



# Doncaster Council

## Report

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Date: 23/02/2021

To the Chair and Members of Cabinet

**The Independent Review and Redraft of DMBCs Tree Policy and Tree Risk Management Plan for Doncaster Council's Trees and Woodlands**

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Cllr Chris McGuinness	All	No

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Tree Policy was written before the Declaration of a Climate & Biodiversity Emergency for Doncaster (2019).
2. To ensure alignment with our recently approved Environment and Sustainability Strategy and to ensure effective management of council trees, an independent tree policy review was initiated by the Mayor, with the objectives of ensuring that the policy was fit for purpose in relation to the management of street trees and that it is aligned with the ambitions set out in the Environment and Sustainability Strategy.

### EXEMPT REPORT

3. This report is not exempt

### RECOMMENDATIONS

4. It is recommended that Cabinet:
  - a. R1: Note and discuss the independent review findings and how these have been translated into the revised policy
  - b. R2: Approve the revised policy

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

5. The DMBC Tree Policy was developed and adopted before the Declaration of a Climate & Biodiversity Emergency in 2019. In early 2020, the Environment and Sustainability Strategy was approved. The Strategy sets out how residents, elected representatives, public and private sector organisations and community groups need to respond to the climate change and biodiversity crisis. It identifies an ambitious range of interventions of various scales from simple individual behaviour changes to significant borough wide investment requirements.
6. The independent review will ensure the tree policy reflects Doncaster's ambitious Environmental priorities set out in the Environment and Sustainability Strategy, best practice relating to Tree Management, environmental conservation, and local decision-making processes and will ensure specialists and the public can contribute as part of the process.
7. The final revised policy will ensure that decisions relating to the management of street trees follow clear processes that keep the local residents fully informed throughout.

## BACKGROUND

8. The Tree Policy was written before the Declaration of a Climate & Biodiversity Emergency for Doncaster (2019) and before DEFRA's consultation on an England Tree Strategy (2020) that will aim to *increase tree establishment and woodland creation to support nature recovery, clean growth and the commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050*.
9. The Tree Policy is not, therefore, a strategy for delivering Doncaster's entire contribution to the England Tree Strategy and the borough's 2040 net-zero target. It will of course will make a valuable contribution, and being visible to the general public, may well be a reference point for public perceptions around practical progress to net-zero.
10. An independent tree policy review was initiated by the Mayor with the objective of ensuring that the policy was fit for purpose in relation to the management of street trees and engagement with residents and aligned to the borough's ambitious plans set out in the Environment and Sustainability Strategy. The specification is attached at Annex A.
11. Professor Ian Rotherham was approached mid-December 2020 and agreed to undertake the review. Professor Rotherham is an academic at Sheffield Hallam University and more information can be found [here](#).
12. The process has involved a number of direct engagement sessions with professionals, relevant organisations like the Woodland Trust, environmental activists and online consultation through Doncaster Talks. The engagement and consultation ran from 5 January to 31 January 2021.
13. A total of 746 online responses were received and 72% of these were from Doncaster residents. The tree policy will be revised during the first week of February in line with the initial findings of Professor Ian Rotherham, who submitted an initial findings paper during the last week of January. This is attached at Annex B.

14. The tree policy is being redrafted week commencing 1 February based on the initial findings paper and the feedback received through regular weekly digest meetings.

### Revised Tree Policy

15. The Tree Policy has been amended to reflect the findings of the independent review and officers will provide more detail relating to changes in the Cabinet meeting, however changes in the plan include:
- i. Tighter alignment with the Environment and Sustainability Strategy and the ambitions to respond to the Climate and Biodiversity emergency
  - ii. An operational decision tree/pathway to be followed for all operational decisions ensuring a strong evidence base for any decision made
  - iii. Clarity about communications and the need to be clear at all stages
  - iv. A reduced timeframe from initial engagement through to action being taken
  - v. Details of a range of best practice engineering solutions to be considered, etc

### OPTIONS CONSIDERED

16. The appointment of a specialist independent reviewer was the only option considered. An independent review ensures a broad range of views can be considered alongside national best practice to improve the policy where necessary, but particularly in relation to the management of street trees and engagement with residents.

### REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

17. An independent reviewer brings a wealth of specialist knowledge and is impartial to all interested parties in Doncaster ensuring that any recommendations relating to changing the tree policy are made without any bias to any organisation or individual.

### IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

18. The revised Tree Policy will impact on the following key outcomes:

	Outcomes	Implications
	<p><b>Doncaster Working:</b> 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"> <li>• Better access to good fulfilling work</li> <li>• Doncaster businesses are supported to flourish</li> <li>• Inward Investment</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Doncaster Living:</b> Our vision is for Doncaster's people to live in a borough that</p>	<p>This revised policy will shape the management of street</p>

	<p>is vibrant and full of opportunity, where people enjoy spending time;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The town centres are the beating heart of Doncaster</li> <li>• More people can live in a good quality, affordable home</li> <li>• Healthy and Vibrant Communities through Physical Activity and Sport</li> <li>• Everyone takes responsibility for keeping Doncaster Clean</li> <li>• Building on our cultural, artistic and sporting heritage</li> </ul>	<p>trees to ensure they remain healthy as trees play a crucial role in improving Quality of Life</p>
	<p><b>Doncaster Learning:</b> Our vision is for learning that prepares all children, young people and adults for a life that is fulfilling;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school</li> <li>• Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better</li> <li>• Learning in Doncaster prepares young people for the world of work</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Doncaster Caring:</b> Our vision is for a borough that cares together for its most vulnerable residents;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have the best start in life</li> <li>• Vulnerable families and individuals have support from someone they trust</li> <li>• Older people can live well and independently in their own homes</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Connected Council:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A modern, efficient and flexible workforce</li> <li>• Modern, accessible customer interactions</li> <li>• Operating within our resources and delivering value for money</li> <li>• A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents</li> <li>• Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths</li> <li>• Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance</li> </ul>	

## RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

19. The council has been very open about undertaking an independent review of the tree policy and has committed to implementing all of the recommendations made. To be as inclusive, the external consultation was

sent to as many interested parties and organisations as possible including all Ward Members and Parish Councils.

