

APPENDIX 2

WIRRAL TREE STRATEGY PUBLIC CONSULTATION SUMMARY REPORT JULY 2020

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** Trees provide wide ranging social and environmental benefits by contributing to the health and wellbeing of communities, providing habitat for wildlife and acting as a foundation for biodiversity, as well as offering extrinsic beauty to our surroundings and economic value to our neighbourhoods. The Council, therefore, has a duty to protect and manage Wirral's tree stock on behalf of residents and future generations, to ensure a safe and pleasant environment for all. Following the declaration of an Environment and Climate Emergency on the 15th July 2019, the Council is committed to protecting Wirral's natural environment and intensifying efforts to achieve net zero emissions across all Council operations by 2030 and across the Borough as a whole before 2041.
- 1.2** In response to this, the Council and partners have worked together to develop an ambitious Tree Strategy, which focuses on tree maintenance and planting as a means of carbon capture for the period 2020-2030.
- 1.3** A full public consultation and stakeholder engagement exercise was carried out to gather comments and gauge levels of support from residents, visitors, local organisations, and key partners, as well as to inform and improve the Strategy in line with any concerns raised.
- 1.4** This report presents a summary of the feedback from the consultation exercise on the draft Tree Strategy.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1** In 2016, a large horse chestnut tree on the perimeter of Arrowe Country Park fell onto a busy carriageway, tragically killing a baby girl. A full investigation was carried out which concluded that Wirral Council's lack of a 'proactive, robust tree management system in place for Parks and Countryside' was a contributing factor in the accident. In response, a Tree Action Plan was formulated to address issues relating to tree management in Wirral. The Tree Action Plan identified the need for a Tree Strategy, which would enable Wirral Council to comprehensively plan for the future management of tree stock across the Borough, as well as establish a tree planting programme to meet the needs of the Council's environment and climate emergency agenda.
- 2.2** In July 2019, a Task and Finish group was established by the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee to carry out a review of the developing Tree Strategy. The Task and Finish group instructed the Council to carry out a consultation exercise, in order to identify local views on the proposed strategy

and report back to the Task and Finish group alongside the draft strategy itself, to allow for a comprehensive review.

- 2.3** The consultation exercise took place over 6 weeks from the 8th November to the 20th December 2019. The exercise consisted of: (i) an online survey for residents and local organisations; and, (ii) sustained engagement with interested stakeholders and partners across a variety of formats. The online survey produced 244 individual responses to a series of open and closed questions, relating to measures outlined in the Tree Strategy. Across a series of emails, face-to-face meetings, and telephone consultations, the stakeholder and partner engagement collected valuable input from groups, such as: Wirral Initiative for Trees and Friends of Parks groups.

3.0 CONSULTATION METHOD

- 3.1** The online consultation contained 11 questions to gather information regarding respondent demographics, gauge levels of agreement with proposed tree maintenance and planting proposals, as well as provide opportunity for comment on how to ensure a biodiverse and resilient tree stock, where to plant new trees, and how to improve communications. A link to the draft strategy was provided upon which these questions were based.
- 3.2** The consultation was made available online via an external platform accessible from the Council website. Whilst many stakeholders and partners engaged with the online survey directly, additional correspondence was invited and incorporated into the consultation results in the 'Stakeholder and Partner Engagement' section of the Full Public Consultation Responses which are available online at the Council website at:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/treestrategy>
- 3.3** The Council's website was used extensively throughout the consultation, with a home page presence promoting the consultation and providing access to it. The consultation was also highlighted on the Council's internal intranet page for Council employees. The Council's various social networking profiles (Facebook and Twitter) were also used to promote the consultation.
- 3.4** The consultation ran from the 8th November until 20th December 2019.

4.0 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

- 4.1** The Council used online software to capture all responses and provide analysis of the quantitative aspects of the consultation questions. Responses completed online went directly onto the system, where they were held and analysed.
- 4.2** All responses to the individual questions posed were analysed regardless of whether questionnaires were fully or partially completed.

4.3 The comments have been reviewed and analysed by the Climate Emergency Team to identify common themes and suggestions. All these comments and the Council’s responses are available in full online on the Council website at: <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/treestrategy>

4.5 A total of 244 responses to the consultation were received.

4.6 Response to Question 1 (Are you a resident, visitor, or organisation/ charity/ business?)

4.6.1 Table to show responses:

Are you a resident, visitor, or organisation/ charity/ business?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
A resident (Wirral Council Taxpayer)	90.04%	217
Visitor	2.49%	6
Organisation/Charity/Business	7.4%	18
	Answered	241
	Skipped	3

4.7 Response to Question 2 (To what extent do you agree or disagree that tree cover in Wirral should increase by a minimum of 10% by 2030?)

