

DECISION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIRECTORATE	PLANNING COMMITTEE	12 th September 2018	7
TREE & WOODLAND STRATEGY FOR FYLDE BOROUGH			

PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

SUMMARY

This report is to seek members' approval for the adoption of a tree and woodland strategy for the purposes of public consultation.

The Strategy sets out objectives, policies, procedures and action plans to be adopted. Its purpose is to provide the Council, individual elected members, residents and developers with clear guidelines on tree management, protection and tree planting as part of approved landscaping schemes.

The strategy will be dynamic: it will contain action plans and be subject to monitoring and review. Its scope has been chosen to align with government guidance and the contents reflect best practices in modern urban forestry.

The strategy has been prepared in conjunction with a members' working group and will be subject to external consultation, but members are asked to adopt the strategy in draft form since no major content changes are expected.

The Committee are asked to consider report and determine whether it supports the preparation of a capital growth bid for resources to support additional tree planting to be considered as part of the 2019/20 budget preparation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Planning Committee adopts the tree strategy for the purposes of public consultation.
2. That the Planning Committee adopts the draft strategy for the purposes of on-going tree management issues in respect its policies, procedures and with regard to assessing proposals as part of its development management role.
3. That committee considers the report and determines whether it supports the preparation of a capital growth bid for resources to support additional tree planting to be considered as part of the 2019/20 budget preparation.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS DECISIONS

None

CORPORATE PRIORITIES	
Spending your money in the most efficient way to achieve excellent services (Value for Money)	√
Delivering the services that customers expect of an excellent council (Clean and Green)	√
Working with all partners (Vibrant Economy)	
To make sure Fylde continues to be one of the most desirable places to live (A Great Place to Live)	√
Promoting Fylde as a great destination to visit (A Great Place to Visit)	√

1.0 Background.

1.1 Fylde's urban forest is locally recognised as an asset and has led to its reputation as a green borough, but trends in development and tree management have seen some erosion of tree cover and it has proved difficult in some instances to guarantee tree protection, particularly in development proposals.

1.2 The deployment of the TPO and Planning system alone are insufficient to secure both tree protection and delivery of new planting. Adopted policies and guidelines are needed that will not only secure better protection of trees but also will generate new tree planting and help the council secure "the right tree in the right place".

1.4 There is a need to harmonise the approach to managing council-owned tree stock and to extend industry best practices to the tree stock that was transferred to the town and parish councils, who will be invited to adopt the strategy. Avoiding practices harmful to the wellbeing and appearance of trees requires a policy approach.

1.5 The council has a responsibility to future generations in respect of providing a resilient urban forest that will assist in climate change adaptation. To deliver this, a strategic approach is necessary.

1.6 On 13th June 2018, the government provided councils with an endorsement for this approach by appointing a Tree Champion, among whose aims is to "*promote local authorities' development of comprehensive tree and woodland strategies for their areas.*" (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tree-champion-to-expand-englands-woodland>)

1.7 Trees need green spaces in which to grow, and to this end the strategy will make reference to the provision of green infrastructure (GI) and the size, species and numbers of trees in new landscaping schemes. Government recognises and supports this approach and as of 2016 has incorporated GI into its guidance as being "*important to the delivery of high quality sustainable development...*" (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#para027>)

2.0 Compatibility with Fylde Local Plan to 2032.

2.1 In the emerging plan, **Policy ENV 1** specifically refers to the protection of landscape features. The policy also refers to the securing of tree planting and landscape features in the context of new development.

2.2 Policy **ENV4** identifies the council's requirements for the provision of Green Infrastructure.

2.3 Policy **GD7 Achieving Good Design in Development**, states at subsection (L) that the council seeks the "protection of existing landscape features and natural assets as an integral part of the development; requiring multi-functional green infrastructure to be integrated into urban areas; providing enhancements to open spaces to encourage people to use them; protecting and enhancing habitats; providing open spaces and linkages to the wider ecological networks as part of the Green Infrastructure network; and enhancing the public realm".

