



CABINET – 19 NOVEMBER 2021

TREE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND TREE CHARTER

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Cabinet with progress on work taking place under the framework of the Tree Management Strategy which sets out the approach for the management of the County Council's trees and woodlands. The associated Tree Management and Planting Plan sets out the action to be taken to deliver the Strategy and has been updated to ensure that the Council's pledge of "a tree for every resident" can be delivered
2. The Council has been working in partnership with the National Forest to produce a Tree Charter for the County. Endorsement is sought for the Charter which is an overview document outlining a broader County-wide approach to tackling climate change and creating a sustainable place through more tree planting.
3. The latest iteration of the Tree Management and Planting Plan and the Tree Charter are attached as Appendices A and B to this report respectively.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that
 - (a) The latest iteration of the Tree Management and Planting Plan be noted;
 - (b) It be noted that the County Council has become a signatory to the Tree Charter for Leicestershire.

Reasons for Recommendation

5. The Tree Management Strategy and associated Tree Management and Planting 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 help to protect trees and woodlands as a valuable natural asset to Leicestershire and mitigate risk.

6. The updated Tree Management and Planting Plan has been produced to ensure delivery of 'one tree for every resident', the equivalent of 700,000 trees within an approximate timescale of 10 years.
7. Tree planting can help mitigate the effect of climate change and a partnership approach across the County is considered the most effective way forward.
8. The Tree Charter is a statement of intent which calls for partnership working across Leicestershire.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

9. The Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on the Tree Management Strategy at its meeting on 9 November and its comments will be reported to the Cabinet. It is intended that the Environment and Climate Change 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

10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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.
13. In March 2020, the Cabinet approved the Tree Management Strategy and associated Tree Management Action Plan.

Resource Implications

14. There are no resources implications arising from the recommendations in this report. The tree planting initiatives will be funded via external grant applications, existing budgets and from the £400,000 per annum that has already allocated through the MTFs to support the response to Ash Dieback and the forestry programme.

15. 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 the Cabinet as appropriate.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

16. This report will be circulated to all members of the County Council.

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PART B

Background

17. 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.
18. 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.
19. 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.
20. The Tree Management Strategy ensures that the Council:
 - Provides 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.
 - Reduces the risk to the public from potentially hazardous trees.
 - Specifies the Authority's policy on levels and standards of tree management.
 - Ensures the most efficient use of resources.
 - Increases public awareness of the value of trees in the environment.
21. 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 is reviewed annually by the Director of Corporate Resources.

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 one of the most common native trees within the Leicestershire rural landscape and is common across farms, woodlands and along road corridors.
24. There are over 500,000 Ash trees in Leicestershire, many of which are on adopted highways verges or adjacent to areas of public use. As the Highway Authority, the Council is responsible for maintaining the safety of road users.
25. Once infected a high proportion of trees will die (the rate of decline varies according to the age, health and condition of the tree).
26. The effects of Ash Dieback will have a significant effect on the biodiversity and landscape of the County and the proposed tree planting initiatives outlined in the Tree Management and Planting Action Plan will assist with mitigating this loss.
27. Through the Ash Dieback Board, the Council is undertaking a programme of ongoing inspections of its highway trees to monitor progress of the disease and identify works as required.

Tree Planting Pledge

28. The Council has undertaken a project to get 700,000 trees planted across the County; the equivalent of one for every resident of Leicestershire. To achieve this ambitious pledge, the Tree Planting Action Plan has been updated to identify a number delivery over a 10-year period.
29. Delivery of the pledge will be achieved by two key threads of 'Partnership Working' and 'Leading by Example'.
30. As a major landowner in Leicestershire, the Council will identify areas of its own landholdings where trees, woodlands and hedgerows can be planted to increased overall tree coverage. The County Council will also develop new approaches to securing significant numbers of tree stock to ensure continued supply for planting schemes.
31. The County Council will collaborate with a range of different organisations and partners such as the Woodland Trust and National Forest to facilitate and deliver the planting of 700,000 new trees in Leicestershire. It will take a lead in identifying funding, encourage collaborate working towards tree planting targets and develop mechanisms to capture and monitor tree planting across the County.
32. Through the new Tree Charter, the Council will work with partners such as District and Parish Councils to deliver campaigns which will engage residents and other partners by raising awareness about the benefits of trees and encouraging tree planting.

33. A Tree Planting Project Board has been set up to manage the pledge and to provide oversight and assurance of the project and delivery to agreed timescales. The Board is chaired by the Assistant Director for Corporate Services and consists of officer representatives from different areas of work across the Council. The varied membership will provide expertise in their own specialist area use their experience and knowledge and offer views on managing risks and issues, make the project team aware of wider opportunities.
34. External funding has been sought to assist with key tree planting projects throughout the County. An application to the Forestry Commission Local Authority Treescape Fund on behalf of a partnership of District and Parish Councils has been successful. The bid will provide £227,000 over four years to plant and maintain new trees. Further grant funding bids will follow as opportunities arise.

Tree Charter

35. 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.
36. Building on previous work with the National Forest Company, the Tree Charter for Leicestershire is a joint document that has been 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.
37. The Charter calls for collective vision and partnership working across Leicestershire to enhance the treescape. The Charter identifies three key drivers for action: to support a secure and safe future, to enhance the wellbeing of communities and to facilitate sustainable enterprise.

Woodland Management across Country Parks

38. All of the Council's country park sites have woodland to a greater or lesser degree. Management of woodland has historically taken various forms;
 - Ad hoc management of woodland based upon health and safety, tree health concerns or invasive non-native species control
 - Tree planting schemes as a result of National Forest tender schemes on reclaimed sites in the National Forest
 - National Forest grant scheme funded programmes to manage woodland first thinning's, predominantly on the Council's Heart of the Forest sites.
39. From 2022 the Council will be implementing a new Woodland Management Plan which has been agreed with the Forestry Commission for the sustainable management of 338ha of woodland across the County Parks estate.

40. To assist with financing the plan the Council has applied for a Countryside Stewardship Woodland Improvement grant to fund management activities over a five-year period. The total value of the grant would be circa £110,000 over 5 years, plus £3,000 in capital works.
41. The Management Plan recognises the multi-purpose use of woodlands within the wider context of County Parks and sets out management operations for the woodlands to be sustainably productive and to manage the woodland with enhanced benefits to wildlife, amenity, public access, and wider landscape considerations. Management recommendations also reflect potential future implications to woodlands to ensure that they are as resilient as possible to future changes and threats from climate change and pests and disease.

Conclusion

42. 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.
43. The agreed Tree Management Strategy and associated Tree Management and Planting Plan will enable the County Council to preserve, develop and increase its tree stock and maximise the associated natural capital benefits. The updated targets within the plan address the step change required to meet the Conservative Manifesto pledge for the planting 700,000 trees across the County.
44. Leicestershire is fortunate to be part of the National Forest. The Tree Charter recognises the benefits of working closely with the National Forest Company and will ensure that the Council provides leadership across the County to deliver and encourage an increase in appropriate tree planting and tree management.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

45. 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

46. 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 the Cabinet 24 March 2020 - "Tree Management Strategy"

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s152061/Tree%20Management%20Strategy%20report.pdf>

Appendices

Appendix A - Tree Management and Planting Plan.

Appendix B - Draft Tree Charter