



## **ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**

**Thursday, 21 July 2022**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>TREE, HEDGEROW AND WOODLAND STRATEGY PROGRESS REPORT 2022</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES</b>

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

In response to the Environment and Climate Emergency declaration by Wirral Council in July 2019, a Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy was approved in July 2020.

The aims of the strategy are to protect, regenerate and care for Wirral's existing trees, hedgerows and woodlands. To plant more trees and hedgerows. To create a framework for decision making and establish a prioritised action plan for 2020-2030.

This report provides the first update on the progress of the Strategy, including the metrics selected to assess performance and the actions achieved to date. The tree, hedgerow and woodland planting undertaken since the Strategy was adopted is summarised within this report and further details are provided within Appendix 1.

This matter is not a key decision but affects all wards within the Borough and supports the delivery of the Wirral Plan 2021-2026 and its sustainable environment priorities.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee is recommended to note and comment on the contents of this report, the progress of the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy to date and the Strategy actions for 2022/23.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 1.1 Trees, hedgerows and woodlands not only improve biodiversity, but they also capture and store carbon, help prevent flooding, reduce air pollution, regulate temperature, improve visual amenity, increase a sense of place for our communities and research shows that trees improve the physical and mental well-being of those that live around them.
- 1.2 The Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy provides a framework for the improved provision and protection of these habitats. The successful implementation of the Strategy will help to deliver the objectives of the Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan and assist in the Council's commitment to help conserve UK pollinators.
- 1.3 The recommendation to note the progress of the Strategy has been made to allow its action plan and policies to be monitored and encourage endorsement and wider application of the Strategy Vision across the Borough.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 The report provides Committee with an update on Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy which was approved in July 2020 in response to the Environment and Climate Emergency declaration. Therefore, the alternative of not implementing the Strategy and its objectives would not address the Council's declared emergency.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

#### **Strategy Development**

- 3.1 Trees, hedgerows and woodland provide numerous benefits for people, nature, climate and the economy but they are also at risk from pests and diseases, climate change and development pressure. To manage these risks and maximise the ecosystem services that trees provide, a strategy is required to set out how the local treescape will be managed now and in the future. As well as the emergence of new threats and the declared environment and climate emergency, the unprecedented focus on trees and woodlands in national government policy led to a greater need for an effective strategy within Wirral.
- 3.2 To maximise widescale adoption and create a true sense of co-ownership, the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy was developed in partnership with a network of stakeholders including community groups as well as local and national organisations. The strategy sets out its purpose, scope, governance and required outcomes, as well as detailed management policies, actions for securing future tree stock and includes a robust commitment to community involvement.

#### **Strategy Aims and Vision**

- 3.3 The vision of the strategy is to plant over 210,000 trees in the ten-year span. In doing replacing many times over the number of trees unavoidably lost. The trees that are planted will see Wirral's tree canopy cover doubled by the time they are fully grown. To adopt the principle of "the right tree for the right place" in order to ensure the most resilient tree population possible. To establish a clear picture of Wirral's tree stock and its benefits and work constructively with individuals and groups to deliver the vision.
- 3.4 The four overarching aims of the Strategy are:
1. To protect, regenerate and care for Wirral's existing trees, hedgerows and woodlands
  2. To plant more trees on the principle of the 'right tree for the right place' and encourage appropriate natural regeneration
  3. To plant, restore and maintain hedgerows in rural and urban landscapes
  4. To provide a framework for decision making and establishing a prioritised action plan for 2020-2030 and a model for many years beyond that

#### **Advisory Board and Strategy Metrics**

- 3.5 An advisory board was set up in 2020, this brings together key local stakeholders, other council department representatives alongside external advisory organisations. With regular meetings, the purpose of the board is to drive ongoing momentum and oversight needed to ensure the Strategy delivers its aims. The board plays an active role in reviewing the actions delivered to ensure the strategy remains fit for purpose and providing support and advice.
- 3.6 The Strategy lists the outcomes which the Council must deliver, and the advisory board has agreed upon the metrics which will be used to assess the Council's performance in achieving these outcomes. These outcomes and the agreed actions, indicators and assigned responsibilities are presented in Appendix 1.

