

Executive report to Scrutiny

Scrutiny Commission: Neighbourhood Services & Community Involvement

Date of scrutiny commission: 01 July 2021

Title: Tree Strategy Review

Lead executive decision maker: Councillor Adam Clarke
Deputy City Mayor for Environment & Transportation.

Lead director: John Leach, Director of Neighbourhood
Services & Enforcement

Useful Information:

Ward(s) affected: All Wards
Report author: Stewart Doughty
Report Version: 1

1. Summary

To provide members with an update on progress since the introduction of the Tree Strategy which was adopted by the City Council in November 2018.
<https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/185470/trees-strategy-2018-23-v2.pdf>

2. Recommendations

Scrutiny Commission is asked to comment on the report and suggest any amendments to its content and format prior to publishing the review document on the Council's web pages.

3. Introduction

The first Leicester Tree Strategy was formally adopted in November 2018 during National Tree Week.

It is a five-year strategy which aims to sustain and increase the tree stock in Council ownership and to improve the quality of the city's trees. It also promotes the important role trees can play in maintaining a high-quality city environment, reducing air pollution and contributing to flood risk management.

The strategy outlines how we manage the city's trees to ensure that we sustain and enhance Leicester's urban forest for future generations.

A formal review of all of the aims and actions within the strategy has been undertaken and the data collated in a table for ease of reference as attached at appendix 1.

4. Report

The Tree Strategy review considers the two financial years since its adoption 2019/20 and 2020/21. The annual review in 2019/20 was delayed due to COVID 19 and has been combined into one review document.

The review aims to monitor the delivery of the aims of the Tree Strategy via the five key strategic objectives:

- Promoting amenity
- Promoting habitat and wildlife
- Responding to global obligations
- Managing the pressure on trees in others ownership
- Delivering this strategy

And a series of 22 actions as specified in the Tree Strategy.

The review document gives the current position statement and identifies what has been achieved over the 24 months period, with a series of measures.

Each section is colour coded for ease of reference.

There are a series of headline key facts included in the start of the document on page 3 which give an overview.

5. Consultations

Cllr Adam Clarke, Deputy City Mayor for Environment & Transportation.

CMB

6. Implications

6.1. Financial Implications

The works associated with the management of the Councils tree stock are met from existing revenue budgets with some tree planting funded from various capital projects and Section 106 funding. In addition a series of successful external funding bids has supported tree planting projects, including EarthWatch and the Urban Tree Challenge funds – Amy Oliver, Head of Finance, ext. 37 5667

6.2. Legal Implications

The Leicester Tree Strategy was adopted in November 2018. The Tree Strategy Review aims to monitor delivery of the aims of the Leicester Tree Strategy to date. There are no legal implications arising from this update report.

Katherine Hall, Locum Solicitor, Planning & Highways

6.3. Equality Implications

The strategy aims to sustain and increase the tree stock in Council ownership and to improve the quality of the city's trees. It also promotes the important role trees can play in maintaining a high-quality city environment, reducing air pollution.

There are no direct equality implications arising from this update report. It is important to note that although air pollution can be harmful to everyone, some people are more affected because they live in a polluted area, are exposed to higher levels of air pollution in their day-to-day lives, or are more susceptible to health problems caused by air pollution. The most vulnerable face all of these disadvantages.

Groups that are more affected by air pollution include:

- older people
- children
- individuals with existing CVD or respiratory disease
- pregnant women
- communities in areas of higher pollution, such as close to busy roads
- low-income communities

Surinder Singh, Equalities Officer, Ext 37 4148

7. Author

Stewart Doughty, Head of Parks & Open Spaces






Trees bring enormous environmental and ecological benefits to our city.

They enhance our streets and grace our parks, making a huge contribution to our health and wellbeing.

This five-year strategy will guide us in sustaining and increasing our tree stock and help us improve the quality of the city's trees.

It will also help promote the important role trees can play in maintaining a high-quality city environment, reducing air pollution and contributing to flood risk management.


Sir Peter Soulsby
CITY MAYOR


Cllr Adam Clarke
DEPUTY CITY MAYOR FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Our Aims

The city council will:

- Ensure that the current level of tree canopy and tree numbers under the city council's control are extended and the quality improved.
- Ensure trees under the council's control are managed with the intention of resolving conflicts and problems in a rational, consistent and economic way - listening to the different views, taking them into account but ultimately taking responsibility for, sometimes difficult, decisions.
- Encourage other landowners to plant and manage their trees through advice, guidance and where necessary, the use of tree protection legislation.

