

<b>Title of Report</b>	<b>TREE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY</b>	
<b>Presented by</b>	Paul Sanders Head of Community Services	
<b>Background Papers</b>	None	<b>Public Report:</b> Yes
<b>Financial Implications</b>	There are no financial implications associated with the Strategy, only to develop and deliver an annual Action Plan. If costs for the delivery of specific actions cannot be covered through accessing external funding or existing revenue budgets, then consideration will be given to accessing funding for them as part of the appropriate capital or revenue budget setting process.	
	<b>Signed off by the Section 151 Officer:</b> Yes	
<b>Legal Implications</b>	There will be a requirement for the Council to comply with Health and Safety requirements when undertaking any work to trees. The Council will have particular undertakings as the asset owner.	
	<b>Signed off by the Monitoring Officer:</b> Yes	
<b>Staffing and Corporate Implications</b>	All actions will be delivered by the Parks and Open Spaces Team Leader and the Parks and Open Spaces Development Officer as part of their substantive roles.	
	<b>Signed off by the Head of Paid Service:</b> Yes	
<b>Reason Agenda Item Submitted to Scrutiny Committee</b>	To notify Community Scrutiny Committee of the proposed new NWLDC Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Management Strategy, and to seek members views and comments.	
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>THAT COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE NOTES AND PROVIDES FEEDBACK ON THE DRAFT NWLDC TREE, WOODLAND AND HEDGEROW MANAGEMENT STRATEGY TO INFORM CABINET’S CONSIDERATION OF THE STRATEGY ON 25 MARCH 2025.</b>	

## 1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 Trees provide a significant contribution to the quality of people’s lives. In addition to the aesthetic value they bring, they also provide other significant benefits:

- Improving air quality and reducing air pollution

- Absorbing carbon dioxide and contributing significantly to mitigating climate change
- Reducing flood risk
- As part of a wider ecosystem, supporting and hosting flora and fauna
- Improving physical, mental and social human health

1.2 There are various national and local policies and guidelines which advocate and support the planting and effective management of trees and hedgerows. These include:

#### **Environment Improvement Plan**

In 2018, the Government set out its plan for recovering nature and reversing the decline of biodiversity.

#### **Leicestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

Leicestershire County Council has been mandated by Government to produce a strategy that will prioritise actions to drive nature's recovery across the county, and will support wider environmental benefits such as climate change, flood mitigation and improved air and water quality. Local authorities are a key stakeholder in supporting the development and delivery of this strategy at a local level.

#### **NWLDC Zero Carbon Roadmap**

The Council has a target to achieve a Net Zero Carbon Council by 2030 and a Net Zero Carbon District by 2050. The Council can help to mitigate the effects of climate change and offset the use of fossil fuels by planting trees and hedgerows and creating small woodlands.

#### **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)**

BNG is a way of creating and improving natural habitats by ensuring relevant new planning applications can demonstrate at least a 10% BNG as part of the proposed scheme.

1.3 Forest Research, as part of the Forestry Commission, has stated there is currently an average tree canopy cover across the country of 13%, and the Government has a target to increase this to 17.5% by 2050. In Leicestershire the coverage is at 14.2%. The canopy cover level in both the Coalville area, where the Council owns most of its land, is higher than the national average at 18.6%, and the average across the district is higher still at 19.2%. The aim of the strategy is to increase this to 20% by 2050.

1.4 Various services within the Council are responsible for managing a portfolio of trees. These services are:

- Parks and Open Spaces within Leisure Services
- Property Services
- Housing Services

1.5 The trees managed are sited in various locations:

- Parks
- Open Spaces
- Cemeteries
- Woodland sites
- Play areas

- Car parks
  - Housing sites
  - Adjacent to buildings, properties and assets
  - Special expense sites
- 1.6 With the exception of trees on housing sites, responsibility for the day-to-day management of Council trees sits within the Parks and Open Spaces team, either through a Service Level Agreement which is in place with Property Services for trees they are responsible for, or the direct management of all other trees. Trees on housing sites are currently managed independently by the Housing Service.
- 1.7 There is a full and comprehensive management programme in place for the trees managed by the Parks and Open Spaces team which includes:
- Periodic tree surveys
  - The identifying and prioritising of maintenance tasks required
  - Budgeting to allow for maintenance tasks to be delivered
  - The documenting and recording of all inspections and works undertaken on a management software system
- 1.8 The Housing Service is currently undertaking work on their portfolio of trees to ensure a similar management programme is in place.
- 1.9 The Council is supportive of planting more trees and hedgerows across the district and on land it owns, and this has been evidenced by recent tree planting at the Hermitage Ecopark, Coalville Park, and Sharpley Avenue Recreation Ground, for example, as well as the annual Free Tree Scheme, delivered in partnership with the National Forest, which gives trees and hedgerows to residents free of charge.
- 1.10 Despite there being a comprehensive programme in place for the management of trees, and a track record of supporting the planting of trees and hedgerows, the Council does not have a public facing document that highlights to partners, stakeholders and residents how these elements are managed and what actions are planned to be delivered on an annual basis to support them. Consequently, a draft NWLDC Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Management Strategy (**Appendix 1**) has been developed for consideration and adoption by the Council. The development of a Tree Strategy is one of the key aims set out in the Council's Delivery Plan approved by Council in November 2023.

