



Doncaster Council

28th November, 2018

**To the Chair and Members of the
COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Tree Policy and Tree Risk Management Plan for Doncaster Council's Trees and Woodlands

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Cllrs Joe Blackham & Chris McGuiness	All	No

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report provides information on the Tree Policy and Tree Risk Management Plan for Doncaster Council's Trees and Woodlands, which is intended to establish a clear, consistent and structured approach to how Street Scene will maintain trees on land owned and managed by Doncaster Council in line with the principles and actions of the Doncaster Green Infrastructure Strategy 2014-2028.
2. The policy also represents a significant change in the way that municipal trees will be managed in support of the main vision of the Council to find new ways of working to develop public services in line with the Doncaster Growing Together strategy.
3. The document is presented to the Communities and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel for information. The document is attached as appendix A.

EXEMPT REPORT

4. This is not an exempt report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. That Members receive and comment upon the Tree Policy and Tree Risk Management Plan for Doncaster Council's Trees and Woodlands.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

6. Towns and cities everywhere bear testament to the value of the municipal tree and, whilst the value of trees in towns has been known throughout the world since the earliest times, there is a growing body of research that underpins trees as an immensely valuable and functional part of urban infrastructure that is responsible for providing a wide range of social, environmental, economic and health benefits.
7. However, although trees are a positive feature, they can also cause a range of problems, from being a nuisance or inconvenience to potentially causing serious injury or property damage.
8. This Tree Policy and Tree Risk Management Plan is intended to:
 - establish a clear, consistent and structured approach to how Street Scene will inspect and maintain trees on land owned and managed by Doncaster Council so as to maximise the benefits that they provide whilst keeping the risk they pose within acceptable limits;
 - to provide a framework for decision-making and prioritising of tree works for Street Scene Officers to ensure that decisions on tree pruning and removal are consistent and balanced against the positive contribution that trees make to the environment and their enjoyment by local communities;
 - to act as a source of information for residents about the management of municipal trees within the borough; and
 - to support the main vision of the Council to find new ways of working to continue to grow the local economy and place, and to develop public services in a way that ensures all of Doncaster's people and communities benefit with an improved quality of life in Doncaster.

BACKGROUND

9. Doncaster Council is responsible for many thousands of trees growing in its woodlands, parks and open spaces, cemeteries, housing estates, industrial estates and alongside the highway. Along with the many thousands of trees in private property they comprise an '*urban forest*' that significantly enhances the quality of life in the urban environment, and forms an integral part of its shape, colour and diversity.
10. The urban forest also confers economic benefits to Doncaster:
 - directly, through wood products, such as timber or biomass fuel; and
 - indirectly, through eco-system services, including the production of oxygen, offsetting of carbon emissions, absorption of air pollutants, slowing of storm-water run-off and moderation of urban temperatures.

11. However, although trees are a positive feature, they can also cause a range of problems, from being a nuisance or inconvenience to potentially causing serious injury or property damage. Doncaster Council has a legal '*duty of care*' to consider the risks posed by trees on its land so it is important that whilst we must aim to maximise the benefits that the urban forest provides we must also take precautions to keep the risk that individual trees pose to people and property as low as reasonably practicable.
12. Theme 2: Trees and Woodlands of the Doncaster Green Infrastructure Strategy 2014-2028, which was adopted by the Council in 2014, identified many of the challenges facing urban tree management in the borough and set out the broad strategic direction for the management of trees and woodland in both public and private ownership that is required to preserve a functioning urban forest.
13. In support of these aims, eight headline principles were set out. Those shown in **bold** below are promoted through this policy:

A. Every opportunity will be taken to establish new trees and expand our woodland estate on appropriate sites within the Borough.

B. The pruning or felling of trees will be resisted, unless:

- **there is a sound reason to justify the proposed work;**
- **no alternative solution can be found; and**
- **replacement planting is carried out where felling is allowed.**

C. Powers under planning legislation will be used to protect existing trees as appropriate and seek new planting (in relation to both existing protected trees and opportunities associated with development proposals).