It will also:

- Compensate adequately for the loss of significant trees in the landscape by planting more than one replacement - wherever practical at, or near, the location of the removed trees.
- Ensure that public realm infrastructure schemes that involve tree removal or tree planting will incorporate quality planting and design and that designers and lead agents liaise with the council at appropriate stages of planning, design and implementation.

Review:

- The delivery of the aims of the Tree Strategy is via five key strategic objectives, with a series of identified actions. The strategy will be judged against these actions.

Trees & Woodlands Portfolio Key Facts

Management of tree stock of 150k individual registered trees and 109 hectares of woodland.

In-house team comprising of an establishment of 33.68 staff, as appendix 1. Annual maintenance budget of £1.5m

Trees planted 8,771 small trees and 748 heavy stock (total 9,519) 1,054 trees felled 2019/20 – 2020/21 as part of stock management. That's 9 trees planted for every tree felled.

Only LA accredited as an Arboricultural Association contractor.
100% of team trained to HSE standards.

100% of by-product waste recycled, combination of biofuel woodchip material, logs or milled timber. Average 963 tonnes per annum saving £109k in landfill costs plus transport costs.

In partnership with The Tree Council, established 15 volunteer Tree Warden's

A total of 177 mature trees have been surveyed which meet the Local Wildlife Site criteria for designation (inc 9 new locations).

Establishment of the Climate Woods group with representatives from a range of services, scoping opportunity for mass tree planting projects.

3 additional Tree Protection Orders established giving a total of 535 TPO's offering a level of amenity protection.

293 planning consultations undertaken relating to TPO applications and notifications of trees in conservation areas.

Partnership working with the Forestry Commission, Earth Watch and the Tree Council to develop and introduce a range of projects.

Development of a Tree Trail template to be used across a range of sites.



Watermead Tree Planting



Aylestone Meadows Urban Tree Challenge



Timber Mill in operation



Mulching Tiny Forest, Queensmead Primary Academy

Ref	Strategic objective	Delivered by	Measured by	Lead responsibility	Current position
1	Promoting amenity	Monitor the health of the council's trees.	Inspection and survey programme.	T&W	<p>Schools, Highway, Housing and Parks tree stock inspections undertaken to identify works required to manage the health of the tree stock.</p> <p>2019/20 - 194 surveys completed 2020/21 - 174 surveys completed</p> <p>This equates to 29% of all of the sites with trees were surveyed (total 1,281 sites). Sites include 208 parks, 185 housing transects, 642 highway transects etc.</p>
			Continue to expand the council's tree stock	T&W	<p>Replacement planting of heavy stock has been undertaken in the highway, housing areas and parks and open spaces, along with new developments.</p> <p>2019/20 - 445 trees were planted 2020/21 - 303 trees were planted</p> <p>Examples: 23 Watermead Memorial Walk 16 Bede Park avenue 19 Victoria Park new band stand area</p>
			Engage a team of volunteer Tree Wardens.	LEV	<p>In partnership with The Tree Council an initial 15 Tree Wardens have been established and registered as a constituted group, trained to assess and report issues and assist in tree planting and establishment, eg. early identification of Ash Die Back etc.</p>
2	Promoting amenity (cont)		Level of complaints.	T&W	<p>Formal complaints received: 2019/20 - 9 complaints</p>

Ref	Strategic objective	Delivered by	Measured by	Lead responsibility	Current position
		Maintain trees with the aim of reducing nuisance, hazard and complaint			2020/21 - 2 complaints No complaints have been upheld by the LG Ombudsman.
			Tree inspection programme to identify and eliminate potential risk. Maintain inventory register for each tree on Ezytreev database.	T&W	Visual tree inspection regime as ref 1 above: Sites inspection frequency 3 – 7 years based on potential risk depending on location: This identifies the condition and health of the tree stock and any impact the whole tree, might provide in terms of nuisance, hazard and complaint, typical examples being, obstruction of highway/street lamp, removal of deadwood, tree disease and potential tree failure, etc.
			Aim for two thirds of available budget to be targeted on proactive maintenance, rather than emergency works.	T&W	Annual programme of works identified following site surveys with the aim to manage the stock in a safe and healthy condition and reduce the reliance on emergency reaction works. 2019/20 Reactive spend £299k (47%) Proactive spend £341k (53%) 2020/21 Reactive spend £252k (45%) Proactive spend £305k (55%) Reactive spend impacted by storm frequency:

