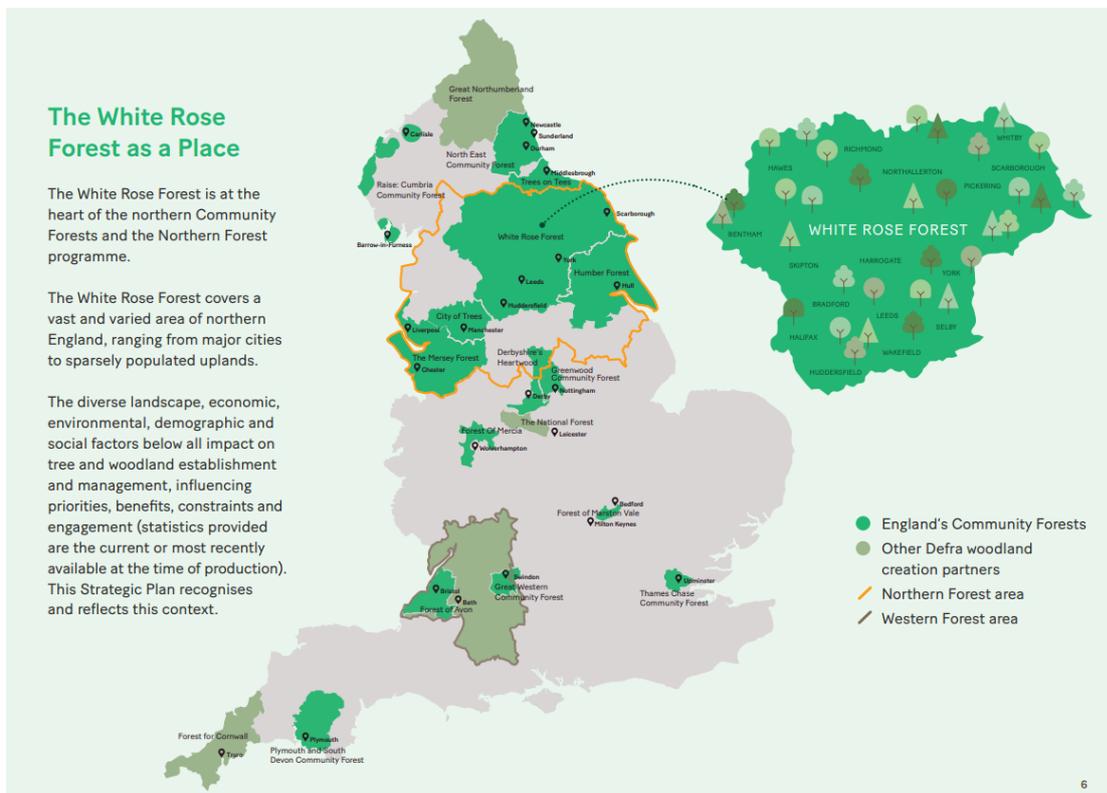
- Increase tree canopy cover in line with government statutory targets
- Protect and restore more trees and woodlands
- Engage more people, communities and businesses in the planting, management and contact with trees and woodlands
- Promote the transformational benefit of trees and woodlands
- Grow the impact and sustainability of the White Rose Forest

The Plan will help shape and prioritise investment into North and West Yorkshire for the benefit of the economy people and nature. Each local authority has played a key role in writing this Strategic Plan, setting local targets to optimise local impact.

The Strategic Plan will frame a 5-year WRF Action Plan 2025-2030 that will lay out in more detail specific projects and programmes with identified resources and funding for the WRF core partners to work towards achieving the strategic objectives. Any new funding programme such as Trees for Climate 2 and the 5 yearly WRF Action Plan 2025-2030 will be subject to separate decision making at the time.

In broad terms, the Strategic Plan will provide the greater tree and woodlands resource that, by targeting public benefit, will contribute to the Kirklees Flood Risk Strategy by providing better natural flood management, landscape scale nature restoration, cleaner air, urban cooling, better farm productivity, better accessibility to nature and associated health benefits and increase the region's attractiveness and retention of investment over the next 25 years.

The WRF Strategic Plan along with the other 14 Community Forest Plans will provide a nationally significant portfolio covering 20% of England's land area and provide Government and national bodies with a rationale for investment.