D. The use of current best practice and appropriately trained arboricultural operatives in carrying out all tree work within the borough will be promoted.

E. A proactive management system will be adopted for the Council's tree resource, and any necessary work identified during on-going health and safety inspections will be carried out within the timescale specified.

F. The Council will aim to inform tree owners of their legal responsibilities with regard to their trees and will, where appropriate, use its statutory powers to implement works to privately owned trees in the interests of public safety.

G. The Council will manage its own woodland estate sustainably and to meet the multipurpose objectives of biodiversity, recreation, access, education, geodiversity and landscape value, and to help offset the impacts of climate change, and will encourage sustainable

management and increased public access for privately owned woodland within the borough.

H. The Council will seek to investigate breaches of planning legislation relating to protected trees and for unauthorised works to its own trees and woodlands, including theft of timber, and will seek to take proportionate action where deemed appropriate.

14. The Tree Policy and Tree Risk Management Plan is intended to embed these principles into municipal tree management practices and establish a clear, consistent and structured approach as to how Street Scene will maintain trees on Doncaster Council land.
15. To do this, the document includes a policy framework to ensure that decisions on the pruning or removal of trees on land owned and managed by Doncaster Council are balanced against the positive contribution that trees make to the environment and its enjoyment by local communities. The policy reflects the minimum standard necessary for Doncaster Council to maintain the current level of benefits that trees provide and to meet its legal obligations in the management of trees in its ownership.
16. Tree canopy coverage (*syn. "the layer of leaves, branches and tree stems that cover the ground when viewed from above"*) can be used as a proxy for the benefits provided by the urban forest by linking the area of canopy cover to the ecosystem services provided by trees. Doncaster's tree canopy coverage (including both municipal and private trees) has been estimated at 12.2%, the lowest in South Yorkshire (average of 16.4% - Rotherham, 15.6%; Sheffield, 18.4%; Barnsley, 19.2%) and below the average for England of 16% (based on 283 towns and cities). Furthermore, the Urban Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committee (FWAC) Network, advisers to the Forestry Commission on urban forestry, recommends that a canopy cover of 20% is a good aspiration.
17. However, the perceived value of trees varies greatly amongst Doncaster's residents and communities and the tree resource is being placed under increasing pressure as a reaction to real or perceived problems, increased contact with human activity and through the demand for land for development and economic growth. All too often, the value that trees confer is not fully recognised or understood and pressure is applied for unnecessary pruning or removal of healthy trees in order to be seen to be '*doing something*'. Such reactive work is rarely in the best interests of the tree or cost effective, sets a poor example to residents and private sector tree owners and results in a reduction in tree canopy coverage and the benefits provided by the urban forest.
18. Doncaster's municipal tree resource is widespread and diverse and trees on Council land are currently managed by responding to complaints concerning specific trees as they arise (*syn. 'reactive management'*). This reactive approach to tree management:
 - is an inefficient use of resources, requiring the Council's tree officers and arborists to move about the borough to attend to jobs on individual trees

as they arise rather than working on whole streets or groups of trees at once;

- results in the inspection and management of only a fraction of the tree resource on Council land (i.e. only those with a complaint raised);
 - results in ad-hoc and inconsistent maintenance practices;
 - is vulnerable to being difficult to defend (health and Safety at Work Act and legal liability) in the event of a tree failure incident; and
 - prevents financial planning of the tree management service.
19. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) considers that “*for trees in a frequently visited zone, a system for periodic, proactive checks is appropriate*”. Therefore, whilst reactive tree maintenance will always form a key element of overall tree maintenance operations (e.g. for emergency works resulting from high winds), we are moving to a proactive approach to the management of trees through a programme of routine tree inspections to identify and prioritise necessary tree maintenance work.
20. This new approach to tree maintenance will be applied to all trees under the direct management of Street Scene (i.e. on parks, open spaces and highways) and to those where Street Scene is acting as a managing agent (e.g. land managed by St Leger Homes Doncaster, other Council departments or schools where a service level agreement is in place for tree maintenance).
21. This change in approach will fully utilise the Council’s computerised tree management system, which will record the location, species and size of all trees on Council owned and managed land, to form the basis of the routine inspection system and keep records of inspections and recommended and completed works for every tree under Street Scene’s management. To date, 32,000 municipal trees have been added to the database on parks and open spaces, highways, cemeteries and St Leger Homes Doncaster managed land. It is estimated that surveying will take two years to complete but the proactive inspection system can be rolled out as each land holding is completed.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