Ref	Strategic objective	Delivered by	Measured by	Lead responsibility	Current position
					<p>Storms played a factor during the life of the Tree Strategy, with 14 recorded included Storm Hannah, Storm Ciara, Storm Francis and Storm Ellen being the most notable of the past 50 years and resulting in tree damage and losses. It is important to note with Climate Change the likelihood for storms to disrupt planned survey work is likely to increase.</p> <p>In addition COVID-19 brought its own disruption during 2020..</p>
3	Promoting amenity (cont)	Use a variety of species and cultivars.	Planting plans	T&W	<p>Tree species are chosen to meet the suitability to location being planted using a range of native trees but also recognising that exotic trees have a place in the landscape.</p> <p>e.g. Watermead memorial trail predominantly native tree stock utilised, Bede Park Liquidambar styraciflua 'Slender Silhouette' (Sweet gum), planted due to its fastigiate form, i.e. will have minimal impact on area CCTV coverage.</p>
			Promote the wide selection of species and cultivars used at key parks	P&OS	<p>Development of a tree trail template which can be downloaded or used as an App to showcase and promote core species across a site encouraging the user to visit the whole site. Abbey Park developed as a trial.</p>

Ref	Strategic objective	Delivered by	Measured by	Lead responsibility	Current position
4	Promoting amenity (cont)	Reduce problems that can be associated with the presence of trees when making decisions about planting design and the positioning of trees in the landscape.	Right tree right place	T&W Planning	<p>Early engagement between planning team and developer as part of the design process to build in tree stock which provides appropriate amenity suitable for the location.</p> <p>e.g. Ashton Green, green infrastructure planning with Morris Homes. 93 tree's planted in phase one along with 368 hedgerow whips.</p>
5	Promoting amenity (cont)	Purchase planting stock of good quality and prepare an underground environment that is conducive to good tree growth.	Procurement policy to ensure quality and scope of species.	T&W	Tender developed for a procurement exercise to establish a framework contract for the supply of a range of species and cultivars to meet the needs of the council.
			Successful establishment of heavy tree stock.	T&W	<p>Preparation of suitable tree pits with appropriate soil conditioner, drainage and irrigation systems to ensure successful establishment.</p> <p>2019/20 – 97% establishment rate 2020/21 – 98% establishment rate</p> <p>Any establishment failures are replanted within the following planting season.</p>

Ref	Strategic objective	Delivered by	Measured by	Lead responsibility	Current position
6	Promoting habitat and wildlife	Encourage the planting and management of woodland and groups of trees.	Identify sites with scope for planting of woodland groups and seek funding to support projects.	P&OS	<p>Climate Woods group established, with representatives from a range of services, scoping opportunity for mass tree planting undertaken and agreed. Successful projects to date include:</p> <p>2019/20 Anstey Lane road widening compensation tree planting at Castle Hill Country Park 2,544 trees planted.</p> <p>2020/21 Urban Tree Challenge, funded by the Forestry Commission, schemes for planting 4,848 small trees at Knighton Park and Aylestone Meadows.</p> <p>Tiny Forest, in partnership with Earthwatch 600 trees planted in a space the size of a tennis court.</p> <p>Schools fruit tree project, in partnership with the Tree Council, to plant 60 fruit trees at, Queensmead, Merrydale Junior and Mellor Primary.</p>
7	Promoting habitat and wildlife (cont)	Where it is compatible with amenity, seek to retain old tree stock, including trees in decline and manage them in a way that promotes their value to wildlife.	Number of trees identified and surveyed.	T&W & Nature Conservation	A total of 177 mature trees have been surveyed which meet the Local Wildlife Site criteria for designation due to the size (girth) generally being over 3.77m and containing features likely to be of value for wildlife such as cracks, fissures and crevices.

Ref	Strategic objective	Delivered by	Measured by	Lead responsibility	Current position
					Where practicable large standing dead trunks (habitat poles) are retained to support wildlife, as they are valuable eco systems.
8	Promoting habitat and wildlife (cont)	Favour native trees over exotics when specifying, planning and implementing new planting.	Species type and quantities	T&W/Planning	<p>Examples of schemes utilising British native tree stock, including Oak, Silver Birch, Hornbeam, Field Maple, Hazel.</p> <p>2019/20 Anstey Lane road widening compensation tree planting at Castle Hill Country Park 2,544 trees planted.</p> <p>2020/21 Urban Tree Challenge, funded by the Forestry Commission, schemes for planting 4,848 small trees at Knighton Park and Aylestone Meadows.</p> <p>Watermead memorial walk.</p>
9	Promoting habitat and wildlife (cont)	Protect and conserve protected or rare species through appropriate compensation when loss cannot be avoided.	Staff training. Bio diversity action plan	T&W/Planning	<p>Tree inspection prior to felling to determine presence of protected bats species, team are LANTRA trained to utilise specialist endoscope.</p> <p>T&W work with Nature Conservation team to ensure Bio Diversity Action Plan is adhered to.</p> <p>Ensure that the Wildlife & Countryside Act is taken into consideration when undertaking any maintenance works to protect active bird nests during the nesting season.</p>