4.7.1 Table to show responses:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to increase tree cover in Wirral by a minimum of 10%?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	84.38%	162
Agree	9.90%	19
Neither agree nor disagree	3.65%	7
Disagree	1.04%	2
Strongly disagree	1.04%	2
	Answered	192
	Skipped	52

4.8 Response to Question 3 (The Council has a plan for managing and inspecting trees that the Council is responsible for, sometimes we may need to cut down (fell) a tree for public safety reasons. For every tree the Council cuts down we will replace it with two new trees and for if a mature tree is cut down we will replace with three new trees. Box one in the strategy document details the council's approach to tree felling and replacement planting; to what extent do you agree or disagree with the way the draft strategy proposes dealing with end of life trees and maintaining continuity of tree cover?)

4.8.1 Table to show responses:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the tree felling and replacement proposal?		
Answer Choices	Responses	

Strongly agree	43.09%	81
Agree	32.98%	62
Neither agree nor disagree	4.26%	8
Disagree	6.91%	13
Strongly disagree	12.77%	24
	Answered	188
	Skipped	56

4.9 Response to Question 4 (Do you have any comments about the plans to improve the biodiversity and variety of trees in Wirral?)

4.9.1 Summary of themes from comments:

- Biodiversity is important.
- Plant a wide variety of species to increase diversity.
- Plant mixed woodland with trees of different ages.
- Plant native trees where possible.
- Maintain diversity through good tree management.
- Maintain diversity by not felling existing trees.
- Current diversity of trees if not sufficient to protect biodiversity.
- Deadwood contributes to the ecosystem and should be left where it stands.
- The strategy needs to be more ambitious in its planting commitments.
- A two-for-one replacement planting policy is not enough.

4.10 Response to Question 5 (Do you have any comments about the plans to improve the resilience of Wirral's future tree population, in the context of a warming climate and potential new pests and diseases?)

4.10.1 Summary of themes from comments:

- Support for resilience plans.
- Plant a wide variety of species and increase diversity to ensure resilience.
- Plant disease resistant trees and species tolerant to climate change.
- Plant native trees grown locally instead of non-native trees which can introduce new diseases and pests to the UK.
- Opposition to what has been perceived as excessive felling.
- Discussion of ash dieback and the importance of not cutting down all ash trees in an outbreak as some will survive and re-establish a more resistant and resilient population.
- Correct maintenance and regular inspections are key to preventing disease and early diagnosis.
- Educate the general public and share information more widely to raise awareness of tree diseases and how to recognise them.
- Don't chip or transport diseased timber.
- Woods will naturally regenerate into mixed species resilient places if left to nature.

4.11 Response to Question 6 (To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed governance and review process of the strategy?)

4.11.1 Table to show responses:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed governance and review process of the strategy?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	26.67%	48
Agree	36.11%	65
Neither agree nor disagree	2.22%	40
Disagree	7.78%	14
Strongly disagree	7.22%	13
	Answered	180
	Skipped	64

4.12 Response to Question 7 (Do you have any comments about the communications approach to raising public awareness of tree management and maintenance matters?)

4.12.1 Summary of themes from comments:

- Need for more extensive communication to increase awareness and community engagement.
- Consultation online on Council website is not enough.
- Need to inform residents of work planned, communicate reasons for felling, and show that all other options have been considered before felling commences.
- Raising awareness of replacement planting plans and encouraging communities to get involved may assuage fears around felling and reduce vandalism.
- Include children and schools in planting programmes, so young people understand the importance of trees.
- Communication needs to be wide ranging across different platforms and local associations.
- Proposed communication platforms – local newspapers e.g., Wirral Globe as not everyone uses the internet, online/social media to target younger people, make use of friends of parks and community groups who can distribute posters or disseminate information, leave notices in public buildings like libraries, community centres, and park noticeboards, put leaflets through the doors of residents living near proposed felling sites.
- Example of good practice: “Yes, we've been horrified to see the trees in Port Sunlight removed so when you came to remove the trees in Pollitt Square, the information sheet we received showing us the trees and more importantly the reasons why they were being removed was reassuring. This is a critical step in preparing people and we were so pleased that we understood the reasons taken.”

4.13 Response to Question 8 (To what extent do you agree with the legacy and species selection elements of the draft strategy in context to the native vs non-native species debate, and providing species fitness for their spatial confines?)

4.13.1 Table to show responses:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the legacy and species selection elements of the draft strategy?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	32.89%	49
Agree	35.57%	53
Neither agree nor disagree	22.15%	33
Disagree	5.37%	8
Strongly disagree	4.03%	6
	Answered	149
	Skipped	95

4.14 Response to Question 9 (To what extent do you feel the draft strategy will support the delivery a safe, sustainable, resilient and diverse tree stock for Wirral?)