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [NC 8/2/2021]**

20. There are a number of legal implications for the Council to consider in managing its tree stock, including ensuring the trees are in a safe condition and do not pose a risk to the public or property. In particular, the Council's approach to the management of its tree stock should reflect the fact that the felling of growing trees is restricted under section 9 of the Forestry Act 1967. This legislation requires any felling of trees to be authorised by a felling licence issued by the Forestry Commission, or the work falls within one of a number of the statutory exceptions to the need for a licence, which are primarily set out in section 9 and the Forestry (Exceptions from Restriction of Felling) Regulations 1979. An exception applies where felling is being undertaken in compliance with any obligation imposed by or under an Act of Parliament e.g. the duty imposed on the Council to maintain highways that are maintainable at public expense under section 41 of the Highways Act 1980.
21. In addition, when considering any tree works, the Council should comply with relevant good practice such as the Forestry Commission's Operations Note 051 on Highway Tree Management.
22. The Council has complied with its duty to act fairly by consulting with the public and other interested parties on the proposed tree policy.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [JC 10/02/21]**

23. If the recommendations which form part of the initial findings are accepted this would lead to increased cost. Prior to accepting the recommendations, these would need to be costed and funding identified.
24. The Capital budget 2021/22 to 2024/25 subject to approval on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2021 includes the following allocations which will support the delivery of the Tree policy;
  - £190k allocation in 20/21 for the purchase of an Additional mobile elevated tree platform to assist in the Tree work and address health and safety concerns.
  - £120k allocation in 20/21 for a Tree Management system. To enable procurement to identify and implement a replacement solution to current system (Treewise) prior to the end of the existing contract.
  - £144k (£36k p.a. for next 4 years) to plant 100 large-canopied trees per year along main arterial highways to improve the environment and help increase canopy cover in the borough.

### **HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS [AC 03/02/21]**

25. There are no direct HR Imps in relation to this report, but if in future staff are

affected or additional specialist resources are required then further consultation will need to take place with HR.

### **TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS [PW 03/02/21]**

26. There are no technology implications in relation to this report.

### **HEALTH IMPLICATIONS [CT 03/02/21]**

27. As highlighted in Annex B urban trees are a valuable tool for improving public health. They reduce harmful pollutants and mitigate summer air temperatures, and when residents are in close proximity, urban trees have been shown to benefit both physical and mental health. The review has highlighted several areas where improvements can be made to the management of urban trees, in particular the way that any works to be carried are communicated to residents and interested parties. It is also noted that much of the work currently is carried out on a reactive basis without much time for communicating plans to residents. Therefore, the introduction a communication plan and the development of a public facing document that not only explains the benefits of urban trees, but will also lay out the process for when tree work is required will demonstrate the council's commitment to maintaining our urban trees in a transparent and informative way.

### **EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [JB 02/02/21]**

28. Decision makers must consider the Council's duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty at s149 of the Equality Act 2010. The duty requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the act, and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not share that protected characteristic.

### **CONSULTATION**

29. A number of direct engagement sessions were held throughout January with various professional bodies, relevant organisations and activists. Alongside this, public consultation was published via the Doncaster Talks website for the public to respond to. This was circulated via corporate communications through their distribution list, was sent to all Ward Members and to Parish Councils.
30. A total of 746 online responses were received with 72% of these being from Doncaster residents.
31. The public consultation gathered a wide range of views on subjects such as methods of notification and consultation regarding tree removal and replacement, priorities to consider when deciding on tree removal, and the location of replacements trees.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

32. None

## GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

n/a

## REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS

Bethany Haley, Senior Programme and Projects Manager  
01302 736 042 [bethany.haley@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:bethany.haley@doncaster.gov.uk)

Jonathan Bucknall, Service Manager, Business Partner and Programmes  
01302 734547 [jonathan.bucknall@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:jonathan.bucknall@doncaster.gov.uk)

**Dan Swaine**  
Director, Economy and Environment

## ANNEX A

# Specification for an independent review of Doncaster Council's Tree Policy

## Background

**Tree Policy and Tree Risk Management Plan for Doncaster Council's Trees and Woodlands** aims to provide a *'clear, consistent and structured approach to how Street Scene will maintain trees on Doncaster Council owned land.'*

The scope of the policy extends to all trees and woodland 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. for other Council departments or schools). This has to operate within the capability and resource base of the Tree Service, there are limitations to the budget for tree maintenance.

This policy does not apply to decisions relating to protected trees or trees affected by development, which are administered by the Local Planning Authority, or trees on land not owned by Doncaster Council, except where issues of public safety override.

The Tree Policy was written in 2018 before the Declaration of a Climate & Biodiversity Emergency for Doncaster (2019) and before DEFRA's consultation on an England Tree Strategy (2020) that will aim to *increase tree establishment and woodland creation to support nature recovery, clean growth and the commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050*. It is relevant to note, therefore, that the Doncaster Council Tree Policy is not a strategy for delivering Doncaster's entire contribution to the England Tree Strategy and the borough's 2040 net-zero target. It will of course will make a valuable contribution, and being visible to the general public, may well be a reference point for public perceptions around practical progress to net-zero.

## Removal and replacement of trees

Doncaster Council is committed to the principle of ***minimal tree removal***, considered only a last resort, where no alternative solution can be found.

There are situations where trees are unsafe and pose a health and safety risk to people or property, and so need to be removed for risk management.

On other occasions, other reasons such as a road improvement scheme, root damage from utility works, or root damage to pathways and driveways means that a range of measures need to be considered including removal and replacement (the number of replacement trees required to compensate will depend upon the size of the tree(s) being lost). This is the focus of the Tree Policy review.

