

TREE STRATEGIES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report sets out the Council's revised Tree Strategy (2020) and the Tree Risk Management Strategy as detailed in Appendix 1 and 2.

It is best practice for the Council to have a tree strategy in place, which clearly defines NFDC's approach to the management of potential tree risk within the District. The two Strategies ensure that the Council undertakes its legal duty of care in an appropriate and reasonable manner. Furthermore, the Tree Strategies also set out a framework for a proactive management of NFDC's tree resource to maximize the benefits to local communities and manage potential conflicts or future threats.

The Tree Strategies and the agreed maintenance regimes and inspection practices will assist with safeguarding the Council against any insurance claims. It will also provide the Council guidance on tree-related enquiries and issues. Furthermore, the Strategies addresses and outline an optimum tree replacement and planting program, ensuring tree cover within the District is maintained and developed. A separate Planting Specification is attached as Appendix 4. This will produce a positive bearing on the Council's Environment Action Plan.

The Tree Strategies link to the Council's Corporate Plan with assisting wellbeing and protecting the special and unique character of the New Forest and outlines the following aims:

- To improve service to the customer;
- To proactively manage all resources efficiently and effectively;
- To maintain excellent performance with service delivery; and
- To develop effective partnerships with other local organizations

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The current Tree Strategy and the Tree Risk Management Strategy were both agreed by the Cabinet in 2014 and is subsequently now due for renewal. A Member Task and Finish Group was established to review the current these documents.

3 MEMBER TASK AND FINISH GROUP

- 3.1 A Member Task and Finish Group was set up to review the Tree Strategies and provide input to its objectives and outcomes. The Members included:

Cllr Neil Tungate (Chair);
Cllr Ann Bellows;
Cllr Sue Bennison;
Cllr Keith Craze;
Cllr Stephanie Osbourne; and
Cllr Ann Sevier.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regulatory Services, Alison Hoare also attended these meetings.

3.2 During meeting sessions, the Task and Finish Group made the following suggestions. These include:

- including a position statement at the beginning of the Tree Strategy;
- updating it with the latest information and legislation;
- including hyperlinks and references to other Council departments, where necessary;
- improving the appearance of the document to look more corporate and make it more accessible;
- including current working practices and remove any redundant sections;
- strengthening particular sections, in particular a more robust policy to protect tree stock;
- having a policy to ensure that other Council departments request approval to remove any Council owned tree;
- including a quick reference section to find information;
- the addition of a new section relating to planning matters (TPO's and new housing / developments); and
- Changing the name of the document from Corporate Tree Strategy to Tree Strategy

Members of the Task and Finish Group also agreed the need to include an Ash Dieback element within the Tree Strategy document. This has proceeded in the production of a separate Action Plan to accompany the Tree Strategy; Ash Dieback Action Plan (Appendix 3).

The Ash Dieback Action Plan (Appendix 3) was agreed further to recommendations published by Government, and in response to the inevitable spread and increased prevalence of Chalara Ash Dieback within the District; this separate action plan has been identified as vital to good management and is subsequently presented as a supplementary document to the Tree Strategy. To summarize, this supplementary document analyses of the Council's risk exposure and provides steps to mitigate that risk. Action points are required to be completed across various departmental sections of the Council.

4 CONSULTATION

The period of consultation was timetabled to ensure all parties involved were able to provide constructive feedback within the given consultation period. This feedback was appropriately incorporated within the revised Strategy documents.

Consultation Timetable

Documents sent to consultees	05/02/2020
Consultation responses submitted	19/02/2020
End of consultation period	20/02/2020
Consideration of all responses and revise document if required	02/03/2020

The following consultees were contacted and provided their feedback:

- NFDC Planning Services - Claire.Upton-Brown@NFDC.GOV.UK
- NFDC Housing Services - Grainne.ORourke@NFDC.gov.uk
- Legal – Andrew.Kinghorn@NFDC.gov.uk
- Insurance - James Clarke
- Health & Safety – Antony Whittle
- Forestry England - Rothnie, Bruce (Bruce.Rothnie@forestryengland.uk)
- National Trust – dylan.everett@nationaltrust.org.uk
- New Forest National Park Authority Tree Team - nik.gruber@newforestnpa.gov.uk
- Hampshire County Council Arboricultural Team – Chris Corder chris.corder@hants.gov.uk and Mark Weal Mark.Weal@hants.gov.uk

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 All of the revised actions within the Strategies and associated documents will be contained within the current budgets for tree maintenance. With the revised Tree Strategy, the Council will be able to deal with insurance and compensation claims in a more robust manner if the processes and procedures identified within this strategy are adhered to.

The Ash Dieback Action Plan has a predicted cost of £200,000 to fell infected trees over the next ten years. Currently there is provision of £14,500 for financial year 2020/21. This need will be reviewed for future years as part of the annual budget process.

6 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None identified at present.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 One of the most important aims of the Tree Strategies is to maintain and enhance the environment within the New Forest as a Special Place. Improvements to tree care and inspection will all have positive benefits for the local environment. The Strategies aim to take a more proactive approach to the management of our tree stock, focusing on enhancing the biodiversity value of our tree and woodland fauna under Council ownership.

8. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS AND DIVERSITY

- 8.1 None identified at present.

9. CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 The Council's original Tree Strategies was based on best practice and paid particular reference to good examples of local authority tree management, both locally and nationally. Since 2014, changes in management approach, objectives and legislation have necessitated revising these Strategies. The review did not identify any significant changes to the current Strategies, however, during its formulation, the revised version has engendered the production of an additional document covering the management of Ash Dieback in the form of an action plan.

10. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 None identified at present.

11. EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM (EMT) COMMENTS

11.1 EMT acknowledge the work that has gone into refreshing the Tree Strategy documents and especially the work that has been undertaken in terms of Ash Dieback. The documents are very inclusive and whilst EMT support their approval by the Portfolio Holder a key action would be to see they are considered again in 12 months to review the overall layout. EMT suggest that a more fundamental review of the strategy should take place in the next 12-18 months, in coordination with planning and other areas to produce a more strategic, cross cutting document, that may perhaps take the form of a suite of documents that fully includes and integrates planning mitigation (biodiversity net gain etc), climate mitigation, tenancy and housing, open space. Associated guidance documents could then be produced are more specific and meaningful for different readers.

12. ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL COMMENTS

12.1 The Panel considered the Tree Strategies and associated documents at a meeting on 12 March 2020. The Panel expressed their support of these documents for approval by the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regulatory Services.

13. RECOMMENDATION

13.1 That the following four tree documents be approved:

- Tree Strategy (Appendix 1)
- Tree Risk Management Strategy (Appendix 2)
- Ash Dieback Action Plan (Appendix 3)
- Planting Specification (Appendix 4)

PORTFOLIO HOLDER ENDORSEMENT

I have agreed to the recommendation of this report.

Signed: Cllr Alison Hoare

Date: 14 April 2020

For further information please contact:

Background documents:

Mark Bursey - Corporate Tree Officer
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Steve Jones - Service Manager Open Spaces
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Date on which notice given for this decision – 14 April 2020

Last date for call-in – 21 April 2020