Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 14**

National Park Authority Meeting

24 June 2025

White Rose Forest Strategic Plan 2025-50

Purpose of this report

1. To seek the Authority's endorsement of the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50).

Recommendations

2. That Members;
   a) Note that a new White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50) has been developed and approved by the White Rose Forest partnership.
   b) Endorse the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50) to demonstrate the Authority's formal support.

Strategic Framework

3. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and support the strategic planning framework:
   - Corporate Plan Objective 20:
     Through Grow Back Greener and other local funding programmes, support farmers and landowners to create at least a further 225 hectares of native broadleaved and mixed woodland that enhances the National Park's landscape by 2025.

Background

4. 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, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) organisations, alongside national, regional and local charities, businesses and community enterprises.

5. 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.

6. The White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50) - see **Annex** - 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.

7. 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/business leaders, funders (including government) and partners.

8. 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.

9. The Authority has been a member of the White Rose Forest partnership since 2019.

The White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50)

10. The White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50) builds on the foundations of the highly successful White Rose Forest Action Plan (2021-25), and experience and learning of the partnership over recent years. It creates an umbrella strategy for North and West Yorkshire, which accommodates more bespoke strategies/plans/actions at a local level (such as the National Park Management Plan, and Dales Woodland Strategy), and establishes a structure for more detailed action planning.

11. The Strategic Plan articulates the broad and diverse benefits (environmental, economic & social) of trees and woodland and emphasises the concept of an extensive network of all trees and woodland across North and West Yorkshire (and wanting to expand, improve and better connect this – effectively the Lawton principles). It broadens the aims/objectives to reflect the current priorities, making these more obvious (e.g. nature recovery, woodland management, community engagement, accessibility, partnership).

12. The Strategic Plan demonstrates the level of ambition for the White Rose Forest area and what could be possible in 25 years and highlights that everyone has a part to play and how the partnership will work together to deliver on the ambition.

13. The Strategic Plan expresses the partnership's long-term direction and level of ambition through a Vision and a set of Strategic Objectives (see pages 12-13):

    1. Expand the area of trees and woodland — from 12% to at least 16.5% coverage — and improve connectivity;
    2. Protect and restore more trees and woodland;
    3. Engage more people, communities and businesses in the planning, designing, planting, management and use of trees and woodland;
    4. Promote the transformative role of trees and woodland;
    5. Grow the impact and sustainability of the White Rose Forest partnership.

14. The Plan has been subject to extensive engagement and consultation with stakeholders and the public. Some key findings from the public engagement were:

    - 93% of respondents agreed 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
- 91% of respondents supported the long-term direction and level of ambition outlined in the Summary White Rose Forest Strategic Plan.

15. The White Rose Forest Strategic Board is now seeking endorsement of the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50) from strategic partners, to raise the profile of the White Rose Forest and the partnership's new Strategic Plan, and to demonstrate strategic partner support for its long-term direction and ambition.

Linkage with existing Strategies and Plans

16. The level of ambition within the Strategic Plan aligns with, and will help to support, the ambitions set out in both the current Dales Woodland Strategy, and the ambitions for nature recovery and climate set out in the new National Park Management Plan (see item 9 on this agenda).

Financial Implications

17. There are no direct financial implications. The White Rose Forest Agreement, to which the Authority 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. The White Rose Forest Agreement signatories have committed to working collectively, collaboratively and in good faith towards securing and accessing funds for the delivery of the Strategic Plan and associated 5 yearly Action Plans.

18. The Authority will continue to support the achievement of WRF's ambitions directly and indirectly through its existing woodland team. Page 20 of the Plan identifies some of the ways in which this would be done.

Legal Implications

19. There are no direct legal implications of endorsing the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50). The Authority is a signatory to the White Rose Forest Agreement, and as such is a member of the Strategic Board which approves the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50), on behalf of the partnership.

20. The Plan is the first to make specific reference to the new duty on public bodies (s245 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2024), committing the White Rose Forest to ensuring that its activities contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the National Park and the achievement of the objectives of the new National Park Management Plan.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

21. None

Climate Change Implications

22. Increasing woodland cover is a critical element of the Government's plans to achieve the legally binding target of net zero by 2050. Done in the right way, the increase in woodland cover would not only make a very significant positive contribution to storing carbon but would also help to reduce flood peaks, improve air quality, increase the resilience of natural habitats, and provide cooling effects.

Conclusion

23. By endorsing the White Rose Forest Strategic Plan (2025-50), the Authority will be confirming its support for the White Rose Forest partnership and the long-term direction and level of ambition of its Strategic Plan, which aligns with the ambitions that the Authority and it's local partners have already set out in the Dales Woodland Strategy and the new National Park Management Plan.

Gary Smith
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