

**Public**  
**Key Decision - NO**

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy Review 2020 – 2030. Annual Update.

**Meeting/Date:** Overview and Scrutiny (Customers and Partnership) – 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2022

**Executive Portfolio:** Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning, Councillor Jon Neish

**Report by:** Arboricultural Officer

**Ward(s) affected:** All

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### **Executive Summary:**

This report provides an update on projects and work streams carried out during 2021 under the strategic objectives set by the Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy 2020-2030 and its Action Plan.

The Action Plan focuses on the aims of the Tree Strategy and sets out a clear direction for arboricultural management across all Council services which interact with trees.

The Action Plan prioritises aspects of the Councils arboricultural management and the report reviews the completion of standalone projects set to be completed over 2021. It also provides an update on projects which are in progress and are due to be completed a later point in the plan period.

Of the 7 “High Priority” objectives, 2 objectives (or the outcomes therein) have been met, 3 are on target for completion as per the set timescales and 2 have experienced delays.

This update also gives details of the commissioned Huntingdonshire Canopy Cover Assessment and sets out how this will be taken forward into future work streams across the Council.

### **RECOMMENDED**

To note the work undertaken during 2021 on the Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy Action Plan and endorse the timescale changes and amendments to the document where proposed.

## 1. **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide an update on the outcomes of work streams set out in the Tree Strategy Action Plan during 2021 and to propose changes where required.
- 1.2 To report on the outcomes of a commissioned report which reviews Huntingdonshire's tree canopy cover.

## 2. **BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy 2020 – 2030 was adopted by Cabinet in November 2020 and included a 10-year Action Plan which sought to implement aims of the Strategy. In addition, the Tree Strategy set out a mechanism for annual reporting to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide project updates, set out any required alterations or additions to the Action Plan or to note any industry or organisational changes that impact on the Tree Strategy.
- 2.2 The Action Plan is focused on the 7 Key Aims of the Tree Strategy and sets out several objectives under each of the following:
  1. To promote sustainable management of the Council's trees through effective use of our resources.
  2. To maximise the environmental, economic and health benefits of trees across the district;
  3. To fulfil the Council's duty of care in respect of the management of its tree stock;
  4. To create a legacy of tree planting across the district;
  5. To promote community engagement in all aspects of tree planting and management, realising the maximum benefits they can provide;
  6. Make efficient and strategic use of the Council's regulatory powers for the protection of trees of current and future value.
- 2.3 These objectives have been allocated a priority category to ensure that projects and actions which were urgently required or those which act as the basis for latter work are prioritised. The following system was used:

<b>Green</b>	Long term projects which will either evolve over the course of the Action Plan or form part of our core day to day operations
<b>Amber</b>	Tasks that have already commenced or are less time and resource sensitive than those categorised as "red".
<b>Red</b>	Projects that require immediate attention and additional resources

2.4 The Action Plan also sets timescales for project completion and details where additional resources are required.

### 3. **UPDATE ON ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN IN 2021**

3.1 Year 1 of the Action Plan seeks to complete projects that are urgently required or act as the being of work streams that come to fruition later during the life of the Tree Strategy. During 2021, several high priority projects have formed part of work areas across Development and Operational services, with many spanning the two. While work carried out during 2021 has focussed on the high priority (Red) objectives, some actions in medium and low priority areas were also undertaken as part of usual Council operations. A table showing progress made in respect of all objectives is contained in APPENDIX 1.

3.2 **High priority (Red) project areas:** The Action Plan sets out 7 objectives under the highest priority rating requiring action in 2021. These cover the following areas:

Key Aim	Objective	Project area	Status
1	5	Creation of an internal training programme for all arboricultural staff across HDC services	Not completed
2	4	Development of a tree biosecurity policy	Not completed
3	2	Development of a tree and building subsidence policy	On target
	3	Investigation and development of a tree risk management system (TRMS)	On target
4	3	Increasing urban canopy cover relative to available planting space and aiming to increase overall urban tree canopy cover to a minimum of 20% by 2030.	Objective met
6	2	To digitise the Councils data in relation to Tree Preservation Orders.	On target
	5	To review standard conditions used for tree works applications.	Objective met

3.3 Of the 7 objectives, 2 objectives (or the outcomes therein) have been met, 3 are on target for completion as per the set timescales and 2 have experienced delays.

3.4 Key Aim 4, Objective 3 is aimed at increasing canopy cover across Huntingdonshire. Outcome 1 (commissioning of a Canopy Cover Assessment) was completed in Autumn 2021. Outcomes 2 and 3 under

this objective are on target to be completed during 2022. Further details of the outcomes of this work are included in section 4 of this report.

