

The background of the slide features a large, light blue watermark of the City of Vancouver's coat of arms. The crest is a shield divided into four quadrants. The top-left quadrant shows a sailing ship on the water. The top-right quadrant shows a stag's head with antlers. The bottom-left quadrant shows a beaver. The bottom-right quadrant shows a grizzly bear. Above the shield is a crown with four maple leaves. A banner at the bottom of the shield contains the motto "A NE FOR A".

## **Agenda Item 9**

## **Forest Estate Plan**

**Falkirk Council**

**Title:** Forest Estate Plan  
**Meeting:** Executive  
**Date:** 16 April 2019  
**Author:** Director of Development Services

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 Working in partnership with the Central Scotland Green Network Trust (CSGNT), a suite of six Urban Woodland Management Plans (UWMP) have been prepared. Together these plans form the Falkirk Council Forest Estate Plan. Consultation on the six UWMP has already been carried out. Executive is asked to approve these plans for submission to Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS).

**2. Recommendations**

**2.1 It is recommended that the Executive:**

- (1) approves the suite of six UWMP which together comprise the Falkirk Council Forest Estate Plan.**
- (2) instructs officers to submit the six UWMP to Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) for approval;**
- (3) instructs officers to apply to the Scottish Government's Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) for Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) and Sustainable Management of Forest Grant (SMFG) and, depending on the outcome, begin the implementation of the Falkirk North UWMP in 2020; and**
- (4) instructs officers to continue to monitor funding availability from FGS and other sources and report back to Executive on progress and opportunities for implementation of the other 5 UWMP in 2020.**

**3. Background**

- 3.1 Woodlands and forests are a vital national resource and play an important role in rural development and sustainable land use. As well as helping to reduce the impacts of climate change and providing timber for industry, our forests enhance and protect the environment and provide opportunities for public enjoyment.
- 3.2 A significant amount of woodland across the Council area is Council owned. The Council has responsibilities to manage, maintain and improve this woodland but has limited resources available to achieve this. The Council's Forestry and Woodland Strategy (FWS) aims to support the delivery of approximately 850ha of new woodlands over the 40-year lifespan of the

Strategy. New planting on Council owned land could have a significant role to play in meeting this objective.

- 3.3 In February 2017 Falkirk Council's revenue budget for 2017/18 was approved including £15k allocated toward the production of a Forest Plan. The plan was intended to assist in leveraging in additional annual Forestry Commission grant funding for the sustainable management of Council owned woodlands including felling and restocking, woodland thinning, and access and signage improvements.
- 3.4 Council officers worked in partnership with CSGNT to prepare the plan. Early in the project, CSGNT's appointed project manager advised that the most appropriate way of maximising future funding potential would be to prepare a suite of UWMP which could then be used as a basis for securing Woodland In and Around Town (WIAT) Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) and Sustainable Management of Forest Grant (SMFG). This suite of UWMP would together comprise the Council's Forest Estate Plan. Many private rural estate owners already access this funding source by this approach. This Forest Estate Plan represents a significant first for Falkirk Council in attempting to access Forestry Commission grant funding for the Council's forest estate portfolio on this scale.
- 3.5 UWMP can only be prepared for land within a WIAT area. To qualify, urban woodlands must be within one kilometre of a town with a population of 2,000 or more people. Six UWMP areas (shown in appendices 1 to 6) were identified. Table 1 below shows the characteristics of each UWMP:

**Table 1: UWMP area characteristics**

<b>UWMP Area</b>	<b>Woodland Compartments</b>	<b>Total forest inventory area</b>
<b>Bo'ness</b>	10	36.72ha
<b>Bonnybridge</b>	10	29.98ha
<b>Denny</b>	11	22.20ha
<b>Falkirk North</b>	8	74.28ha
<b>Falkirk South</b>	17	43.41ha
<b>Polmont</b>	14	65.04ha
<b>Total</b>	70	271.63ha

- 3.6 Each UWMP will be prepared to cover a period of 10 years and will contain a set of information on topics prescribed by Forestry Commission Scotland:
- Woodland description
  - Vision and objectives
  - Stakeholder engagement
  - Analysis and management strategy
  - Management proposals
  - Monitoring and review; and
  - Work programme
- 3.7 The same vision and objectives have been identified for each of the six UWMP and are shown in table 2 below:

**Table 2: UWMP Vision and Objectives**

<b>Vision</b>
To improve the resilience, amenity, and conservation value of woodland areas, in addition to an expansion of woodland cover across grass parkland to improve both aesthetic appeal and habitat connectivity, in consultation with local residents.
<b>Objectives</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve woodland resilience with respect to a range of threats including windblow, pathogens and climate change;</li> <li>2. Enhance biodiversity through a range of appropriate interventions including thinning, supplementary planting and invasive species removal;</li> <li>3. Improve amenity potential of woodland through a range of appropriate interventions including tree safety surveys, path creation and signage installation; and</li> <li>4. Increase woodland cover by small-scale tree planting to 'round-off' and create a more organic shape to woodland areas in addition to connecting isolated blocks, and feathering out dense planting through lower density planting on expanded areas.</li> </ol>

#### 4. Consultation

- 4.1 Initial consultation was carried out in June/ July 2018 by CSGNT via an online questionnaire which was targeted at local residents and advertised through local groups with an interest in woodland. 131 responses were received. The results of this survey influenced the vision and objectives for all 6 UWMP outlined at table 2 above.
- 4.2 Once concept maps showing initial proposals for woodland management within each UWMP area had been produced, a community drop in session was held to gather feedback on initial proposals. Feedback received in the community drop in sessions was used to inform the finalisation of the six UWMP.

