

# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Executive Director Neighbourhoods and  
Environment

to  
Cabinet

on  
14<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Agenda  
Item No.

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

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## Southend-on-Sea Borough Council Tree Policy

Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s)

Cabinet Member: Cllr C Mulroney

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

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### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To seek the adoption of the revised tree policy (Appendix 1).
- 1.2. To note the results of the public consultation on the tree policy.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. **Agree** to adopt the tree policy (Appendix 1).
- 2.2. **Agree** to the development of a planting strategy that will consider the availability of land, its usage, and tree planting opportunities.
- 2.3. **Acknowledge** that the adoption of the tree policy will require ongoing funding to manage the Council's tree stock, which will need to be considered within future budget setting.

### 3. Background

- 3.1. In 2019 the Council committed to reviewing and updating its tree policy. As a result of this commitment, an interim tree management statement was agreed to guide tree management until a new policy is adopted.
- 3.2. The previous report set out the Council managed tree population as follows: approximately 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. The tree population information provided was only part of the picture relating to the Borough's tree cover, and therefore set out the need for a tree canopy assessment to gain a better understanding of the overall tree cover, relating to trees managed by the Council and those on private land. The tree canopy assessment can be seen at (Appendix 2).
- 3.4. The updated tree policy considers best practice around urban tree management, the Council's response to the declared climate emergency, the safety of the public, the results of the tree canopy assessment for Southend-on-Sea and the challenges and limitations the dense urban nature of the Borough presents.
- 3.5. The Council recognises the importance of having diverse green infrastructure within the Borough and acknowledges that trees are an important part of the urban environment. The importance of trees as part of the green infrastructure is reflected within the tree policy.
- 3.6. The Council has committed to enhancing and maintaining the greening of the Borough but also to conserving essential habitats and green space for leisure and recreation.
- 3.7. As part of the ongoing commitment to green infrastructure, this planting season 5000 shrubs and 700 standard trees will be planted, this is a significant addition to the normal planting programme and demonstrates the Council's commitment to the importance of the green environment.
- 3.8. The tree policy also recognises the importance of the contribution of our entire community, including groups, charities, schools and businesses to maximise the opportunity in achieving the Council's commitment to tree canopy cover.
- 3.9. The Council is also committed to applying for grants and external funding to support the delivery of planting projects.
- 3.10. Keeping Southend citizens informed about the Council's tree management works and how they can help with tree planting on their property is also recognised within the updated tree policy.
- 3.11. The updated tree policy has also considered the comments and views received during the public consultation on the draft policy (Appendix 3).
- 3.12. It was clear from the consultation results that people are interested in trees and the benefits they can have in an urban area.
- 3.13. It should also be noted that the majority of the people who responded to the consultation strongly agreed or agreed with the approach set out in the draft policy.
- 3.14. The consultation results further highlighted the importance of the need for proactive communications and information and how this would help inform

the Borough's citizens about the need for a variety of green infrastructure and habitats and that sustaining and increasing canopy cover is about more than planting trees.

- 3.15. In reviewing the consultation comments, several respondents raised questions about increasing the Borough's canopy cover from the current 12% to 15%, with some querying if a higher percentage could be set. It should be noted that a target of 15% for coastal locations is set out in a report by Forestry Research, part of the Forestry Commission.
- 3.16. To put this into context, Southend-on-Sea has an area of 41.75km<sup>2</sup> and the current canopy cover is 5.17km<sup>2</sup>. To achieve 15%, over an additional 1km<sup>2</sup> of tree canopy will be required, the equivalent of 150 football pitches.
- 3.17. To meet and exceed the target of 15%, a collective community effort is required. Therefore, it is further advised that the Council embarks on a programme of community engagement that enables everyone in the Borough to contribute towards this goal maximising the opportunities of achieving the target and beyond.
- 3.18. With the benefit of the evidence from the canopy cover report and to ensure the Council maximises the opportunities on its own land, a evaluation will be carried out early in the 2021 with the objective of ensuring as many sites as possible are identified that have the potential for tree planting. This survey and any decisions that are taken as a direct result of the survey will inform future tree planting programmes and give a strong indication of the potential in meeting and exceeding the target.
- 3.19. It is also recommended that as part of the survey and planting strategy, all communities in the Borough are asked to consider and put forward sites they own for potential tree planting thus helping the Borough as a whole in maximising the desired outcome
- 3.20. It is important to note that when managing an urban tree population, it is considered in the Borough as a whole. Due to the nature of the Borough, it is not possible to guarantee a 15% tree canopy cover in every location. Some wards will inevitably have minimal tree cover, possibly below the 15% cover target for the complete Borough, whilst others will have more than 15%, supporting the average across the Borough.
- 3.21. A tree canopy assessment will only consider trees above a certain size. Therefore planting which has been undertaken in recent years as part of the Council's continued tree planting programme, will not have been included in the tree canopy assessment used in the preparation of the updated tree policy. However, these trees are likely to contribute to future canopy assessments, helping the Borough reach a 15% tree canopy cover. It is also important to note that maintenance work, including pruning and crown reductions, will influence the Borough's canopy cover. For further information on how canopy cover is calculated to see appendix 2

- 3.22. Development within the Borough also has an opportunity to contribute to the tree canopy cover by, where possible, protecting trees within development sites and including tree planting within the landscape. These issues would be considered as part of the planning application process.
- 3.23. Other free text comments received during the consultation have been grouped into categories, such as the planting of fruit trees. Appendix 3 includes officer feedback to the free text comments.

