

REPORT TITLE: DRAFT TREE STRATEGY

2 MARCH 2022

REPORT OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER: Cllr Hannah Williams, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

The Policy Committee at the meeting in January 2022 agreed that the council's draft Tree Strategy should be brought to the Committee in March 2022 for consideration.

This paper introduces the Winchester City Council Tree Strategy (draft) which will be taken to Cabinet in summer 2022 for approval and asks members to provide comment.

The Tree Strategy sets out how the City Council will address both its legislative and managerial duties in relation to trees, in order to protect and enhance the district's tree stock in a sustainable and appropriate manner, whilst recognising its value to people and places. It is the first time the council has produced a tree strategy and it has been written for a wide audience including residents, arboricultural contractors, councillors and council officers. Its main purpose is to agree a set of policies by which the council will manage its tree stock and its statutory function in relation to trees. Once the policies have been agreed, consideration will be given to how we best present this information to the various audiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the Policy Committee review and provide comment upon the Tree Strategy (Draft) as shown in appendix 1, and in particular consider and comment on:
  - a. The overall approach of the document;

- b. The guiding principles outlined in the report under section 4, which aim to provide a consistent and equitable approach to tree management;
- c. The procedures identified under section 7 – The council's own tree stock;
- d. Section 8 – Undertaking works on council owned trees; and
- e. All policies identified in the report.

- 2. That officers will take account of the Committee's comments in finalising the Tree Strategy which will be taken to Cabinet later in the year.

## 1 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 1.1 The draft Tree Strategy reflects an approach that aims to be delivered within existing budgets and resources. Having an agreed set of policies by which the council will manage its tree stock and its statutory function in relation to trees; setting out how work will be prioritised and providing information on when it will be undertaken, will help to more effectively manage the competing demands for limited resource across the areas identified in the Strategy.
- 1.2 Staffing resources currently includes a two year fixed term contract which was created to tackle a backlog in the tree surveying programme and associated works. It is likely there will be a need to continue with a significant tree surveying programme beyond the initial survey programme and consideration of the options for the most efficient way to resource this will need to be given at the appropriate time.
- 1.3 There will always be uncertainty around the amount and type of work generated through the council responsibilities for the management, protection and care of its trees. An increase in tree related work is likely to occur going forward, in light of the changing climate and weather patterns including storm frequency. Whilst we have some discretion regarding when works are to be undertaken, any works which are deemed essential will require immediate resourcing. This will place pressure on the capacity to carry out all the team's functions and duties and will require reprioritisation or deferral of work especially any that is not statutory or contractual obligations.
- 1.4 In addition, the impacts of climate change and diseases such as Ash Dieback are not currently quantified but are likely to require additional survey work.
- 1.5 Therefore there may be a need to review the longer term resourcing of the tree team but any additional financial implications will be brought before Members through the appropriate channels.

## 2 RISK MANAGEMENT

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
Financial Exposure	By adopting the policies in the tree strategy, this will provide a clearer understanding of future work priorities and therefore budgetary needs.	
Exposure to challenge	The tree strategy will help manage our exposure to challenge as it provides clarity on the council's priority in relation to trees.	Once the principles and policies have been agreed, the council will adapt how it communicates these messages to various audiences.
Innovation	The tree strategy is the first	The tree strategy will

	document of its type to have been produced by Winchester City Council.	provide a basis for how we adapt our tree service going forward.
Reputation	The tree strategy demonstrates the council's commitment to managing its assets and legislative duties.	
Property	This strategy demonstrates how the council is meeting its liability under the Occupiers Liability Act and minimising exposure to legal challenge.	The tree strategy allows the council to manage its tree stock in an effective and risk appropriate manner, whilst supporting the climate emergency work.
Community Support	The tree strategy will undergo a wider consultation/engagement process following consideration by HEP.	
Timescales		The document will go to Cabinet July 2022.
Project capacity	The tree strategy is being written within existing resource. However, there will be a need to seek external support in the production of the document. This will be funded by existing budgets.	

### 3 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

- 3.1 At the Health and Environment Policy (HEP) Committee meeting in January 2022, it was agreed that the emerging Tree Strategy (Draft) should be presented to the HEP Committee in March for comment.
- 3.2 The Tree Strategy sets out how the City Council will address both its legislative and managerial duties in relation to trees, in order to protect and enhance the district's tree stock in a sustainable and appropriate manner, whilst recognising its value to people and places.
- 3.3 The council's legislative duties include making and enforcing Tree Preservation Orders (TPO), determining TPO applications; assessing applications relating to trees in conservation areas, commenting on development management applications for tree works and supporting strategic planning processes.

- 3.4 The council's managerial responsibilities relate to approximately 32,000 trees which are on council owned land.
- 3.5 The council has many practices and processes for managing and responding to tree issues, so there is a need for a single document which consolidates all these and sets out the council's position and policies in one place. How this information will be made available to various audiences will be considered as part of the work to promote the Strategy and its use once approved.
- 3.6 This strategy will be the main point of reference for all works in relation to trees which come under the remit of the City Council, including trees owned and managed by the council and those in private ownership where the council has a role in their safeguarding or management. It is purposely detailed to allow members, officers, contractors, land owners and the public access to information when considering work on trees and to better understand how the council undertakes its responsibilities in relation to tree ownership and management.
- 3.7 Whilst there is no national guidance in relation to writing tree strategies, this document does reflect industry best practice and legislation. In addition, tree strategies produced by other authorities have been reviewed and used to inform Winchester City Council's tree strategy.
- 3.8 This strategy complements other work that responds to the climate emergency declared by Winchester City Council in June 2019 and forms part of a suite of plans developed in response.
- 3.9 Members are asked to consider the report and the attached Tree Strategy (Draft) and provide comments and feedback. Please note the document is not in its final format, and the look and feel of the document will alter.

#### 4 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 4.1 Alternative option: To not produce the Tree Strategy (rejected). Whilst the council has a number of operational practices and procedures relating to trees, these have evolved over the years. Our existing working practices are based on experience, technical knowledge, legislation and engagement with residents and others. There is a need to bring these together in a single document which can be accessed by others and which states the council's position on a range of work areas.

#### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

##### Previous Committee Reports:-

HEP017 – Management of Open Spaces – Scoping Report; 19 January 2022.

##### Other Background Documents:-

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 - Winchester City Council Tree Strategy 2022 (Draft)

Annex i to Appendix 1: Tree Strategy 2022 appendices.