

APPENDIX 3. HDC Canopy Cover Assessment Report - Key Findings

Background:

In 2020 the Council endorsed the Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy 2020 – 2030 and the associated Action Plan.

A key project set out in the Action Plan was to commission a Canopy Cover¹ Assessment of the district in the first year of the plan period, providing a baseline understanding of the spatial extent and socio-economic benefits of tree population. Quantify our cover levels is an essential first step in managing our urban forests and ensuring the Council can maximise the benefits derived from trees by those who live and work in the district while maintaining a sustainable tree population.

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. The brief also set out to obtain an assessment of the ecosystem services provided by our tree population. In early 2021, Treeconomics were commissioned to undertake an assessment of canopy cover and ecosystem services our current canopy cover provides. A copy of the report is attached.

Findings:

The report concludes the following:

- I. The overall canopy cover of the district of Huntingdonshire is estimated at 10%, ranging across wards from 24% to 3%.
- II. Cover is notably lower than Engadin average at 16% and significantly lower than the suggested 20% cover target set by Forest Research to maximise tree related benefits.
- III. Wards at centre of the district, typically have a greater canopy cover, with those in the northern part of the district being very low. However, this may be attributed to our landscape character in these areas.
- IV. The existing canopy cover significantly contributes to our environmental quality, with trees storing approximately 637,000 metric tonnes of carbon sequestering a further 25,000 metric tonnes of carbon a year.
- V. In terms of pollution uptake, our trees remove 3,100 tonnes of particulates a year at a value of £25 million annually
- VI. The environmental benefits of our tree cover in relation to flood alleviation is worth £4 million each year.
- VII. There is a direct correlation throughout the district between average house prices and canopy cover, with an average increase of £8,300 in areas of higher tree cover.
- VIII. Crime rates generally increase in areas throughout the district with lower tree canopy cover
- IX. The average number of hospital admissions in relation to canopy cover does not appear to show any major differences.
- X. There is a direct correlation between educational achievement levels and canopy cover with increased attainments levels in higher canopy cover areas.

¹ Canopy cover (also referred to as tree canopy cover and urban canopy cover) can be defined as the area of leaves, branches, and stems of trees covering the ground when viewed from above. It is a two-dimensional metric indicating the spread of tree canopy across an area.