#### **4. Other Options**

- 4.1. Continue managing council trees as per the interim management statement and not adopt a new tree policy.
- 4.2. Stop managing the Council's tree stock and accept that the trees will decline and the risk to citizens and visitors will increase, resulting in a rise in claims against the Council and the potential for criminal proceedings to be taken against councillors as a result of any death or injury associated with a tree.

#### **5. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 5.1. To help maintain the safety of our citizens and visitors and to support the increase in the Borough's canopy cover, it is recommended that the new tree policy, Appendix 1, is adopted.
- 5.2. The adoption of the tree policy supports the 2050 vision which includes several outcomes in which trees play a part.
- 5.3. Management of trees contributes to the response to the climate change emergency.

#### **6. Corporate Implications**

- 6.1. Pride and Joy. "Our Streets and Public Spaces are valued and support the mental and physical wellbeing of our residents and visitors."
- 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".
  - 6.2.1. The Council's tree policy provides clear guidelines on maintaining and increasing tree canopy cover within the Borough, supporting the 2050 ambition to mitigate the effects of Climate Change.
- 6.3. Financial Implications
  - 6.3.1. As part of the commitment to increase canopy cover to 15% by 2050 there will need to be investment in both the capital cost of planting additional trees and the revenue cost of maintaining them.

- 6.3.2. The current tree maintenance budget provides for the cost of maintenance for the current tree numbers. A significant increase in the canopy coverage will require a permanent increase to the revenue maintenance budget. An increase from 12% to 15% is a proportional increase of 21% based on current canopy coverage.
  - 6.3.3. The delivery of a planting strategy and land availability study will require officer time and numbers may need to increase to support this. External consultants may also be required to provide and review i-Tree data.
  - 6.3.4. Arboriculture works are procured in line with Council procurement procedures. The retendering of the contract for the provision of tree works and associated services may have resource implications such as additional cost requirements and will need to be considered at the appropriate time pending the result of any tender exercise.
  - 6.3.5. 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. Results of public consultation are included in Appendix 3.
- 6.8. Equalities and Diversity Implications
- 6.8.1. An equalities impact assessment is to be undertaken on the draft new tree policy.
- 6.9. Risk Assessment

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
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 tree policy Appendix 1.
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.
Insufficient available space to increase tree canopy cover to 15%	Planting over the last 5 to 10 years will be recognised within the next canopy assessment. Planning policy to be used where possible to encourage tree planting within developments. Review of potential sites for group tree planting to be undertaken.

#### 6.10. Value for Money

- 6.10.1. Any associated works will be procured in line with Council policies and procedures.
- 6.10.2. Managing the Council's tree stock reduces the risk of claims against the Council.
- 6.10.3. The supply, plant and watering to establishment, (watering and establishment is over three years), of one standard container-grown tree is currently £290. Average tree planting per year is 300 standard trees. Current additional planting commitments and whip planting are not included in these figures.
- 6.10.4. The current maintenance expenditure on highways tree is £450,000 per year.
- 6.10.5. No dedicated budget is currently allocated to tree maintenance within parks and woodland. However, £95,000 on average is spent per year.

6.10.6. No data is available on the current expenditure on highways path maintenance that is as a result wholly or partly related to tree root damage. However, it is estimated that for streets with trees 15% to 20% of footway repairs are related to trees.

6.10.7. Southend's tree cover has a financial benefit to the Council. However, this is not easily recognised within the overall budget. The tree canopy assessment (Appendix 2) provides examples of these benefits, such as better health and reduced hospital admissions.

#### 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 °C to 8°C;
- Reduce the need for air conditioning by 30% and save energy used for heating by 20 to 30%;
- Absorb up to 150kg of CO<sub>2</sub> 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 Interim Tree Management Statement;
- 7.2. Southend-on-Sea Vehicle Crossing Policy and Application Guidance;
- 7.3. Council's We love Trees webpage. [www.southend.gov.uk/welovetrees](http://www.southend.gov.uk/welovetrees).

### 8. Appendices

- 8.1. **Appendix 1 New Tree Policy for Southend-on-Sea;**
- 8.2. **Appendix 2 Tree canopy assessment of Southend-on-Sea;**
- 8.3. **Appendix 3 Results of Tree Policy consultation and comments on free text from the public consultation.**