



DELEGATED DECISION BY PORTFOLIO HOLDER

4th November 2019

REPORT TITLE	WIRRAL TREE STRATEGY CONSULTATION
REPORT OF	<i>DAVID STEVENSON, POLICY & STRATEGY OFFICER</i>
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER	<i>COUNCILLOR ELIZABETH GREY, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE</i>

REPORT SUMMARY

The Cabinet Member is requested to approve a decision to undertake a public consultation exercise for a Tree Strategy. A Tree Strategy would provide a unified, high level, public facing document detailing a Borough wide vision for trees, woodland and hedgerows in Wirral. Pre-consultation activities have been undertaken as detailed in the report to inform a draft strategy to go out to consultation.

This is not a decision requesting approval of a Tree Strategy for Wirral, merely a decision to undertake a consultation exercise on a Tree Strategy for Wirral.

This matter affects all Wards within the Borough

This is not a Key Decision.

This item is for Delegated Decision.

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is requested to endorse submitting the Council's draft Tree Strategy to a public consultation exercise.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 A Tree Strategy will provide a public facing and unified vision for the Council's trees across all Council departments. Trees, woodlands and hedgerows provide numerous environmental and aesthetic benefits and are key to Wirral's landscape characteristic. By setting this in the context of a strategy we can set a vision for how we will manage these important assets and work with private landowners and other owners of trees/woodlands for the benefit of Wirral.
- 1.2 The Tree Strategy will stipulate targets for tree planting which will form part of the Council's response to the Climate Emergency declaration of July 2019.
- 1.3 Nationally recognised charities the Tree Council and the Woodland Trust recommend that all Local Authorities develop a Tree Strategy. Nearby Local Authorities including Wrexham have also developed a Tree Strategy.
- 1.4 Embarking on a period of public consultation will allow members of the public and other stakeholders to input into the development of the strategy. This feedback will be invaluable in developing the strategy, understanding local views on trees, woodland and hedgerows and securing buy in to the development of the strategy.
- 1.5 In developing a Tree Strategy Wirral Council will realise opportunities for closer community working and involvement in the management of trees, woodlands and hedgerows in Wirral. For example, community planting schemes.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 For the Cabinet Member not to approve the decision to undertake a public consultation exercise for the Tree Strategy.
- 2.2 This would result in the Tree Strategy not progressing any further, negating the significant benefits that a Tree Strategy would bring Wirral.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Wirral has never had a Tree Strategy.
- 3.2 Organisations including the Woodland Trust recommend that Local Authorities have a Tree Strategy to ensure effective management of trees and woodland
- 3.3 The Tree Strategy is being developed in conjunction with a Tree Risk Management Policy, in the final document this will be provided as an appendix. The two documents are intrinsically linked but are not the same.
- 3.4 The Tree Strategy will not be principally an operational or technical document but is high level and designed to set out a strategic vision for how the Council will boost the benefits of trees, woodlands and hedgerows over a ten year period in Wirral.

- 3.5 This will act as a marker of intent and include appropriate performance measures against key outcomes listed below (subject to consultation).
- 3.6 Safe management of our Council tree stock, we will fell trees only when necessary. We will communicate with residents, ward councillors and other stakeholders as necessary in a local area when we take a decision to fell or conduct major work. As a Council we will plant twice as many trees as we fell.
- 3.7 Above this we will work with our own tree stock and in partnership with others to access funding opportunities for an ambitious planting scheme.
- 3.8 We will select the “right tree for the right place” in our own tree planting schemes. This will take into account the characteristics of the site and the purpose of planting on that site. This will mean that, as sites determine, we will plant a mixture of native and non-native trees.
- 3.9 We will consider the long term legacy of tree planting. We will look to plant a diverse mix of canopy and smaller trees that benefit the ecology of Wirral. We will future proof our tree stock and ensure it is resilient to climate change and other challenges.
- 3.10 We will identify key areas for afforestation in Wirral to boost carbon sequestration and other ecosystem services. We know that access to green space and trees is not equal, we will seek to afforest areas which are deprived and/or have low tree cover. We will focus on schools and opportunities to link up areas of green space.
- 3.11 We will work closer with Merseyforest to be integral to the development of the Mersey Community Forest and the Great Northern Forest with the Woodland Trust.
- 3.12 We will work with local, regional and national stakeholders to share best practice and knowledge around trees

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The consultation is not expected to have financial implications. Any rooms required etc. such as for forum events will be located at Council facilities.
- 4.2 Following the conclusion of the consultation there are likely to be financial implications based upon the outcomes of the consultation. These will be dealt with in a later report.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no legal implications of going out to consultation.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The consultation exercise will be undertaken using existing resources.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 Negative publicity could be accrued during the consultation on the Council's management of trees, woodlands and hedgerows.
- 7.2 Whilst this may occur, the actual process of going out to consultation and having an open discussion with the public demonstrates the Council's values to be Customer focused, Accountable, Ambitious and Professional.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Group Leaders, Cabinet/SLT and SLT have been briefed on the development of a Tree Strategy for Wirral.
- 8.2 Pre consultation engagement has been undertaken with other Local Authorities to understand best practice in Tree Strategies.
- 8.3 Officers have engaged with national charities including the Tree Council and the Woodland Trust.
- 8.4 Officers have engaged with a variety of stakeholder groups including, but not limited to, Wirral Tree Wardens, Conservation Areas Wirral, Wirral Wildlife and Friends of Wirral Parks Forum.
- 8.5 Some public engagement regarding general principles and interest in Tree Strategies has been undertaken at a Tree Council event in Birkenhead on the 19th October 2019.
- 8.6 The partnership working approach in bringing the Tree Strategy to consultation has been cited by the Tree Council as a national first and is being utilised in an academic study into the development of Tree Strategies by Local Authorities by the Tree Council and Forest Research.
- 8.7 Already positive relationships have been built with community and third sector stakeholders with an interest in tree and woodland management, we hope to continue to develop these positive relationships into the future.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Officers will engage in discussions with the Communities Equalities Officer to follow best practice to ensure that the consultation will not exclude anyone based on their protected characteristics.
- 9.2 As the Tree Strategy is currently draft, subject to consultation and further amendment it would not be appropriate to undertake an Equalities Impact Assessment at this stage.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Undertaking this consultation will have no impact on emissions of CO2. However the Tree Strategy itself once adopted is likely to have positive impacts on CO2 sequestration of trees in Wirral due to proposed targets around increased tree planting.

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APPENDICES

N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Woodland Trust (2016) Local Authority Tree Strategies
<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2016/07/local-authority-tree-strategies/>

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
N/A	N/A