



**CABINET – 24 MARCH 2020**

**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 approval for the 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 Plan. The Tree Management Strategy and the Tree Management and Planting Plan are attached as Appendix A and Appendix B to this report respectively.

**Recommendations**

2. It is recommended that
  - (a) The comments of the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted;
  - (b) The Tree Management Strategy, and the associated Tree Management and Planting Plan, be approved, noting that these will be updated annually by the Director of Corporate Resources;
  - (c) The partnership with the National Forest Company to produce an overview document outlining a broader County-wide approach to tackling climate change and creating a sustainable place through more tree planting, be welcomed.

**Reasons for Recommendation**

3. The County Council has a legal duty to manage and maintain all trees on its land, in parks and open spaces and on the public highway.
4. The Tree Management Strategy, and associated Tree Management and Planting Plan, sets 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.

5. Tree planting can help mitigate the effect of climate change and a partnership approach across the County is considered the most effective way forward.

### **Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)**

6. The Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report at its meeting on 16 January and its comments are set out in Part B of this report.
7. It is intended that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive annual reports on progress with the Strategy and planting plan including to ensure that it continues to align with the broader Environment Strategy.

### **Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

8. The County Council's Strategic Plan recognises the importance of the natural environment and the countryside which makes Leicestershire an attractive place to live and work. The Tree Management Strategy establishes a clear vision for ensuring that Leicestershire's trees and woodland can provide multiple benefits that improve the quality of life for citizens and communities.
9. The Tree Management Strategy accords with the Council's Environment Strategy and complements the Energy Strategy and Carbon Reduction Plan. The County Council has declared a Climate Emergency and is committed to achieving carbon neutrality in its own operations by 2030.
10. Set within this context, the underlying principle of the "Tree Management Strategy" is 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.
11. In November 2019, the Cabinet approved the submission of the draft Tree Management Strategy to the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

### **Resource Implications**

12. There are no resources implications arising from the recommendations in this report. The tree planting initiatives will be funded via existing budgets and from the £400,000 per annum that has already allocated through the Medium-Term Financial Strategy to support the response to Ash Dieback and the forestry programme.
13. Any future funding requirements that might emerge from the implementation of the Tree Management Strategy or measures to respond to the spread of Ash Dieback will require individual business cases to be developed and approved by the Director of Corporate Resources or by members as appropriate.

**Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

14. A copy of this report will be circulated to all members of the County Council.

**Officers to Contact**

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## **PART B**

### **Background**

15. 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 and on the public highway.
16. Additionally, the County Council has a wider responsibility to provide leadership in tackling climate change and to mitigate against the social, economic and environmental problems that are exacerbated by it. It also has a broader strategic role to provide leadership as an exemplar and to influence the behaviours of private landowners, schools, communities and individuals to create a sustainable place, so that future generations to enjoy a great quality of life.
17. Increasingly, communities are beginning to experience the adverse effects of climate change. It is now a bigger problem than it has ever been. Trees have a vital role in the preservation of the environment and local ecology as they provide oxygen, store carbon and improve air quality. It is widely acknowledged that woods, trees and hedgerows can have a key role in enabling natural flood management, and strategic planting can have a positive impact in preventing and alleviating floods. A more strategic response is also required, and this is most effectively delivered in partnership.

The Tree Management Strategy will

- Provide a framework to establish a healthy, balanced and sustainable tree population capable of withstanding predicted climatic changes and the impact of diseases such as ash dieback.
- Reduce the risk to the public from potentially hazardous trees.
- Specify the Authority's policy on levels and standards of tree management.
- Ensure the most efficient use of resources.
- Increase public awareness of the value of trees in the environment.

