

Executive 260121

COASTAL COMMUNITY FOREST – EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

LEAD MEMBERS	Mike Starkie, Elected Mayor of Copeland
LEAD OFFICER	Pat Graham, Chief Executive Officer
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WHAT BENEFITS WILL THESE PROPOSALS BRING TO COPELAND RESIDENTS?

The specific benefits of a Coastal Community Forest in Cumbria will be shaped in response to local need and long term aspirations.

Benefits associated with community forests generally include:

- Creation of healthy, inspiring and resilient places for communities and nature to live side by side
- Connection of urban populations with the wider landscape, for leisure and recreation
- Helping communities to respond and adapt to climate change
- Responsiveness to societal and policy developments – meeting the community’s long-term wellbeing and environmental needs
- Trees meet the community’s needs for a safe, attractive place, good health, economic development and connection with thriving nature
- Flood resilience and management
- Biodiversity enhancement
- Community participation in place-shaping

WHY HAS THIS REPORT COME TO THE EXECUTIVE?

This report introduces the concept of community forests and the opportunity for Cumbria to develop a plan for a Coastal Community Forest, which would support the Council’s new Climate Policy and sustainability framework set out in the Copeland Vision 2040.

The paper makes recommendation to Executive to support the submission of an Expression of Interest for the Coastal Community Forest in Cumbria to be considered as one of the next three community forests in England.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the Executive:

1. Notes the information in this paper;
2. Supports the submission of an Expression of Interest for the Coastal Community Forest to be considered as one of the next three community forests in England.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Community Forest programme was established in 1990 by the Countryside Commission as a pilot project to demonstrate the potential contribution of environmental improvement to economic and social regeneration. Since then, 10 Community Forests have been created across England.
- 1.2. England's Community Forests now form the country's biggest environmental regeneration initiative and the programme is highlighted as part of the Government's 25 Year Plan for the Environment.
- 1.3. Community Forests are a long-term investment in places, delivered by partnerships of public, private and voluntary sectors, with the following aims:
 - **Support regeneration and growth** - Making towns and cities more attractive places in which to live, work and do business; attracting new investment and creating jobs
 - **Support local communities** - Harnessing the enthusiasm, commitment, and knowledge of local people; helping them improve their local area and enhancing health and wellbeing
 - **Creating Better Places** – Enriching and enhancing biodiversity the environment, creating new facilities for recreation and leisure and making our towns and cities more sustainable
- 1.4. There is opportunity for the Coastal Community Forest in Cumbria to become one of the next three to be developed.

2. DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

- 2.1. In October and November, two meetings were held between local partners including the Council, Allerdale and Barrow Borough Councils, the National Trust, Forestry England, Woodland Trust, Cumbria Woodlands, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Lake District National Park Partnership and BEC. Cumbria County Council and the Zero Carbon Cumbria Partnership have also been engaged.
- 2.2. Through these meetings, an initial plan of action was agreed:
 - To develop an initial expression of interest to be submitted to the Community Forests Trust in January 2021
 - To then develop a full bid including agreed (in principle) governance arrangements
- 2.3. Should the bid be successful, a Community Forest Plan would need to be developed. Governance and management arrangements would be agreed by the partners and the planning authorities would have a central role.

3. COASTAL COMMUNITY FOREST

- 3.1. No specific sites have yet been identified, but the areas to be explored in Copeland would be broadly those between the boundary of the Lake District National Park and the coast.
- 3.2. Any future Community Forest Plan would be consulted upon, ensuring that the views of residents, businesses and stakeholders are taken into account.

- 3.3. Should the Coastal Community Forest submission be successful, it was suggested that this becomes a workstream of the county-wide decarbonisation/climate programme being led by the Zero Carbon Cumbria Partnership, of which Copeland Borough Council is currently a supporting partner.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 4.1. Do nothing: this would represent a missed opportunity to deliver against the commitments made in the Council's Climate Policy and Copeland Vision 2040.

5. STATUTORY OFFICER COMMENTS

- 5.1. Monitoring Officer/Legal Comments: *From a legal perspective it is too early to identify any legal issues which may arise. Looking at the list of existing community forests this seems to be a mix of external charitable trusts or local authority run forests some receiving grants of millions of pounds. Legal issues will arise and these will be dealt with at the appropriate time. These could include company/charity incorporation, grant funding conditions, land disposals/acquisitions, rights of way/relationship with coastal margin, etc. For the time being, provided that there are no new budget implications, the matter is confirmed as an executive function.*

- 5.2. Section 151 Officer Comments:

- 5.3. EIA Comments: N/A

- 5.4. Policy Framework Comments: N/A

6. RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

- 6.1. There are no new resource requirements for the council associated with this proposal at this time.
- 6.2. Relevant officers from across the Council have been asked to provide information in support of the Expression of Interest.
- 6.3. Should a Community Forest Partnership be formed, it would have responsibility for determining the resource requirements to support development and delivery of the Community Forest Plan and subsequent forest management.

7. HOW WILL THE PROPOSALS BE PROJECT MANAGED

- 7.1. The Nuclear Sector Development Manager will continue to lead the Council's engagement with local partners to develop and submit the Expression of Interest. Over time, if the Coastal Community Forest bid is successful, it is envisaged that this would transition into the leadership of the Strategic Planning team.
- 7.2. Responsibility for development of any future Community Forest Plan and implementation of partnership and management arrangements will be subject to appropriate governance.