

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: A Tree Strategy for Huntingdonshire

Meeting/Date: COMT - July 7th 2014
Overview and Scrutiny (Env Well Being) - 15th July 2014
Cabinet - 17th July 2014

Executive Portfolio: Cllr Doug Dew, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing and Cllr Darren Tysoe, Executive Councillor for Operations & Environment

Report by: Brian Ogden – Arboricultural Officer, Planning Services

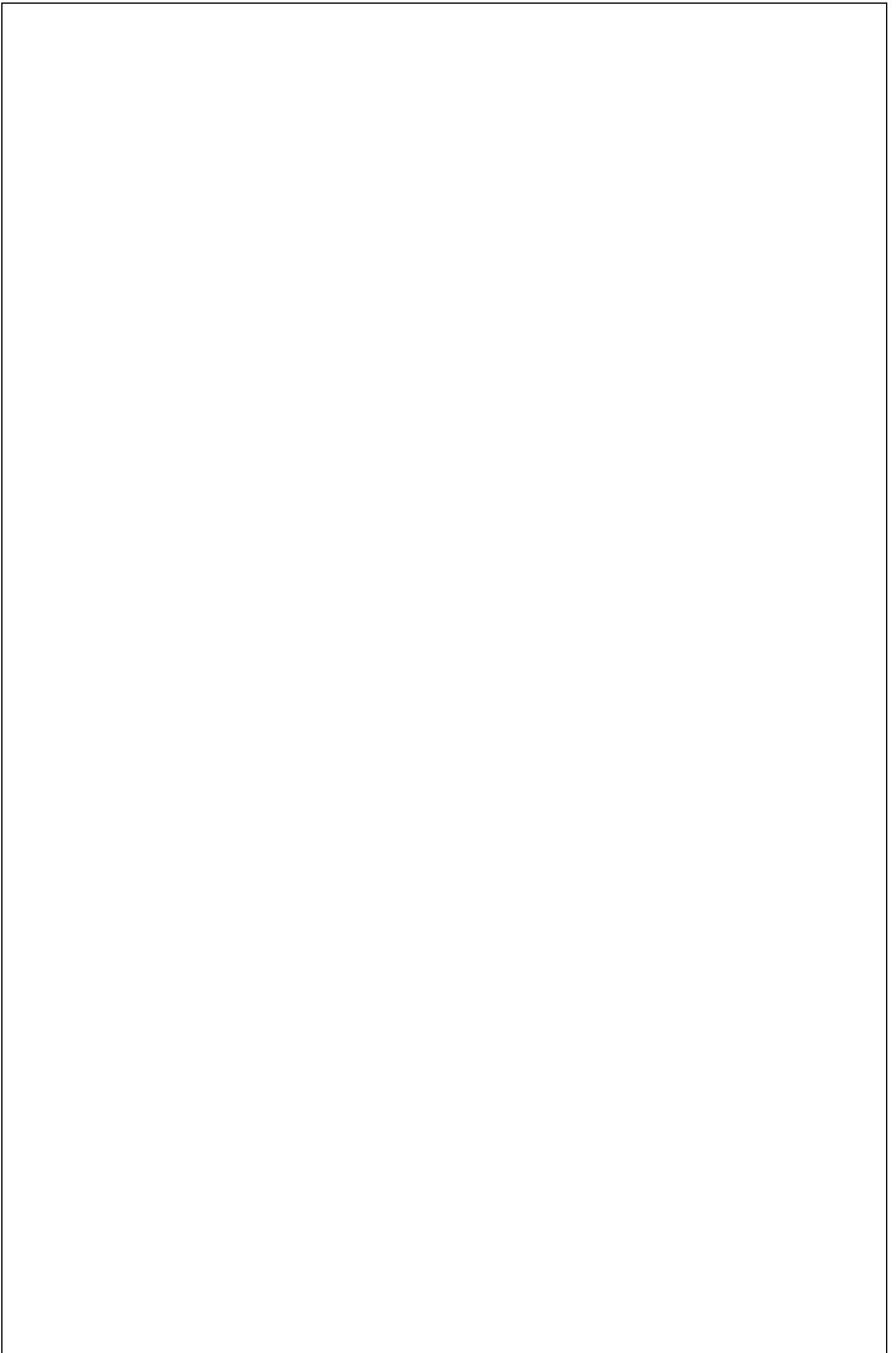
Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

In 2010 members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) resolved to produce and adopt a comprehensive tree strategy for the whole of Huntingdonshire. The aim of the strategy is to provide a solid framework for protection, maintenance and enhancement of trees within the District of Huntingdonshire. Management, care, and planting of trees in the District is unplanned and fragmented, with varied standards of care from very good to very poor. The strategy has been developed to be a useful and practical working document, not a mission statement, to provide a framework with achievable, clear, measurable targets for the incremental long term improvement to the tree population in Huntingdonshire.

Recommendation(s):

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny [Environmental Well Being] Panel endorses the Tree Strategy and recommend that it be adopted by Cabinet.
2. That Cabinet adopts the Tree Strategy by Cabinet, subject to any minor amendments agreed between the Head of Development and the relevant Executive Councillors
3. That Cabinet authorises the Corporate Director (Delivery) to proceed with implementation of the Action Plan 2015-2020.



1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT/PURPOSE?