#### **Progress to Date**

- 3.7 Headline actions completed since 2020:
- A survey of all trees to form a single data base and establishment of a tree risk assessment matrix. This has been achieved through the recruitment of two full-time permanent tree inspectors to carry out rolling cyclical inspection of the Council's tree stock and adoption of new software to evaluate and manage the Council's tree inventory.
  - Implementation of Ash dieback policy and distribution of communications to internal and external stakeholders regarding identification and management of Ash dieback and Meripilus.
  - Membership to Mersey Forest which has led to over 110k of grant funding for woodland planting.

- Creation of a Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Community Engagement Policy and Action Plan.
- Twenty-six community planting events and fifteen school planting events held during the 2021/2022 planting season.
- A total of 45,559 trees planted since the Strategy was adopted. Details of the planting are presented in Appendix 1.

### **Priorities for 2022/2023**

3.8 The following actions will be given priority in 2022/2023

- Existing Tree Preservation Order (TPO) Review which is due to commence in July 2022.
- Completion of a I-Tree study in partnership with Forest Research to calculate the ecosystem services of Wirral's tree canopy. The data collection will commence in July 2022.
- Deliver a training program for staff within the affected service areas on the value of trees, TPO's and the tree strategy vision. The first training session is expected in September 2022.
- To plant the annual target of 21,000 trees between November 2022 and April 2023 with particular focus on hedgerow provision.

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The nature of the report is to monitor progress of the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy, therefore there are no financial implications from the report
- 4.2 The annual budgets for tree maintenance remain at £222,100 for highways and £140,000 for parks. An overspend of approximately £187,000 to the parks budget is expected due to ongoing storm clearance works. The budget shortfall will be paid from the reserve which was allocated for tree risk management just after the Arrowe Park fatality.
- 4.3 Over £110,000 has been secured through the Mersey Forest for the planting and establishment of six woodlands in the first two planting seasons (2020/2021 and 2021/2022) and further Trees for Climate applications will be submitted in the coming months to secure additional woodland funding for 2022/2023 season.
- 4.4 A grant of £249,630.93 was secured in 2020 as part of Round 1 of the Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCf) to plant and establish 674 standards, 400 feathers and 620 whips this planting was completed by April 2021. A total of £367,645 was then secured through the governments Round 3 of the UTCf for a further 959 standard trees. 246 Round 3 trees were planted in 2021/2022 season and the remaining 713 will be planted between November 2022 and April 2023.

4.5 Delivery of tree planting not eligible for grant funding has been supported by Environment and Climate Emergency budget.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The Council has a clear duty of care under both civil and criminal law for the health and safety of those on or near Council land and has potential liabilities arising from the falling of a tree or 5 branches, therefore sufficient tree risk management and maintenance is essential in adhering to those duties.

5.2 There are no direct legal implications from the establishment and delivery of the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy, however, its implementation ensures that the desired outcomes are achieved for all, and the resources applied have the maximum effect.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

6.1 There are no staffing implications arising directly from this report.

6.2 The tree team who drive the implementation of the Strategy consists of five permanent members of staff, two tree inspectors, two tree officers and one team leader.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

7.1 In adopting the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy 2020 to 2030, the Council has committed to achieving its aims. A failure to demonstrate action would present a reputational risk and a missed opportunity to support the Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan and future Pollinator Plan.

