



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

**Monday, 21 October 2024**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>TREE, HEDGEROW AND WOODLAND STRATEGY PROGRESS REPORT 2024 AND REVISION</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 overarching 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 to 2020 to 2030. The strategy supports the Council Plan 2023-2027 under the theme protect our environment,

This report provides the third update on the Council's progress in the delivery of the strategy. The report also introduces the revised strategy, which has been updated to reflect the insights gained over the past few years and to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness.

The report looks ahead to priority actions for the next 12 months.

This matter is not a key decision but affects all wards within the Borough.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the progress of the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy 2020 to 2030.
2. Endorse the priority actions for 2023/2024.
3. Approve the Strategy revisions.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

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

- 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 sets out Wirral's vision for how the treescape will be managed now and in the future and provides a framework for the improved provision and protection of these habitats to meet the needs of local people and help the natural environment to recover, adapt and thrive.
- 1.3 The successful implementation of the Strategy will help to deliver the objectives of the Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan, Local Nature Recovery strategies, the Wirral Pollinator Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 This 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. The options of not acting or delaying actions have not been considered as this would not respond to the Council's declaration or ensure the Council meets its priorities set out in the Wirral Plan.

### **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**

- 3.3 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 2020-203 and a model for many years beyond that.

### **Progress in 2023 / 2024**

- 3.4 Continued implementation of the Council's Tree Risk Management System: A total of 12,490 tree inspection records and 1,174 work orders were completed between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.
- 3.5 Review of the Strategy: The strategy now includes new chapters on Trees and Development, Natural Regeneration, and Community Case Studies, along with updated policy and legislation references.
- 3.6 Recognised as a 'Tree City of the World': This acknowledges the Borough's commitment to protecting and celebrating urban trees and forests. This recognition is part of an international programme that highlights areas demonstrating excellence in urban forestry and tree care.
- 3.7 Appointed co-ordinator of Wirral's Tree Wardens and relaunch of the volunteer network: This network now has 94 members, 48 of whom have been inducted. The programme of activities has included regular workshops on trees and the law, tree biology, tree threats and challenges, a book club, planting events, sketch events and a member newsletter.
- 3.8 Continued membership to Mersey Forest: This resulted in £16,339.60 of grant funding for woodland planting during the 2023/2024 planting season.
- 3.9 Planting of 16,164 new in the 2023/24 season: Details of the planting are presented in Appendix 1.
- 3.10 Planting of 2,517 additional trees: These were planted during the 2023/2024 season to replace those lost in previous planting seasons.

### **Priorities for 2024/2025**

#### **Revision of Management Plans**

- 3.11 Existing tree management plans for Parks and Countryside sites will be updated and enhanced. The need to update these management plans is driven by the increasing challenges posed by pests, disease and extreme climate conditions. Over the past few years, the prevalence of tree pest and diseases, such as Ash Dieback, has escalated, threatening the health and sustainability of our tree populations. Additionally, the impact of past storm damage, coupled with the rising frequency and intensity of storms due to climate change, has highlighted the vulnerabilities without our existing tree and woodland ecosystems. Updating these plans is essential to

address these emerging threats, ensuring that our management strategies are resilient and effective. The revised plans will also allow us to identify new planting opportunities, optimise our response to canopy threats and prioritise actions that safeguard the long-term health and diversity of Wirral's green spaces.

### **Promote the Value of Wirral's Trees**

- 3.12 A key aim of the tree strategy is to protect and care for Wirral's existing trees. While recent efforts have rightfully focused on new tree planting, it is equally important to preserve the mature trees that already provide substantial ecological, social, and economic benefits. These trees enhance biodiversity, improve air quality, sequester carbon, and contribute to the character and amenity of the Borough.
- 3.13 However, ongoing threats such as pests, diseases, vandalism, and climate-related stresses have made the conservation of these trees more urgent than ever. Additionally, pressures from development, infrastructure projects, and intentional damage further endanger the existing tree population. In light of these challenges, we recognise the need to ensure our communications approach, in the coming year, emphasises the value of Wirral's existing trees. By raising awareness of their importance, we aim to increase community support for their protection and encourage actions that prioritise tree retention alongside new planting efforts.

