



**ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 10 NOVEMBER 2022**

TREE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on 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 over a 10-year period.
2. The Committee is asked to note this report and make any comment on the issues covered.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

3. 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 woodlands can provide multiple benefits that improve the quality of life for citizens and communities.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. In March 2020, the Cabinet approved the Tree Management Strategy and Tree Management and Planting Action Plan. In November 2021, the Cabinet received an update on progress with work taking place under the framework of the Tree Management Strategy, in particular the updated Tree Management and Planting Plan and the Tree Charter.

Background

7. The County Council is responsible for managing approximately 321,000 trees comprising of individual specimens, tree groups and woodlands. This includes 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.
8. The County Council also has a duty under the Highways Act to ensure that an estimated population of 420,000 privately owned trees adjacent to the highway, do not pose a danger to its users
9. The County Council receives approximately 1,200 enquiries each year regarding 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.
10. 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 enjoy a great quality of life.
11. 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 - 2025 and is reviewed annually by the Director of Corporate Resources.
12. The strategic aims of the Tree Management Strategy are to:
 - Conserve and enhance the tree resource in terms of quality and numbers
 - Promote public safety through appropriately resourced tree inspection and maintenance programmes
 - Fulfil the council's legal obligations as a tree owner by addressing safety and major nuisance issues effectively
 - Inform customers of our legal obligations relating to trees and manage enquiries and expectations appropriately
 - Establish sustainable management programmes for council woodland utilising external funding from central government agencies
 - Promote and increase the current level of tree planting on public and private land to address the recent decline of individual trees and mitigate the potential effects of ash dieback and other potentially harmful diseases
13. The Tree Management and Planting Plan is an addendum to the Council's Tree Management Strategy which focuses on the policies identified in the Strategy to achieve

the stated strategic aims and objectives. It identifies key actions and the timescale required for the County Council to manage and enhance tree and woodland assets under its stewardship.

Operational Arrangements

14. The strategic management of the Council's tree assets is the responsibility of the Forestry Team within the Corporate Resources Department. All tree assets are logged on the Council's specialist tree management software Ezytreev.
15. Tree maintenance in open spaces and country parks is undertaken by an external contractor; this contract was procured in 2021 and provides access to the required levels of expertise to ensure appropriate works are commissioned.
16. Staff within the Operational Highways section in the Environment and Transport Department currently undertake the tree maintenance work on the highway network.
17. Trees within the highway are currently inspected on a three-year cycle with an average target of 16,561 trees and tree groups to be visited each year (one third of the overall highway resource). For the full financial year of 2021/22, the Forestry Group exceeded this target and inspected 19,341 trees and tree groups as part of its day-to-day inspection of highway tree assets.

Tree Planting Pledge

18. The Council made a pledge for an 'ambitious project to plant 700,000 trees', which is the equivalent of one for every resident of Leicestershire. To achieve this pledge, the Tree Management and Planting Action Plan was updated in 2021 to ensure delivery of the pledge over a 10-year period.
19. As a major landowner in Leicestershire, the Council has identified areas of its own landholdings where trees, woodlands and hedgerows can be planted to increase overall tree coverage.
20. Collaboration is key to the pledge and the County Council is working in partnership with a range of different organisations such as the Woodland Trust and National Forest to facilitate and deliver the planting of 700,000 new trees in Leicestershire.
21. A key delivery function of the pledge will be the development of a new tree nursery by the Council to secure suitable native tree stock and ensure a continued supply of trees for planting schemes delivered both by ourselves and partners throughout the County.
22. £100,000 per annum has been secured for the next four years towards the nursery project within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Phase 1 of the project is in progress to develop the site vision, finalise legal agreements and set up proof of concept.
23. A new microsite has been created on the Council's webpage at <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/trees> to champion trees and encourage residents to log tree planting in their communities. This will enable tree planting across the County to be more effectively captured and monitored and a clear view on progress towards the pledge provided. The new website also brings together guidance on tree care, information on tree wardens and news channels.

