

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 25 SEPTEMBER 2017
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (PUBLIC PROTECTION, PLANNING AND
GOVERNANCE)

DRAFT TREES AND WOODLAND STRATEGY 2018-2022

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council's Trees and Woodland Strategy sets out the methods and policies which dictate how the Council will manage its trees and woodlands. This is the third revision of the strategy and will update the adopted strategy from 2013.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the committee approve the Draft Trees and Woodland Strategy for public consultation. Please note that the strategy will be added to the Council's online consultation system to make it more attractive and easier for people to comment.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 This document updates the Trees and Woodland Strategy from 2013, responds to issues raised by the Tree Scrutiny sub-committee that sat in 2016-2017 and takes into consideration the Submitted Local Plan, through minor amendments and consolidation of repetitive information.
- 3.2 For information, the Tree Scrutiny sub-committee was established to review the Council's tree management function, as a result of approaches received by ward councillors from residents who had experienced difficulties with trees or as a result of trees. The sub-committee spent time discussing a range of matters with officers and the executive members for environment and planning. It ultimately concluded that the strategy and approach is fit-for-purpose but requires some updating. It considered the main failing of the strategy was in the provision of clear and easily accessible information on street tree management, especially on the website. It recommended that clear information including images and pictures should be available in respect of pruning, suckers, contact details, yearly cycles, when specific work will be done on trees, what work residents can carry out themselves, articles in Life magazine and training sessions for councillors. This was reported to Cabinet on 6 June 2017 and it was resolved that the recommendations would be considered as part of the review of this strategy.
- 3.3 The background to Policy 4 (Pests and Diseases) has been enhanced to reflect the increasing threats of exotic or unusual pests and diseases which may invade the borough in the coming years.

- 3.4 Policy 9 (Green Infrastructure) has become a separate item to reflect its importance within the Council and the Submitted Local Plan.
- 3.5 The strategy also outlines the increased use of the Council's website to allow stakeholders greater access to general local tree information. This includes a new Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page to help answer many of the issues raised by the Tree Scrutiny sub-committee.
- 3.6 Consultation letters will be sent to Hertfordshire County Council, town/parish councils, other Council departments, community groups, local interest groups, wood wardens and tree wardens together with a web-based consultation for a period of six weeks. The views of the Borough Panel will also be sought.
- 3.7 It is currently anticipated that the results of the consultation and a revised strategy will be brought back to this committee for approval in early 2018. The strategy will then progress to Cabinet for adoption by the Council.

4 Legal Implications

- 4.1 There are no legal implications associated with the adoption of the Strategy.
- 4.2 The lack of an up-to-date strategy may leave the Council open to legal challenge in the event of a fatal or catastrophic incident. The Strategy clearly defines the tree management process which, if adhered to, ensures the Council works to current best practice to minimise risk.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no additional financial implications. The Strategy is currently funded through existing budgets, an agency agreement and grant aid. In the case of woodland work, a very small income is also generated through the sale of timber. These sources of funding are not currently expected to change.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 Failure to provide an adequate management regime leaves the Council open to risk or dereliction of duty of care, and any subsequent claim as a result of lack of management would be difficult to defend.
- 6.2 The lack of appropriate management of trees and woodlands presents a reputational risk to the Council.
- 6.3 There is no proposed change to the Council's policy regarding claims of subsidence damage caused by trees.

7 Security and Terrorism Implications

- 7.1 There are no security or terrorism implications associated with consulting on the Draft Strategy.

8 Procurement Implications

8.1 There are no procurement implications associated with consulting on the Draft Strategy.

9 Climate Change Implications

9.1 The eventual adoption of an up-to-date Strategy will have a positive impact as the appropriate management of trees and woodlands will help mitigate the effects of climate change.

10 Policy Implications

10.1 This document is a revision to an existing policy document and, if adopted, will have implications. However, there are no major departures in this draft from the previous document and new initiatives will not have any financial implications.

11 Link to Corporate Priorities

11.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Business Plan 2015-2018 and particularly Priority 1 to maintain a safe and healthy community and Priority 2 to protect and enhance the environment.

12 Equalities and Diversity

12.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been carried out in connection with the recommendations in this report. The EqIA was completed on 30 August 2017. It found no negative impact on any of the protected groups under Equalities legislation.

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Appendices:

Draft Trees and Woodland Strategy (September 2017)

Background Information:

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee Trees and Woodlands Report (Cabinet 6 June 2017)