## **Purpose**

The Review is intended to advise whether the **Tree Policy is fit for purpose** in respect of

1. Consultation and decision-making (and consequent operations) for tree removal and replacement – both individual and avenues of street trees. (ref Policy 6 and section 12 of the Tree Policy)
2. Valuation of trees within the removal and replacement decision-making process in relation to their climate mitigation and carbon sequestration services, and in relation to other ecological, social and economic values these trees might have. (Ref. section 10 of the Tree Policy)
3. Significant disagreement e.g. between residents and professional assessment, or amongst residents.
4. Consistency of 1. and 2. above with
  - Doncaster Council's statutory responsibilities.
  - The intent of the Environment Strategy including climate change mitigation and adaptation.
  - Doncaster Council/Team Doncaster's overall strategy and policy principles
  - relevant findings from the Report by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Investigation into a complaint against Sheffield City Council (ref: 17 004 913)
  - Reasonable resourcing expectations for delivery.
  - Best practice/exemplars and next practice in the management of street trees.

## **Out of scope**

- Review of specific instances or examples of the application of the policy
- Rewrite of the Policy (this will be completed by DMBC officers based on the recommendations)

## **Outputs**

The Review will provide

- A summary of evidence reviewed
- A statement of findings regarding the fitness for purpose of the Tree Policy as detailed above
- Recommendations for changes where that fitness for purpose could be improved. Recommendations should assist in the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation of the Policy from the perspectives of
  - Council Tree Service operations, Highways, other relevant Council services
  - Elected Members
  - Members of the public directly affected by Tree Service operations
  - The wider Doncaster public
  - Reasonable resourcing expectations for delivery.
  - Best practices/exemplars and next practice in the management of street trees.
- Attendance (virtual) at Economy & Environment Overview & Scrutiny as may be required to talk to the findings

## **Independent Reviewer**

The Review should be conducted by a party who

- Is not an employee or current contractor of Doncaster Council
- Has evidence of experience and expertise in tree and/or highways management or can draw directly on such expertise.
- Will be perceived as having some credibility and neutrality by diverse stakeholders.
- Will be offered a contract to a maximum value of £5K via ODR
- Will be supported with practical arrangements by Policy, Insight & Change Officers (see below)

## **Process**

Independent Reviewer will review documentation provided and undertake focused interview (online) with invited interested parties, maximum 10:

- DMBC Tree Service/Street Scene Manager
  - DMBC Highways Head of Service/Manager
  - Independent street tree expert - Woodland Trust representative/STAG/Sheffield Independent Tree Panel
  - Two residents with recent experience of street tree removal (not necessarily Middlefield Road – will need to ensure these are not ‘select council friends.’)
  - Local activists – Green Party to nominate two.
  - Elected Member group leaders or their nominees
  - Accessibility/mobility representative (wheel chair user)
1. An open consultation will be held via DMBC website, asking for comments on specific issues on the Tree Policy within the scope of this review.
  2. Examples of good practice in street tree removal and replacement will be sourced by PICS
  3. All the above will inform the independent Reviewer’s final report findings and recommendations
  4. DMBC Policy Insight & Change will author an amended Tree Policy taking account of the independent review findings and recommendations (see Roles below).

## **Timescales**

Background documents provided for background reading before Christmas/New Year.

Evidence gathering interviews, public consultation and writing of statement and recommendations to take place between 4<sup>th</sup> January and 1<sup>st</sup> February.

Timescales for the subsequent approval processes in a more detailed Project Plan.

## **Sign-off**

The Independent Reviewer’s Report is to be signed off by the joint PICS and Streetscene project group.

Amended Tree Policy to be approved by Exec Board, Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny, and Cabinet.

## **DMBC Roles**

### **Legal Services**

- Providing legal input and advice to the review to ensure the final version is legally compliant

### **Policy Insight and Change**

- Project management support for the overall process
- Administrative support to the Independent Reviewer, including witness contact details, scheduling of interviews, ongoing collation of evidence to facilitate final report writing
- Identification of good practice examples and collation of the Independent Reviewer
- Writing the final version of the tree policy based on the recommendations made by the review
- Supporting the tree policy through the approval process

### **Role of Economy & Environment**

- Ensuring a service perspective is maintained and fed into the review of the tree policy to ensure the feasibility of delivery
- Ensuring the translation of the tree policy into operational delivery
- Leading on taking the amended Tree Policy through the approval process

## **Appendix – sections of the Tree Policy for particular consideration**

*6.0 In order to conserve and sustain the public tree resource and maximise the benefits that it can provide it is essential that individual issues are dealt with consistently and that decisions on tree pruning and removal are balanced against the positive contribution that trees make to the environment and its enjoyment by local communities.*

Policy 3 – Tree Planting

10.0 Tree valuation

12.00 Tree replacement requirements

## ANNEX B – Initial Findings

# Review of the Doncaster MBC Tree Policy 2021

Professor Ian D. Rotherham

### 1) Rationale & Overview

Doncaster MBC is seeking to establish, review and improve its commitment to sustainable urban treescapes and particularly to street trees and highway trees within its remit.

Overall feedback in relation to the commitment to sustainable future treescapes has been very positive. It is suggested that the emerging policy at this level should both be informed by the national future treescapes vision, and at the same time, feed up, to inform that emerging vision. This is an especially appropriate time to be undertaking such a review.

This review is focused within the wider Tree Policy to specifically consider ‘street trees’ and other trees outside of woodlands and for which the Council has a management function. This consideration is within the context of recent difficulties in terms of a small number of problematic sites where work has been undertaken and triggered concerns from local residents.

The approach has been to review relevant external policy documents and other pertinent information, to meet with and interview expert stakeholders both inside and external to the Council, and to seek the opinions of other local stakeholders and the local community.

It was widely recognised that the current document is serving a hybrid function with both strategic elements and specific actions. In the long-term this is not ideal and potentially leads to a mismatch of perceived aims, objectives, process and actions.

### 2) Process

The review focussed on trees outside of woodlands and specifically on street trees. The wider Tree Policy includes woodlands and similar situation but these were not considered here. The work involved a wide-ranging review of relevant policy and tree management documents, and a consideration of the current Doncaster Tree Policy in the context of the Council’s emerging Environmental Strategy and associated commitments.

