

Wiltshire & Swindon Tree Warden Scheme

Briefing Note No. 23 - 22

Service : *Natural and Historic Environment*

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Summary of the project

Wiltshire Council's Woodland Grant Application and Planting Support (GAPS) Team, as part of its partnership with Swindon Borough Council's Great Western Community Forest (GWCF), wish to relaunch a Tree Warden Scheme in association with The Tree Council.

The reason for this project

The Wiltshire Council Business Plan states that our mission is to ensure:

- The people of Wiltshire are empowered to live full, healthy and enriched lives.
- Our communities continue to be beautiful and exciting places to live.
- Our local economy thrives and is supported by a skilled workforce.
- We lead the way in how councils and counties mitigate the climate challenges ahead.

To support this Wiltshire Council has produced a Climate Strategy and a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy to help meet these aspirations. A central part of these strategies is to promote the enhancement of existing trees and woodlands as well as facilitating the planting of new trees and woodlands across Wiltshire for the benefit of people, nature and to help mitigate climate change.

As mentioned in the previous Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF) Cllr Briefing Note, dated 5/10/2022, as part of our successful £294k bid we stated that we would revive the Tree Warden in Wiltshire. With Woodland Officer recruitment completed and the full GAPS Team in place we are now able to relaunch the Tree Warden Scheme. As the GAPS Team is working in partnership with GWCF we can also support Tree Wardens across the Borough of Swindon as well, something that was also in the bid.

The WCAF bid set challenging tree planting targets for the GAPS Team to achieve between 2023-2025.

- 111ha of planting 2023-24 (25% of annual target required by the Climate Strategy)
- 222ha of planting 2024-25 (50% of annual target required by the Climate Strategy)

Only by fully engaging and encouraging local communities to proactively get involved in tree planting at the Parish and Town Council level can we hope to meet these targets.

What will Tree Wardens do?

The Tree Wardens will be able to assist the GAPS Teams with as many of these roles as they feel able:

- Act as a contact and support for tree related matters in their local area
- Identify areas in the community for local tree and woodland planting.
- Protect trees by reporting early signs of pests, disease and vandalism.
- Gather, survey and record information about trees important for wildlife or heritage.
- Get involved in campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of trees.
- With support from GAPS Officers apply for planting grant funding for community projects.
- Co-ordinate local volunteers to manage community tree and woodland planting.
- Set up tree nurseries using seeds collected locally.
- Work with local groups and schools – support The Tree Council's schools orchard programme and Young Tree Champions.
- Lead guided tree walks and give talks to local groups.
- Spearhead Tree Council initiatives and campaigns throughout the year.
- Work with local landowners to identify areas for tree, woodland or hedgerow planting or assist with laying hedges or tagging hedge trees for protection.

Whilst the Tree Wardens will be working under the auspices of the local Town or Parish Council the GAPS Team will support with training, co-ordination, and advice.

Tree Wardens will not adjudicate in local disputes regarding trees, undertake major tree works use machinery or chemicals, work from height, or make any judgements about tree safety. This remains the remit of professional tree experts. The GAPS Tree Warden Scheme is primarily about the proactive facilitating of tree and woodland planting at the community level to meet Council biodiversity and climate targets. It does not replace any of the existing Council structures for dealing with existing tree issues and these enquiries should still be referred to either the Highways or Estates teams through the appropriate channels.

Next steps

We will undertake a communication campaign over the Summer to start recruiting Tree Wardens with a view to beginning online and / or face to face training in September in time to start helping us with the 2023-24 planting season.

Suggested actions for Councillors

Please could you raise this new initiative with your networks and promote it at the Town and Parish Council level. Our aim is to have a tree Warden in each of our Parishes to help us ensure the right trees are planted in the right places for all our communities.

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