7.2 There are serious public safety risks from falling branches, collapsing and windthrown trees, therefore effective tree maintenance, which is a key part of the Strategy is vital to mitigate and reduce the risks of a tree related incident from occurring.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

8.1 To ensure quality and consistent engagement, a Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Community Engagement Policy and Action Plan has been created. The engagement policy sets out the principles that will support successful collaboration across the Borough, ensuring key stakeholders have a platform to influence and take part in the delivery of the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland strategy vision including planting. Since November 2021 a total of 26 community planting events, 15 schools planting events and eight tree maintenance events have been held. In addition, a Tree Statutory Advisory Board has been established to advise and support the Strategy delivery.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.
- 9.2. The Equality Impact Assessment undertaken for the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy had been reviewed and details the potential positive impacts arising.
- 9.3 The Equality Impact Assessment is available via this link:  
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

**10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy will play a key role in tackling the climate emergency in Wirral helping to achieve ‘net zero’ carbon emissions by 2030. Alongside carbon sequestration, trees, hedgerows and woodlands also help provide a nature-based solution to build resilience against storm water management and air pollution. In addition, they support an abundance of wildlife including mammals, birds, amphibians, flora, and pollinators. As such, this Strategy will help towards the target of a 20% ‘net gain’ in biodiversity across all council land.

**11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 Trees provide many social and economic benefits, but poorly managed trees can present public health risks. The Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy allows us to identify risks, highlight areas for investment, and plan appropriate management and by demonstrating a strong commitment towards trees for the long-term, the Strategy allows new opportunities for Wirral to secure external funding for tree planting. It has allowed the establishment of stakeholder networks and steered existing enthusiasm towards a unified vision of doubling Wirral’s tree canopy.

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**APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy Progress to Date (July 2022)

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy 2020-2030  
 Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Community Engagement Policy 2021-2030

**SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

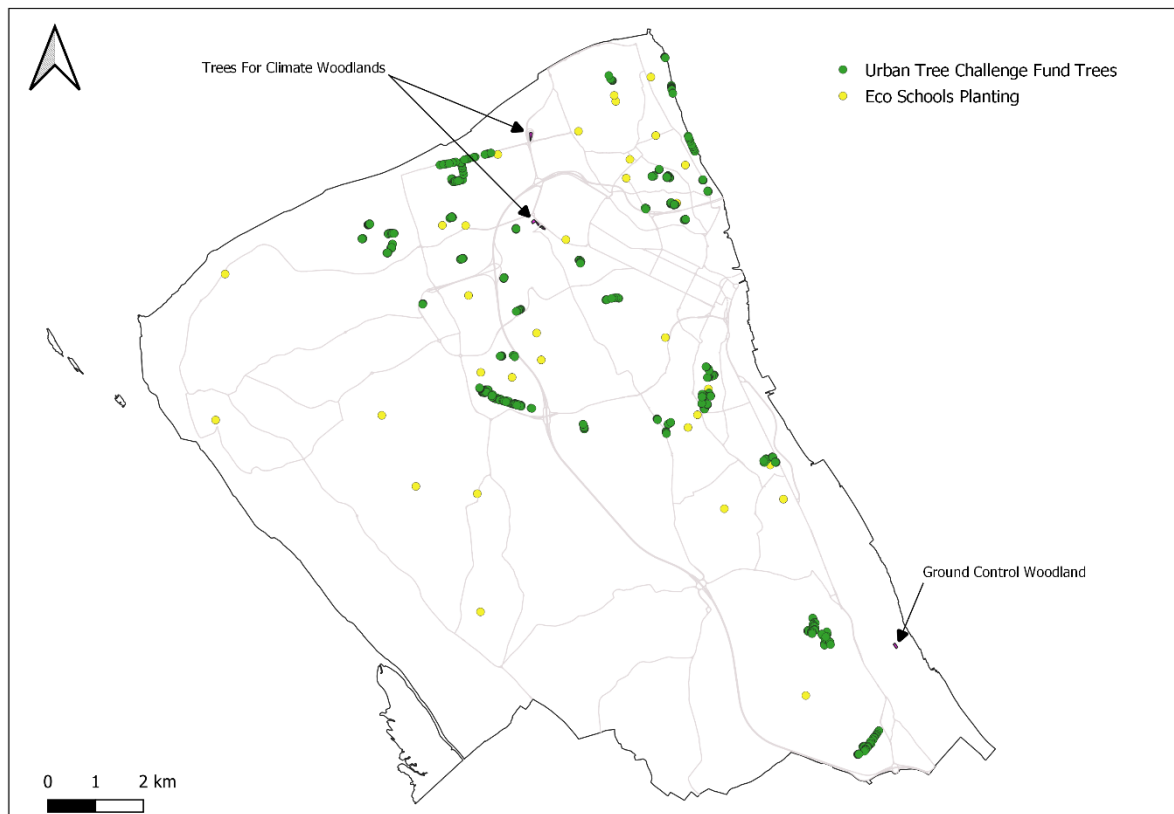
Council Meeting	Date
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Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy 2020-2030 - Cabinet	<b>June 2020</b>
COVID-19 Memorial Woodland - Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee	<b>March 2022</b>

