

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

REQUEST FOR MAYORAL DECISION – MD2909

Title: Urban Tree Challenge Fund 2021-23

Executive summary:

As part of London's Recovery Programme, the Green New Deal mission sets an objective to improve London's natural environment and tackle the climate and ecological emergencies. This decision requests approval for funding to invest in tree planting to help meet this objective.

Following success in the first round of the national Urban Tree Challenge Fund (£2m awarded for 2019-21, MD2567), the GLA co-ordinated a bid to the 2021-23 round of the fund for the planting of 7963 trees across 22 boroughs. The Forestry Commission has offered a grant of £3.3m which must be match-funded. To support take-up across London, the GLA will provide £937,500 of the required match-funding (with the remaining amount supplied through borough contributions or in-kind support). This Mayoral Decision will approve the GLA spend and acceptance of the Forestry Commission grant. The GLA will be the accountable body, receiving monies (to be paid in arrears in 2021-22 and 2022-23 with further maintenance payments in 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24) and distributing them to boroughs via grant funding agreements.

Funding is from the "Tree Planting" (£0.5m) allocation in the GLA Mayoral Budget 2021-22 (approved under MD2795). A further £0.5m is allocated in 2022-23, subject to future confirmation of the 2022-23 budget.

Decision:

The Mayor approves:


- i. receipt of £3,334,346 from the Forestry Commission
- ii. expenditure of up to £4,271,846 (of which £937,500 is GLA funds) to fund tree planting (subject to future budget confirmation).

Mayor of London

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has my approval.

Signature:



Date:

20/1/22

PART I – NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE TO THE MAYOR

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. The Mayor has committed to make London a world leader in improving the environment locally and globally, taking the lead in tackling climate change, reducing pollution, developing a low carbon economy, consuming fewer resources and using them more effectively and ensuring all Londoners have access to a high-quality biodiverse environment. To address these challenges the Mayor has committed to a Green New Deal for London, combining strong economic recovery with action to tackle the climate and ecological emergencies creating green jobs and opportunities for all Londoners. It will help ensure London becomes a zero carbon, zero pollution city by 2030.
- 1.2. The London Recovery Board, co-chaired by the Mayor of London and the Chair of London Councils, has set out a programme for the capital's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that seeks to build back better and make London a fairer, more equal, greener, and more resilient city. Accelerating the delivery of a cleaner, greener London is one of the Board's five key outcomes for the Recovery Programme.
- 1.3. As part of the Recovery Programme, the Green New Deal mission, jointly developed by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and London Councils, will tackle the climate and ecological emergencies and improve air quality by doubling the size of London's green economy to accelerate job creation for all. The four objectives of this mission are to:
 - improve London's natural environment, improve air quality, and tackle the climate and ecological emergencies
 - promote and incentivise activities that sustain and grow London's green economy
 - prioritise interventions reducing health inequalities and social injustices
 - engage Londoners and businesses in the journey to become a zero-pollution and greener city.
- 1.4. Making London's public realm greener, improving access to and enhancing green spaces, increasing the capital's resilience to the impacts of a warming climate, and improving air quality are critical to achieving the aims of the Green New Deal mission. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated more than ever the importance of green infrastructure¹ for Londoners' wellbeing, reinforcing the extensive existing evidence base.²
- 1.5. Tree planting will help deliver the Green New Deal mission by increasing canopy cover in those parts of London with low existing cover. Increasing London's tree canopy by 10 per cent is a target within the London Environment Strategy as tree canopies have positive effects in relation to the Urban Heat Island effect and air quality, helping to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Increasing the presence of trees in the public realm is also known to have wellbeing and mental health benefits.
Urban Tree Challenge Fund
- 1.6. In April 2021 the government announced round 3 of its Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCf), intended to support the planting of 44,000 large 'standard' trees (circa 5 years old and 3m in height) over a two-year period (2021-22 to 2022-23) as part of its umbrella Nature for Climate Fund. The UTCf supports a number of objectives in Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan and contributes toward meeting the government's commitment to increase tree planting across the UK to 30,000 hectares of trees a year by 2025.

¹ The network of parks, green spaces, rivers and canals, wetlands, trees, gardens, green roofs and walls.