3.0 Scope of the strategy.

3.1 Areas covered by the tree strategy:

- (a) The importance of trees to the Borough;
- (b) Opportunities to plant;
- (c) Threats to trees;
- (d) Highway trees;
- (e) Trees in open spaces;

- (f) Trees in development applications;
- (g) The importance of landscaping trees.

3.2 Objectives.

3.2.1 The core objectives of a tree strategy are straightforward:

- To preserve the trees we already have using Planning-based policies and tree management policies robustly based on arboricultural standards and technical guidance.
- To increase and enhance the Borough's urban forest through planning conditions, tree planting schemes and community engagement.
- To secure the right tree in the right place, so that tree problems are designed out at the planting stage.
- To address a trend towards the loss of street trees.
- To put the Council at the forefront of positive tree planting and management by having a specific budget for tree planting schemes.

3.2.2 The Regeneration Team actively engages with the Development Management Team in securing the best design solutions it can. The team is a key consultee in the consideration of planning applications and with regard to tree protection and landscaping planning conditions accompanying planning permissions. In the case of pre-application contact, or following the submission of an application, discussions are commonplace with developers about the need to incorporate significant tree cover as part of a woodland, to achieve a screening solution or to enhance the layout of a development. An adopted tree strategy will provide the Council – and developers - with a clear policy direction and commitment to providing as much tree cover and planting as possible. This will be an efficiency: it assists both officers and applicants by setting parameters from the outset.

3.2.3 The Strategy will address technical aspects of tree management and planting by adopting British Standards in relation to trees, as well as assisting in setting tree protection levels in development proposals. The Strategy should place the council in a stronger position where trees are an issue in planning appeals. The proper consideration of proposed works to trees, whether or not they are the subject of a preservation order, is an important part of the work of the Council's Tree Officer. Established procedures and practices are in place, but the incorporation of these practices and procedures within the Strategy will assist the process both from the Council's point of view, for developers and the general public who may have to deal with tree preservation matters.

3.2.4 Concern has been expressed from a number of sources over the years about the reduction in the level of tree cover in towns and villages, particularly with regard to street trees. This matter was discussed by the Working Group with representatives of the County Council in its capacity as highway authority. The position is that since adopting a policy 2005, the County Council has not replaced trees in the highway. Following a review, this policy was renewed by LCC in July 2018 and is unlikely to be altered. The result is a noticeable loss of trees in some locations and significant gaps along streets that were designed as tree –lined boulevards.

3.2.5 The County Council allows for the 'sponsored' replacement of trees in highway verges – for example if the Borough or A parish council donate them - conditional on all future liabilities arising from them resting with the donor. The outcome of this over time will be unprogrammed tree planting and public realm trees being in disparate ownerships.

3.2.6 Neighbouring unitary authorities such as Blackpool Council are still able to plant new trees in the highway and new street tree planting is evident in Blackpool. This leaves Fylde with a diminishing stock of street trees by comparison.

3.2.7 There is no doubt that across the Borough, street tree losses have become apparent. If unchecked, the ultimate result of a non-replacement policy will be depletion of the street tree resource to nil. Street trees are an essential part of the character and quality of many streets in the Borough; they create a unique sense of place

and are a benefit to property values. In addition, there are many highways where new street trees could enhance the area considerably.

3.2.8 As matters stand, should the Borough Council not wish to have a programme of street tree planting, only the following options are open.

- The achievement of street tree planting as part of regeneration schemes, examples being in St Annes and Ansdell
- Planting as part of planning permissions where street trees are an integral part of the design or where the interface of the new development might benefit as existing highway(s) – enforcement of landscaping conditions is essential.
- The use of modest regeneration budgets for specific schemes

In an attempt to provide a meaningful response to enhancing street tree planting, within a present highway, a dedicated budget would ideally be required. (Section 4 to follow).