**APPENDIX 1**  
**Wirral Council**  
**Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy**  
**Progress to Date (July 2022)**

**1. Planting Season 2020/2021**

A total of 24,032 trees were planted between November 2020 and the end of March 2021. Comprising 674 standard parkland/street trees and 1026 saplings planted as part of the Urban Tree Challenge Fund, 9600 woodland trees planted as part of the Mersey Forest Trees for Climate scheme, 1520 woodland trees planted through sponsorship from Ground Control, 1000 trees provided to Green Waste Subscribers as part of a pilot project, 10k saplings planted on Eco Schools sites, 203 street trees as part of highways projects and 9 street trees planted through combined authorities funding.



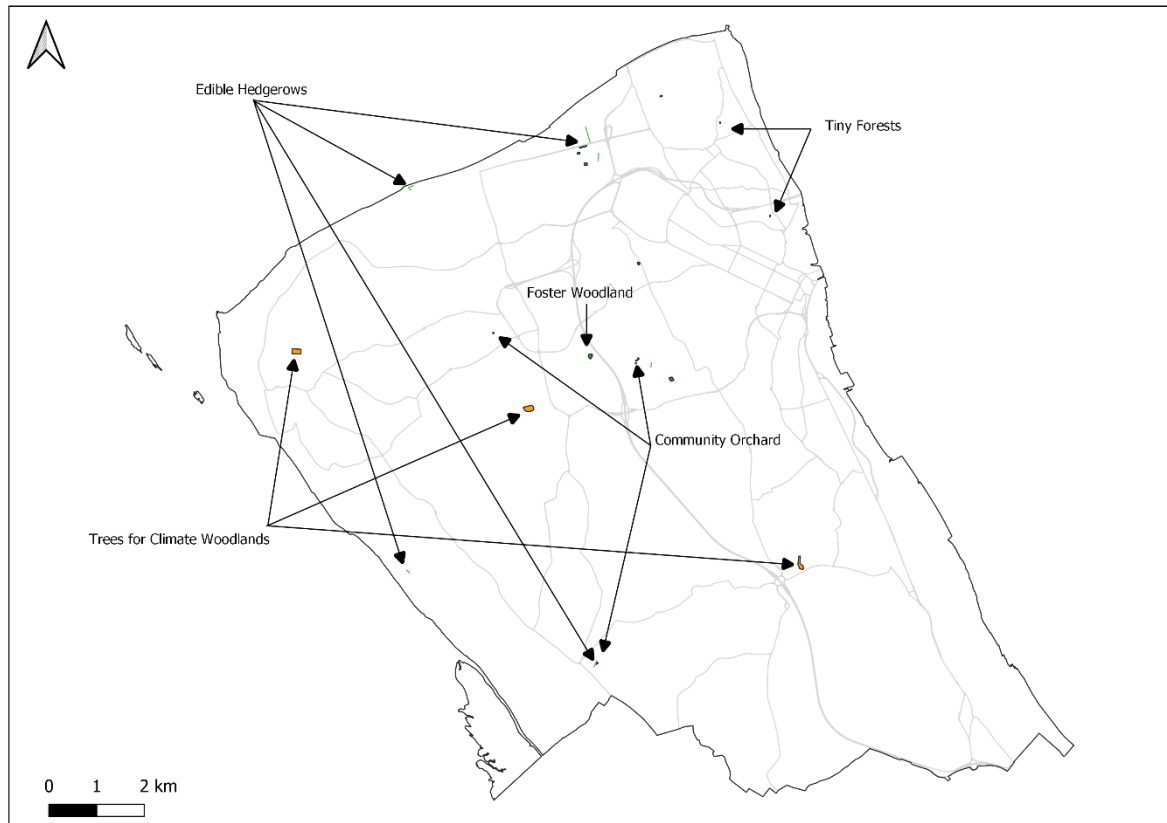
**Insert 1: 2020/2021 Planting Highlights**