22. Continue with the current reactive approach to the management of trees on Council land. This is not the recommended option.
23. Produce a tree policy and tree risk management plan to support the transformation to a proactive approach to the management of trees on Council land. This is the recommended option.
24. Adopting the Tree Policy and Tree Risk Management Plan will:
- implement the principles and actions of Theme 2: Trees and Woodlands of the Doncaster Green Infrastructure Strategy 2014-2028 to help produce a healthy, extensive and well managed municipal tree population that will be resilient to the impacts of climate change and will maximise the benefits that trees can provide;

- help the Council meet its legal ‘duty of care’ to consider the risks posed by trees on its land by providing a framework for tree risk management of municipal trees;
- provide a framework for decision-making and prioritising of tree works for Street Scene Officers and act as a source of information about the management of municipal trees within the borough for residents; and
- support the main vision of the Council to find new ways of working to continue to grow the local economy and place, and to develop public services in a way that ensures all of Doncaster’s people and communities benefit with an improved quality of life in Doncaster.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL’S KEY OUTCOMES

25.

	Outcomes	Implications
	<p>Doncaster Working: Our vision is for more people to be able to pursue their ambitions through work that gives them and Doncaster a brighter and prosperous future;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to good fulfilling work • Doncaster businesses are supported to flourish • Inward Investment 	<p><i>Research has shown that there are strong links between business investment / relocation decisions and the quality of the landscape.</i></p> <p><i>The natural environment, including an extensive, well managed urban forest, is a key economic asset for the borough in attracting future investment.</i></p>
	<p>Doncaster Living: Our vision is for Doncaster’s people to live in a borough that is vibrant and full of opportunity, where people enjoy spending time;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The town centres are the beating heart of Doncaster • More people can live in a good quality, affordable home • Healthy and Vibrant Communities through Physical Activity and Sport • Everyone takes responsibility for keeping Doncaster Clean • Building on our cultural, artistic and sporting heritage 	<p><i>The quality of the natural environment is a major determinant of health and well-being. Research has shown a strong link between the quality of natural environments and improved sense of psychological well-being and increased motivation for participation in exercise and recreation.</i></p> <p><i>The urban forest is a highly visible component of the borough’s landscapes and confers significant benefits in creating attractive, high quality environments with opportunities for contact with nature.</i></p>
	<p>Doncaster Learning: Our vision is for learning that prepares all children, young people and adults for a life that</p>	<p><i>Air quality is an issue of national concern, particularly from particulate air pollution,</i></p>

	<p>is fulfilling;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school • Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better • Learning in Doncaster prepares young people for the world of work 	<p><i>which can exacerbate asthma and other respiratory conditions in children. Air pollution has also been linked to significant reductions in intelligence. Parts of the borough suffer elevated levels of air pollution, principally from traffic-generated sources.</i></p> <p><i>The urban forest acts like an air filter, intercepting airborne particulates and producing oxygen, helping to enhance a community's respiratory and mental health.</i></p>
	<p>Doncaster Caring: Our vision is for a borough that cares together for its most vulnerable residents;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have the best start in life • Vulnerable families and individuals have support from someone they trust • Older people can live well and independently in their own homes 	
	<p>Connected Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A modern, efficient and flexible workforce • Modern, accessible customer interactions • Operating within our resources and delivering value for money • A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents • Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths • Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance 	<p><i>The proactive management of trees on Council land reduces inefficiency and helps financial planning of the tree management service.</i></p> <p><i>The urban forest also confers indirect economic benefit through the provision of ecosystem services, including the production of oxygen, offsetting carbon emissions, absorbing pollution, slowing storm-water run-off and moderating urban temperatures that would otherwise have to be counteracted by an engineered alternative. A particular issue for Doncaster is its carbon footprint - the borough was ranked 59th of 63 cities for its CO2 emissions per capita by Centre for Cities, 2016.</i></p>

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

26. Good quality performance management arrangements ensure that priorities are achieved and good quality services are delivered to the residents of Doncaster.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [HL 23.10.2018.]