- 3.5 The digitisation of the Council's Tree Preservation Orders under Key Aim 6, Objective 2 has also been completed. A project to scan all the Council's paper records was undertaken in mid-2021 with all historic hard copy files now digitised.
- 3.6 Objectives which are on target for completion include Key Aim 3, Objective 2 which seeks to develop a Building Subsidence Policy and contains an outcome that requires the approval from Councils insurance Officers and insurers. This is on target to have project scoping completed by the end of Q1 2022.
- 3.7 Key Aim 4, Objective 3 (Investigate and develop a tree risk management system (TRM)) is also on target. A commitment has been initiated to exploring TRM systems, Officers have attended training and are trialling a "Quantified Tree Risk Assessment" system (QTRA). A report will be completed on this system for members approval of adoption. Official adoption of QTRA is required by the systems owner to ensure there is appropriate overall legal responsibility within the organisation using the system.
- 3.8 Key Aim 6, Objective 5 is also on target for completion but slightly delayed in its final stages. This seeks to review the Council's standard conditions used for application for works to protected trees. An initial review of these has been undertaken and a rolling programme of annual review / update of these will be continued to ensure they reflect industry and legal best practice. Final administrative processes are needed to finalise this project
- 3.9 Key Aim 3 Objective 5 has been included in the high priority category in error (timescale for completion by 2025) and will be amended in the Action Plan as a medium priority.
- 3.10 Several outside factors and limited resources across Development and Operations Arboriculture have prevented the completion of Key Aim 1, Objective 5 (staff training programme) and Key Aim 2, Objective 4 (development of a biosecurity strategy). Revised timescales for these are proposed.
- 3.11 The creation and implementation of a staff training program for all officers across HDC with an arboricultural element to their role (Key Aim 1, Objective 5) was proposed to be in place by end 2021. Initial work to explore the Council's legal requirements in relation to arboricultural competence required for tree management roles has commenced which will form the basis of this objective. However, limited availability of resources (principally officer time) has prevented this objective from being completed. This area remains a priority across all HDC arboricultural functions and it is proposed to highlight this project as a priority for 2022.
- 3.12 Key Aim 2, Objective 4 proposed the development and promotion of a biosecurity strategy for all aspects of tree management (and service areas

which interact with trees) at the Council. Project scoping for this objective was due to be completed by end 2021. Work is yet to be started in this area due to a forthcoming consultation on the Government’s proposed Plant Biosecurity Strategy. This project area remains a “High Priority” area, however it is proposed to extend the target date for project scoping to June 2022 to ensure any proposals follow the most current Government and industry best practice and to prevent potentially abortive work.

3.13 **Medium priority (Amber) project areas:** In addition to the 7 high priority actions for 2021, a further 3 objectives included elements to be completed in year 1. These cover the following areas:

Key Aim	Objective	Project area	Status
1	4	Development of the Council’s existing tree surveying methods to cover all service areas.	On going
3	1	Development of the Councils surveying methods (Software and hardware)	On going
4	5	Understand and improve establishment rates of new trees on development sites.	Objective not met

3.14 Key Aim 1, Objective 4 (tree surveying methods) forms part of ongoing work in the Council’s Operations service area. Integrated customer service and asset management software systems have been explored to assess business suitability. Currently “Ezytreev” tree surveying software is best suited for tree asset management. There are still on-going projects to upgrade the system and to link any software to a TRM system noted above.

3.15 Key Aim 3, Objective 1 (Tree Survey Methods; software and hardware) projects have been created to initiate updating current tree surveying software & hardware, different asset management systems have been explored including partnership projects. The objective is still in progress as it requires budget availability, research for suitability / performance and longevity of equipment.

3.16 Key Aim 4, Objective 5 (tree establishment rates on development sites) was due for project scoping and reporting by end 2021. Unfortunately, officer changes in Development Services and a focus shift to strategic projects such as the A428 diversion has prevented this from being completed. While this objective remains a priority, it is proposed to extend the target date for project scoping and reporting to end 2022.

