

Public
Key Decision - Yes

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy Review

Meeting/Date: Cabinet – 19th November 2020

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning

Report by: Arboricultural Officer, Tamsin Miles

Wards affected: All

Executive Summary:

This report sets out the steps taken in the review of the Council's existing 2015 Tree Strategy and documents the development of the Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy 2020-2030 and its Action Plan.

The Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy 2020 – 2030 is a collaborative document (written by Officers alongside a Councillor Working Group) which builds on the Council's existing 5-year tree strategy.

The 2020 Tree Strategy is an evidence-based document which sets out a clear direction for arboricultural management across all Council services which interact with trees. At the heart of the strategy is a robust vision which focuses on sustainability and creating a legacy of tree establishment and management.

The revised strategy contains updated policies relating to all aspects of Local Authority tree management and incorporates national issues such as biosecurity, canopy cover management and subsidence.

Alongside the revised strategy, a 10-year Action Plan has been developed which sets out key projects and tasks to be completed over the life of the strategy. These set out how we can meet the key aims of document and works towards its vision. The report concludes with resource implications, implementation proposals and wider considerations of the document's endorsement.

RECOMMENDED

To endorse the Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy 2020 – 2030 and the proposed 10-year Action Plan

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek endorsement of the Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy 2020 – 2030, its vision (*'managing our districts trees in a sustainable way to ensure that their benefits are experienced by current and future generations'*) and the 7 key aims which underpin the strategy.
- 1.2 The report also seeks the endorsement of the proposed Action Plan.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The current Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy (2015 Strategy) was developed and adopted by the Council in 2015 and covered a 5-year period to 2020.
- 2.2 The 2015 Strategy focussed on gaining a better understanding of our own tree stock (trees owned managed by the Council) and developing standards for others to work to in relation to protected trees and development. The strategy included a broad action plan covering tasks to be completed over the strategy period and set policies in relation to the management of Council owned trees and woodlands.
- 2.3 While the 2015 Strategy provided a sound grounding for the arboricultural functions of the Council, it not only reflected a different organisation to that which we have today, but also an arboricultural industry which has changed significantly in the 5 years since its adoption. These organisational and industry-based changes resulted in a recommendation by Officers that a wholesale review of the 2015 Strategy was required.
- 2.4 To facilitate this review, a Councillor lead Tree Strategy Working Group (under the scope of the Overview and Scrutiny – Customers and Partnerships) was created 2017. The working group, alongside Arboricultural Officers from Development and Operations set about reviewing the content and 2015 Strategy, developing a new vision for the 2020 Strategy, and setting the scope for any new topic areas to be included.
- 2.5 Final proposals for the vision and scope of the 2020 Strategy were presented to Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Customers and Partnerships) in October 2019 with a view to have a revised Tree Strategy ready adoption in mid-2020.

3. THE KEY CHANGES TO THE TREE STRATEGY

- 3.1 The tree strategy review process has looked at all elements of the 2015 Strategy and considered their relevance in light of modern arboricultural management. It responds to current national issues that affect trees, considers how our residents interact with them and incorporates these into the core of the document. While many of the central themes and policy areas contained in the 2015 Strategy have been retained as part of the this review, the 2020 document takes a more strategic approach to tree population management and looks to what may be required of local

authorities over the next 10 years. The principal changes proposed in the 2020 Strategy include:

- 3.2 **A move to managing trees at a strategic level:** During the tree strategy review process a number of different Government consultations have been issued which propose changes to how local authorities will need to manage their own tree stock. These also propose the introduction of statutory monitoring against key indicators such tree planting and canopy cover.
- 3.3 One of the most likely requirements is the need to produce a Tree Strategy, with one of the consultations going so far as to indicate the likely required content for such. To ensure the Council is as best placed as possible in the face of any changes, the 2020 Strategy incorporates key topic areas which are likely to become a statutory duty. Taking this higher-level approach enables the Council to embed these expected changes into our day to day working and allow the impact of these to be fully considered without the pressures of them being imposed by a set date.
- 3.4 **Inclusion of a central vision:** A central “vision” has been introduced to the document which leads onto 7 core aims. These were developed with the Councillor Working Group and are intended to ensure all the Council’s actions in the management of the districts tree population (regardless of service area or department) are working towards one core purpose.
- 3.5 **A focus on data analysis:** A key element of the 2020 Strategy is that its aspirations and the policies are based on detailed analysis of current data concerning the district’s tree population (section 2 of the 2020 Strategy). The collection of data required to be able to do this was a key action of the 2015 Strategy and has formed the basis for the review.
- 3.6 Our analysis of this over the review period has allowed us to focus the polices and actions of the 2020 Strategy on known strategic issues that affect Huntingdonshire (woodland cover statistics for example) while also being in a position to identify and address detailed challenges such as the limited age diversity of our own trees. The combination of these different strategic issues ensures a robust tree strategy can be put in place which promotes effective tree management.
- 3.7 **Engagement with national initiatives:** During the life of the 2015 Strategy, organisations such as The Woodland Trust and The Tree Council have developed national initiatives and campaigns which look to manage tree populations as a whole. These include the Tree Charter (by the Tree Council) which aims to promote “the creation of greener landscapes with trees”. The principles of these national campaigns have been embedded into the 2020 Strategy and would enable the Council to publicly endorse these initiatives should we wish to.
- 3.8 **A Review of all policies:** All the existing polices contained in the 2015 Strategy have been reviewed, revised, or removed where needed. The