The process of the review had two main elements:

- a) **Discussions with key stakeholders inside and outside of the authority including local organisations and individuals from the community;**
- b) **A wide-ranging on-line survey of stakeholder attitudes.** Whilst this (b) was a self-selecting sample and cannot be considered representative of the wider community of Doncaster, it did achieve a response of over 700 returns.

The findings from the above were then analysed and fed into the review and re-writing process for the Tree Policy document by lead officers.

**Consultees:** local community stakeholders were consulted along with other individuals including representatives from Doncaster Mobility. Local authority officers responsible for Doncaster Street

Scene, for the tree management, and for highways management were interviewed. The external experts included Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, the Arboricultural Association, a nominee of the Woodlands Trust (with considerable experience as a professional arborists working in the private sector for local authorities and others), and a senior figure from the Tree Council. All are thanked for input but it is noted that their involvement does not amount to endorsement of any findings or recommendations.

### **3) Feedback**

The initial findings suggest key outcomes to be noted and some important issues to be addressed – now or in the near future.

**3.1 Positive feedback:** The broad review of the opinions of organisations and individuals consulted has been very positive in welcoming the Council's environmental commitments. With regard to street trees, as might be expected, there are mixed views about trees and their management. This report will highlight some of the issues noted. Furthermore, from local citizens already impacted on by recent street tree management, there remain serious doubts about the positive statements on tree management and a concern that considerations of finance, perceived risk and damage and of nuisance will override the desire to retain mature trees. The wider public survey confirmed the great importance that the public of Doncaster place on their urban trees and specifically on street trees, but also demonstrated the wider range of public opinions from very positive about trees to particularly upset by tree nuisance and impacts.

**3.2 Communication concerns:** In the feedback from professional stakeholders there were concerns about the Council-public interface but at two levels. One was a worry that communication at various levels had not been effective, but this was balanced by comments about a need to consult the public potentially hindering necessary professional tree works. It was noted that the public often don't fully understand professional tree management issues, and at the same time, the professionals may fail to recognise public concerns or people's limited awareness of technical matters. Communication is then the key to bridging these barriers and removing misunderstanding.

This review primarily concerns street trees and those in other managed urban greenspaces, but the Tree Policy is wider and includes woodlands and other trees. This did cause some confusion for some stakeholders and the observation that the whole resource and its management should be considered more holistically as the Doncaster 'urban forest'.

There are also cross-references to wider Council policies on climate *etc* and these may not be immediately accessible to all readers.

**3.3 Budgets & funding:** It was noted in consultations that long-term cuts in funding from central government have led to significant reductions in dedicated tree officers. The impacts of these budget cuts over thirty years or more should be reflected upwards to national government and into the emerging national future treescape agenda. An additional factor is that it becomes increasingly difficult to retain experienced tree workers in competition with private sector employment opportunities; and when cuts are made in services then it is often experienced officers who retire.

The funding issue is however, at the heart of any meaningful response to the climate emergency and to future treescape issues. The Street Scene team report that 60% of their work is reactive to situations and 40% is proactive. If resources are reduced then the ability to undertake desirable proactive works becomes less. Indeed, there is already a current 2-year backlog of reactive works

and this clearly places strain on any ability to undertake non-essential activities, however desirable. The Tree-wise database currently includes 40,000 trees mostly from the urban catchment with few from Doncaster's extensive rural areas. Professionals indicated that resources and information are vital for an effective tree service and the authority needs at least two fulltime, permanent tree inspectors in order to discharge its functions. An expert external consultee stated very strongly that central government should make the employment of necessary tree officers a statutory requirement.

A further issue in relation to funding and workforce was that as the team gets older there can be problems of health and safety in relation to physical tasks such as tree-climbing. This is simply noted as fact but without any recommendation.

**4) Communication:** It was generally accepted that communication was at the core of any effective urban tree management policy and from those involved, that this had not always worked well in Doncaster. Additionally, it was noted that communication might occur at two levels: **1) Consultation** on policies, strategies, and long-term visions; **2) Notification and information** on specific tasks of maintenance and management (such as pruning, crown-lifting *etc*) or when necessary removal of street trees is planned or (in emergencies) has been implemented.

**4.1 Communication & information:** It was noted that good and effective information was essential to a good tree policy and when potentially controversial works must take place, can help better inform the public and reduce dissatisfaction with Council performance. Furthermore, it was noted that 'consultation' is only appropriate when the opinions sought can be genuinely taken into account and can reasonably and realistically influence subsequent actions. If this is not the case, then we are dealing with notification and that should be supported by both information, and by **education**. The latter means improving knowledge both within the Council's key workforce and with outside stakeholders and agencies, including for example, the local media.

A complicating factor is that members of the public and non-specialists with authority too (including elected members) generally lack detailed knowledge of tree management processes, issues, problems and technical language. This means that communication to be effective must be clear, unambiguous, thoughtful, and in plain English. A dedicated email hotline, a web page presence, and even a telephone hotline could ease communication and information issues.

**4.2 Soft skills:** It has been suggested by consultees both inside the Council and external too, that support for professionals in what might be called the 'soft skills' i.e. communication, may be necessary. Furthermore, staff involved in Council-wide public communications and help-desks might benefit from briefly on the public-facing aspects of the Tree Policy too. Additionally, it was noted that when messages from the public are passed on then the necessary information for effective tree team action may be missing.

According to internal consultees the current communications process with regard to street trees and street tree management has been limited in scope and in impact. Both internal and external stakeholders feel that along with 'soft skills' issues, there is a need for **a) standardised, clear, on-site signage** when street tree work is planned or about to begin; and **b) a dedicated on-line page on the Council's website** to which updates on tree works can be posted and especially if a tree is taken down during emergency work, an explanation as to why that was. Dedicated administrative support would help too as might a dedicated telephone hotline. It seems to be imperative that there is a communications lead role to support workers on the ground and their management teams. However, whilst a more effective communications role will help address key issues, it is still

important that those workers directly in the public gaze are more adequately supported in dealing with informal queries and questions which naturally arise.