- 3.17 **Low priority (Green) project areas worked towards during year 1:** A core element of these objectives covers work which form part of the Councils core day to day operations concerning tree management. Green projects are reviewed as part of service's annual business planning (service plans) and evolve as part of service development.
- 3.18 Key Aim 4, Objectives 1 and 4 (Continued development of the tree planting program and to take part in and support national tree planting events) have formed a major part of the work undertaken by Operations. The arboricultural department has developed and explored opportunities as part of the Councils commitments to increase tree canopy where possible on HDC land. At the end of 2020 tree planting program (March 2021), the Council had planted approximately 20 standard size trees across various open spaces in towns and villages and trialled mass tree whip planting. Under the 2021 tree planting program (November 2021-March 2022) seeks to set 40 standard size (including memorial trees) and undertake woodland regeneration tree planting trials in woodland managed by the Council.
- 3.19 Key Aim 5, Objective 1: (Promote voluntary working parties) has formed a key part of Operations Arboricultural Departments work during 2021. The department has successfully organised community tree planting projects as part of a national incentive under the Queens Green Canopy Jubilee campaign, sponsored by The Woodland Trust. This is one of the Council's first major partnership tree planting campaigns aimed at increasing tree in Huntingdonshire and has seen between 1000-2000 tree whips planted over three selected sites. The first woodland community partnership creation project took place in Godmanchester on the 4th December 2021 seeing residents, community groups and Councillors attending and planting over 400 trees planted. This was followed by local primary schools planting an additional 200 trees. Further commitments with local community groups are in place to complete the project, where approximately 800 tree whips will be planted. In early 2022, the second woodland creation project commenced at Hill Rise Park in St Ives. A partnership project between HDC and a Groundworks Green Recovery volunteer team (with potential for community involvement) is expected to plant between 600 and 1000 tree whips across selected areas within the park. The third site is set to be at Priory Park, St Neots where an extension to the existing woodland will be planted using approximately 400 tree whips.

#### **4. COMMISSIONING OF THE CANOPY COVER ASSESSMENT.**

- 4.1 A key project set by the Action Plan was to commission a Canopy Cover Assessment of the district in the first year of the plan period (2021) (Copy APPENDIX 2). Undertaking this assessment early in the life of the Action Plan allows the results to underpin a range of wider environmental projects across the life of the Tree Strategy.
- 4.2 The study was carried out by a specialist consultancy with the aim of providing a baseline understanding of the spatial extent and socio-

economic benefits of our tree population. This ensures the Council can maximise the benefits derived from trees by those who live and work in the district while maintaining a sustainable tree population.

- 4.3 The scope of the study was also set to include an assessment of canopy cover figures at a ward level with ONS data such as healthy life expectancy, hospital admissions, crime rates and indices of multiple deprivation as a comparison. The brief also set out to obtain an assessment of the ecosystem services provided by our tree population. A summary of the key findings of the assessment is contained in APPENDIX 3.
- 4.4 The results of this assessment will form the basis of a Tree Canopy Improvement Plan set to be researched and written in 2022 by a cross departmental working group. This will look to scope projects and policies to preserve and enhance our current tree population and be used to provide baseline information for wider Council environmental projects across the organisation.
- 4.5 Once published, the study will also be shared with partner organisations (such as community groups and Town / Parish Councils) to allow them to investigate ways in which they can manage and improve canopy levels in their areas.

## **5. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS**

- 5.1 The Action Plan sets out key projects based on the sustainable management of the wider tree population of Huntingdonshire. This update highlights where work has been completed and where alterations are needed as a result of resource challenges and changes in government policies.
- 5.2 While there are likely to be future funding and resource requirements for projects set out in the Action Plan, endorsement of this update 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 arboriculture.
- 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 set for the scoping of projects to be completed 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 Action Plan and update 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 update to the 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 Tree Strategy Action Plan, continual revenue funding for arboricultural services across the Council is required.
- 9.2 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. The Action Plan seeks bring about projects that can harness these benefits over the life of the Tree Strategy.

## **11. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 **Climate change and environmental improvement:** The Action Plan update and commissioned Canopy Cover Assessment set about tasks and projects which can assist the Council in tackling wider environmental improvement and issues surrounding a changing climate.
- 11.2 Though the projects and objectives of the Action Plan are 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) which a direct environment benefit can be realised.

## 12. **REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS**

12.1 The Action Plan provides a set of objectives to be achieved over the life of the Tree Strategy in support of its 7 key aims. These are focussed on ensuring a sustainable tree stock is created across Huntingdonshire.

12.2 This update sets out how the initial objectives have been actioned over 2021 and amends the Action Plan to reflect changes in priorities and resources to ensure the set objectives can be met.

## 13. **LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

**Appendix 1** – Table showing progress with all objectives under the Tree Strategy Action Plan.

**Appendix 2** – Canopy Cover Assessment Report

**Appendix 3** – Canopy Cover Assessment Key Findings

## 14. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy 2020 – 2030](#)  
[Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy Action Plan.](#)

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