

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda
Item No.

Report of Deputy Chief Executive (Place)

to
Cabinet
On

Date 17 September 2019

Report prepared by: Paul Jenkinson Head of Parks and Open
Spaces

Review and update of Southend's Tree Policy

Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s)

Cabinet Member: Cllr C Mulroney

Part 1 (Public Agenda Item) / Part 2 (Confidential Agenda Item)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To seek approval on the approach to be taken to review the current tree policy.
- 1.2. To seek approval to adopt a new tree policy as per the approach set out in Appendix 1.
- 1.3. To make councillors aware of the likely release by DEFRA of requirements and guidance on the production of tree management strategies and consultation of tree removal.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. **Agree** to adopt an interim approach to tree management, including planting as set out in Appendix 2, until the a new tree policy for the borough is adopted.
- 2.2. **Agree** to adopt a new tree policy as per the approach set out in Appendix 1.
- 2.3. **Agree** to fund planting and maintenance of an additional 1,000 standard trees in the next three planting seasons. This is in addition to the usual c300 replacement trees planted each year.
- 2.4. **Agree** to promote and enhance the donated tree scheme working alongside residents, businesses, organisations and other interested parties who would like to support tree planting within the borough.

3. Background

- 3.1. Southend-on-Sea Borough Council's current tree policy was adopted in 2003 and was introduced to formalise the approach taken for the management of council-owned trees across the borough.
- 3.2. The town has approx. 28,000 urban trees made up of 20,000 recorded street trees and 8,000 trees planted in 'Green Corridors'. In addition, there is a significant tree population in the parks, open spaces and woodlands.
- 3.3. Since the introduction of the tree policy in 2003, interest in the environment and climate change has increased with the approach taken to manage our trees being of increasing interest to many residents and local groups.
- 3.4. The presence of trees within the borough brings many benefits and the approach taken by the council to manage its trees is to maintain and enhance the level of canopy cover. However, the management of trees does include their removal when no other options are available.
- 3.5. To help with the management of trees, a database of council managed street trees is maintained. Council managed parkland trees and woodland are also recorded. However, as only areas managed directly by the council are noted the overall canopy cover of the town is not able to be considered when considering a strategic approach to tree management and elements such as locations for tree planting.
- 3.6. A tree canopy assessment is a tool to help analyse the current canopy cover of an area, such as a borough, and plan for future tree canopy cover. Urban trees can be considered part of the green infrastructure that complements our grey infrastructure and should be managed with equal importance.
- 3.7. Tree canopy assessments can help determine how much land area is covered by trees, identify the location of those trees and where there are new opportunities to plant trees. Tree canopy assessments also determine the amount and location of impervious cover in a community.
- 3.8. To assist with the development of a new tree policy for the town, a canopy assessment has been commissioned.
- 3.9. Local groups and individuals have always shown an interest in the management of trees and especially why highways trees are removed. However, recently, increased activity on social media has occurred with people posting their views on our tree management.
- 3.10. Tree management has become a high profile subject in recent years due to a contract let by Sheffield City Council, which linked highways maintenance with tree management.
- 3.11. In July 2012 Sheffield City Council entered into a 25-year city-wide highways maintenance PFI contract with Amey, to deliver what is known as

the 'Streets Ahead' programme of highway maintenance. The contract is worth over £2bn and includes upgrading and maintaining the city's roads, pavements, street lights, bridges and other items on or around the streets. It also includes the management of highway trees as part of the 'other items'. The contract contains a commitment to fell 200 trees per annum, and 5,474 trees were felled between 2012 and 2018.