A vital part of the implementation of any local authority tree policy is the provision of the necessary resources to deliver. This was raised by an expert consultee as **'right officers, right resources'** and an important matter to be raised with national decision-makers. Essentially there should be a statutory duty to employ appropriately qualified tree management personnel and this should be underpinned by dedicated budgets from central government.

**4.3 Consultation & notification:** An important observation by many consultees concerns the difference between 'consultation' with public and 'notification'. In relation to street trees the former relates largely to matters of long-term vision, of strategy, and to specific resulting policies to achieve the aims and objectives of these. Consultation implies options and therefore a chance to influence decision-making and outcomes. Given that the stated policy of DMBC is to remove mature trees from highways when there are no other realistic, feasible, or viable options in terms of risk, health and safety (including pavement damage), or the discharge of the authority's statutory duties, then communication to the public on a tree to be removed is notification not consultation. It is important however that such notification is accompanied by clear information which is easily accessible and that states unambiguously the process gone through and the reasons for the decision reached. The other situation for tree removal is in the event of an emergency such as imminent catastrophic failure. Again, the public and other stakeholders should be informed as to what happened and why the tree had to be removed.

**4.4 Timing of communication** and delays between informing the public of works taking place and the action happening on the ground can be detrimental. This can have a very negative impact on public responses and relates directly to funding matters noted in (3.3).

**4.4 Clarity of information:** In the case of the streets affected by tree removal in recent years there seem to have been mixed messages as to the reasons for felling and whether trees were diseased or damaging pavement surfaces. Feedback from local residents suggests that communication was not clear, unambiguous, or timely. For major tree removal situations it is important for evidence to be presented to local stakeholders in order to retain local confidence in decision-making and the associated processes.

Notification of proposed major works appears to have been separated from the felling by a matter of years and a final notice given to arrive over the Christmas break when no Council officers were available to take questions or concerns from local people. Furthermore, the removal was to take place in early January. No street notices were posted on the trees and not all home-owners were contacted. Additionally, the local residents felt that they did not receive full or convincing evidence for the decision to remove. A further matter was raised suggesting that signage and highways safety issues were not satisfactory when the work was undertaken.

It is important for major projects that there are effective trails in terms of documentation (including photographic record), audit, and communication.

Local stakeholders have suggested major errors in data presented in the current Tree Policy and hazard or fatality and risk statistics that are significantly out of date. These should be removed or updated.

**5) Decision-making:** A further pillar for a tree policy is the establishment of a clear **'decision-making tree'** as a mechanism, and ensuring that this process is transparent and comprehensible. This process should move along a scale from no action or limited action, for example to pruning or

pollarding, to crown lifting, and through to potential removal. At each stage appropriate conditions should be met and nationally-accepted good practice should be applied. It is important that the public and elected members understand the steps, the necessity as the intervention becomes more severe, and that they have full confidence in and trust of the judgement and competence of officers undertaking the work. Communication (item (4)) is essential in order to avoid unnecessary disruption to effective services and to minimise adverse public reactions to essential works. This approach was discussed and supported by all consultees.

**5.1 Evidence:** The evidence-based for tree management and potentially for removal must be clearly established and where necessary, transparent. Nationally accepted best practice criteria should be applied and a subjective valuation system such as CAVAT (Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees) or the Helliwell System for the Amenity Valuation of Trees should be used to generate figures for loss of services and replacement values.

It is important to establish robust and defensible processes in relation to what is 'reasonable', and what is 'desirable', and what is 'possible' in terms of tree management and retention. If mature trees are to be removed because it is considered to be too expensive to undertake necessary remedial works to, for example, damaged pavements, then this decision should be robust and transparent. Furthermore, whilst evaluation systems are both controversial and are quasi-subjective, they do produce a realistic estimate of the financial worth of trees threatened by removal. Additionally, either CAVAT or i-Tree Eco, can be applied to generate nominal figures for ecosystem services generated by said trees, and this can focus on a meaningful comparison with costs of engineering solutions where saving trees is possible.

[See Appendix 3 – Decision-making tree]

**5.2 Replacement:** Raised in discussion with local citizens is the matter of whether it is possible or desirable to replace avenue trees by gap-filling where older trees have been lost or where diseased trees have to be removed. One argument is to replace avenue trees as a cohort but another option is to replace as needed and this was supported by some local people. Furthermore, this was an issue on which local residents felt they should be consulted on. Another matter was former policies to plant avenues of genetic clones to give enhanced avenue form but of course setting up future potential problems for pests and diseases.

**5.3:** Forward planning should identify specific 'policy pinch-points' such as where a tree avenue provides important connectivity between other habitats in the urban forest system, or where significant or 'heritage' trees are involved. [The latter include veteran trees from the older rural landscape or trees of particular value or significance for social or historical reasons like wartime memorial plantings and where works need to be especially sensitive]. Such information should be held within the Council's tree database and taken into account in the decision-making process.

**6) Strategy or Policy?** An observation from external experts is that the Tree Policy as it stands is perhaps not the best vehicle for a public-facing document and statement. It would be more effective to have a 'vision' for Doncaster's future treescape resources with a 'strategy' that included 'aims' and 'objectives', and supported by internal-facing 'policies' and 'actions'. Whilst stakeholders accept this is not possible at the present time, it remains a longer-term aspiration. In the meantime, it is suggested that the current Tree Policy needs to be better adapted to its dual role of both strategic vision and policy for actions.

A further point noted by expert stakeholders is that this Policy needs to be adopted and fully embraced by **ALL** Council departments and directorates and not regarded as the sole prerogative

of the tree professionals such as Street Scene. This is especially so in relation to public communication and public-facing services. There are also budget implications for the service with regard to client departments (see (3.3)).

**7) Tree Policy content and presentation:** The document as it stands, as a nicely illustrated pdf, is clearly intended to be public-facing as well as an internal guidance. However, this does raise specific issues noted by the consultees. The first matter is that some of the content is unnecessarily technical and would be more appropriate for an internal guidance document (albeit in the public domain) but not in the primary strategic overview. Taking the Policy as standalone without an over-arching strategy, it will be important to reduce technical terms and jargon to a minimum but without adversely affected the clarity of the message.