² www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/11015viv_natural_capital_account_for_london_v7_full_vis.pdf

- 1.7. Given success in its first round and the amount of work involved in submitting a bid and meeting Forestry Commission requirements, the GLA again led a London-wide bid and invited all boroughs to participate. We also supplemented the Forestry Commission funding offer, making it easier for boroughs with over-stretched resources to participate and at scale. Twenty-two boroughs are part of the bid: Barking and Dagenham, Barnet, Camden, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield, Greenwich, Hackney, Haringey, Harrow, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Kingston, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Newham, Richmond, Southwark, Sutton, Tower Hamlets and Westminster. All boroughs were invited to participate in the bid, of those who are not part of this GLA-led application, some have accessed the fund via other applications (given established projects with organisations like Trees for Cities for example) and some did not have the capacity to identify planting locations or deliver planting.
- 1.8. The application was submitted in July 2021 with notice of its success received on 22 November 2021 (we had expected to hear the outcome of the application in early September 2021, the risks associated with the three months delay are set out in the risk register, section 4.1 below). The full application has been accepted with no changes from the Forestry Commission, the funding offer is categorised as 'conditional' until confirmation of funding from the approval of this MD.
- 1.9. This MD seeks the Mayor's approval to spend the following:
- GLA budget (totalling £937,500):
 - £439,750 approved in the 2021-22 GLA Mayoral Budget under the Green New Deal mission (under cover of MD2795) for "Street Tree Planting"
 - £497,750 from the 2022-23 budget under the Green New Deal Mission (subject to budget approval) for "Street Tree Planting"
 - £3,334,346 from the Forestry Commission, as per the terms of the Urban Tree Challenge Fund.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

Objectives

- 2.1. To contribute to meeting the objectives of the Green New Deal mission including to:
- improve London's natural environment, improve air quality, and tackle the climate and ecological emergencies
 - promote and incentivise activities that sustain and grow London's green economy
 - prioritise interventions that reduce health inequalities and social injustices
 - engage Londoners and businesses in the journey to become a zero-pollution and greener city.

Outcomes

- 2.2. The combined funding from the UTCF, GLA and boroughs will enable the planting of up to 7963 large 'standard' trees across 22 boroughs (listed above in paragraph 1.7). The trees (the vast majority of which are street trees) will be planted in 2021-22 and 2022-23 and targeted in Lower Super Output Areas with low canopy cover and high deprivation. Planting proposed in the application was split evenly across years, with 3981 trees scheduled to be planted in year one (2021-22) and 3982 trees scheduled for year two (2022-23). As tree planting season is typically November to March, factors such as the availability of trees and the delay by the Forestry Commission in confirming the funding, risk the number of trees being planted in 2021-22 being lower than planned. If this occurs, subject to confirmation by the Forestry Commission, the aim would be for

any shortfall in the number of trees planted in 2021-22 being made up in the numbers planted in 2022-23.

- 2.3. Tree numbers vary significantly by borough, primarily due to capacity – either the officer time or physical space to deliver tree planting on such a scale and at short notice. The London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Hackney, Ealing and Newham are all scheduled to plant 1000 or more trees each as part of this programme.

