

Tiny Forest

Committee: Leisure & Recreation Committee

Title: Proposal for Tiny Forest Planting – St Mark's Park

Date: 6th November 2025

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1. Purpose of Report

To seek approval in principle for the establishment of a Tiny Forest at St Mark's Park, delivered in partnership with Earthwatch Europe, ahead of public consultation and community engagement.

2. Background

The Council has been approached by Earthwatch Europe, a leading environmental charity, with an offer to collaborate on the creation of a Tiny Forest. A dense, fast growing native woodland planted in an area roughly the size of a tennis court (200m²).

Tiny Forests are designed specifically for urban areas and deliver multiple environmental, social, and educational benefits, including:

- Enhanced biodiversity and habitat creation for wildlife
- Carbon capture and contribution to climate change mitigation
- Flood mitigation and improved soil quality in waterlogged spaces
- Outdoor learning opportunities for local schools and groups
- Increased community engagement and stewardship of green spaces



Tiny Forest
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Over 280 Tiny Forests have been planted across the UK to date, with over 7,000 people engaged and 900 volunteers regularly supporting ongoing maintenance and citizen science activities.

Most Notable at:

[East Wichel Park, Swindon - Earthwatch Europe](#)

[East Wichel Park, Swindon](#)

3. Proposed Site: St Mark's Park

Following a review of potential sites, St Mark's Park has been identified as the most suitable location for this project.

The proposed planting area (approx. 200m²) is:

- Located behind the Bowls Club (see site plan)
- Currently underused and frequently waterlogged, limiting recreational use
- Occasionally subject to antisocial behaviour, with the project providing an opportunity for positive activation of the space.

The site is well connected by existing pathways and adjacent to existing Park facilities, providing accessibility for volunteers, school groups, and visitors.



4. Project Delivery

- The project is fully funded by Earthwatch Europe through external sponsorship (Admiral Group), meaning no direct cost to the Council.
- Earthwatch will provide:
 - 600 native trees and planting materials
 - Expert guidance and site design
 - Community planting sessions involving schools, volunteers, and local residents
 - Training and support for local "Tree Keepers" to assist with ongoing maintenance and citizen science monitoring
- Planting is proposed for **Dec 25 / Jan 26**

5. Consultation

Respondents: 33

Awareness & Support

- **57.6%** of respondents were unfamiliar or only slightly familiar with the Tiny Forest concept.
- Despite this, **66.7%** of respondents said they were either *very supportive* (51.5%) or *somewhat supportive* (15.2%) of the project.

Park Usage & Perceived Benefits

- **73%** of respondents visit St Marks Park regularly or occasionally.
- Most valued benefits of tree planting:
 - Boosting biodiversity (66.7%)
 - Supporting wildlife (66.7%)
 - Tackling climate change (36.4%)
 - Creating community spaces (36.4%)
 - Outdoor classrooms and enhancing natural landscape (30 - 51%)

Concerns Raised

- Key themes included:
 - Anti-social behaviour (drug use, loitering, safety concerns at night)
 - Lighting and safety, multiple calls for improved lighting
 - Maintenance, worries about upkeep, vandalism, and litter
 - Loss of open space, concern from groups who use the current green for children's activities
 - Impact on existing clubs, especially the nearby bowls club regarding leaf fall and wildlife

Community Involvement

- **51.5%** indicated they were likely to participate in Tiny Forest activities.
- Preferred activities included:
 - Tree planting (56%)
 - Wildlife monitoring (64%)
 - Educational workshops (20%)
 - Community events and gatherings (28–40%)
- Several respondents provided contact details to get involved.

Youth & Community Group Links

- 21% said they are involved with schools, youth groups, or community organisations that may wish to participate. Named groups included:
 - St Mary's Catholic Primary School
 - Florence Street Mission Hall youth groups
 - The local Bowls Club

Demographics

- A broad age range of residents responded, with most aged between 35 and 64.
- 57.6% of participants have lived in the area for 10+ years, reflecting long term community investment in the park.

Summary

The survey shows strong community support for the Tiny Forest at St Marks Park, with a clear appetite for involvement and recognition of environmental and educational benefits. However, it also highlights genuine safety and maintenance concerns, particularly regarding lighting, antisocial behaviour, and impacts on current park users. These concerns should be addressed through careful design, communication, and community engagement as the project moves forward.

6. Benefits

The Tiny Forest initiative is expected to deliver meaningful benefits for the local area, including:

- Creation of a biodiversity hotspot within an urban setting
- Improvement of a currently underused and waterlogged area
- Opportunities for environmental education and citizen science
- Enhanced community cohesion through planting and events
- Contribution towards the Council's climate change and green strategies

7. Design Options

As part of the next stage of the Tiny Forest project, a shortlist of potential forest layouts will be shared with the local community to help shape the final design. Options include several well established templates used across the UK, such as the Kidney Bean, Amphitheatre, L-shape, Rectangle, and octagonal formats, as well as more abstract shapes tailored to irregular spaces (see appendix).

All designs follow core Tiny Forest criteria: a 200m² area, pathways, a small outdoor classroom, fencing, and space for benches. Pathway configurations will be considered carefully, particularly with regard to accessibility, line of sight, and minimising antisocial behaviour, which were key community concerns highlighted in the consultation.

7. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. Proceed with the Tiny Forest installation at St Marks Park.
2. Review safety and accessibility concerns raised during consultation:
 - Improved lighting in and around the park.
 - Ensuring clear lines of sight are maintained in the forest layout.
 - Incorporating accessible pathways with appropriate surfaces and gradients.
3. Engage with the local community in selecting the final forest design, using a shortlist of layout options (e.g. Kidney Bean, Amphitheatre, Linear).
4. Involve local groups and schools in the planning and planting stages, particularly:
 - St Mary's Catholic Primary School
 - Florence Street Mission Hall youth groups
 - Interested residents who provided contact details
5. Work with Earthwatch to:
 - Finalise design and project timeline.
 - Provide community engagement materials and template options.
 - Outline ongoing maintenance expectations for the site.
7. Monitor outcomes through post planting engagement and feedback sessions, ensuring ongoing community involvement in the forest's development and upkeep.