It has been requested by residents, tree campaigners, and external expert stakeholders that the Tree Policy begins with very positive statements about the positive benefits which trees, particularly street trees, bring to Doncaster both now and in the future.

#### **7.1 Tree benefits:**

- Landscape & sense of place / history, heritage & connectivity with the past / local distinctiveness / visual enhancement
- A green & high quality environment / clean air / removal of particulate pollution / noise reduction
- Enhanced urban ecology, biodiversity, habitat continuity & connectivity, enhanced pollinator habitat
- Moderation of extreme weather and '*climate-proofing*' of urban areas / mitigation of flood risk / mitigation of summer high temperatures – up to 4-5 degrees reduction / moderation of precipitation runoff and flood-risk through interception at canopy level and root-pits acting as '*soakaways*' to take surface runoff into groundwater
- Good health – mental and physical
- Enhanced property values and the desire to reside in a locale
- Free recreation
- Reduction in costs or expected costs of air-conditioning *etc*
- Enhanced house values & 'desire to live' in a locale

Some readers of the current Tree Policy feel that the current message is unduly negative and has an emphasis on problems, potential problems, and their resolution. These issues should be covered but later in the document and in a more nuanced way. [See also Appendix 2- Trees and carbon sequestration].

**8) Implementation & action for trees:** the Street Scene tree team reported that their work was around 60:40 split between reactive/proactive operations. Rather worryingly, with 40,000 urban trees on the operational database, there was a two-year backlog in planned reactive works.

**8.1** In all services, resources are important. In achieving the aims of any tree vision for Doncaster the provision of experienced, qualified officers on the ground determines the ability to deliver; a case in point being the two tree inspector posts currently filled by temporary staff. To achieve the

policy objectives then there is a need for broad awareness of street trees and greenspace trees across all Council departments and directorates. This was recognised as being not just a matter for Street Scene but involving a wider ownership of policy and delivery. In terms of long-term sustainability there is a clear role for planning and development to also be involved and engaged.

**8.2** When development occurs and a tree has to be removed for reasons other than arboriculture i.e. health and safety / risk / damage, then a CAVAT valuation or a Helliwell assessment should be undertaken to assess replacement costs. This is generally the case and the calculation is used 'conservatively' to estimate an uninflated value.

**8.3** It is essential that when major works such as street tree avenue removal takes place, that **a) the flow of information** is clear, good, unambiguous and timely; and **b) restoration, remedial works, and re-planting** are speedy, efficient, and appropriate. Long periods of a street looking damaged and desolate are dispiriting for local people, and damaging to the authority's reputation in the eyes of its citizens. The timing of the implementation of street tree works is very important and as noted, long delays between key steps need to be avoided (see also (4.4)). It is important to plan ahead to deliver good and speedy restoration work when trees are to be replaced and to include repairs to grass verges *etc.*

**8.4** In the urban catchment trees and communities can be brought into intimate and close interactions, with both benefits and disbenefits. Larger-scale operations may have significant effects on an area and there may be additional social and environmental impacts in particular situations. Where these are known and are predictable, then it is important that careful planning leads to effective implementation and communications in order to minimise adverse impacts.

**8.5** Mismatches between strategic visions and commitments and tree management actions on the ground should be avoided. Unambiguous information is central to good public relations in relation to tree matters. For tree felling decisions where rot, hollowing and disease are given as reasons it has been requested that the Authority utilises best practice and technology. This would include techniques such as Sonic Tomography and where applicable the evidence should be publicly accessible. In the case of this action being followed then a cost is incurred in purchase of technology, training in its application. It is further suggested that advice be sought from the Arboricultural Association or the Tree Council on the best available technology and on likely costs.

**9) Some specific points:** Communication might be more effective through splitting the document into two parts – **1) a public-facing strategic vision** with commitments to broad issues and clear explanation of processes and timelines with regard to urban trees, **2) A more detailed working document** with specific policies and action plans against targets. This might be a future refinement.

**9.1** There needs to be clarification of 'risk probability' 1:10,000 and logic of some other statistics provided. Similarly there was a request for clarification of need to include 'common law rights' – Section 9 – which seems more appropriate for an internal policy briefing rather than a public-facing document.

**9.2** There appears to be a strategic mismatch between this document as a '**strategy**' rather than a '**policy**' which are not the same and this was noted by a number of consultees. It has also been noted that there are differences between say, 'policy', and 'guidance' and these need to be made very clear to both officers and the public. However, it was also stressed that it was worth linking the Doncaster initiative to emerging national tree strategies. Perhaps this could be noted at the outset.

**9.3** A number of consultees, including local community members, questioned the rationale for the tree replacement numbers. So how are they calculated / justified. Maybe relate this specifically to the Bristol study in order to clarify the rationale. From discussions it is clear that the figures used by other authorities such as Bristol provide a compensatory approach and this is reasonable but not scientifically based.

**9.4** Separation of DMBC services into ‘**people**’ functions and ‘**space**’ functions can be unhelpful and create barriers; the example given being the split in countryside activities and tree management. With this situation in mind it is important that treescapes and street trees are viewed holistically as a corporate function, and efforts are made to foster collaboration and information or skills.

**9.5 Some miscellaneous points raised and noted:** DMBC are to be congratulated on their peat-free policy for replacement tree-planting.

It was suggested that some specific details in the Policy are inappropriate for a document of this sort but terms such as Tree Preservation Orders (and their implications) should be clarified.

It is important to apply best practice alternative approaches to tree management and to relevant engineering.

According to a local councillor, tree management processes are subject to ‘scrutiny’; and this is noted as an important part of the democratic process.

In terms of designation TPOs are the responsibility of the Planning Department but the trees are still the responsibility of the Street Scene team.

**9.5** A number of consultees, both experts and community, noted the points, ‘**don’t promise what you cannot deliver**’ (see (3.3)). In other words it is best not to raise expectations of a service delivery unless a) it is possible, feasible, and desirable, and b) is fully and effectively resourced. [See also notes on consultation vs notification (4.3)].