**2. Planting Season 2021/22**

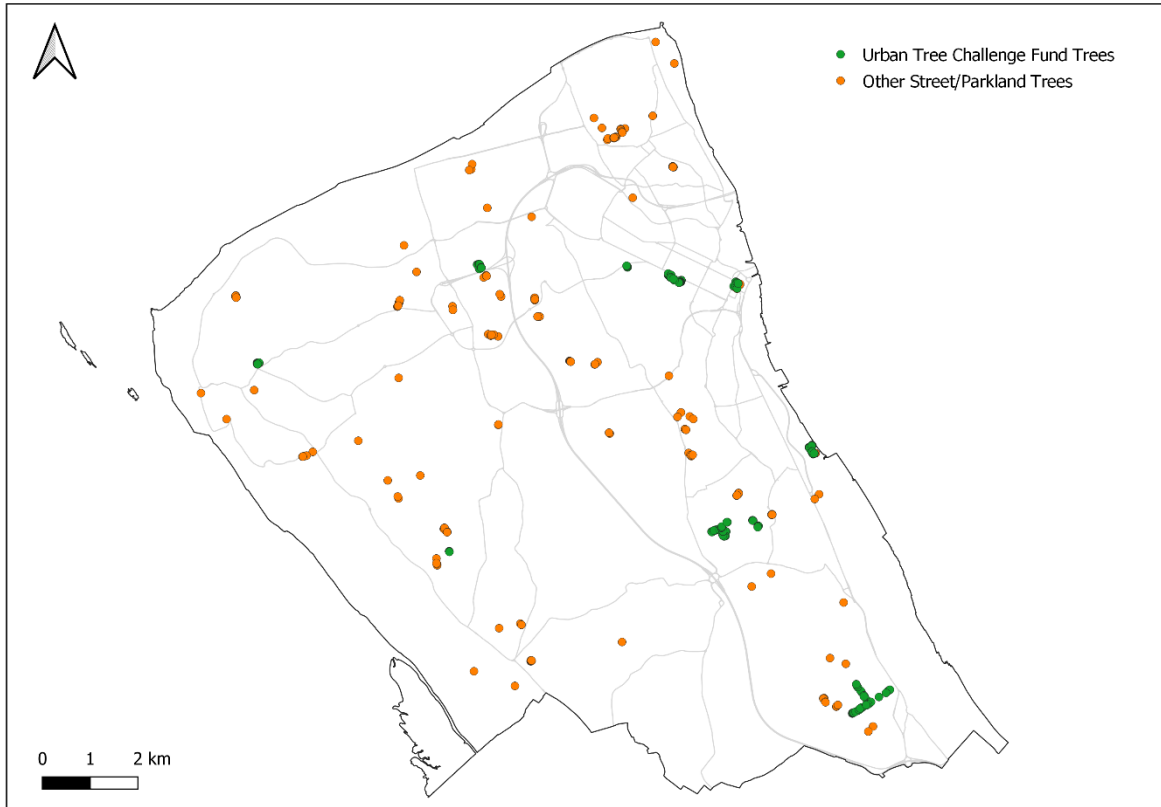
A total 21, 527 trees were planted between November 2021 and the end of March 2022. Comprising 509 standard street/parkland planting, 1km of new hedgerow and 7.2 hectares of new woodland. Included within this planting was Wirral's first two Tiny Forests delivered in partnership with Earthwatch, a woodland dedicated to Wirral's foster carers, a Covid memorial woodland in Arrowe Country Park, three



new Trees for Climate woodlands (including one created from natural colonisation) and over 8,000 trees dedicated to the Queens Green Canopy. 98% of the 21,527 trees planted this season were planted by Wirral's communities which includes over 500 volunteers.