- 1.1 This report seeks the endorsement and adoption of the Tree Strategy by Cabinet, and also for the Authorisation of the Corporate Director – Delivery to proceed with implementation of the Action Plan 2015-2020.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Since 2011 work has been progressing to develop a comprehensive tree Strategy for the whole of Huntingdonshire. It is recognised that trees are being lost faster than they are being planted, and that tree management, care, and planting is fragmented and standards vary. The aim of the Strategy is simple, to protect and care for the trees we have, and to provide a framework for planting more trees. The Strategy has been developed to be a working document, and not just a mission statement. The Strategy provides a real framework with clear measurable targets that will provide incremental, long term improvement to the valuable tree resource in Huntingdonshire.
- 2.2 The Strategy sets out the Council's approach to tree care management, risk management, and statutory planning requirements, and through a five year action plan determines the direction for all of HDC's tree related management and projects.
- 2.3 The Tree Strategy for Huntingdonshire 2015 to 2020 also provides operational standards for the care and management of trees and helpful best practice guidance for other tree owners, such as Parish and Town Council's and Schools on tree risk management practices, and quality of tree work.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE STRATEGY

- 3.1 To meet the aim of providing a framework to protect, maintain and enhance trees within Huntingdonshire, the Strategy has three main parts:

1. Action Plan

Key aims and objectives for trees in the District and a five-year plan for the work that needs to be carried out to deliver these aims and objectives.

2. Tree Policies

The guiding principles on how trees in the District will be protected and cared for, and how new tree planting will be promoted.

3. Tree Guidance Notes

Guidance notes setting out operational standards, and outlining how management decisions are made. These are stand alone documents that will be updated to reflect best practice and legislative amendments as they change, and additional documents may be added if required. The Guidance notes include; a specification for work to trees on Council land, a guide on how the Council responds to customer requests for work to trees, a Supplementary Planning document for Trees and Development, a method for the Evaluation of Trees for Tree Preservation Orders, a Policy for dealing with Planning Enforcement, a Tree Risk Management policy, a practical guide to Tree Risk management for public bodies such as Parish Councils, Schools etc, a guide for dealing with insurance claims against the Council, and a guide for dealing with Ash Dieback.

- 3.2 The Tree Strategy is a practical working document. It will provide an up to date point of reference for Council Officers, Council Members, Policy Makers, and

for other large and small land and tree owners, professional and non-professional.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

4.1 To be circulated separately.

5. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 The next steps in relation to the adoption and implementation of the Tree Strategy will include final engagement and consultation with Council departments/services. This action will ensure that the Council has a consistent approach to the care, management of, and advice provided for trees throughout the District.

5.2 Following this final consultation Publication of the Tree Strategy is proposed for January 2015, where it will be made available as an 'online' resource to allow access to all Guidance documents, and external links. The implementation of the Strategy 2015-2020 is detailed in part one the Action Plan.

5.3 Officers will be carrying out a yearly review of the Tree Strategy with clear performance indicators, and because of this the Tree Strategy is a dynamic document which can respond to changes in the District, new legislation and emerging industry best practice. A detailed analysis and review will take place every five years.

6. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN

6.1 The adoption and implementation of the Tree Strategy and its initial five year action plan links with Corporate Plan themes to enable sustainable growth, to improve the quality of life in Huntingdonshire, and working with our Communities.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The Strategy has been developed to improve and reduce the risks of insurance claims against the Council, to improve and assist Officers with the day to day decision making process, and to strengthen and provide a consistent approach to the Council's position regarding trees and development, and tree protection. There will be many improvements to the Council's procedures by the adoption and implementation of the Strategy, the most important of which are:-

7.2 The move from unplanned to planned management of trees will not only improve the valuable tree resource in the district, it will reduce the risk of insurance claims, allow for a better defence of any spurious claims, and may also reduce insurance premiums.

7.3 The introduction of an adopted method of evaluation of trees for protection will ensure any legal challenges against newly made Tree Preservation Orders are less likely to be successful.

7.4 The introduction of improved procedures for planning related tree offences should lead to more effective and efficient use of resources, and reductions in planning contraventions.

- 7.5 At a later date, once the overall Tree Strategy is adopted, it is intended that “Trees and Development”, guidance note 3, be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document. This will give more coherent, consistent, and sound support to our position on the retention, protection, and care of trees during any development in the District. This will be subject to the normal statutory consultation used for the production of any planning document.
- 7.6 The adoption of a Tree Risk Management System allows Officers to make defensible decisions and allow the confident retention of trees without fear of undue legal challenge, and give the Council a solid base for defending any spurious insurance claims.
- 7.7 Providing best practice tree risk advice to public and private bodies will reduce the risk of harm to the public.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Resource implications of the adoption and implementation of the Tree Strategy have been considered and are listed in Part 2 of the Strategy “The Five Year Action Plan”. The Strategy has been developed so as not to require any additional implementation resources. While the Strategy is not likely to result in any resource savings, if implemented it will enhance the provision of an effective service, as well as improving the tree resource in our area.

9. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Tree Strategy will enable the service areas that have responsibilities for trees to work more effectively together. These include Planning, Operations, Countryside, Legal, and Finance.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 10.1 The adoption of this Strategy and its policies, and the implementation of the action plan will improve the protection of trees in the District, improve the standard of the care of trees in the District and will increase overall tree cover in the District. The Tree Strategy provides a much needed framework for the protection, maintenance and enhancement of trees within Huntingdonshire, and provided a framework for a plentiful, healthy and attractive tree population that is managed and maintained to a high standard for the benefit of all. The adoption of this strategy and its supporting documents will ensure that all matters relating to the management of Council trees are dealt with in a co-ordinated and accountable manner, based on good practice which will raise tree management standards.

11. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – Draft ‘Tree Strategy for Huntingdonshire’

CONTACT OFFICER

Enquiries about this report to **Brian Ogden, Arboricultural Officer**, Planning Services
Tel No. 01480 388437