3. Equality comments

- 3.1. Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, as a public authority, the Mayor of London must have 'due regard' of the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation as well as to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who have a protected characteristic³ and those who do not. This involves having due regard to the need to remove or minimise any disadvantage suffered by those who share a relevant protected characteristic; taking steps to meet the different needs of such people; and encouraging them to participate in public life or in any other activity where their participation is disproportionately low.
- 3.2. The programmes outlined in this MD form part of the policies and proposals in the London Environment Strategy, which has been informed by a full integrated impact assessment, including consideration of equalities.⁴ The Equalities Assessment Report for the London Environment Strategy noted that exposure to poor environmental conditions is much higher among Black, Asian and minority ethnic Londoners.
- 3.3. Black, Asian and minority ethnic Londoners, and lower-income Londoners, are more likely to live in areas of deficiency of access to green space, or in areas where green space quality is poor. GLA research has found that women, adult Londoners aged 25 and under, lower-income Londoners and social renters visit parks less often.⁵ National research has found that Black, Asian and minority ethnic people are least likely to visit green spaces. Similarly, 21 per cent of households in London lack access to a private or shared garden, and across England, Black, Asian and minority ethnic people are less likely to have access to a garden than White people.⁶
- 3.4. Climate change will disproportionately affect those least able to respond and recover from it. Poorer Londoners will find it more difficult to recover from flooding and will suffer more from the impacts of the urban heat island effect. Extreme heat events will have a greater impact on older people, very young children, socially isolated people and people with existing health conditions.
- 3.5. The work outlined in this MD responds to, and aims to tackle, these disparities. The tree planting supported by the Urban Tree Challenge Fund is focussed in areas of low tree canopy cover and poor performance against the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. Tree canopy is significant in terms of resilience to the effects of climate change (for example, higher temperatures) while deprivation is significant to people's ability to cope with and adapt to environmental challenges and, arguably, the resilience of wider areas (such as London boroughs). While planting locations included in the application were based on Forestry Commission data as per the terms of the fund, there is a good correlation between the proposed locations and those areas faring poorly on the GLA's Climate Risk Mapping as the respective datasets are based on similar factors (low green cover, high deprivation for example).

³ The "protected" characteristics and groups are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, gender, religion or belief, sexual orientation, and marriage/civil partnership status. Compliance with the Equality Act may involve treating people with a protected characteristic more favourably than those without the characteristic. The duty must be exercised with an open mind and at the time a decision is taken. Conscientious regard must be had that is appropriate in all of the circumstances.

⁴ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/draft_les_equality_impact_assessment.pdf

⁵ GLA polling undertaken September 2017 to inform London Environment Strategy

⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/oneineighbritishhouseholdshasnogarden/2020-05-14>

4. Other considerations

- 4.1. The key risks associated with the planting programme are set out in the table below along with relevant mitigation measures:

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	RAG	Mitigation
Further Covid-19 restrictions	High	Low	AMBER	<p>Good communication to ensure frank discussions can take place around organisational capacity and delivery. In the event of a further lockdown, each project will be reviewed, and new parameters put in place where needed.</p> <p>In previous rounds the Forestry Commission has allowed planting intended for year 1 to roll over to year 2 given the impact of lockdowns. Assuming they take the same approach, the two-year nature of the programme should mean the impact of further lockdowns is low.</p>
Poor availability of tree stock prevents completion of planting over two years	High	Low	AMBER	<p>Keep in good contact with boroughs regarding their ordering, liaise with the Forestry Commission if problems arise (e.g., re scope to adjust delivery dates or support in finding available stock).</p> <p>A two-year programme should enable any delays in year one to be addressed in year two subject to confirmation of grant offer from Forestry Commission and GLA budget for 2022-23</p>
Boroughs do not plant the number of trees set out in their grant funding agreements (e.g. given adverse weather)	Low	Medium	GREEN	<p>A two-year programme should enable any delays in year one to be addressed in year two.</p> <p>Numbers of trees confirmed in grant agreements with boroughs are realistic and deliverable by their contractors.</p> <p>Claim amounts will align with the number of trees planted in the foregoing year.</p> <p>Regarding weather, the window for tree planting can be extended into March without impacting grant claims.</p>
Delivery programme overspend	Low	Medium	GREEN	<p>Funding offers will be subject to execution of funding agreements capping GLA funding, payments will be made on achievement of milestones (and evidence of associated expenditure). Match-funding is a requirement.</p>
Delivery programme Underspend	Medium	Low	GREEN	<p>The GLA match funding can be put towards other tree planting projects if street tree planting projects come in under budget.</p>

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	RAG	Mitigation
Planting delivered is of a poor quality or poorly maintained	Low	Medium	GREEN	<p>Funding agreements will include clear milestones for payment.</p> <p>Boroughs are responsible for maintenance and receive maintenance payments in years three and four to support effective maintenance.</p> <p>Project monitoring will include detailed locations of planting, photographic evidence and there will be site visits to a proportion of projects to check on delivery.</p>