**Insert 2: 2021/2022 Woodland and Hedgerow Planting Highlights**



**Insert 3: 2021/2022 Standard Tree Planting Highlights**

## Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy Metric

<b>Aim 1:</b> To protect, regenerate and care for Wirral's existing tree, hedgerows, and woodland				
<b>Ref. No</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Reporter</b>
1	Support a survey of all Wirral's trees to form a single data base.	Recruitment of two full-time permanent tree inspectors to carry out rolling cyclical inspection of the Council's tree stock.	Completion to Council tree inventory.	Nicola Wallbank
<b>Progress to date:</b> Complete				
2	Support a comprehensive review of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and conservation areas.	Desktop review of all existing TPOs and assessment of their enforceability.  Site inspections and revised evidence base for confirmed TPOs following desktop review	Number of TPOs reviewed annually.	Matt Parkinson & Rob Rainford
<b>Progress to date:</b> Desktop review methodology has been devised, and the review will commence in July 2022				
3	Review, strengthen and implement enforcement policies to ensure protection of existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows.	Implementation of legislation, policy, and best practice guidance to avoid and enforce loss or damage.  Apply and enforce planning Conditions for the protection of new and existing trees, hedgerows, and woodland where applicable.	Number of reported incidents of tree loss or damage from vandalism that have occurred annually.  Number of tree related planning enforcement notices issued annually.	Nicola Wallbank and Steve Lacey
<b>Progress to date:</b> Ongoing action - Six reported incidents of vandalism in 2021				
4	Establish the overall value of Wirral's trees, to show what	Measure, map and project ecosystem services (carbon storage, air	Annual projection of cumulative carbon sequestration rates of new	Nicola Wallbank

	condition and size they are, and how much they benefit the environment and ecosystem.  Establish the overall value of Wirral tree population and describe its profile in quantitative, qualitative, and functional terms.	purification, water purification, pollination, local climate regulation, noise regulation and access nature) using EcoserveR or I-Tree.	woodland.	
<b>Progress to date:</b> A project to measure the ecosystem services of Wirral's tree canopy in partnership with Forest Research has commenced and the carbon sequestration rates projections will be available from April 2023				
5	Establish a cycle of tree risk assessment and update management and action plans on an annual basis.	Rolling cyclical inspection of the Councils tree stock.	Number of sites inspected annually.	Nicola Wallbank
<b>Progress to date:</b> Ongoing action – all parks and greenspace sites inspected in 2021, inspections now taking place of all highways (a full survey of our highways was last completed in 2020)				
6	Use and evaluate the Council's Tree Risk Assessment Management tool in making decisions.	Implementation of risk assessment matrix.	Number of LA codes produced annually.	Nicola Wallbank
<b>Progress to date:</b> Ongoing action - 4,427 LA codes issued in 2021				
7	Implement an Ash dieback policy and pre-empt or manage any other diseases that will adversely affect Wirral' existing, replacement and new tree cover.	Deliver communications to internal and external stakeholders regarding identification and management of Ash dieback.  Application of risk assessment matrix on incidences of Ash dieback and	Number of Council owned trees felled because of Ash dieback per year.	Rob Rainford

	other diseases.			
<b>Progress to date:</b> Ongoing action -total of 22 trees removed to date as a result of Ash Dieback				
8	Deliver a training program for staff within the affected service areas on the value of trees, TPO's and the tree strategy vision.	Delivery of presentations and email bulletins to internal colleagues.	Number of colleagues who attend Tree Strategy webinars per year.  Number of Tree Strategy bulletins sent per year.	Nicola Wallbank, Matt Parkinson and Rob Rainford
<b>Progress to date:</b> Training programme to commence in September 2022				
9	Improve communication channels between WBC and residents.	Consultation with residents, Councillors and internal colleagues regarding tree works where required and feasible.  Creation of Public Consultation Strategy for new planting.	Annual response rates to public online consultation surveys.	Matt Parkinson and Rob Rainford
<b>Progress to date:</b> Ongoing action - First customer satisfaction survey published between 24 <sup>th</sup> August and 23 <sup>rd</sup> September 2021 with 10 responses. Community engagement policy has been created				