The WRF Trees for Climate programme has a very strong track record of achievement over the last five years. The programme was extended by DEFRA to 6 years. The original contracted target for new woodland in North and West Yorkshire was 1,955 hectares. By March 2025 (Year 5 of the programme), 2006 hectares have been planted with a total of £23m being invested to date. During year 6, an estimated 500 hectares of additional planting will take place making a total of 2,500 hectares, comfortably exceeding the 1,955-hectare target. The WRF has contributed approximately 35% of the total England's Community Forests programme. The WRF delivery pathway is recognised nationally as a leading methodology for delivering landscape change to industry standards. In 2024, the WRF was awarded 'Community Forest of the Year.'

## 2. Information required to take a decision

The White Rose Forest is the Community Forest for North and West Yorkshire. A partnership of local and combined authorities, national park authorities and national landscape organisations. WRF Members are:

- Leeds City Council
- City of Bradford Council
- Kirklees Council (Accountable Body)
- Wakefield Council
- Calderdale Council
- North Yorkshire Council
- City of York Council
- West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority
- Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority
- North York Moors National Park Authority

The White Rose Forest is not a single 'forest', but the network of all trees, woods and forests across North and West Yorkshire, including trees in gardens and on residential streets, in town and city centres, along transport routes, in parks and green spaces, by rivers, canals and lakes, on farmland and in the countryside.

The White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50), see Appendix 1, is the long-term strategic document governing development of the White Rose Forest, setting out the partnership's vision, aspirations and targets for tree and woodland establishment and management in North and West Yorkshire.

Its purpose is influencing/advocating, profile raising and securing commitment, plus being used as the basis for bidding for and directing the use of resources. Its principal audience is therefore local political and business leaders, funders (including government) and partners.

The partnership has progressed the development of a new Strategic Plan over the last 18 months, with the process now completed with the approval of the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50) by the partnership's Strategic Board on 26 March 2025.

The previous year (2023/24) was a record year for tree planting in the White Rose Forest (WRF) and England's Community Forests (ECF).

- 802 hectares of trees and woodland planted across the White Rose Forest
- Of this total, 777 hectares were planted as part of our flagship Trees for Climate programme. This equates to 119% of our White Rose Forest target for 2023-24 and 39% of all 1,976 hectares planted across England's Community Forests
- England's Community Forests collectively delivered more than 38% of all Defra funded trees and woodland despite covering only 20% of England, making our network the most successful Defra partner
- The WRF dealt with 316 new woodland creation enquiries from local landowners
- Achievements helped the White Rose Forest become 'Community Forest of the Year 2024' and England's Community Forests to be offered a place on the Government's national Tree Planting Taskforce

By improving natural capital in North and West Yorkshire between 2020 and 2024, data calculated by Liverpool John Moores University found that the WRF Trees for Climate programme 2020-24 WRF directly supported:

- 49,433 households with increased access to nature
- Ecological networks extended by 2,609 hectares
- 1,119 more hectares of land with high natural flood management potential

During the 2023/24 financial year, WRF investment in North and West Yorkshire amounted to £7,063,691 awarded to over 45 grant recipients, covering 74 sites from the Trees for Climate programme and £909,826 awarded over 14 grant agreements, covering 113 sites via the Northern Forest Grow Back Greener programme.

<b>White Rose Forest District</b>	<b>Total Capital Funds invested 2021 – March 2024</b>
Bradford	£224,332
Calderdale	£358,707
Kirklees	£2,066,994
Leeds	£2,690,756
North Yorkshire	£9,897,588
Wakefield	£995,421
York	£101,010
<b>Total</b>	<b>£16,334,808</b>

### **3. Implications for the Council**

Trees and woodland are one of the most effective nature-based solutions for adapting to climate change and providing habitat to protect and enhance biodiversity. Due to this and the societal benefits, there is also strong public support for more trees and woodland.

Successful delivery of the Strategic Plan will provide a wide range of direct and indirect (and often multiple) benefits for: business; the environment; nature; and communities.

As accountable body for England's largest community forest, Kirklees is able to demonstrate continued leadership across the region.

#### **3.1 Council Plan**

The WRF Strategic Plan 2025-50 and its 5 objectives provide a strong underpinning for delivery of element of the Council Plan, particularly where the natural environment can impact directly on communities, adaptation to climate change and supporting economic growth.

The Council Plan is ambitious about sustainability and inclusion, ensuring everyone in this generation and future generations can benefit from economic growth. As set out in the Environment Strategy, we continue to aim for a greener, net zero, and climate-ready Kirklees by 2038 – that means mitigating and reducing emissions as well as adapting to the social, economic, and environmental impacts of climate change.

