



**ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE: 11 NOVEMBER 2024**

**TREE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY ANNUAL UPDATE**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES**

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an annual update to the Committee on the ongoing 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.
2. The Committee is asked to note the update provided 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 in. 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 local communities. The Tree Management Strategy also accords with the Council's Environment Strategy and Net Zero Leicestershire Action Plan 2023-2027 and complements the Energy Strategy and Carbon Reduction Plan.
4. The Tree Management Strategy was approved by Cabinet in March 2020 and runs from 2020 to 2025.

**Background**

5. The County Council is responsible for managing an estimated 321,000 trees comprising of individual specimens, tree groups and woodlands. This includes over 400 hectares of woodland on its land holdings with approximately 37% of trees on country parks, 35% of trees on highways, 12% of trees on county farms, 10% of trees on schools and 6% of trees located across other properties.
6. The County Council has a statutory responsibility to ensure tree safety under the Occupiers' Liability Acts, Health and Safety at Work Act and Highways Act. The responsibility requires the County Council to carry out an inspection programme undertaking works as appropriate to control the risk of injury to council staff, visitors to council premises, or users of the council's adopted public highway.

7. The County Council also has a duty under the Highways Act to ensure that an estimated population of over 420,000 privately owned trees adjacent to the highway, do not pose a danger to its users.

### **Review of 2023/24**

8. The strategic management of the Council's tree assets is the responsibility of the Forestry Team within the Corporate Resources Department. The Forestry team employs a number of specialist arboriculturists to ensure trees across the Council's estate are inspected and managed appropriately.
9. The Forestry team continue to work across Council departments to feed into key policy documents to shape and manage the Council's tree stock. Work over the last year has concentrated on revisions of the Highways Design Guide and the Value of Trees project.
10. The Forestry Team continues to deliver a traded service to district, parish and town councils, schools and Academy Trusts providing expert tree advice and tree inspection services. Over 200 individual schools are now signed up to the Council's school tree management package to ensure that trees are maintained in a safe condition and managed appropriately. The team also continues to provide regular planning advice to Blaby, Melton, and Harborough District Councils.
11. The Council receives a high volume of enquiries each year relating to trees. Between September 2023 and October 2024, the County Council received and responded to 1,059 enquiries relating to trees and tree management. Many of the enquiries related to safety concerns and nuisance issues (e.g. branches overhanging the highway) but also included requests from residents and landowners for specialist advice and guidance.
12. Trees within the adopted highway are currently inspected on a three-year cycle with an average target of 16,588 trees and tree groups to be visited each year. The Forestry Team is currently exceeding this target having inspected 17,218 trees and tree groups for the report period as part of its day-to-day inspection of highway tree assets.
13. Since 2021 the Council's target to plant 700,000 trees, the equivalent of one for every resident of Leicestershire, has been led by the Forestry Team working in partnership with a range of different organisations such as the Woodland Trust and National Forest to facilitate and deliver the planting of new trees in Leicestershire. To date 437,220 trees have been logged on the Council's dedicated tree for every person webpage.
14. Despite the current success with tree planting, it is recognised that more emphasis on planting outside of the National Forest and concentrating on areas of lower canopy cover such as Melton and Harborough will increase the wider benefits of trees to residents across the county.
15. Applications to the Forestry Commission Local Authority Treescape Fund, Urban Tree Challenge Fund and DEFRA Coronation Living Heritage Fund have been made by the County Council on behalf of a wider partnership involving district and

parish councils and which will provide capital and revenue funding over four years to plant and maintain new trees. The most recent grant application to the Forestry Commission will provide £445,000 of funding towards tree planting and maintenance this season. It will also fund the installation of five new 'tiny forests' within public parks in Loughborough, Mountsorrel, Melton and two schemes in Harborough.