## **2.0 NWLDC TREE, WOODLAND AND HEDGEROW MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

- 2.1 The NWLDC Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Management Strategy has been based on a template produced by the Woodland Trust and developed using examples of best practice of tree management strategies created by other organisations. It applies to all trees the Council has management responsibility for, including those on housing sites.
- 2.2 The purpose of the Strategy is to:
- Highlight the benefits of trees and hedgerows
  - Highlight the management principles with regards to trees and hedgerows
  - Give detail as to how the Council will manage its tree stock
  - Highlight the challenges facing the Council in its management of trees

- Highlight the national and local policy and guidance that underpins the management of trees and hedgerows
- Give a clear commitment to increasing canopy cover across the district
- Protect people and property
- Support the Council's journey to Zero Carbon.

### 2.3 The Strategy sets out:

- The aims and objectives in terms of managing trees and hedgerows and increasing canopy cover across the district
- Details of how frequently trees will be inspected, what the inspections will consist of, how maintenance work will be prioritised, and the timescales for undertaking work
- When the Council will look to undertake work on trees and when it will not
- How private and protected trees are managed, what work is permitted to them, and how this can be undertaken
- The partners the Council will work with to deliver the Strategy and the Action Plan
- Parcels of land the Council owns where further tree planting could be considered.

2.4 It is proposed that as part of the Strategy and in line with Government targets, the Council commits to increasing the amount of tree canopy cover across the district from 19.2% to 20% by 2050.

2.5 Prior to publication, the Strategy will be made more user friendly with a cover, the addition of pictures, and the formatting of the text.

## **3.0 NWLDC GENERAL FUND TREE, WOODLAND AND HEDGEROW ACTION PLAN**

3.1 Subject to the strategy being adopted, an Action Plan will be developed to support delivery of it. The Action Plan will be reviewed annually and will be developed in line with the Council's budget setting process so that additional resources can be requested if required.

3.2 The Action Plan will underpin delivery of the Strategy by highlighting the specific actions that will be undertaken in support of it during the financial year.

3.3 The Action Plan will highlight partner organisations with whom projects and initiatives will be delivered, what specifically will be delivered, potential outputs from the action, and any financial implications.

3.4 The primary aims of the Action Plan will be to:

- Increase tree canopy cover across the district
- Manage risks to people, property and infrastructure from trees and hedgerows
- Improve biodiversity
- Ensure the effective maintenance of trees and hedgerows
- Engage the voluntary sector and key stakeholders in the development and management of the Council's tree stock

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Action Plan will highlight any financial implications associated to the delivery of actions.
- 4.2 Where possible, external funding will be accessed to support the delivery of the actions. If that is not possible then, where feasible, existing general fund or Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budgets will be used.
- 4.3 Standard maintenance actions such as the undertaking of tree surveys and the routine maintenance works that come from these will be funded through existing revenue budgets as part of the budget setting process.
- 4.4 If there are proposed actions within the Action Plan that cannot be funded either through external funding sources or existing revenue budgets, then these will be considered through the appropriate capital or revenue budget setting process.

## **5.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The co-ordination of the delivery of the Action Plan will sit within Leisure Services, in the Parks and Open Spaces team as a joint responsibility of the Parks and Open Spaces Team Leader and the Parks and Open Spaces Development Officer. As their roles focus on horticultural development and the management of grounds maintenance, they currently take responsibility for the delivery of actions of this nature. Consequently, it is not anticipated that there will be any resource implications, although this will be monitored.

## **6.0 RISKS**

- 6.1 Whilst there are no perceived risks to having a Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Management Strategy and Action Plan, if the Council was to continue to operate without one and a tree caused personal injury to a resident or a property, then the Council's defence may be significantly weakened if there were no Strategy outlining how the Council manages and maintains its tree stock. Advice from the Council's insurers has been taken in the preparation of the Strategy, has informed the document and will also inform the development of the associated Action Plan.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 The Strategy has been developed in consultation with the following stakeholders:

- The National Forest Company
- The Woodland Trust
- The Forestry Commission
- Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust
- Leicestershire County Council
- Travelers Insurance Company
- NWLDC Planning Policy Team
- NWLDC Property Services

## **8.0 NEXT STEPS**

- 8.1 The Strategy will be presented to Cabinet at their meeting on 25 March 2025, alongside any further comments for consideration from Scrutiny Committee, with a

view to seeking approval for the Strategy to be adopted corporately and for the 2025/26 Action Plan to be developed thereafter.

8.2 Once the Strategy is adopted a formal launch will take place July 2025.

<b>Policies and other considerations, as appropriate</b>	
Council Priorities:	Clean, green and Zero Carbon
Policy Considerations:	Zero Carbon Health and Wellbeing Planning Policy
Safeguarding:	None
Equalities/Diversity:	None
Customer Impact:	Creating a safer environment, and creating environments that are aesthetically more pleasing, encourage physical activity, and support mental wellbeing
Economic and Social Impact:	None
Environment, Climate Change and zero carbon:	Reduced carbon emissions, reduced risk of flooding, improved air quality, increased levels of biodiversity
Consultation/Community Engagement:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The National Forest Company</li> <li>• The Woodland Trust</li> <li>• The Forestry Commission</li> <li>• Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust</li> <li>• Leicestershire County Council</li> <li>• Travelers Insurance Company</li> <li>• NWLDC Planning Policy Team</li> <li>• NWLDC Property Services</li> </ul>
Risks:	Whilst there are no perceived risks to having a Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Management Strategy and Action Plan, if the Council was to continue to operate without one and a tree caused personal injury to a resident or a property, then the Council's defence may be significantly weakened if there were no Strategy outlining how the Council manages and maintains its tree stock.
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