The Council Plan sets out how thriving people and communities, now and over the long term, will see the Council work with businesses and community groups in local places to support efforts to build safe, clean, and green places where people want to live, work, and visit.

One of the 4 themes in the Council's Environment Strategy is nurturing nature. We want to protect and expand existing natural habitats and create new spaces for wildlife. We want to ensure that everyone has access greenspace and can benefit from the natural environment. This strongly resonates with the WRF Plan's objectives for expanding tree cover as part of nature recover and the objective of engaging more people by for example expanding household access to local woodlands.

The White Rose Forest is one of the Kirklees Environment Plan case studies and states that "Kirklees Council is a key partner and the accountable body of the White Rose Forest, which has the aim of establishing 2,500ha of new tree canopy cover in our river catchments and 1000ha of new tree canopy in our urban areas and along our major transport routes by 2025. Since declaring a Climate Emergency in 2019, Kirklees Council has created 59ha of new tree canopy cover across the district."

### **3.2 Financial Implications**

There are no direct financial implications of endorsing the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50). The White Rose Forest Agreement, of which Kirklees Council is a signatory, is clear that there will be no obligation on any signatory to make an annual financial contribution, although voluntary contributions can be made.

All capital and revenue funding for WRF delivery and costs of the core team is 100% externally grant funded. Development of the WRF Strategic Plan itself has been paid from the Trees For Climate programme and the development of the WRF Action Plan 2025-2030 will likewise be funded through that programme. These documents will be used to underpin future bidding for additional capital and revenue programme funding.

Kirklees Council is not only one of the constituent members of the White Rose Forest but is also the Accountable Body for the whole of the partnership. This means that Kirklees Council is legally responsible for administering the external funding, employing the majority of the staff and holding numerous individual contracts with specific landowners. All of the Council's costs are met exclusively from external funding.

The Council maintains a risk register for its role as Accountable Body, including any potential redundancy costs should funding come to an end and resourcing all future monitoring and reporting obligations. This risk register is reviewed on an annual basis alongside colleagues from the Council's Risk and Audit team and sufficient project funds are held to adequately cover the worst-case position should no further funding be forthcoming (felt unlikely at this stage), thereby protecting the Council from any costs associated with its role as Accountable Body. Finally, the WRF team also holds a Trees for Climate programme risk register which is reviewed every two months by WRF partners on the WRF Programme Management Group to ensure the programme's financial obligations and targets are met and operational issues addressed, summaries of which are reported to the WRF Strategic Board chaired by Kirklees Council 3 times a year.

### **3.3 Legal Implications**

There are no direct legal implications of endorsing the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50) as it is not a statutory or legally binding document.

Kirklees Council is a signatory to the White Rose Forest Agreement, and as such is a member of the Strategic Board which has made the recommendation that the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50), is adopted by Partners' respective governance.

The WRF Plan aims to support the Government's statutory target of achieving 16.5% tree cover by 2050

The White Rose Forest is debated by the Council's Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.

### **3.4 Climate Change and Air Quality**

The Trees for Climate programme is in part driven by the need to provide both a mitigation and adaptation response to the climate emergency declared across the WRF area.

Mitigation is the absorption of CO<sub>2</sub> in the trees and the soil planted by the programme. Each scheme is registered on to the Woodland Carbon Code to give the landowner the opportunities to verify and validate the expected carbon sequestration rates for use on the carbon market or to have their carbon units for insetting to drive their respective organisations to net zero.

Each WRF Local Authority District has in part set its local tree planting target to 2050 to support the net zero and emissions pathway targets. The Plan demonstrates that it has an overall positive contribution to Net Zero.

Climate change adaptation is a measurable benefit of woodland creation particularly regarding biodiversity, natural flood management and urban cooling. Trees and woodland significantly impact the rate of water flow and, at a catchment scale, can overtime, reduce the risk of flooding downstream

The WRF Strategic Plan has been aligned to and fed into the Local Nature Recovery Strategies to ensure that species can connect to wider habitats as the climate changes using industry standard principles of landscape improvement and connectivity.

Trees and woodland play a significant role in improving air quality. The local uplift of the Trees for Climate programme has calculated using recognised Natural Capital benefits assessments. This is of particular benefit in Green Streets where encouraging trees and woodlands along major transport corridors will provide an overall benefit to air quality.

