



**ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE - 2 MARCH 2023**

**VALUE OF TREES ON THE HIGHWAY TOOLKIT**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT**

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the views of the Committee on:
  - i. The Value of Trees (VoT) on the Highway Toolkit.
  - ii. The proposal to consider how the toolkit can be integrated into the future Leicestershire Highway Design Guide (LHDG), which is currently under review, to facilitate future tree planting within the highway.
  - iii. The proposal for the Council to work in partnership with the National Forest Company to develop a Tree Charter action plan that encourages take up of the toolkit by third parties.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The Council's Strategic Plan (adopted in March 2022) outlines the five key outcomes for 2022 to 2026. As a toolkit that provides guidance to ensure that trees thrive within and adjacent to the highway and has the potential to influence the design of future highway development, VoT helps to support these outcomes, and particularly that of a "Clean and Green" Leicestershire.
3. On 15 May 2019, the County Council declared a Climate Emergency, with a commitment to achieve carbon net zero by 2030 for its own emissions and 2045 for Leicestershire emissions. The application of the VoT toolkit would enable trees along the highway to thrive, thereby maximising their carbon storage potential and contributing to the aims of the Net Zero Leicestershire Strategy and Action Plan.
4. In addition to supporting the Council's Tree Management Strategy and Tree Charter, the toolkit can help ensure the design and delivery of high-quality planting schemes as part of the vision to plant 700,000 trees across Leicestershire.
5. The Council's Environment Strategy sets out how it will reduce the environmental impacts of travel and transport. VoT would help to deliver key aims of the Strategy including those relating to enhancement of biodiversity and adapting to climate change.

**Background**

6. The invaluable contribution of trees to communities and wildlife is well documented but there are also significant challenges in ensuring their continued presence and resilience along our highway network. Trees are suffering from an increased prevalence of pests and diseases such as ash dieback and the impacts of climate change, and there are additional concerns over highway safety and the question of responsibility for carrying out and paying for their future maintenance.
7. Following an approach from the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT), the Council agreed to undertake the work to develop an approach that would help local authorities to re-establish trees as a prominent feature along the highway network. With funding available from Rees Jeffreys Road Fund, the Council engaged specialist consultants from Treeconomics to develop a bespoke toolkit for Leicestershire that could be adapted for use nationally.
8. Using the species selection tool and valuation matrix, the toolkit monetises the value of trees to communities in terms of the ecosystem services they provide (carbon storage and sequestration, reduced air pollution and flooding). It also provides a method of calculating the lifetime cost of planting and maintaining trees within the highway, alongside guidance on best practice around tree species selection and planting specification.
9. The outputs can be used by third parties and the Council's own internal services during the design of tree planting schemes that form part of new development. The information can be used to provide a robust case for investing in the planting and maintenance of trees in communities.
10. There are considerable benefits to be gained from the application of the VoT approach, including:
  - i. **The right tree in the right place** - Trees that are resilient and appropriate for a variety of locations. The assessment and consideration of the impacts on adjacent infrastructure (damage to highway and nearby buildings by tree roots) will be undertaken on a site-by-site basis, using best practice as set out in the report.
  - ii. **A blueprint for tree planting and management.** Consistent and convincing guidance for future third party development and in-house design that also considers local variation.
  - iii. **A sound understanding of the costs and benefits of trees** - A tool to help engage with a wider audience and a solid foundation from which to obtain funding for tree procurement and management and make a financial case for trees in communities.
  - iv. **Reflecting current policy and guidance** – including changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and the National Design Code, which expect that local policies and plans reflect an aspiration for places to be “beautiful, healthy, greener, enduring and successful” and that new streets should be tree-lined.
  - v. **Green infrastructure (ecosystem services)** – In addition to their attractiveness in the landscape, trees can deliver multiple benefits as a part of

green infrastructure including the carbon sequestration and storage, reduced flooding and providing habitat for wildlife. They can also provide health benefits by cooling urban areas, improving mental health and wellbeing and reducing fine particulate matter air pollution.