4.14.1 Table to show responses:

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the draft strategy will ensure a safe, sustainable, resilient, and diverse tree stock for Wirral?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	20.67%	31
Agree	37.33%	56
Neither agree nor disagree	24.67%	37
Disagree	10.67%	16
Strongly disagree	6.67%	10
	Answered	150
	Skipped	94

4.15 Response to Question 10 (Are there any locations in Wirral that you would like to recommend as an area to be considered for new tree planting? Where possible give the nearest postcode or street name)

4.15.1 List of suggestions include:

Birkenhead

- Birkenhead: Town centre, Birkenhead Park (especially by visitors centre), Birkenhead North Station area, Beechwood Estate, Chester Street, Argyle Street, central reservation on Conway Street, Borough Road (near Quarry Bank grassed area, also Whetstone Lane), Queensway tunnel roundabout

(replacement trees), incorporate trees into Birkenhead redevelopment e.g. Wirral Waters, around Birkenhead docks, Fearnley Road, Cleveland Street (grass adjacent), Church Street.

- Rock Ferry: Rock Park, grass verges along B5136.
- Prenton: Victoria Park, Fender Way, Bedford Road/ Old Chester Road, Northwood Road, fields behind Sainsbury's (Duck Pond Lane Park), Overton Way, Woodchurch Road, Dell Road (grass verges), Prenton Hall Road area, Townfield area.
- Tranmere: Mersey Park, Church Road, Pearson Street, Derby Road.
- Bidston: around M53 and connecting roads (particularly downwind to control particulate matter levels).

Wallasey

- Wallasey: Harrison Park, Central Park, Oxton Park, St Mary's College, Mill Lane, Wallasey Cemetery/ Earlston Gardens, The Delph (Rake Lane), Brighton Street, Poulton Road, Gorsey Lane, Oxton Road.
- Egremont: grassy areas along Kings Street, grassy area by Tobin Street.
- Seacombe.
- Moreton: banks of the Birket between Leasowe and Moreton (Reeds Lane area), M53 between junctions 1 and 2 (Moreton spur), Town Meadow Lane (surrounding grassy area).
- Leasowe: footpaths by the Leasowe Coastal Trail.
- Liscard: St Albans road (circle shopping centre with trees).
- New Brighton: Tower Grounds, The Dips, Marine Promenade (to Leasowe and New Brighton), Seabank Road, Elleray Park, Magazines Conservation Area (including Vale Park), Warren Golf Course (Grove Road).

Wirral West

- West Kirby: Grange Hill, Ashton Park, behind West Kirby Household Waste Recycling Centre (tip), Greenbank Road playing field, St Bridget's Church, Sandlea Park, Banks Road, Hilbre High School, Black Horse Hill, Calday Grange Grammar School, fields behind Gilroy Road, grassy area by Kale Close, Saughall Massie.
- Caldy: Mereworth.
- Hoylake: behind George Road, Hoyle Road, Hoylake Municipal Golf Course, along Trinity Road.
- Meols: Forest Road/Dove Point (parade), horse fields, Carr Lane.
- Pensby: Pensby Park, Pensby Playing fields, Pensby school, land off Barnston Road.
- Thingwall: Sparks Lane (land adjacent to Scouts hut).
- Greasby: Mill Lane grass verges, fields along Pump Lane, Greenhouse Farm fields.
- Frankby: Frankby cemetery, Royden Park, Grow green corridor from Royden Park to Thurstaston Common.
- Irby area: Harrock Woods, Oaklea Road, Irby Road, fields around Mill Hill Road.
- Upton: Warwick Park, Upton Meadow, Upton bypass (cricket club side).
- Arrowe Park: Arrowe Park Road, Arrowe Commercial Park, Arrowe Park golf course.

- Woodhurch estate.
- Thurstaston: Wirral Country Park.
- Barnston Dales and along Barnston Road, Storeton Lane fields.

Wirral South

- Heswall: Wirral Way, Heswall field/shore, grassy area at Boundary Road/ Telegraph Lane, along Telegraph Road from Mere Lane to the Cottage Loaf roundabout.
- New Ferry: Shorefields area, Pollitt Square, Grove Square, New Ferry Park, New Ferry Road.
- Port Sunlight: River Park.
- Bebington: Stanton Road and Civic Way (replacement fellings), Bebbington Road Precinct, Cross Lane, Kings Road, Beechway Road, Mayer Park, Higher Bebbington recreation grounds, Abbots Grange Estate, Bebbington Cemetery and surrounding field, outside the Oval and Bebbington Library.
- Bromborough: Marfords Park, Wirral Grammar School for Boys far playing fields, Croft Retail Park (surrounding fields), Bromborough Green and Common (off Allport Lane).
- Eastham: The Chase and Brookhurst Park, Plymard Playing fields, between railway line and Gorsefield (replacement planting).
- Spital: Dibbins Hey area.
- Clatterbridge and Raby motorway overpasses.