- 3.12. As a result of the Sheffield City Council, a national review and public consultation were undertaken concerning tree management, and it is expected that DEFRA will be releasing new requirements and guidance relating to tree management and the production of tree strategies for local authorities.
- 3.13. It should be noted that Southend-on-Sea Borough Council does not have any commitment to remove a set number of trees annually and tree management does not form part of the highway surfacing contracts.
- 3.14. All tree inspections in Southend are undertaken by qualified arboriculturalists directly employed by the council and tree removals are based on an inspection of the individual tree.
- 3.15. Tree removals are only undertaken when no other form of management is appropriate. Removals are based on the following:
 - a. Decay in any part of the tree has reached an advanced stage and the tree cannot be considered safe for retention.
 - b. The tree has a disease known for its unpredictable or rapid progression that renders the tree unsafe. For example the root and butt decay fungi Giant Polypore (*Meripilus giganteum*).
 - c. Wind action has severely loosened the tree's anchorage. (storm damage)
 - d. Broken branches in the crown have caused the centre of gravity to be shifted heavily away from the main stem to render the tree unsafe.
 - e. The tree is dead or dying.
 - f. The tree has been hit by a vehicle leaving large wounds in the crown and or stem and possibly affected the tree's stability and anchorage.
 - g. A heavily leaning stem is causing an obstruction to vehicles and or pedestrians using the highway and or footpath.
 - h. The growth of the tree's roots are severely disrupting the surface of the adjacent highway and/or footpath and no other engineering solutions are practicable.
 - i. Stem and or root growth is severely restricting rights of way along the highways.
- 3.16. Trees may sometimes be removed as a result of agreed private and highways developments. However, before trees are removed, engineering options to enable their retention will be investigated. When the tree/s cannot be retained funding for replacement planting will be sought.

- 3.17. Trees may sometimes be removed where it has been verified, through ongoing investigations, site surveys and other relevant technical data supplied by the property owner, that a tree within Council ownership is a significant contributor to property damage.
- 3.18. Situations do occur when the roots of a tree are causing direct damage to property or an adjoining or hard surface. In these situations, root pruning will be investigated. However, if this is not an option or root pruning would result in the tree being unstable, removal may be the only option.
- 3.19. Due to this increased interest in tree removals on 29 July, the Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning announced that all non-emergency tree removals were suspended, excluding where there has been a commitment to the removal as part of an insurance claim or planned highways maintenance works, pending the agreement of a new tree policy.
- 3.20. Trees planted on the highway require ongoing maintenance to ensure the safety of the public and to help retain trees in challenges locations which pose to the trees. The management of trees also helps maintain a level of canopy cover across the town.
- 3.21. When referring to tree management, it should be noted that this includes all aspects of maintaining the town's trees, including, habitat benefits and planting new trees.
- 3.22. Once a tree is dead or has been identified with a condition meaning it is no longer suitable for maintaining on the highway, the predictability of how that tree will behave becomes more unpredictable with the risk of branch drop or the tree falling increasing. This is a risk which must be managed now and in the new tree policy to ensure the safety of the public and or property.
- 3.23. In regards to tree planting the current tree policy states that we will plant two trees for each one removed where practicable. Many factors adversely impact on the opportunities to plant trees, particularly in streets including underground and overground utilities, adjoin structures and available space. The 2 for 1 aim cannot always be fulfilled and often not 1 for 1 in the precise location of a street tree removal a more specific planting total is included in this proposal
- 3.24. On average, over 300 standard trees are planted each year. In addition to standard trees, a number of young trees in the form of whips are also planted averaging 200 to 500 per year.
- 3.25. To continue with the management of council-owned trees across the borough, it is recommended that a new tree policy is introduced setting out clearly the approach that will be taken with regard to the management of trees, including planting and also how residents and other interested parties will be kept informed about tree removals and planting. For details of the approach to the new tree policy and anticipated development program, please see Appendix 1.

3.26. It is also recommended that an interim tree management approach, including planting, is adopted and published, to ensure the continued good management of the town's trees. Appendix 2 This interim policy would be replaced once the new tree policy has been developed.

3.27. The 2050 vision includes a number of outcomes in which trees play a part. Committing to and funding the planting of 1,000 trees over three years not only reaffirms the council's commitment to maintaining tree canopy cover across the borough but also delivers on 2050 outcomes in Pride and Joy and Safe and Well.

3.28. The intention to introduce a new policy has been made public and aspects for inclusion have been publicised.

4. Other Options

4.1. Continue managing council trees as per the existing tree policy without review.

4.2. Continue managing council trees as per the existing tree policy until the guidance from DEFRA is available.

5. Reasons for Recommendations

5.1. Reviewing the current policy, adopting an interim approach and subsequently reviewing and adopting a new tree policy once the DEFRA guidance is released will ensure the appropriate continual management of the town's trees, the safety of the public and property and allows interested parties to become involved at different stages.

5.2. By committing and funding the planting of an additional 1,000 trees over three years this not only reaffirms the council's commitment to maintaining tree canopy cover across the borough but also delivers on 2050 outcomes in Pride and Joy and Safe and Well.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1. Pride and Joy. "Our Streets and Public Spaces are clean and inviting."