24. The Leicestershire Tree Charter was Launched in November 2021 in conjunction with the National Forest. The Charter calls for collective vision and partnership working across Leicestershire to enhance the treescape and identifies three key drivers for action: to support a secure and safe future, to enhance the wellbeing of communities and to facilitate sustainable enterprise.
25. Through the Tree Charter, the Council is working 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.
26. Funding for County Council-led tree planting projects is provided through the Council's Ash Dieback Board, in particular, for the supply of free tree packs, hedge packs and the MOREwoods project in partnership with the Woodland Trust.
27. To achieve the overall pledge target of 700,000, the Council set a target of 70,000 trees planted per annum over a 10-year period. To date 104,275 trees have been logged on the Council Council's tree planting map and database and therefore 15% of the target has been delivered. Further data on sites which are known to have been planted in the 2021/22 season and which will increase the total accumulated number further is awaited from the National Forest.
28. The Council has also sought external funding to assist with key tree planting projects throughout the County. Applications to the Forestry Commission Local Authority Treescape Fund and Urban Tree Challenge Fund on behalf of a partnership of District and Parish Councils have been successful and provide £250,000 over four years to plant and maintain new trees. The Forestry Commission has also confirmed a grant to the Council of £150,000 to fund project officers to coordinate and encourage new tree planting throughout Leicestershire over two years starting from April 2023.

Ash Dieback

29. 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.
30. 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 all road users.
31. Once infected, a high proportion of trees will die (the rate of decline varies according to the age, health and condition of the tree).
32. 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.
33. Through the Ash Dieback Board, the Council is undertaking a programme of ongoing inspections of its highway trees prioritised by the road classification to monitor progress of the disease and identify works as required. The Council is also contacting landowners where ash trees have been noted as declining to inform them of their legal

duties. To aid this work a new leaflet for landowners and ash dieback has been developed.

Resource Implications

34. There are no resource implications arising from this report. Tree planting initiatives are fully funded through external grants which have been sourced and also finances have been allocated through the MTFS to support the Ash Dieback and the forestry programme.
35. 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.

Conclusions

36. The Council's trees and woodland make a valuable contribution to what makes Leicestershire a great place to live. As well as their aesthetic value, they provide enormous ecological and environmental benefits and meaningful contribution to the health and wellbeing of residents.
37. The Tree Management Strategy enables the County Council to preserve, develop and increase its tree stock and maximise the associated natural capital benefits. The updated tree planting targets within the Tree Management Strategy address the step change required to meet the Council's pledge for the planting 700,000 trees across the County.
38. The current work towards the tree planting pledge and success for securing external grants will ensure that tree planting is accelerated across the County as part of the 'tree for every resident' pledge and as part of the recovery for Ash Dieback.
39. The cyclic inspection of Council-owned trees on the highway is being effectively monitored and any work required is undertaken in accordance with the Tree Management Strategy. Overall, the Council is managing trees within its custodianship in an appropriate and effective way to balance the risk to the public whilst maintaining a sustainable tree population capable of withstanding predicted climatic changes and the impact of diseases such as Ash Dieback.

Background papers

Tree Management Strategy 2020-2025

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2021/2/16/Tree-Management-Strategy-2020-2025.pdf>

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>

Ash Dieback Action Plan

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2019/6/4/Ash-Dieback-Action-Plan.pdf>

Report to the Cabinet on 19 November 2021 – Tree Management Strategy and Tree Charter

<https://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s164695/Tree%20Management%20Strategy%20final.pdf>

Presentation to the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 9 November 2011 - Tree Management Strategy

<https://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s164544/OSC%20slides%20Tree%20Strategy%20November%202021v3.pdf>

Leicestershire Tree Charter

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2021/11/30/Leicestershire-tree-charter.pdf>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

40. None.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

41. There are no equality or human rights implications arising from this report. Although 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.

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