Proposed Governance

18. The Tree Management Strategy provides a framework within which the County Council can discharge its obligations to safeguard the trees under its stewardship. Adhering to the guidance contained within the Strategy will enable Officers and Members to meet the Council's legal obligations and to provide leadership in tackling climate change. The Strategy covers the period from 2020 to 2025 and will be reviewed annually

**Comments of the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

19. The Environment and Transportation Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the draft Tree Management Strategy and the Tree Management and Planting Plan on 16 January 2020.
20. Members raised the following:
  - a. That whilst the planting of native species would help address their loss, some consideration should be given to planting continental species that might be better suited to hotter, drier summers. The Director said this would be explored but explained that the Tree Management Strategy also needed to be considered in the context of biodiversity. By keeping native species as the basis for planting, the woodland ecosystem would be supported and help ensure the survival of native animals, plants and insects.
  - b. That the County Council should engage with nurseries to ensure that they were sourcing seeds with the correct provenance. It was confirmed that this was being done and that the Council would ensure that its own tree stock was strengthened. Consideration would also be given to establishing the Council's own nursery to fulfil future demand.
  - c. A request that the Council would use broadleaved trees where possible. Officers confirmed that this would be a key part of future planting plans as there were many benefits associated with the use of broadleaved trees, including higher establishment rates and more resilience to pests and diseases because of their greater genetic diversity.
  - d. There should be a greater emphasis on tree planting and work with the National Forest Company to investigate the feasibility of expansion of the National Forest boundaries. Both of these requests are being progressed.
  - e. A request that the Strategy has a greater emphasis on carbon capture; officers within the Environment Team have been consulted and the Strategy has been revised accordingly to include the section on climate change added at page 25 of the strategy.
  - f. Members welcomed proposals to support communities with tree planting such as the residents of Thrussington, who had raised £1000 to treeline the entrances to the village.

### **Changes to the draft Strategy**

21. In summary, following consultation with Elected Members and external and internal stakeholders the draft Strategy has been amended to include additional information on carbon capture and climate change. The Strategy and future tree planting will provide a greater diversity of tree species and will align more closely to the wider elements of the Environment Strategy.

### **Partnership working with the National Forest Company**

22. The Tree Management Strategy provides a framework for future work and the governance for this, but the detail will change over time with ongoing work to be carried out in partnership with other organisations and the extension of this beyond the Authority's own estate and across the whole County landscape.
23. Building on previous work with the NFC and noting the comments of the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee, officers met with the Chief Executive and other colleagues from the National Forest Company in February.
24. It was agreed that a further joint document will be produced to forge a partnership that will align the common strategic priorities of both organisations around the promotion of health, preserving the environment and safeguarding the local economy.

### **Conclusion**

25. 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 our health and wellbeing of residents. Through clearly defined guidelines, the Tree Management Strategy will enable the County Council to preserve and develop its tree stock and to maximise the associated benefits.
26. However, changes in the global environment of enormous proportions are faced. Both the County and Country are confronted by a climate emergency. These broader external challenges provide the County Council with an opportunity to demonstrate leadership across the place by progressing tree to complement other strands of the Environment Strategy.
27. The need to address climate change will require, swift action, radical changes and a strategic approach that is delivered within a partnership framework. Leicestershire is fortunate to be part of the National Forest. It makes sense for officers to work closely with the National Forest Company to further develop their twenty-five-year vision, which closely aligns with addressing the climate emergency declared by the Authority and the County Council's aspirations to reduce carbon.
28. Following further partnership working, it is planned that the County Council will be able to: carry out the detail of existing plans, including the tree planting at

Scamhazel Farm, identify further opportunities and provide additional plans for the improved management of the public realm.

### **Equality and Human Rights Implications**

29. There are no equality or human rights implications arising from the recommendations of this report. Although the paper acknowledges that 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**

30. 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**

Environment Strategy 2018 – 2030

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2018/7/19/LCC-Environment-Strategy-2018-2030-June-18.pdf>

Report to Cabinet 22 November 2019

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=5608&Ver=4>

Report to Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee 16 January 2020 and minutes of that meeting

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1044&MId=6200&Ver=4>

### **Appendices**

Appendix A, Tree Management Strategy.

Appendix B, Tree Management & Planting Plan.

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