6.2. Safe and Well. "Green City - We act as a green city with outstanding examples of energy-efficient and carbon-neutral buildings, streets, transport and recycling".

6.3. Financial Implications

6.3.1. A commitment to fund the planting of 1,000 trees over three planting seasons will require an investment of £317,000. The investment across revenue and capital is shown in the table below:

| Description of works | No. of trees | 19/20 | 20/21 | 21/22 | 22/23 | 23/24 | 23/24 |
|----------------------------------|--------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| | | £(000) | £(000) | £(000) | £(000) | £(000) | £(000) |
| Purchase of standard trees | 400 | 40 | | | | | |
| | 300 | | 30 | 30 | | | |
| Planting of standard trees | 400 | 26 | | | | | |
| | 300 | | 19.5 | 19.5 | | | |
| Root barrier. Selected locations | * | 9 | 7 | 7 | | | |
| Total Capital - £188,000 | | 75 | 56.5 | 56.5 | | | |
| Watering | 300 | | | | | 16 | |
| | 400 | | 22 | | | | |
| | 600 | | | | 32 | | |
| | 700 | | | 38 | | | |
| Maintenance | 300 | | | | | | 2 |
| | 400 | | 3 | | | | |
| | 600 | | | | | 4 | |
| | 700 | | | 5 | | | |
| | 1,000 | | | | 7 | | |
| Total Revenue - £129,000 | | | 25 | 43 | 39 | 20 | 2 |

6.3.2. The total capital amount of £188,000 is recommended for addition to the Capital Investment Programme. The revenue amounts commencing in 2020/21 will be included as part of the Council's revenue budget setting.

6.3.3. Any change to the current approach taken to tree management as part of a new tree policy may have resource implications such as additional staffing requirements and will be allocated at the appropriate time.

6.3.4. Not managing the council's tree stock effectively could result in claims against the council for damage to property or person.

6.4. Legal Implications

6.4.1. The council has an obligation and duty of care to inspect and maintain trees under its control.

6.4.2. Not managing the council's tree stock effectively could result in action being taken against the council.

6.5. People Implications

6.5.1. No people implications have been identified at this time.

6.6. Property Implications

6.6.1. Not managing the council's tree stock effectively could result in damage to council assets or private property.

6.7. Consultation

6.7.1. No consultation has been undertaken at this time. However, an approach to consultation is set out in Appendix 1.

6.8. Equalities and Diversity Implications

6.8.1. An equalities impact assessment will be undertaken on the new tree policy.

6.9. Risk Assessment

| Risk | Mitigation |
|--|--|
| Injury, death or damage to property from trees currently identified for removal remaining onsite. | Trees in a dead or declining condition should be removed. |
| Reputational loss from not removing dead, dying or diseased trees for which residents have already advised of the removal. | Adopt an interim approach as per appendix 2. |
| Increase in misinformed or incorrect information being posted on social media | Communications team to monitor and respond to social media as required. |
| Lack of understanding of why we manage our trees, including pruning, planting and removal. | Update FAQs on the council website. Provide presentation to councillors and others in September. |

6.10. Value for Money

6.10.1. Any associated works will be procured in line with Council policies and procedures

6.11. Community Safety Implications

6.11.1. No community safety implications have been identified at this time.

6.12. Environmental Impact

6.12.1. A well maintained and managed tree stock enhances the environment and helps provide an attractive and pleasant place to live.

6.12.2. Urban trees provide the following benefits:

- Cool air by 2 0C to 8 0C.
- Reduce the need for air conditioning by 30% and save energy used for heating by 20 to 30%.
- Absorb up to 150kg of CO2 per year and consequently help mitigate climate change.
- Urban trees can help filter urban pollution and fine particulates.
- Provide habitat, food and protection to plants and animals, increasing biodiversity.
- Improve physical and mental health.
- Increase property values by 20%.

7. Background Papers

7.1. Southend-on-Sea Borough Council Tree Policy 2003

7.2. Southend-on-Sea Vehicle Crossing Policy and Application Guidance

8. Appendices

8.1. **Appendix 1 Approach for New Tree Policy for Southend-on-Sea**

8.2. **Appendix 2 Interim approach for the management and maintenance of Council maintained trees**