#### 5. Programme of Works

- 5.1 The programme of woodland management works prescribed within the suite of six UWMP is significant. Woodland management intervention works will involve felling and thinning of individual trees in significant areas of existing woodland. This can be an emotive subject for communities due to the intensive nature of works within woodlands and the short term impact on their local landscape. Table 3 below shows the key outputs of each UWMP at the end of the plan period i.e. by 2029:

**Table 3: Key UWMP outputs**

	Bo'ness	Bonnybridge	Denny	Falkirk North	Falkirk South	Polmont	Total
<b>Area of woodland</b>	78.13	28.28	50.54	74.3	43.41	155.02	429.68

	Bo'ness	Bonnybridge	Denny	Falkirk North	Falkirk South	Polmont	Total
<b>accessible to the public (ha)</b>							
<b>New semi-bound footpaths (m<sup>2</sup>)</b>	3,976	4,896	3,195	5,542	2654	3,946	24,209
<b>Upgraded path (m<sup>2</sup>)</b>	2,986	502	0	5,709	2,423	3,049	14,669
<b>Area woodland clearance (ha)</b>	0.35	1.13	0.27	0	1.17	1.1	4.02
<b>Area of thinning (ha)</b>	11.39	12.93	15.36	39.4	10.84	3.65	93.57
<b>Scrub/ Woody Vegetation Eradication</b>	3.35	0.31	0.1	0.19	5.16	2.25	11.36
<b>Tree safety survey</b>	14.5	7.17	7.67	2.36	6.11	29.66	67.47
<b>Small-scale tree and shrub planting</b>	23,814	2,004	3,367	2,189	1,925	6,138	39,437
<b>New single standard tree</b>	26	1	0	23	8	40	98

- 5.2 It should also be emphasised that the implementation of these UWMP will lead to the planting of nearly 40,000 new trees and in this regard will contribute towards our long term FWS objective.
- 5.3 The expert silvicultural advice of CSGNT and FCS has gone into the production of these UWMP and, should Executive approve this report and its recommendations, the UWMP would be submitted for consideration and final approval from FCS.
- 5.4 An estimate of external funding potential from the six UWMP via WIG and SMFG has been made based on the current grant rates set by the Scottish Government's Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) and is shown in table 4 below:

**Table 4: UWMP external funding potential**

	WIG (over 10 years)	SMFG (over 5 years)	Total
<b>Bo'ness</b>	£233,047.68	£6,703	£239,818.18
<b>Bonnybridge</b>	£176,925.04	£6,299	£183,224.04
<b>Denny</b>	£126,034.16	£5,821	£131,855.16
<b>Falkirk North</b>	£266,311.51	£6,897	£273,208.51
<b>Falkirk South</b>	£140,655.67	£7,104.50	£147,787.17
<b>Polmont</b>	£234,617.20	£8,402.50	£243,397.7
<b>Total</b>	£1,177,591.26	£41,227	£1,218,818.26

- 5.5 The FGS forms part of the Scottish Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. Although the theoretical external funding potential from all six UWMP is noted as c£1.2m in table 4 above FCS have indicated that they can only confirm the availability of WIG funding in 2020/21. The availability of WIG post 2020 is dependent on the review of the Scottish Rural Development

Programme which is, in turn, dependent on the basis of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.

- 5.6 Furthermore, FCS have also indicated that Falkirk Council would only be eligible to receive a maximum of £100k in WIG in 2020/21 from the national funding pot and that grant funding will be awarded on a first come, first served basis. Any delay in submitting the six UWMP to FCS will therefore increase the chances of WIG funding being unavailable in 2020/21.
- 5.7 As there will not be enough available funding to immediately implement all 6 UWMP an exercise was carried out to identify which of the 6 UWMP should be prioritised for implementation. Assessment criteria relate to:
- strategic fit with the objectives of
    - the Open Space Strategy (OSS); and
    - the Forestry and Woodland Strategy (FWS);
  - external funding potential
  - proximity to deprived communities as defined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)
- 5.8 A more detailed explanation of the rationale is set out within a background paper. The results are presented in table 5 below:

**Table 5: UWMP prioritisation**

UWMP area	OSS	FWS	Funding	SIMD	Total	Overall Ranking
<b>Bo'ness</b>	1	1	4	4	10	2
<b>Bonnybridge</b>	5	6	2	5	18	5
<b>Denny</b>	6	5	6	2	19	6
<b>Falkirk North</b>	2	4	1	1	8	1
<b>Falkirk South</b>	4	3	5	5	17	4
<b>Polmont</b>	3	2	2	3	10	2

- 5.9 UWMP have been ranked against each criterion with the best performing UWMP area ranked 1 and the worst performing ranked 6. The individual rankings have then been added together. Falkirk North which has the lowest total score and an overall ranking of 1 is recommended as the most suitable to be prioritised for implementation.