**10) Right tree, right place:** The rationale behind tree replacement figures needs to be clarified. To seek replacement equivalence *in situ* may be difficult and even inappropriate for example when it is desirable to use smaller tree species and varieties to minimise shading, and damage to infrastructure. Like-for-like replacement of large ‘forest’ trees might then be in greenspace as close as possible to the removal site.

It is also important to seek to mix species and varieties at local and borough levels in order to minimise future risk of pest and diseases and to choose trees that will cope with expected climate change scenarios.

Single clones of species may present as attractive ‘neat’ avenues but are especially vulnerable to failure due to these factors.

**11) Mobility and access issues:** Safe access along footpaths is important for all users but for those with mobility issues becomes especially significant and there are accepted national standards for this. Footpaths and highways need to be maintained to a suitable level that discharges the Council’s statutory responsibilities and accords with good practice for access and mobility provision. Furthermore, local groups representing people with mobility problems can help in raising awareness of access issues and standards. It is also noted that individuals with mobility issues may be most reliant on local greenspaces and therefore potentially gain particular benefit from accessible street trees on their doorstep. Footpath and highways maintenance need to be

according to accepted national standards. Where potential conflicts occur with tree management then a first step is to utilise a mix of tree interventions and engineering solutions to maintain safe access and to retain street trees wherever possible. In section (8.4), the need to plan ahead for difficult situations or where impacts of for example, either major tree works or issues such as where tree-damage to pavements may be particularly acute is noted. Added to this, there may be some situations that arise where mobility issues are especially significant, perhaps close to retirement homes or supported accommodation. Again these should be considered in forward planning and appropriate advice taken.

## **12) Working with the public to create a sustainable future for Doncaster's street trees:**

Discussion with external stakeholders and feedback from the public consultation has indicated possible future opportunities to engage, educate, and work with local communities on treescapes and street tree issues. A remarkable insight from the on-line survey was that half those who responded would be prepared to be involved in any future voluntary 'tree wardens' initiative. Whilst clearly the survey gained responses from motivated individuals (both positive and negative with regard to street trees) and cannot be considered representative of the wider Doncaster public, this is still a very encouraging finding. Essentially this lends support to ideas of partnership working on non-professional aspects of urban trees and to a wider engagement with local people. In particular across the Doncaster District there is a good number of Parish Councils and these can be a mechanism in some cases to access key resources and also to connect with local people on the ground. Tree warden projects are frequently in conjunction with Parish Councils.

Suggestions of ways to better engage local people include:

- a) A voluntary Tree Warden scheme;**
- b) Improved public information and educational materials;**
- c) Events such as a 'Doncaster Tree Day'** to celebrate urban trees and raise public awareness. This might include tree decoration activities for people but especially children as happens in Europe.

Whilst a tree warden scheme **(a)** might at first sight seem a costly undertaking I believe much of the expenditure might be offset by grant-aid project bids with external partners such as local trusts and the Doncaster network of Parish Councils for example. Grant-funding bodies such as the Big Lottery for example might assist with set-up and initial running costs. Furthermore, there is considerable expertise available from bodies like the Tree Council and the Woodland Trust to support such an initiative. Both **(b)** and **(c)** would also be eligible for grant aid and furthermore, would be eminently suitable for business sponsorship. It is also important to note that in setting up any partnership or volunteer scheme such as community tree wardens, this should not make undue extra demands of professional staff time, and the roles of volunteers and professionals need to be clearly established at the outset. Volunteers on the ground can help be the eyes and ears of the tree service and can help communicate issues at a neighbourhood level. Effective communication, as already established, provides a better service; it helps avoid problem issues, and ultimately, may help save money when costs are incurred through a breakdown in community relations.

**13) Assessing and evaluating the benefits of urban street trees:** Approaches and mechanisms for assessing things like amenity value of trees have already been noted. It is important to understand that there is no single 'correct' system and all the toolkits are in part subjective. However, these approaches do help the manager provide an estimate of some of the wider benefits of urban trees and in particular, of the costs incurred when trees are removed.

The benefits to be considered include climate mitigation, flood-risk reduction, carbon sequestration, impacts on property values, biodiversity, and both mental and physical health and wellbeing. Some of the toolkits help provide estimates of benefits and some give economic indicators of possible losses and compensations. Furthermore they help give substance to forward planning scenarios and some idea of the benefits to be derived from future interventions and actions such as tree planting.

**14) Horizon-scanning:** In street tree management, it is important to plan for and anticipate future changes which may be in environmental conditions or national policy context for example.

Some key factors and issues underpin a relevant horizon-scanning approach. These matters include:

- a) **Climate change**
- b) **Associated with (a) increasingly extreme weather events such as flooding**
- c) **New and more diverse pests and diseases**
- d) **Increasing development and urbanisation across the borough**
- e) **National policy initiatives and especially the future treescapes agenda**
- f) **Regional initiatives particularly the Great Northern Forest**
- g) **The Environment Bill and likely 'duty to consult' on local authority tree felling + net gain for biodiversity**
- h) **Likelihood of an increasingly aging population and therefore potentially greater access and mobility issues**

**Appendix 1: Engineering alternatives to tree removal (provided by STAG from Sheffield Streets Ahead document)**

	Sensitive Engineering Solutions
1	Installation of thinner profile kerbs
2	Excavation of footways for physical root examination prior to an ultimate decision being made on removal
3	Ramping/ Re-profiling of footway levels over roots (within acceptable deviation levels).
4	Flexible paving/ surfacing solution
5	Removal of displaced kerbs leaving a gap in the channel
	Tree based Options
6	Root pruning
7	Root shaving
8	Root barriers and root guidance panels
9	Excavation beneath the roots damaging the footway
10	Tree growth retardant
11	Creation of larger tree pits around existing trees
12	Heavy tree crown reduction / pollarding to stunt tree growth
13	Retain dead, dying, dangerous and diseased highway trees for their habitat value

	Other non-engineering solutions
14	Line markings on the carriageway to delineate where it is not safe to drive or park
15	Building out kerb line into carriageway
16	Footpath deviation around the tree
17	Installation of a geo-grid under the footway to reduce reflective cracking
18	Reconstruction of the path using loose fill material rather than a sealed surface
19	Filling in of pavement cracks
20	Reduce the road width and widen the footways as well as converting them to grass verges
21	Close a road to traffic
22	Change to contract specification to leave the footways as they are without carrying out any repairs and removing trip hazards
23	Abandonment of the existing footway In favour of construction of a new footway elsewhere
24	Permanent closure of footways to pedestrians. Dig up and replace as grass verges.
25	Seeking the views of residents about removal where that is considered by the Council to be the only option and getting the residents to sign a legal agreement regarding accepting liabilities.