4.0 Financial implications – request for a tree planting budget.

4.1 Arising out of the discussions within the Working Group, the Strategy potentially contains a commitment to an annual tree budget allowing the Regeneration Team to carry out programmed tree planting, perhaps on rotation throughout the Borough. Most of these schemes would be carried out on a partnership basis. It may well be the case that in particular areas the most effective way of adding tree cover might be those where the Borough may be able to work in partnership with town or parish councils, other appropriate bodies. This may not result in highway planting schemes but other forms of planting to enhance public open space, for screening unsightly development, enhancing an important view or to establish a woodland for ecological benefit.

4.2 The Council has previously donated trees to private gardens where their planting offered a benefit to public visual amenity. It is not suggested that this type of initiative might now be appropriate. It does however, illustrate that in the past, this Council was aware of a loss of tree cover and its consequent impact and was looking for innovative ways to increase the overall stock.

4.3 If Planning Committee is of the opinion that the establishment of a tree planting budget is worthy of support, this would need to be considered as part of the next budget cycle. The precise means by which the budget would be utilised would clearly need to be established, whether this be one of undertaking specific highway street tree planting schemes or the method by which grant aid might be considered for smaller schemes. It is suggested that if the initiative is supported, the precise means of establishing priorities and the scope for eligible spend be reported back to this and any other relevant committee. The costs and benefits of each type of tree planting scheme would form part of that consideration.

4.4 In the course of the discussions within the Working Group about the scope for and amount of budget that would be appropriate, a number of factors were discussed.

- The potential financial implications for the Council in respect of other budget considerations.
- The practicality of achieving schemes, 'on the ground' taking account of lead in times, project development and implementation upon staff resources.
- Ensuring high quality stock to ensure survival rates and longevity, reflecting in proper installation, watering and any replacements needed.
- Any resources required in monitoring conditions attached to 'grant aid' or other financial support.

Taking all of these factors into account, a figure in the region of £20,000 - £25,000 would appear to be an appropriate amount. This would be for year 1 and could be reviewed on an annual basis. The need for reporting on the implementation and success of scheme would need to be built into the system to monitor outputs.

5. Approved Contractors Scheme.

5.1 Council officers are often asked whether they can recommend tree contractors that may be able to satisfactorily carry out works to preserved trees. Currently, the Tree Officer supplies contact details based on professional experience, but no formal list of local tree contractors is available via the council's website.

5.2 Some other councils operate such lists as a means of encouraging responsible tree work in their areas and as a service both to residents who seek advice and to encourage contractors to apply appropriate standards. The Tree Officer would require that contractors wishing to register provide annual proof of public and employer's liability insurance, National Proficiency Test Council (NPTC) certificates for their chainsaw users, and examples of risk assessments. This will exclude tree contractors who do not fulfil professional requirements. The scheme should not expose the council to any legal liability, and should not be unduly onerous to operate since it merely a register that requires annual review and administration.

6.0 Conclusion.

6.1 The adoption of a tree strategy is commensurate with government policy and meets the government's requirement to adopt such strategies.

6.2 The strategy will underlie and provide better definition to certain aspects of the emerging local plan to 2032.

6.3 All aspects of modern urban forestry make strong connections to the council's corporate priorities.

6.4 The Strategy will set out a clear ambition and vision as to how the Council will view the importance of trees within the urban and rural environment

6.5 The Strategy will assist officers in securing high standards and quality of tree cover within development and set a high standards with respect to managing the existing tree stock of the Borough that is subject to tree preservation orders.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	This report requests that the committee indicates its support or otherwise for the preparation of a capital growth bid for the resources to deliver additional tree planting in the borough, to be considered as part of the 2019/20 budget preparation.
Legal	None directly applicable
Community Safety	None directly applicable
Human Rights and Equalities	The scheme relates directly to issues of broad environmental significance that would, benefit all sections of the community in equal measure.
Sustainability and Environmental Impact	The Strategy is aimed at having a positive impact of the character and appearance of this Borough.
Health & Safety and Risk Management	None directly relevant

LEAD AUTHOR	CONTACT DETAILS	DATE
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To Follow: -

Item 7 - Appendix 1 –Tree and Woodland Strategy for Fylde Borough