Ref	Strategic objective	Delivered by	Measured by	Lead responsibility	Current position
10	Responding to global obligations	Respond appropriately and proportionately to the threat of pests and disease epidemics.	Monitor the impact of Ash Dieback.	T&W	<p>Ash dieback disease is a phenomenon that will potentially have a significant impact on the tree stock in the city. Nationally the disease has been under reported and public awareness of it is low. In addition, practitioners are unfamiliar with it and are having to learn what should be done in practice as it starts to affect their areas. So, it is still unclear how fast the disease will establish itself in the city and start to cause practical problems, but experience of other parts of the country points to this occurring much faster than first suggested.</p> <p>Initial outbreak identified in woodland plantations in the north of the City, however the disease is now more widespread across the City.</p> <p>Contingency budget in capital programme for 2021/22 to react and manage.</p>
			Through tree surveys identify concerns on individual tree's health & condition and where necessary review a site for potential pathogens.	T&W	<p>Western Park has a large number of Pine trees infected with Needle Blight. This fungus infects the needles and gradually defoliates the tree. Also present is Phytophthora a fungus that affects many host trees and has already required the felling of several trees within the park.</p>

Ref	Strategic objective	Delivered by	Measured by	Lead responsibility	Current position
					Contingency budget in capital programme for 2021/22 to react and manage.
11	Responding to global obligations (cont)	Recycle the materials that arise from the management of trees, including the use of wood as a carbon-neutral fuel.	Volume of material diverted from landfill and recycled.	T&W	<p>By diverting by-product waste from landfill a saving of £109k per annum on landfill costs plus transporting costs has been achieved. Woodchip is recycled for bio fuel.</p> <p>Recycled by tonnage/total sale value/percentage recycled</p> <p>2019/20 – 1,015t / 100% 2020/21 – 911t / 100%</p>
12	Managing the pressure on trees in others' ownership	Seek to preserve amenity afforded by trees when considering our response to tree work applications made under planning controls.	Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's) created.	Planning	<p>3 additional Tree Protection Orders established giving a total of 535 TPO's offering a level of amenity protection.</p> <p>(Stoneygate Baptist Church, Coles Close, Dukes Drive).</p>
			Revise policy to support tree preservation.	Planning	Adoption of the Pine Tree Avenue tree preservation strategy, protection of a significant avenue of Giant Redwood trees (Wellingtonia). In planning terms, the document represents Informal Guidance. It promotes the trees as a "material consideration" when planning or assessing works that might affect their retention.
13	Managing the pressure on	When assessing planning applications, take into account the effect on trees	Consider all planning	Planning	<p>2019/20 – 118 (all with timeframe)</p> <p>2020/21 – 159 (99% within timeframe)</p>

Ref	Strategic objective	Delivered by	Measured by	Lead responsibility	Current position
	trees in others' ownership (cont)	and protect them where the balance of factors favours preservation.	applications within timeframe.		
14	Managing the pressure on trees in others' ownership (cont)	Where landscaping that includes tree planting is made a condition of planning consent, incorporate quality design and specification.	Process to ensure conditions issued provide suitable design outputs.	Planning	<p>All Planning consents issued seek to secure the standard and specification as requested by Trees and Woodlands officers. Where this cannot be negotiated the reasons are reported and recorded in the Decision Report.</p> <p>Standard Planning Condition wording is being reviewed in respect of the Environment Bill and quality specifications are being considered as part of this review.</p>
15	Managing the pressure on trees in others' ownership (cont)	Work directly with landowners and developers to support them with the management, inclusion and retention of trees affected by the planning process.	Number of planning consultations undertaken.	Planning	<p>Planning consultations undertaken relating to TPO applications and notifications of trees in conservation areas.</p> <p>2019-20 - 134</p> <p>2020/21 - 159</p> <p>T&W offer British Standard 5837 surveys required to ensure all trees are considered as a material consideration for all planning applications, e.g. St Margaret's Bus Station, Anstey Lane and Ashton Green.</p> <p>Planning, Development and Transportation team work with each developer as part of the design process to ensure that existing landscape features can be retained and preserved and are enhanced with new design features.</p>