2020 Strategy contains a total of 20 policies covering all aspects of modern arboriculture in a local authority setting. 5 new policies have been incorporated to cover the following topics:

- Managing ancient and veteran trees (Policy TM5)
- Recycling of tree surgery arisings (Policy TM6)
- HDC action in cases of tree vandalism (Policy TM10)
- Managing trees in the urban environment (Policy TM11)
- Biosecurity management (Policy TBS1)

- 3.9 Where policies were present in the 2015 Strategy which solely covered the Council's statutory duty on a matter (reviewing dangerous trees (2015 Policy TP14) or owners' rights to raise objections to new designations (2015 Policy TP2) for example) these have been removed and the topic embedded into the text of document as they do not need to be re-covered at a policy level.
- 3.10 All of the policies included in the 2020 Strategy have been written (and re-written in the case of those retained from the 2015 Strategy) in such a way that they clearly set out the Council's position in subject. Where possible, technical arboricultural terms have been removed from the policy text and the policies are structured to ensure they can be easily understood by a wide range of groups and the residents of Huntingdonshire. (A full policy list is contained in Appendix 1)
- 3.11 **Updated Action Plan:** A new Action Plan has been written to accompany the 2020 Strategy. While an Action Plan was included in the 2015 Strategy, it focused on our everyday tree management operations. In addition, many of the projects set out have been completed or were no longer relevant. The 2020 Action Plan takes a more strategic stance and looks at projects across all service areas, such as increasing Huntingdonshire's Canopy Cover, managing pest and disease outbreaks and increasing planting. The revised Action Plan includes an indication of a project priority and at suggests at what stage each task should be considered. At this stage the Action Plan does not contain a set timescale for the completion of a task, as these are likely to be resource dependant.
- 3.12 **A revised format:** The 2015 Strategy comprised of a core document and 8 separate guidance notes. The 2020 Strategy has incorporated the content of these (where necessary) into one document to ensure it is easy to navigate.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 4.1 The Panel received the Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy Review at the meeting on 5th November 2020. Members commended the Tree Strategy and thanked Officers and the Overview and Scrutiny Tree Strategy Working Group for their time and effort in conducting the review and producing the updated Strategy.
- 4.2 Members have discussed whether the Strategy should contain reference to the species Black Poplar, which used to be a common species in Huntingdonshire. It has been confirmed that there are efforts to plant Black Poplars and,

accordingly, Section 4.9 (Page 21) has been amended to include reference to “special trees” including Huntingdon Elm and Black Poplar.)

- 4.3 The Panel has noted that there are a number of actions which, in order to be completed, require grants to be obtained and additional resources allocated. It has been suggested that the Council should take steps to acquire the resources needed to fulfil the aims of the Action Plan. It is further suggested that the actions should be prioritised so that the ones deemed most important are completed first.
- 4.4 It has been noted that the table on page 16 uses old Ward boundaries. The Panel recommends that the document should contain up to date information including referencing the current the Ward boundaries. (Additional Officer note: While this is noted by Officers, the Wards used are set data fields in the Council’s tree surveying software and cannot be altered at this time. However, this will be reviewed in the future to determine if boundary and Ward changes can be made. A note to reflect this position has been made in the document (Figure 9, Page 16))
- 4.5 Members have examined the number of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) that have been issued. The figures are cumulative, but it is suggested that this information should be presented based on the number of TPOs issued year on year or during a particular 5-year period. (Additional Officer note: Officers note this point and have altered Figure 15 (Page 22) to show cumulative totals of orders made. However, it has not been possible to show the number of Orders made by year using the data the Council currently holds.)
- 4.6 An observation has been made that tree planting and the installation of street furniture on new build estates are not planned as effectively as they could be. However, it is understood that the new Urban Design Manual will better address these matters in the future.
- 4.7 On a connected matter, it has been suggested that when Members are informed of planning application / decisions it would be beneficial to identify any matters relating to trees.

5. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- 5.1 Failure to endorse this evidence-based Tree Strategy will impact on the direction of our arboricultural operations (across all service areas) to 2030. Key policies are included in the 2020 Strategy which are aimed at altering the way in which some of our key services are provided to ensure they are as efficient and robust as possible. This would also allow Officer’s time to be concentrated on other project based tasks.
- 5.2 The Action Plan sets out key projects based on the sustainable management of the wider tree population of Huntingdonshire. Some of the projects included are based around national environmental issues (decreasing canopy cover in urban areas for example) which are becoming increasingly important in the face of a changing climate.
- 5.3 While there are likely to be future funding and resource requirements for projects set out in the Action Plan, endorsement of the Action Plan is key to ensuring that we maintain a sustainable and robust tree stock and its benefits to our communities can be maximised.

6. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

- 6.1 The 2020 Strategy will cover the Council's arboricultural functions across all services to 2030. It includes a robust monitoring programme (section 17) which sets out annual monitoring and reporting to Overview and Scrutiny Panel on the use of the document and Action Plan. This regular reporting also allows minor changes to be made to the content of the overall document, ensuring it consistently reflects the services provided by the Council and modern arboricultural practices.
- 6.2 An in-depth review is proposed at year 5 to allow any significant changes to be made without the need for a full review.
- 6.3 The Action Plan has been developed in such a way that the primary targets are for the scoping of projects which are for completion later in the strategy period. This allows Officers to fully explore options for all the objectives and present funding and resourcing options for each on a regular basis. These projects will then be the subject of separate funding bids.

7. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- 7.1 The 2020 Strategy and Action Plan aligns with the following aspirations of the Council's Corporate Plan:
- PLACE – Create, protect and enhance our safe and clean built and green environment.
 - PEOPLE – Support people to improve their health and well-being.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The endorsement of the 2020 Strategy and Action Plan does not bring about any additional legal obligations for the Council. However, it does place focus on the Council's duty of care in respect of its tree management operations (across all service areas) and highlights our statutory functions and how they are met.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 To allow the successful implementation of the 2020 Strategy continual revenue funding for arboricultural services across the Council is required.
- 9.2 The Action Plan which accompanies the 2020 Strategy (Appendix 3) sets out a range of broad tasks and projects to be completed between 2020 and 2030. Where additional resources and/or funding is required to undertake standalone projects, these will be subject to additional revenue bids and funding cycles over the life of the strategy.

10. HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Trees can have a significant positive impact on the health of our residents and improve our physical and mental wellbeing.
- 10.2 Research shows that a direct correlation exists between proximity to tree cover and indicators such as increased life expectancy, improved education rates and decreased hospital admissions.
- 10.3 A study of the East London Green Grid (a proposed network of interlinked, multi-purpose and high quality open spaces) by the Arboricultural Association, estimated that increasing the establishment of greenspace (with a quarter of this covered with trees) over an area of 100km² by only 5.5% could avert two deaths and two hospital admissions per year. Further studies by the Tree People indicates that areas with organised community tree planting projects and events have an increased a sense of community empowerment, community ownership and improved wellbeing.
- 10.4 The 2020 Strategy looks to harness the benefits trees can bring to the overall health of residents in Huntingdonshire through our polices and projects set out in the Action Plan.

11. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 **Climate change and environmental improvement:** The 2020 Strategy aims to provide a tangible approach to how the Council can play a part in tackling the challenges of a changing climate.
- 11.2 Though the 2020 Strategy is not an overall solution in tackling climate change across Huntingdonshire, trees are recognised as a key resource in managing environmental issues such as:
 - Decreasing particulate pollution
 - Improving air quality through carbon sequestration
 - Decreasing water runoff and preventing nutrient loss in soils
 - Improving urban drainage
 - Providing urban cooling
 - Creating and improving wildlife corridors
- 11.3 The 2020 Strategy and associated Action Plan places significant importance on these issues and sets about putting in place projects (such as identifying land for planting and assessing and increasing urban canopy cover) from which a direct environment benefit can be realised.

12. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 12.1 In the review of the 2015 Strategy and the development of the 2020 Strategy and Action Plan, new policies and ways of working are proposed that are based on detailed analysis of our own tree stock (and those trees where we play a part in their management). The 2020 Strategy responds to modern arboricultural issues and looks to embed these into our working practices, bringing the Council up to date with industry changes.

12.2 The Action Plan sets out a clear set of objectives to be achieved over the life of the document which support the 7 key aims of the 2020 Strategy to ensure a sustainable tree stock across Huntingdonshire is ensured for the future.

13. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – List of policies included in the Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy 2020-2030

Appendix 2 – Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy 2020 - 2030

Appendix 3 - Huntingdonshire Tree Action Plan

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Tree Strategy Working Group Final Report.](#) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Customers and Partnerships) – 3rd October 2019.

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