11. Officer concerns have been raised regarding the standard of some of the tree planting undertaken by third parties within new highway that is subsequently adopted for maintenance by the Council. Ensuring early engagement with developers, the selection of good quality and appropriate tree stock, and a high quality of planting design and delivery will help minimise the future maintenance burden.
12. It is proposed that the integration of the VoT approach is considered as part of the LHDG refresh to ensure that the appropriate tree species are planted at chosen locations and that schemes are designed and delivered to a high standard. The potential opportunities are:
  - i. Encouraging the use of the species selection and valuation matrices to ensure the right tree for the development location.
  - ii. The integration of the VoT best practice into the LHDG.
  - iii. Using the toolkit as part of the calculation of future commuted sums.
13. The project has identified the need to broaden the scope of the Council's Tree Charter, developed in partnership with the National Forest Company, to include an action plan which would include the VoT approach.
14. The project is now in the process of piloting the toolkit on the ground. The intention is to apply the toolkit to an active externally led development site within the County. This will require discussions with both the appropriate developer and planning authority. There is an additional opportunity to apply the toolkit to highway planting schemes under development by the Council's Forestry team.
15. The report and related species matrix and ecosystem services valuation spreadsheet are available on the Council's and ADEPT's websites, and any feedback received will be assessed.
16. ADEPT is keen to publicise the toolkit nationally with the hope that it will be adopted by other authorities and organisations.
17. To ensure that a holistic view is taken of the natural environment, links into the developing Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) are being explored. The production of an LNRS is a new statutory duty established by the Environment Bill. This duty will require higher tier authorities to develop spatial strategies that will establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits.
18. The development of a software package that incorporates the VoT matrix and spreadsheets into a user-friendly format for third parties is also being considered.

## **Consultation**

19. A series of consultation exercises were undertaken to gain views on key issues from internal and external stakeholders including Council ecology, forestry and economic growth teams, developers, environmental organisations and local planning authorities. This work has helped the team to understand some of the potential opportunities and problems in delivery of the approach and where gaps in information exist.
20. This engagement work will continue over the coming year, and it is proposed to engage with local groups such as Tree Wardens to help future delivery on the ground.

### **Resource Implications**

21. The consultant fees to develop the toolkit and associated report were funded by the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund, which supports research, education and roadside improvement projects that promote advances in road related UK transport policy, design, management and practice.
22. The application of the VoT approach can help to positively manage the financial implications of adopting trees within the highway by ensuring best practice is followed during the design phase of a scheme and that they are maintained using best practice, particularly during the key early years following planting. Equally, through the use of the valuation matrix, the toolkit can help decision making in terms of an investment in trees and an understanding of the monetary value of the ecosystem services they provide for communities.
23. Staff time is required to assess and further develop the toolkit. This work will be undertaken within the Environment Policy and Strategy Team and LCC Forestry Team, with project management support provided by Transport Strategy and Policy. Work to integrate VoT into the LHDG will require input from various highways teams from across the Department.
24. The development of a software package is under consideration. It is not anticipated that this work could be undertaken in-house and two options are currently being explored:
  - i. Working in partnership with an appropriately resourced academic institution; and
  - ii. Engaging a specialist consultant.
25. A funding stream for engagement of a consultant has not yet been identified and further work to understand the potential cost is required. Discussions are taking place with ADEPT about the potential for corporate sponsorship of the development work. The corporate Commercial Team have been involved in the initial discussions.
26. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance were consulted on the content of the report.

### **Next Steps in developing VoT**

Action	When
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Software package – agree approach and initial investigation, development and costing Pilot planting scheme development Research and links to Council corporate priorities	September 2022 to May 2023
Tree Charter engagement and development	September 2022 to August 2023
Pilot scheme delivery	Autumn / Winter 2023
Pilot and toolkit analysis	Winter 2023/24
Software development (subject to approval)	Spring / Winter 2024

27. Following the further development and pilot work it is proposed to bring an update report to the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee in early 2024. This will be an opportunity to present the findings of the pilot, the development of the Tree Charter work and any proposals to modify the toolkit.

### **Background papers**

Tree Charter and the Tree Management Strategy webpage

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/conservation-and-sustainability/tree-for-every-person/tree-charter-and-our-tree-management-strategy>

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

None

### **Equality Implications**

28. An Equality Impact Assessment is not needed as there are no equality implications arising from the recommendations in this report. If adopted, the VoT toolkit is not a change in policy or service but an alternative delivery mechanism, developed to improve current services.

### **Human Rights Implications**

29. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report. If adopted, the VoT toolkit is not a change in policy or service but an alternative delivery mechanism, developed to improve current services.

### **Officers to Contact**

Ann Carruthers  
Director, Environment and Transport  
Tel: 0116 305 7000  
Email: [Ann.Carruthers@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Ann.Carruthers@leics.gov.uk)

Joanna Guyll  
Assistant Director, Environment & Waste Management  
Tel: 0116 305 8101

Email: [Joanna.Guyll@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Joanna.Guyll@leics.gov.uk)

Janna Walker

Assistant Director, Development and Growth

Tel: 0116 305 7215

Email: [Janna.Walker@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Janna.Walker@leics.gov.uk)