## **6. Next Steps**

- 6.1 Subject to Executive approval of the Forest Estate Plan, all six UWMP which comprise the plan will be submitted to FCS for approval. Officers will then work to implement the programme of works prescribed in the Falkirk North UWMP. No further consultation with the public is planned, however, in advance of any on-site works:
- local members will be made aware of any imminent works;
  - works will be advertised on the Council's website and via social media channels; and

- warning signage will be erected so both locals and visitors to these woodlands will be aware in advance of any works and their duration.
- 6.2 The cost of implementing the Falkirk North UWMP is not yet known. More detailed work will be needed to clarify costs and will be dependent on the price of carrying out works within the various woodland compartments and the price of timber when the works are carried out. Additional funding is likely to be needed to be secured to implement the Falkirk North UWMP in 2020 above and beyond the potential £100k available from WIG. Opportunities for additional funding support will be explored with Sustrans for the upgrade of existing paths and the provision of new paths.
- 6.3 The availability of FGS and other potential funding post 2020/21 will be closely monitored to assess opportunities for implementation of the other 5 UWMP within their 10 year lifespan.

## **7. Implications**

### **Financial**

- 7.1 Falkirk Council is eligible for a £10,543.50 UWMP preparation grant which will be payable in 2019/20. Following approval of all six UWMP by FCS, Falkirk Council will become eligible for a £41,227 SMFG payment over 5 years. No WIG is available in 2019/20 as the grant scheme is fully subscribed. Falkirk Council will be eligible for a maximum of £100,000 WIG in 2020/21 but this is allocated on a first come, first served basis. The SMFG payments commence the following year to the WIG ones, i.e. 21/22.

### **Resources**

- 7.2 Existing Council staff will be involved in the delivery of the Falkirk North UWMP. It is anticipated that staff costs can be met from within existing budgets and anticipated income from funding partners.

### **Legal**

- 7.3 To become eligible for WIG funding, there will be a requirement to enter into a lease agreement with Scottish Water for land at Abbotshaugh Community Woodland. Early discussions with Scottish Water have been held and a pre-condition of their agreement to a lease is that a woodland management plan must first be prepared for Abbotshaugh Community Woodland. The submission of the Falkirk North UWMP to FCS will satisfy that pre-condition.

### **Risk**

- 7.4 There is a risk that available WIG funding for 2020/21 will already be allocated by the time the Falkirk North UWMP is approved by FCS. In that circumstance full implementation of the UWMP is likely to be delayed. Implementation of the Forest Estate Plan will enable tree safety surveys to be undertaken on 67.47ha of Council owned woodland, this will reduce the risk of accidents caused by trees on Council owned land.



## **Equalities**

- 7.5 The Plan will have an impact on people so a full EPIA has been produced. The plan will have a positive impact on the age and pregnancy/maternity protected characteristics through improving ease of access to woodlands and increasing the resilience of woodlands, thereby reducing the risk of paths becoming blocked by fallen trees.

## **Sustainability/Environmental Impact:**

- 7.6 The implementation of the Forest Estate Plan will have positive environmental effects through enhancing habitat value, increasing woodland cover, improving the quality of parks and open spaces, and enhancing recreational opportunity but those effects are not considered to be significant, therefore a full Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.

## **8 Conclusions**

- 8.1 A significant amount of woodland across the Council area is Council owned. The Council has responsibilities to manage, maintain and improve this woodland but has limited resources available to achieve this.
- 8.2 By approving the Forest Estate Plan and instructing officers to submit a suite of 6 UWMP to FCS for approval, the Executive will increase the resources available to the Council to sustainably manage its forest estate and potentially unlock significant amounts of WIG funding from FCS to improve its woodlands.

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## **Director of Development Services**

Author: Danny Thallon, Environment Coordinator – 01324 504927

[danny.thallon@falkirk.gov.uk](mailto:danny.thallon@falkirk.gov.uk)

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## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Bo'ness Urban Woodland Management Plan - Compartment Map  
Appendix 2 - Bonnybridge Urban Woodland Management Plan - Compartment Map  
Appendix 3 - Denny Urban Woodland Management Plan - Compartment Map  
Appendix 4 - Falkirk North Urban Woodland Management Plan - Compartment Map  
Appendix 5 - Falkirk South Urban Woodland Management Plan - Compartment Map  
Appendix 6 - Polmont Urban Woodland Management Plan - Compartment Map