

## Council – 17<sup>th</sup> October 2024

### **Notice of Motion:**

#### **Southend's Urban Trees**

Last September this chamber passed a motion on Southend's Urban Trees, their preservation, further updates to our tree policy in the form of a methodology tool box, something our tree policy doesn't have, a scrutiny working party and a statement to plant many thousands and locations brought forward to do so.

It then went to cabinet and stalled. Sadly for our city, it was decided not to carry forward any single aspect of that motion - this cabinet has let it fall into the abyss. Yet ironically, we all approved it.

Additionally, since we passed the motion there has been much said and debated about our green leafy friends and it seems everybody wants to be seen to be promoting them, which is great.

Except, since then we have witnessed the felling of many more trees, approximately 300 a year are felled, if valued correctly, these trees could have a collective CAVAT amenity asset value in the region of £9,000,000.00 (that's million if an average of £30,000 is accounted for each tree) Some of these trees, I and others know, could be saved and/or their decline better managed.

It is important to note that our Tree Canopy Cover continues to diminish, and we are now down to around 12% instead of a minimum of 15%, It may be wise to be aiming for 17% to take account for pollarding and necessary removals.

What we need to collectively understand is that we cannot increase Tree Canopy Cover easily in our lifetime, for it takes decades for a tree to reach maturity with substantial canopy.

We therefore need to better preserve the trees we have and plant many thousands more for the next generation to benefit as our climate continues to heat beyond pre industrial levels.

It's also worth noting, that since the tree motion, we have had no head of service, and we are down to just two tree officers from a team of four to look after the city's 29,000 tree population.

If 29,000 is the baseline figure of 12% - then to reach 17% we would need to plant something in the region of 12,000 trees - trees that will take decades to mature. Therefore, when we hear plaudits of our achievement that we planted a net gain of 100 trees in a year, well, you do the maths. It would take 120 years to reach our target canopy cover.

If disease is suspected, then we have a duty of care to notify Defra to report this and to allow scientists to conduct lab testing so that they can map disease across the country.

We really need to get a handle on this – another big issue our street trees face is “incompatibility with highways” something that is vague and non-specific.

Hopefully this can change in line with Southend's City Vision – and with change Southend could become a trailblazer if a new direction is taken.

**In light of the above I propose this Council:**

1. Enter into a collaborative Knowledge Transfer Partnership with principal partners such as Anglia Ruskin's Global Sustainability Institute and Writtle College, among others, to develop a best practice methodology toolbox to assist with alternative options to tree removal and exact reasons if removal is absolutely necessary;
2. Where disease is suspected or present in mature trees, Southend Council will duly inform Defra's Forest Research through Tree Alert and consider a lab test by their scientists;
3. That research be undertaken to establish the feasibility of introducing a minimum footway requirement.
4. That the process for determining the removal of mature trees be reviewed.
5. Bring forward 1,000's of locations and geo-tag on a publicly accessible interactive map such as PlanIT Geo and work collaboratively to fund and plant the many thousands of trees required.

Proposed by Cllr Richard Longstaff

Seconded by Cllr Nick Ward