

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CLIMATE BIODIVERSITY CABINET PANEL – 10 JULY 2024
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (RESIDENT SERVICES AND CLIMATE
CHANGE)

TREE AND WOODLAND STRATEGY 2024-2029

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this strategy is to set out the council's approach to managing its trees and woodland by supporting our changing and growing borough whilst also maintaining and improving the borough's tree stock and natural environment.
- 1.2 The strategy and its policies set out how Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council manages its trees and woodlands. The priority is to ensure trees and woodlands are in a safe condition whilst acknowledging that trees are natural resource that grow and change over time.
- 1.3 The strategy also acknowledges the importance of trees and woodland in the landscape, for climate change mitigation and for the health and wellbeing of the Borough's residents and visitors.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To consider and note the draft Tree and Woodland Strategy.
- 2.2 If the Climate Biodiversity Cabinet panel unanimously approve the draft Tree and Woodland Strategy, that the Executive Cabinet Member for Environment approve commencement of the public consultation in accordance with their delegated authority.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 Best practice and guidance for Local Authorities is to have an agreed strategy to manage its trees and woodlands. It ensures there is strategic and consistent approach to tree risk management and the management of budgets as well stating clearly what and when the council will undertake works to trees.
- 3.2 A balanced approach to managing trees takes account of their contribution to biodiversity, the environment, human health, safety and quality of life. An appropriate response to tree risk takes account of the human and financial costs involved in controlling risks. It also gives due value of trees in the widest sense.
- 3.3 Whilst it is acknowledged that trees, particularly in urban areas, can cause issues or can be considered a nuisance the wider benefits of trees both aesthetically and environmentally often outweigh these issues.

- 3.4 This document draws upon the council's knowledge and experience as well as accepted industry standards to set aims for the planting, promotion and protection of the treed landscape and provides continuity in the long term management of trees and woodlands. It will be used by the council, local groups, individuals, agencies and any other interested parties as a reference document.
- 3.5 Public consultation will be undertaken on the draft Landscape Management Plan for a period of 8 weeks. This will be open to the public and also shared with key stakeholders, such as the volunteer groups, parish council, and the Herts Wildlife Trust.
- 3.6 There will be a survey hosted on the Council's website and hard copies of the survey available if requested. The consultation will be promoted via the website, social media and direct emails.

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 Landowners/managers have a common law duty of care to ensure trees are as safe as reasonably practicable. A tree owner should take steps to ensure that they are aware of whether a tree is likely to cause harm, and if it is, should take appropriate actions as necessary.
- 4.2 Legislation, including the occupiers' Liability act 1957 and 1984 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, place a duty on tree and woodland owners to consider the safety of those visiting their land.
- 4.3 The tree and woodland strategy demonstrate that the Council is taking a reasonable and practicable approach to the management of its trees and woodlands.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 Management of the council's trees and woodlands is undertaken within existing budgets.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 The Tree and Woodland strategy demonstrates the Council has considered the risks posed by trees and woodlands and shows a reasonable and practicable approach to the management of those risks.

7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 There are no security and terrorism implications.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 There are no additional procurement implications arising from this strategy.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 Trees and Woodland play a vital role in mitigating the effects of climate change. Trees remove carbon dioxide from the air, storing carbon in the trees and soil, and releasing oxygen into the atmosphere.

- 9.2 Trees play a role in decreasing high summer temperatures in built up areas, reducing the urban heat island effect. Trees reduce flooding by slowing rainfall through the canopies of trees and soaking up water in the soil.
- 9.3 Appropriate management of the Council's tree stock ensures that trees are retained, and new planting is undertaken where it is appropriate.
- 9.4 The appropriate management of trees and woodlands contributes to the goals and objectives set in the Council's Climate change strategy.

10 Human Resources

- 10.1 There are no Human Resource implications. The strategy takes account existing resources.

11 Health & Wellbeing Implications

- 11.1 There is growing evidence to suggest that being in nature, including trees and woodland, has positive effects on people's mental health. Studies have shown that green spaces can lower levels of stress and reduce rates of depression and anxiety, reduce cortisol levels and improve general well-being.
- 11.2 Conserving and enhancing trees and woodlands will benefit and enhance green spaces and nature within the borough. This will in turn have a positive effect in the health and wellbeing of residents and those visiting the borough.

11 Communication and Engagement Implications

- 11.1 Once consulted on and approved, the Tree and Woodland Strategy and its policies will be published so that they are publicly available, to inform those wishing to understand process and how the trees and woodlands are to be managed in the Borough.

12 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 13.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's corporate priorities of a commitment towards Action on Climate Change.

14 Equality and Diversity

- 14.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Draft tree and woodland strategy 2024-2029