

Council (Budget) – 20th February 2025

Councillor Questions

1. Councillor Longstaff asks a question of the Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment and Waste (Cllr Hyde)

Question

Southend Council are not planting enough trees. The allocated budget for 25/26 would barely provide for 700 new trees - yet significantly more are removed each year without scrutiny by this council.

This could be seen as a failure to take responsibility in increasing Southend's tree canopy cover commensurate with industry minimum recommendations.

Southend's TCC is clearly diminishing each year with no realistic plans to safeguard or increase our trees.

It's clear our council is failing to understand its responsibilities or legal duty to maintain and safeguard our trees and biodiversity.

With Southend pledging carbon neutrality by 2030, and our city's trees being fundamental to this via carbon sequestration calculations - Could the portfolio holder for the Environment please state how this administration, in terms of locations and numbers, is going to increase its tree canopy cover by the 10,000 trees necessary to be in line with the minimum recommendations.

Answer

We have a strong ambition to plant more trees, despite the significant challenges posed by a lack of space for trees to thrive due to our density and urban character. We take our responsibilities on climate adaptation and biodiversity seriously and are working hard to ensure that nature-based solutions are centred in the climate change programme.

It is not correct to say that the council removes significantly more than 700 trees a year. As has been explained many times, this council removes trees that are dangerous, dead, dying, or diseased, and each removal is lamented.

This administration has planted over 100 street trees ahead of City Day, and many more in our parks and open spaces. Based on current canopy cover of 13%, we will need to plant around 4000-5000 trees to meet our target of 15% by 2050. We are ambitious to do more and to do it faster, so we have set new standards for introducing tree pits as part of our 5-year pavement resurfacing programme, and we will continue to look at ways to not only increase our canopy cover but to also improve our tree equity.