27. As a landowner, the Council has a duty of care to ensure that as far as reasonably practicable, all of the trees on its land are kept in acceptable, condition and do not put persons and property at unreasonable risk. The Tree Risk Management Plan will provide a framework for the Council to carry out regular inspections of trees, to identify at the earliest possible time any risks, so that preventative action can be taken where appropriate.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [MS 23.10.2018.]

28. There are no specific financial implications associated with this report. Any costs arising from implementing proactive management processes would be addressed through existing budgets and proactive management would be expected to derive savings through reductions in inefficiency.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS [DK 25.10.2018.]

29. There are no immediate HR implications arising from this report and the proposed Tree Policy and Tree Risk Management Plan. However, any future changes that impact on the workforce will require HR engagement and would involve separate approval as appropriate.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS [PW 24.10.2018.]

30. There are no specific technology implications associated with this report. The Council has already purchased an electronic tree management system and dedicated tree surveying tablet devices, as agreed by the Technology Governance Board (TGB) in July 14. Where further technology requirements are identified to support the delivery of the Tree Policy and/or Tree Risk Management Plan, these will also need to be considered by TGB.

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS [CT 30.10.2018.]

31. Trees play an important role in the health and wellbeing of the population. Not only do they lend beauty to our communities; time spent in natural environments has demonstrated mental and physical health benefits. Tree-lined streets encourage walking. Shaded areas such as gardens and parks entice families and children to spend more time outdoors and recreational trails with natural landscaping are key to people spending more time cycling, and walking.
32. Trees also help to clean and cool the air and reduce harmful air pollutants and air temperatures and provide areas for people to shade as they travel about the borough.

33. Public Health supports the transformation to a proactive approach to the management of trees on Council land. However, in relation to any works that mean any loss of tree infrastructure Public Health would recommend a Health Impact Assessment be conducted as part of the decision making process.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [TB 16/10/2018.]

34. There are no significant equality implications associated with this report. The document provides a framework for decision-making and prioritising of tree works for Street Scene Officers to ensure that decisions on tree pruning and removal are consistent for all Doncaster residents and businesses, and as a source of information for residents about the management of municipal trees within the borough.

CONSULTATION

35. The policy is implementing the principles and actions of the Doncaster Green Infrastructure Strategy 2014 to 2028, which was adopted by the Council in 2014 following a full consultation exercise. Details can be found at: <http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/planning/green-infrastructure-strategy>
36. The Strategy & Performance Unit were consulted on the document and suggested some changes around accountability (governance of the policy and when updates/refreshes will occur); conclusions, measures and actions; and contact details. Amendments have been made to strengthen these areas.
37. Assistant Directors Dave Wilkinson (Assistant Director of Trading Services and Assets) and Tracey Harwood (Acting Assistant Director of Environment) were consulted on the document and the process of adoption. The document was supported without amendment.
38. Portfolio Holders Cllrs Joe Blackham (Highways, Street Scene and Trading Services) and Chris McGuinness (Communities, Voluntary Sector and the Environment) were consulted on the document and the process of adoption. The document was supported without amendment subject to putting before the Communities and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel as an information item.
39. Whilst the document does not constitute a key decision, as the policies are consistent with the principles and actions of Theme 2: Trees and Woodlands of the Doncaster Green Infrastructure Strategy 2014-2028, which was approved by Cabinet in 2014, it will be formally adopted through an ODR. Any recommendations or comments offered up by this panel will be considered by the decision maker before signing off the decision.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

40. The Tree Policy and Tree Risk Management Plan for Doncaster Council's

Trees and Woodlands. Attached as Appendix A.

41. The Doncaster Green Infrastructure Strategy 2014-2028, available at:
<http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/planning/green-infrastructure-strategy>

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