Links to Mayoral strategies and priorities

4.2. The work outlined in this MD will contribute towards:

- London Environment Strategy Policy 5.1.1: protect, enhance and increase green areas in the city, to provide green infrastructure services and benefits that London needs now and in the future.
- London Environment Strategy Proposal 5.1.1.f: back greater community involvement in the improvement and management of London's green spaces and natural environment.
- London Environment Strategy Objective 5.1: increase tree canopy cover by 10 per cent, and to ensure that over half of London is green by 2050.
- London Environment Strategy Objective 5.2: conserving and enhancing wildlife and natural habitats.
- London Environment Strategy Policy 5.3.1: address underinvestment, and improve the management of London's green infrastructure, by developing new business models and improving the awareness of the benefits of London's green infrastructure.
- Inclusive London Strategic Objective 12: work with partners to help ensure our approach to improving green spaces is inclusive.
- London Health Inequalities Strategy Objective 3.3: a greener city where all Londoners have access to good quality green spaces.
- London Recovery Board high-level outcome to accelerate delivery of a cleaner, greener London, and Green New Deal mission to tackle the climate and ecological emergencies and improve air quality by doubling the size of London's green economy by 2030 to accelerate job creation for all.

Consultations and impact assessments

- 4.3. Consultation for the 2018 London Environment Strategy indicated that planting more trees was consistently well supported by Londoners. Respondents also felt that more needed to be done to protect London's trees, and many had the perception that tree cover in the capital is being reduced.
- 4.4. The Integrated Impact Assessment for the strategy concluded that no negative effects were identified for the EqIA in relation to strategic green infrastructure policies, and that improving the quality of greenspaces would have positive impacts on addressing inequalities in access to greenspace and nature.

Conflicts of interest

- 4.5. There are no conflicts of interest to declare from any of those involved in the drafting or clearance of this Decision Form.

Monitoring, reporting, and evaluation

- 4.6. The Forestry Commission ("FC") grant will be paid in arrears to the GLA. Boroughs will make an annual grant claim to the GLA in arrears after the tree planting season each year, with evidence of expenditure and details of the trees planted. The GLA will then make its annual claim to the FC for the FC grant amount. Once the FC has paid the GLA's claim, the GLA will then use the FC funding and the GLA match to pay valid borough claims. In its previous round, the FC required before and after photographs of 50 per cent of funded trees within each planting area. The GLA has requested confirmation of whether reporting requirements will remain the same so that clear reporting and claim requirements can be incorporated into the GLA's grant agreements with boroughs.
- 4.7. A final evaluation of the programme will be completed by April 2026 (following the three full 'establishment' years to ensure the success of the new planting), we will also be able to produce an interim evaluation following the two planting years. The GLA's Environment team has committed to producing updates to the London Tree Canopy Map every five years, allowing us to track the cumulative effect of planting programmes such as this.

5. Financial comments

- 5.1. Approval is sought for the expenditure of up to £4,271,846 for the Tree Planting programme across financial years 2021-22 to 2025-26. This expenditure is to be financed by the receipt of capital grant from the Forestry Commission totalling £3,334,346 that is to be claimed in arrears across the same period and match funded by the GLA up to the value of £937,500.
- 5.2. The programme expenditure is to be administered via grant agreements to London boroughs and is to be phased over five financial years as detailed within the table below:

	Forestry Commission Grant			GLA	Total
	Planting	Establishment	Total		
2021-22	£538,351	-	£538,351	£439,750	£978,101
2022-23	£538,486	£376,204	£914,690	£497,750	£1,412,440
2023-24	-	£752,503	£752,503	-	£752,503
2024-25	-	£752,503	£752,503	-	£752,503
2025-26	-	£376,299	£376,299	-	£376,299
Total	£1,076,837	£2,257,509	£3,334,346	£937,500	£4,271,846