Ref	Strategic objective	Delivered by	Measured by	Lead responsibility	Current position
					e.g. Ashton Green, green infrastructure planning with Morris Homes. 93 tree's planted in phase one along with 368 hedgerow whips.
16	Managing the pressure on trees in others' ownership (cont)	Provide a 24/7 call out service ensuring a response to tree emergencies at any time.	100% of emergencies responded to within two hours.	T&W	Responding to a range of situations, e.g., tree failure, road traffic accident. storms etc. 2019/20 454 total emergencies responded to. 69 out of hours 2020/21 316 total emergencies responded to 41out of hours
17	Managing the pressure on trees in others' ownership (cont)	Respond within 24 hours to reports of other contraventions, actionable nuisance and hazards and deal with these quickly and proportionately - making appropriate resources available.	Number of contraventions responded to within timeframe.	Planning	2019-20 - 14 tree related cases received and a site visit was undertaken in 100% of the cases within the 24 hour target. 2020-21 - 30 tree related cases received and a site visit was undertaken in 73% of the cases within the 24 hour target. Tree related cases received on Saturday and Sunday can easily miss these targets.
18	Managing the pressure on trees in others' ownership (cont)	Be bound by the relevant planning practice guidance when managing protected tree regulations.	Consider planning enforcement action as required.	Planning	2019/20 - 14 enforcement actions. 1 Prosecution action taken but appealed and conviction overturned, 4 informal warning, 8 No breaches, 1 No action taken as tree was removed being dangerous.

Ref	Strategic objective	Delivered by	Measured by	Lead responsibility	Current position
					2020/21 - 3 – 2 No Breaches, 1 resolved (Planting replacement trees).
19	Delivering this strategy	Adequate financial resources from council budgets and income generation.	Annual review of budget allocation and income forecast.	P&OS	<p>2019/20 budget £000 £1,137 - Salaries £ 164 - Running costs £ (777)- Income £ 524 - Net</p> <p>2020/21 budget £1,149 - Salaries £ 164 - Running costs £ (627)- Income £ 686 - Net</p> <p>Salaries budget reduction due to centralisation of employee insurance costs in 2021/21.</p> <p>All vehicle and plant expenditure budget held centrally by Fleet, annual budget £226,261</p> <p>Income target reduction by £150k in recognition of reducing income from client expenditure.</p> <p>Additional £500k contingency budget for management of Ash Die Back and Western Park sanitisation and replacement planting approved as Policy Provision for 2021/22.</p>

Ref	Strategic objective	Delivered by	Measured by	Lead responsibility	Current position
20	Delivering this strategy (cont)	Appropriately qualified, skilled, motivated and experienced staff	Certificates of competence and CPD for all staff.	T&W	<p>100% of operative's have achieved the required certificate of competence for the range of tasks undertaken.</p> <p>2019/20 - 152 refresher and novice training 2020/21 - 42 refresher and novice training</p> <p>The majority of operative training is a legal requirement as nearly every function requires certification, leading to some operatives holding as many as 50 certificates, many of which require regular refreshment, eg. climbing at height, use of chain saw, pesticides use etc.</p> <p>All staff training and competency is reviewed as part of the quality conversations.</p>
21	Delivering this strategy (cont)	The organisation, systems, depots, facilities and good quality equipment that our staff need.	Infrastructure in place to support T&W team in service delivery.	T&W	<p>Health and safety audit identified pressures on Beaumont Park Depot capacity, identified opportunities to relocate part of service to reduce pressure on available space.</p> <p>4 Transit vehicles have been upgraded to 6.5 tonne tippers to ensure weight capacity is managed appropriately.</p> <p>Ongoing replacement programme of chippers and chainsaw equipment.</p> <p>Ezytreev software system in place to manage tree stock.</p>

Ref	Strategic objective	Delivered by	Measured by	Lead responsibility	Current position
			Accreditation to the Arboricultural Association as an approved contractor.	T&W	<p>The Arb Approved Contractor programme is the only comprehensive accreditation scheme for Tree Surgery businesses in the UK. Every approved contractor has been thoroughly assessed and found to carry out tree work to the highest standard. Assuring customers of good quality tree care undertaken safely and efficiently.</p> <p>Leicester City Council is the only LA to hold the AA accreditation.</p> <p>2020/21 - Accreditation refreshed and awarded.</p>
22	Delivering this strategy (cont)	Support from all appropriate sections of the council.	Awareness and understanding of the Tree Strategy within departments and with core clients.	Marketing & Comms	<p>Tree Strategy marketed with clients and council divisions, including Members via a limited supply of hard copy prints.</p> <p>Directing officers to online documents and reiterating policy on replacement planting.</p> <p>General understanding of the Tree Strategy with officers aware of the replacement policy.</p>

Trees & Woodlands Team Structure