16. Funding for County Council-led tree planting projects has continued to be 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. Last year, in partnership with the Woodland Trust 46,225 trees and 26,875 hedge plants were planted on a range of sites across the county.
17. The MOREwoods scheme created 4.4 ha of new woodlands on farmland at Huncote, Hallaton, Tilton, Barwell, Melton, Seagrave and Asfordby. This year the scheme is aiming for 10ha of new woodland to be created across the county.
18. The new community orchard scheme was launched in 2023 to enable the creation of new orchards with community groups, schools, and other publicly accessible sites. The project has been awarded £28,000 from Defra's Coronation Living Heritage Fund toward a two-year project which will fund approximately 300 new trees per year. Last year over 30 orchards received new trees, and it is expected that another 30 orchard schemes will be delivered this coming winter. Key projects which were planted last year include Market Bosworth Country Park, Forest East Park in Leicester Forest East, Heather Primary School, and Braunstone Town Council.
19. A number of County Council-owned farm sites have been reviewed to identify possible areas for enhancing biodiversity, particularly new tree planting and woodland creation to enlarge and link existing habitats. Two larger scale sites are planned for planting next year with funding from the Forestry Commission England Woodland Creation Offer.
20. The new tree nursery has been developed by the County Council, in partnership with the National Forest, to secure suitable native tree stock and ensure a continued supply of trees for planting schemes delivered both by the County Council and partners throughout the county. The site has been prepared and new polytunnels erected ready for growing to begin this planting season.
21. The nursery will grow trees for a range of Council tree planting projects and supply the Council's free tree stock to replace trees lost in the rural landscape.
22. The challenges posed by the ash dieback disease present within Leicestershire are being addressed through the Council's Ash Dieback Action Plan. Ash dieback is caused by a fungal pathogen and affects ash and other *Fraxinus* species. The effects of the disease will have a significant effect on the biodiversity and landscape of the county.
23. There are over 500,000 ash trees in Leicestershire, with are an estimated 130,000 ash within or adjacent to the highway network and 14,000 trees and groups (32,000+ individual trees) on adopted highway. As the Highway Authority, the Council is responsible for maintaining the safety of all road users. Monitoring of ash

dieback is undertaken throughout the summer period by the Forestry Team to identify trends and provide a specific work programme for highway trees. The trend between 2017 and 2024 suggests that ash die back has now fully established in the County and the rate of spread has slowed down.

24. A dedicated ash dieback works contract was awarded in November 2023 to a specialist forestry company to enable the County Council to plan and undertake large scale mechanised tree works on the highway network. Work has started this year on key stretches of the A511, removing infected ash and thinning remaining plantations. A programme of replanting areas of ash trees removed with mixed native broadleaves also forms part of the works package to ensure trees and woodland continue to thrive. Works will continue around the county concentrating on the strategic road hierarchy.
25. The County Council has produced a protocol for dealing with ash dieback within private land adjacent to the Highway. Tree inspectors within the Forestry Group identify ash trees which may pose a concern. A system of informal letters of notification have been produced to send to tree owners to inform them of ash dieback and potential risks. The letters are the first stage of notification and used to avoid, where possible, resorting to a formal s154 notice of enforcement, which is reserved for trees which pose a credible risk to the highway.
26. As part of the 2022, 2023 and 2024 surveys a program of inspections was carried out along locally interconnecting roads within Melton and Harborough districts. Over 23,000 third party-owned ash within falling distance of the highway have been identified within the surveys and 600 letters of informal notification issued to date.

### **Looking forwards to 2024/25**

27. The Tree Management Strategy provides a framework within which the County Council can discharge its obligations to safeguard the trees under its stewardship. The Strategy covers the period from 2020 - 2025 and officers are to start working on a revision of the document to bring the Strategy up to date. A draft of the revised document will be brought to the Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee for comment as part of the process.
28. Works will continue to develop the tree Nursery to ensure that tree production increases yearly to meet the demands of trees required for new planting schemes to combat climate change and mitigate for tree lost to ash dieback.

### **Resource Implications**

29. 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 delivery of the Ash Dieback Action Plan and the forestry programme.
30. 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**

31. Members are asked to note the report and to make any comments on the report or the management of trees by the Council and the continued work to increase tree planting across the County to combat climate change and mitigate for trees lost to 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>

Leicestershire Tree Charter

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

Report to Environment and Climate Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
November 2023 <https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1292&MId=7151&Ver=4>

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

32. None.

## **Equality Implications**

33. There are no equality 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 Impact Assessment as appropriate.

## **Human Rights Implications**

34. There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

## **Officers to Contact**

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