### **3.5 Other (e.g. Risk, Integrated Impact Assessment or Human Resources)**

The WRF Strategic Plan 2025-2050 Integrated Impact Assessment has been approved and is published on the Kirklees webpage for [Integrated Impact Assessments | Kirklees Council](#)

In summary the impact of the WRF will be largely positive across the range of people with protected characteristics.

The WRF Strategic Plan 2025 -2050 is a high-level plan with 5 objectives over a 25-year timeframe. The broad thrust for example of objective 3 is to "Engage more people,

communities and businesses in the planting, management and contact with trees and woodlands”

It is recognised that during the local delivery phase, the WRF Core Team will work closely with each Local Authority to ensure that each project is shaped to respond to each authority’s priorities both for people, communities and businesses. It is at this stage extra work will be required to ensure the impact is positive for people with certain protected characteristics.

## **4 Consultation**

The engagement of stakeholders, which has taken place throughout the Strategic Plan development process, has broadened the range of place and thematic input, including from:

- District White Rose Forest Groups including Kirklees, Leeds, Calderdale, Bradford, Wakefield, North Yorkshire and York
- Catchment Partnership workshops
- Green Streets workshop
- WRF Ancient Woodland Working Group
- Local Nature Recovery Strategies (both North and West Yorkshire)
- Community Engagement project
- Data and Mapping workshops with wide group of stakeholders

A formal Stakeholder Engagement survey ran from 4 December to 17 January 2025, with responses received from a good range of stakeholders. Considerable support for the consultation document was expressed, with it aligning well the stakeholder policies, strategies and plans.

Stakeholders raised many useful suggestions for how the strategic plan could be further developed / enhanced, which have all been considered in finalising the Strategic Plan. All respondents confirmed they felt a degree of alignment between the consultation document and their policies, strategies and plans, with almost half indicating full alignment

All respondents confirmed support for the long-term direction and level of ambition, as articulated in the vision and targets, with over 70% indicating full support. A copy of the Stakeholder Engagement Survey Report is in Appendix 2.

## **5 Engagement**

Public Engagement survey ran from 6 to 28 January 2025, comprising a number of multiple choice or rating / ranking type questions, with just over 300 responses received.

This has helped raise the profile of the White Rose Forest and confirmed public support for the proposed long-term direction, level of ambition and approach outlined in the consultation document. In addition, it has provided some useful input on the value the public place on trees and woodland and what they would like to see prioritised in the future.

Some key findings in the Public Engagement report were:

- Respondents overwhelmingly agreed (93% Strongly agree or agree) that we need more trees and woodland in North and West Yorkshire.

- Many more respondents thought that trees and woodland close to where they live had declined (40%) rather than improved (25%) in the last 5 years.
- Respondents overwhelmingly supported the long-term direction and level of ambition outlined in the consultation document (91% Strongly support or Support)

A copy of the Public Engagement Survey Report is in Appendix 3

## 6 Options

The WRF Agreement Partners and Kirklees, as accountable body, have previously agreed to produce a WRF Strategic Plan 2025-2050. The need for a WRF Strategic Plan with targets to 2050 was referenced in the June 2020 Kirklees Cabinet WRF report. The resources had been secured to undertake the work

## 7 Next steps and timelines

Once all the WRF partners including Kirklees Council have formally considered and adopted the Plan, it will be published on the WRF website. The Strategic Plan will then be launched by the Mayor of North Yorkshire and the Mayor of West Yorkshire.

The WRF Plan, alongside the other 14 Community Forest Plans and their shared metrics in England, will then be merged into a single “England’s Community Forest’s Plan of Plans”. This document will be the national statement and vision covering 20% of England land area for trees and woodlands and nearly 50% of England’s population.

## 8 Contact officer

Guy Thompson (WRF Programme Director) [guy.thompson@kirklees.gov.uk](mailto:guy.thompson@kirklees.gov.uk)  
07535659649

## 9 Background Papers and History of Decisions

Kirklees Cabinet, 13th July 2020. *White Rose Forest Plan and the Trees for Climate programme*

[WRFFinalCabinetReportJuly2020internalkirklees24.06.20 002 - 02.07.20.pdf](#)

## 10 Appendices

- 1) WRF Strategic Plan 2025-2050 recommended for adoption
- 2) WRF Strategic Plan (2025-50) Stakeholder Engagement Survey Report v FINAL
- 3) WRF Strategic Plan (2025-50) Public Engagement Survey Report v FINAL

## 11 Service Director responsible

David Wildman, Interim Service Director for Skills and Regeneration