

## **Council 7<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

### **Notice of Motion: Southend's Urban Trees**

They say an oak tree spends 300 years growing, 300 years living and 300 years dying. This motion aims to address the way Southend council collectively values its trees, manages them over time and especially during their decline.

Southend's Trees are worth millions as assets of immense community value. Yet these assets are slowly being diminished in the systematic removal of mature trees at a rate that has been unsustainable in Southend over many years.

Our city's urban trees are essential to providing Tree canopy cover (TCC) in an ever heating climate, where, amongst many other benefits, they abate the 'urban heat island effect', which together are responsible for an increasing number of fatalities across Europe. This phenomenon will progressively worsen as the climate continues to heat.

Despite thousands of tree removals over the past 15 years, the replacement strategy has been short sighted in providing minimal and inconsequential replacement trees. Over recent years we have seen a wholesale decline in Southend's mature tree population. TCC now stands at barely 13%, yet the Forestry Commission recommendation for a coastal town/city is 15%. In Leigh-on-Sea it's just 10%. This represents the need for many thousands of more trees.

These facts were established by an independent iTree calculation in 2019, presented by Once-Upon-a-Tree that shows not just TCC, but also a tree populations ability to sequester carbon relative to a town/city's carbon emissions.

It therefore must stand to reason that, amongst many other known benefits, including the mental health of Southend's residents, Trees are an essential part of Southend's bid for carbon neutrality by 2030. Yet we are not planting nearly enough and continue to remove at an alarming rate without adequate replacement.

This motion would be the first step in an enhanced and progressive approach to more refined tree management practices and preservation, that would see more extensive planting across Southend.

Funding would come from more focused grant applications and a collaborative proactive approach to working to address the main issues of TCC decline. Initially providing thousands of locations to plant in preparation for planting seasons between December and March.

Together, Once-Upon-a-Tree group members have personally witnessed many occurrences where trees have been needlessly removed where they could have been saved, better managed and maintained. Indeed some have already been saved due to pressure from local resident groups, where, on second inspection there have been alternatives to removal.

**With no monitoring or QAA procedures I would propose that Southend Council resolves to:**

1. Halt all tree felling, unless there's a perceived immediate risk, until a working party is established, with a mix of council members and external observers, to assess every tree removal to better safeguard our remaining trees and to reassure both member's and the public that every possible alternative has been explored before any further trees are removed. External representatives could be made up of suggested local charitable organisations: Once Upon a Tree, Trustlinks and Essex Wildlife Trust,
2. Develop an alternative methodology toolbox that tree officers and highways engineers can access to do their jobs to the optimum standards, as per best practice under the Tree Design Action Group, the Forestry Commission and the Tree Council of Great Britain,
3. Embed QAA procedures and method statements within the tree policy as part of the proposed toolbox so that common scenarios can be actioned quickly and without ambiguity,
4. Engage the climate change team immediately to assist in making bids for funding to plant thousands of new trees,
5. Project preparation by planning officers, tree offices and highways surveyors to identify locations across Southend in preparation for planting.

Proposer: Cllr R Longstaff

Seconder:

Cllr T Cowdrey

Cllr S Aylen

Cllr K Murphy

Cllr MarinTerry