## Appendix 2- Trees and carbon sequestration]

The issue of carbon uptake from the atmosphere (carbon capture or sequestration) by trees is a topic increasingly discussed and debated because of climate change scenarios and concerns. Furthermore, there is the matter of how carbon is stored and how long for. This has relevance to long-term visions and management practice for street trees, but in reality it is not an over-riding driver or concern. So there are two main aspects to this **a) carbon storage**, and **b) on-going carbon capture**. I have highlighted the main issues below:

- i. A young sapling takes in more carbon per unit of its biomass than a mature tree but in practice it has stored very little. Furthermore, due to its size and volume of active photosynthetic biomass, a mature 'forest' tree captures far more carbon in a season than does a replacement sapling, or indeed a smaller 'ornamental' tree. The carbon is laid down in the timber of the tree, in its branches and in its leaves.
- ii. Removal of a big forest tree and replacement with a 'fit-for-purpose' ornamental tree does not compensate for the lost annual sequestration.
- iii. The fate of the timber and brush from a felled street tree affect the re-release of stored carbon back to the atmosphere.
- iv. Re-planting of 'compensatory' trees in a nearby greenspace is a valuable contribution and a good thing to do. However, the re-planting is not directly connected to the lost tree and could happen regardless of the fate of the street tree.
- v. In the wider context of the borough, the main mechanism for large-scale carbon capture will be through landscape-scale interventions such as new woodland creation and reversion of intensive land-use to say wetland and wet woodland. The street trees make a

modest contribution but their more important roles are things like alleviation of localised pollution and mitigation of localised climatic extremes.

- vi. Finally, the mechanisms and models for calculating any carbon capture impacts are presently not sufficiently refined to be applied with confidence to the street tree situation.

### Appendix 3 – Decision-making tree

As noted earlier (5), this process should move along a scale from no action or limited action, for example to pruning or pollarding, to crown lifting, and through to potential removal. At each stage appropriate conditions should be met and nationally-accepted good practice should be applied. It is important that the public and elected members understand the steps, the necessity as the intervention becomes more severe, and that they have full confidence in and trust of the judgement and competence of officers undertaking the work.

Outline Decision-making Tree – for illustrative purposes only		
Inspection	Routine or specific	
	Professional inspection and judgement and assessment against criteria and policies	
Step 1 No action	-	No action required
Step 2 Limited action	e.g. Routine pruning	Notification through signs on trees and notice on web-site
	Professional inspection and judgement	
Step 3 Remedial intervention necessary	e.g. Severe pruning	Notification through signs on trees and notice on web-site. If major works for a significant tree or an avenue then prior notice and possible consultation
	e.g. Pollarding	Notification through signs on trees and notice on web-site. If major works for a significant tree or an avenue then prior notice and possible consultation
	Professional inspection and judgement	
Step 4 Remedial intervention necessary	e.g. Crown lifting	Notification through signs on trees and notice on web-site. If major works for a significant tree or an avenue then prior notice and possible consultation
Step 5 Consideration of engineering solutions to structural problems	See Appendix 1	Notification through signs on trees and notice on web-site. If major works for a significant tree or an avenue then prior notice and possible consultation
	Tomography or other specialist inspection	
Step 6 Solutions not feasible or viable	Potential removal & replacement	Notification through signs on trees [if time-line allows] and explanatory notice on web-site.

		If major works for a significant tree or an avenue then prior notice and consultation essential except in the case of emergencies
Step 7 Emergency works	e.g. Severe pruning	Notification through explanatory notice on web-site.
	e.g. Removal	Notification through explanatory notice on web-site.
	e.g. Intervention on fallen tree or branches of	Notification through explanatory notice on web-site.
*Note for certain works a Forestry Commission felling license may be required; and subject to the current Environment Bill at Parliament, a public consultation may be necessary for major local authority felling programmes.		

## Appendix 4 – Specific recommendations and broad scale of cost implications

### Communications

- 1) **Communications lead** – cost implications
- 2) **Dedicated website presence** – minor costs to set-up
- 3) **Telephone hotline** – cost implications
- 4) **Dedicated administrative support to support above** -low cost
- 5) **Soft skills training** – training budget costs and staff time to set-up
- 6) **Council-wide awareness-raising of trees and Tree Policy** – training budget and staff time

### Decision-making & Decision-making Tree

- 1) **Setting up and awareness-raising of the Decision-making Tree** – low cost / staff time
- 2) **Implementation of process** - low cost / staff time [much of this is formalising what is already done]
- 3) **Additional process costs** – a) **Impact assessments** with CAVAT, i-Tree Eco, or Helliwell – potentially quite high for specific projects; b) **Tomography** equipment, training, and application - potentially quite high **capital expenditure** for specific projects and application would be staff cost.

### Implementation & action for trees

- 1) **Supporting necessary staff to deliver the work in a timely manner and to the necessary agreed standard** – this is more an emphasis to at least commit to supporting current essential staff including those presently on short-term contracts in the Street Scene team.
- 2) **Community partnership initiatives** [tree wardens, events etc] – these potentially incur costs to initiate and support but also through officer time required in order to interact with volunteers in a meaningful way. – Potential costs but much offset against grant aid and partnership working.
- 3) **Monitoring of projects and implementation** – low cost