**Aims 2 and 3:** To plant more trees on the principle of the 'right tree for the right place' and encourage appropriate natural regeneration. To plant, restore and maintain hedgerows in rural and urban landscapes.

Ref. No	Outcome	Action	Indicator	Reporter
10	Establish a robust partnership and community engagement programme to put the strategy into practice.	Creation and implementation of a Community Engagement Policy and Action Plan.	Number of annual community planting and maintenance events.	Nicola Wallbank
<b>Progress to date:</b> Ongoing action - Engagement policy and action plan has been created. Total of 26 community planting events and 15 school planting events took place between November 2021 and April 2022				
11	Establish a working partnership with private, community and charitable owners of land, businesses, and local developers in the management of trees, hedgerows and woodlands, contributing to an increased canopy/tree cover across Wirral and the establishment of new copses and hedgerows.	Implement Mersey Forest membership and partnership agreement.  Engage with external partners to identify suitable land for planting and help facilitate both tree sourcing and planting.	Annual net gain of Council and partner trees, hedgerows and woodland.	Nicola Wallbank
<b>Progress to date:</b> Ongoing action - Membership to Mersey Forest implemented, pilot scheme with Magenta Living in 2021/2022 in which we planted 25 trees on their land. Net gain of 43k trees since July 2020				
12	Establish and support local tree nurseries on Wirral to provide future tree stock that will be climate resilient and offer appropriate planting for Wirral's environment. This will include schools, community groups and volunteers collecting seeds and cuttings of suitable trees and growing them on.	Identify suitable nursery sites and delivery partners across the Borough.  Facilitate and support nursery set up and establishment.	Number of trees of local provenance planted annually on Council or partner land.	Nicola Wallbank

**Progress to date:** Over 10k trees planted in the 2021/2022 season were sourced and grown in Cheshire with the remaining woodland and hedgerow plants coming from only suppliers that raise trees from seed sourced and grown solely within the UK. Since November 2021 the Strategy has supported the expansion of a local community nursery in Wallasey who cared for many of the trees planted in 2021/2022 season. A campaign to collect, sow and grow local trees from seeds will be launched in August 2022. Identification of nursery sites and/or facilitation of more community nurseries will be the focus in 2023.

13	Ensure all opportunities are taken to plant new, climate resilient trees and hedgerows to support wildlife and public amenity value and encourage appropriate natural regeneration.	Apply the 'selection criteria' defined within the 'Urban Tree Manual' when implementing all new planting.	Annual change in taxonomic diversity of Council trees (to be review once latest street tree survey is completed on Insight)	Nicola Wallbank
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**Progress to date:** Ongoing action – indicator values not available until end of 2022

14	Create a cross-disciplinary working group, involving key representatives from within or outside the organisations whose decisions have an impact on local trees.	Creation of a Tree Strategy Advisory Board (TSAB) and work programme.	Production of a public evaluative report every three years on progress in achieving the strategy, in partnership with the cross-disciplinary working group.	TSAB
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**Progress to date:** TSAB has been created and the public evaluative report is due by July 2023

15	Where relevant, ensure plans for new building or development make provision for retaining existing trees, space for natural regeneration and for increasing the numbers of tree and hedgerows in line with targets for increasing canopy/tree cover.	Continued application of relevant planning legislation and policy and implementation of future statute such as biodiversity net gain principles.	Number of tree related biodiversity units gained through off-site provision	Nicola Wallbank
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**Progress to date:** Preparations for forthcoming biodiversity net gain roll out are underway