- 5.3. Further match funding is provided by the boroughs. The boroughs will demonstrate planting and then claim from the GLA who will, in turn, claim from the Forestry Commission. Should the boroughs fail to meet their requirements, no claims will be made, and no funds will change hands.
- 5.4. It should be noted that the Forestry Commissions grant is to be transferred to the GLA as capital funding, and to provide grant recipients greater flexibility in delivering the programme and to ensure consistency in the way that the GLA has previously accounted for Tree Planting schemes, the grant of £3.4m will be subject to a capital/revenue swap. This swap is to be financed from existing environmental capital projects that are funded by GLA revenue resources and have been included in the Authority's capital strategy.
- 5.5. The GLA's match funding of £937,500 which is a condition of the grant award from the Forestry Commission, profiled as above was included in the GLA's budgets plans for 2021-22, and held within the Environment Unit's revenue budget.
- 5.6. Budgets for 2022-23 are yet to be confirmed and will be finalised as part of the Authority's budget setting process currently underway and as such no contractual commitments should be made on the GLA contribution to the programme until the 2022-23 GLA budget has been approved. In addition, the appropriate break clauses will be included in the grant agreements with the London Boroughs to facilitate the early termination of the agreement(s) should the GLA's match funding not be available in futures years. All appropriate budget adjustments will be made.

6. Legal comments

- 6.1. The foregoing sections of this report indicate that the decisions requested of the Mayor concern the exercise of the Authority's general powers; falling within the Authority's statutory powers to promote and/or to do anything which is facilitative of or conducive or incidental to the promotion of economic development and wealth creation, social development or the promotion of the improvement of the environment within Greater London and in formulating the proposals in respect of which a decision is sought officers have complied with the Authority's related statutory duties to:
- (a) pay due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people
 - (b) consider how the proposals will promote the improvement of health of persons, health inequalities between persons and to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom
 - (c) consult with appropriate bodies.
- 6.2. In taking the decisions requested of him, the Mayor must have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty; namely the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, and to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment) and persons who do not share it and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). To this end, the Mayor should have particular regard to section 3 (above) of this report.

Funding

- 6.3. Officers have sought approval for a £4,271,846 programme of funding to plant trees in boroughs across London. Officers are reminded that they must adhere to the requirements of section 12 of the Authority's Contracts and Funding Code when distributing the funding. Furthermore, officers must ensure that appropriate funding agreements are put in place between and executed by the Authority and the recipients before any (a) commitment to fund it made; and (b) funding is paid to the recipient.

7. Planned delivery approach and next steps

Urban Tree Challenge Fund	Timeline
GLA sign funding agreement with the Forestry Commission to accept the grant funding	January 2022
GLA sign grant agreements with 22 boroughs to award funding	January-February 2022
Announcement of grant funding	January 2022
Tree Planting Delivery 2021-22: year one	January-March 2022
Year one monitoring and grant claim from FC; grant payments to boroughs	March 2022
Tree Planting Delivery 2022-23: year two	November 2022-February 2023
Year two monitoring and grant claim from FC; grant payments to boroughs	March 2023
Delivery end date	April 2023
Year 3 maintenance payments	TBC 2023-24
Year 4 maintenance payments	TBC 2024-25
Year 5 maintenance payments	TBC 2025-26
Final evaluation (external)	TBC by Forestry Commission

Appendices and supporting papers:

None

Public access to information

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) and will be made available on the GLA website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary.

Note: This form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 – Deferral

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? YES

If YES, for what reason: Publication to be deferred until after programme is announced.

Until what date: (a date is required if deferring): no later than 25 March 2022.

Part 2 – Sensitive information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form – NO

ORIGINATING OFFICER DECLARATION:

Drafting officer to confirm the following (✓)

Drafting officer:

Lizzie Botfield has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms the following:

✓

Sponsoring Director:

Phil Graham has reviewed the request and is satisfied it is correct and consistent with the Mayor's plans and priorities.

✓

Mayoral Adviser:

Shirley Rodrigues has been consulted about the proposal and agrees the recommendations.

✓

Advice:

The Finance and Legal teams have commented on this proposal.

✓

Corporate Investment Board

This decision was agreed by the Corporate Investment Board on 10 January 2022

✓

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RESOURCES:

I confirm that financial and legal implications have been appropriately considered in the preparation of this report.

Signature

Date

D. Gane

20/1/22

CHIEF OF STAFF:

I am satisfied that this is an appropriate request to be submitted to the Mayor

Signature

Date

D. Bellamy

10/1/22