Area types

- Urban areas, particularly streets and traffic corridors.
- In parks, woodlands, and green spaces e.g. golf courses.
- Brownfield sites which are unsuitable for housing.
- Wirral Schools.
- More deprived areas should be prioritised.

4.16 Response to Question 11 (Wirral Tree Wardens are a voluntary group dedicated to planting and care of trees across Wirral. Please tick below if you would like to join this group).

Would you like to join the Wirral Tree Wardens mailing list?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	30.33%	74
No	69.67%	170
	Answered	97
	Skipped	170

4.17 Stakeholder and Partner Engagement

5.17.1 A variety of stakeholders, partners and Council staff with relevant expertise engaged with the consultation via email. Across a total of 10 correspondences, these interested parties offered the following comments for consideration:

- Request to consider an area TPO on Conservation Areas where trees are particularly important and a phased application of TPOs in Mountwood, Oxtun, Eastham, and Lower Heswall.
- Advice against protecting Council-owned trees using TPOs because trees in council ownership are generally considered to be in good management and doing so would require that we apply to ourselves to carry out work.
- Concerns over recent felling of trees with high bat roost potential but without a prior bat survey – request that tree felling contractors carry out an initial assessment for bat roosts and follow best practice in protecting wildlife.
- Support for the ‘right tree in the right place’ approach.
- Support for the large-scale planting programme proposed.
- Plant mixed woodland (preferably native species) with open corridors to provide both aesthetic advantage and more habitats than a single species plantation.
- Consider creating separate action plans for example for tree risk assessment and management, tree protection, and ash dieback.
- Vision needs to be clearer – 10% increase in canopy cover goal needs clarifying as it is unclear what the current cover is and so what it would be increased to.
- Refer to air quality benefits and consider using it as an indicator.
- Terminology clarification on e.g. ‘nuisance’ and ‘dangerous’.
- Concern the strategy focuses too much on risk management and doesn’t take into account the statutory management required at SSSIs e.g. need to manage other habitat types.
- Emphasis that the primary concern of the tree strategy should be on the preservation and protection of existing trees and opposition to felling.
- Don’t list internal Council departments as partners.
- The same arboriculturist may not be able to survey all sites over the entire ten years of the strategy.
- Questions around how the Council will communicate proposed work to stakeholders.
- Request for a more ambitious strategy both in term of % cover increase and replacement policy.

5.17.2 All written responses and submissions have been produced and made available for Cabinet to scrutinise.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1** The consultation exercise has shown that although some residents felt the Tree Strategy could be more ambitious and had concerns about the rate of felling, most expressed support for the overall tree planting agenda and intentions of the strategy.
- 6.2** The quantitative results show strong support for the strategy's proposals. In total 94% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the objective to increase tree cover by a minimum of 10% by 2030; 76% agreed or strongly agreed with the objective to replace felled trees with two or three trees; and 63% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed governance and review process, with a further 22% indicating no objection. There was also majority support for the legacy and species selection elements of the strategy as well as confidence in the ability of the strategy to ensure a safe, sustainable, resilient, and diverse tree stock for Wirral.
- 6.3** The overall nature of the comments reflected respondents' support for the strategy's 'right tree for the right place' planting approach with an emphasis on native and locally sourced trees but indicated appetite for an even more ambitious strategy. Accordingly, prominent themes in the open-ended responses were concerns over the rate of felling, the importance of tree maintenance and preservation to ensure a healthy tree stock (particularly in the context of ash dieback), desire for blanket TPOs to protect mature trees, and dissatisfaction with a 'two-for-one' replacement policy as insufficient. The importance of planting a wide range of pest and climate-change-resistant species to ensure a biodiverse and resilient tree stock as highlighted, and emphasis was placed on the need for experts to be involved in decision making for example by working with the Tree Council. Lastly, the need for a more comprehensive communications strategy across multiple platforms was raised to ensure that residents are made aware of planned works in advance and to engage them in planting efforts. Suggestions regarding planting locations for new trees across Wirral have been noted and will be crucial in actualising the strategy's planting commitments.
- 6.4** Comments raised by residents, stakeholders, partners and Council staff with relevant expertise through the public consultation have been taken into account in the final version of the strategy.

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