



CABINET – 22ND NOVEMBER 2019

TREE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the Cabinet's support for the draft Tree Management Strategy which sets out the approach for the management of the County Council's trees and woodlands and includes a tree management and planting programme.
2. The draft Strategy also aims to raise the profile, value and appreciation of trees in the County, to help manage the impact of Ash Dieback, and to meet the challenge of adapting to climate change over the ensuing decades.
3. The draft Tree Management Strategy and the associated Tree Management and Planting Plan are attached as Appendix A and Appendix B to this report respectively.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended
 - (a) That the draft Tree Management Strategy and Tree Management and Planting Plan be supported and referred to the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee for comment;
 - (b) That it be noted that a further report will be submitted to the Cabinet in March 2020 presenting the final Tree Management Strategy and Tree Management and Planting Plan for approval.

Reasons for Recommendation

5. The County Council has a legal duty to manage and maintain all trees on County Council-owned land, in parks and open spaces and on the public highway.
6. The draft Tree Management Strategy and associated Plan set out standards for the management of the tree resource under the stewardship of the County Council which comply with nationally recognised codes of practice and will mitigate the risk (e.g. of insurance claims) as well as helping to protect trees and woodlands as a valuable natural asset to Leicestershire.

7. It is intended to carry out some consultation with partner agencies and specialist groups (such as the National Forest Company and Woodland Trust) to inform the final Strategy and to seek feedback from the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

8. The Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive a report at its meeting on 16 January 2020.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

9. The County Council has developed a Strategic Plan and a “shared vision” across the Council that it wants people to experience in their daily lives and all other County Council plans and strategies seek to align with this vision. The Strategic Plan recognises the importance of the natural environment and the countryside which makes Leicestershire an attractive place to live and work. Leicestershire’s trees and woodland provide multiple benefits that improve the quality of life for citizens and communities.
10. The draft Strategy accords with the Council’s Environment Strategy and complements the Energy Strategy and Carbon Reduction Plan. The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and is committed to achieving carbon neutrality from its own operations by 2030.
11. Set within this context, the underlying principle of the “Tree Management Strategy” will be to use the Authority’s tree assets to improve the quality of life for the citizens and communities and support the Council in delivering its wider ecological and environmental strategic objectives.
12. In March 2011 the Cabinet agreed the current Tree Management Strategy.
13. In July 2018 the Cabinet agreed the Ash Dieback Action Plan, which was aligned with the above iteration of the Tree Management Strategy.

Resource Implications

14. There are no resources implications arising from the recommendations in this report. The proposed tree planting initiatives will be funded and financed that have been already allocated through the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to support the response to Ash Dieback and forestry programme.
15. Officers will seek match-fund specific initiatives and the members will be updated as appropriate.
16. Any future funding requirements that might emerge from the implementation of the Tree Management Strategy or the spread of Ash Dieback will require individual business cases to be developed and approved.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

17. A copy of this report will be circulated to all members.

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PART B

Background

18. The County Council is responsible for managing approximately 82,000 individual tree specimens and over 400 hectares of woodland on its land holdings. It has a legal duty to manage and maintain all trees on council-owned land, in its parks and open spaces, and all trees on the public highway.
19. The County Council receives approximately 10,000 enquiries each year regarding the tree management. Many of these relate to safety and nuisance issues (e.g. branches overhanging the highway) but also include requests for specialist advice and guidance from residents and landowners.
20. In 1994, the government published “Sustainable Development, the UK Strategy and Urban Tree Strategies”. Subsequently the former Department of the Environment along with the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister supported and encouraged the production of tree management strategies by local authorities.
21. The County Council produced its first Tree Management Strategy in 2008 and this was later revised in 2013. A further revision of the Strategy will refresh tree management practice and procedure in line with best practice and ever-changing legislation and to also align work with the Authority’s strategic priorities.

Ash Dieback

22. The challenges posed by the Ash Dieback disease now present within Leicestershire, are being addressed through the Council’s Ash Dieback Action Plan. Ash Dieback, sometimes known as “*Chalara*” is caused by a fungal pathogen and affects *Fraxinus Excelsior* (Ash) and other *Fraxinus* species and was first detected in Leicestershire in 2012.
23. Since the decline of Elm in the late 1970’s, Ash has become the most common native tree within the Leicestershire rural landscape and is common across farms, woodlands and along road corridors.
24. Once infected a high proportion of trees will die (the rate of decline varies according to the age, health and condition of the tree). There are over 500,000 Ash trees in Leicestershire, many of which are on adopted highway verges or adjacent to areas of public use. As the Highway Authority, the Council is responsible for maintaining the safety of all road users.

Operational Arrangements

25. The strategic management of the Council’s tree assets is the responsibility of the Forestry Team within the Corporate Resources Department.

26. Tree maintenance on open spaces and country parks is undertaken by an external contractor; this is an established working relationship and economically viable. However, the current contract expires in 2022 and officers are considering conducting market assessments to determine if the current operating model should continue or if there is an alternative viable delivery model.
27. Staff within the Operational Highways section in the Environment and Transport Department currently undertake the tree maintenance work on the highway network.

Revised Draft Strategy

28. The draft Strategy:
 - Recognises the value that trees provide in relation to meeting the Authority's carbon and environmental agendas.
 - Sets out standards that adhere to nationally recognised codes of practice.
 - Proposes how parks, open spaces, hedge rows and woodlands will be maintained so that trees continue to provide aesthetic, biodiversity, and natural capital value.
 - Recommends a risk management-based approach to mitigate against insurance claims arising from damage to property and or personal injury caused by trees.

Consultation

29. The draft the Tree Management Strategy has been circulated internally, including to Council departments that require tree management services, namely Environment and Transport, Insurance and Legal Services and feedback from this has informed the draft document.
30. The draft Tree Management Strategy and accompanying Plan will be referred for comment to a number of organisations which have particular expertise in this area of work such as the National Forest Company, the Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust.
31. The Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be asked for its comments on the draft Strategy at its meeting in January 2020.

Conclusion

32. Trees are part of what makes Leicestershire a great place to live. As well as their aesthetic value, they provide enormous ecological and environmental benefits and make a huge contribution to the health and wellbeing of residents. The Tree Management Strategy will enable the Council to preserve and develop its tree stock and to maximise the associated benefits.

33. The Strategy also defines clear standards for the Authority to manage its trees in accordance with relevant national guidelines.
34. The draft Strategy considers the key activities required to manage an extensive tree population effectively and aims to guide future planning and ensure that a consistent, high-quality approach is taken across the County.
35. Climate change, population growth and the increasing pressures on the land can put trees and woodlands at risk, as well as pests and diseases. A proactive approach is needed to tree management and to planting more trees across Leicestershire for current and future generations.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

36. There are no equality or human rights implications arising from the recommendations of this report. Any future change to the Council's policies, procedures, functions and services because of the strategy or associated action plans will be the subject of an Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment.

Risk Assessment

37. A key aspect of this Strategy is to minimise legal risk and to ensure that the County Council meets its statutory obligations in relation to the management of trees.

Background Papers

Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan 2018-2022

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2019/6/27/LCC-Strategic-Plan-2018-22.pdf>

Report to the Cabinet on 6 July 2018 "Ash Dieback" and minutes of that meeting

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=5412>

Tree Management Strategy (published 2011)

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=3122>

Appendices

Appendix A - Tree Management Strategy

Appendix B - Tree Management and Planting Plan 2019-2021