### **Strengthen Tree Risk Management Operations**

- 3.14 While the commitment to new tree planting remains strong, we recognise the growing need to allocate additional resources to manage the increasing risks facing our existing tree population. One of the most pressing challenges is the rising prevalence of Ash Dieback, a destructive disease that threatens a significant portion of our tree canopy. The impact of this disease, coupled with the increasing frequency and severity of storms due to climate change, has intensified the need for robust tree risk management.
- 3.15 To address these challenges, we will prioritise strengthening our Tree Risk Management operations in the coming year. This will involve dedicating more resources and personnel within our team to monitor, assess, and mitigate risks associated with Ash Dieback and storm damage. By focusing on these critical areas, we aim to protect public safety, preserve the health of our tree population, and ensure that our urban and rural landscapes remain resilient. Although new planting will continue, our immediate priority will be on managing these risks effectively to safeguard the trees we already have.

### **Establish a Community Tree Nursery at Dibbinsdale**

- 3.16 We plan to set up a community tree nursery within the walled garden at Dibbinsdale, a project that will be led by the Wirral Tree Wardens and supported by the volunteers of Dibbinsdale. This nursery will focus on collecting seeds from around the Borough, which will then be nurtured and grown on-site. The trees cultivated in the nursery will be planted in future seasons, contributing to our ongoing efforts to enhance and expand Wirral's tree canopy. This initiative not only supports local biodiversity but also fosters community engagement and stewardship of our natural resources.

## **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 Over £165,000 has been secured through the Mersey Forest for the planting and establishment of eight woodlands in the first four planting seasons (2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24) and further Trees for Climate applications will be submitted in the coming months to secure additional woodland funding for 2024/2025 season.
- 4.3 In November 2023 we were awarded £37,885 from the Coronation Living Heritage Fund to plant five micro woodlands and three orchards to celebrate the King's Coronation.
- 4.4 Delivery of tree planting not eligible for grant funding has been supported by the Climate Emergency budget allocation.

## **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 comprising: two Tree Inspectors, two Tree Management Officers and one Senior Trees and Woodland Manager.

## **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, Pollinator Strategy and future Biodiversity Strategy.
- 7.2 There are serious public safety risks from falling branches, collapsing and windthrown trees, which can lead to litigation, financial penalties and costs associated with insurance claims. 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.

7.3 Emerging pests and diseases and the impacts of extreme weather conditions are also a serious threat to Wirral's tree population which reduces the benefits they provide and can lead to further economic burdens if not managed. The Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy allows for the creation of more diverse tree population to increase resilience and supports the monitoring and management of affected trees.

## **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. In addition, a Tree Statutory Advisory Board has been established to advise and support the Strategy delivery. This Board brings together key local stakeholders, other council department representatives alongside external advisory organisations who drive ongoing momentum and the oversight needed to ensure the Strategy delivers its aims.

## **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 An equality impact assessment has been reviewed and found to be valid. It can be found at <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/files/wirral-tree-strategy-equality-impact-assessment-july-2020.pdf/download?inline>

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 The Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy will play a key role in tackling the environment and 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 a '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. By demonstrating a strong commitment towards trees for the long-term, the Strategy also allows new opportunities for Wirral to secure external funding for tree and hedgerow 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 Planting Schedule to Date

**Appendix 2** Tree Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy Metric Progress to Date

**Appendix 3** Revised Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy 2020-2030

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy Community Engagement Policy 2021-2030  
Wirral I-Tree Eco Technical Report

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

This report is being considered by the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee in accordance with Section 5.2 (a) and (k) of its Terms of Reference.

The Committee is charged by full Council to undertake responsibility for the Council's role and functions: -

- (a) in co-ordinating the response to cross-cutting sustainability issues such as reducing carbon emissions, air quality issues, climate change response, improving resource efficiency and developing sustainable energy.
- (k) undertaking the development and implementation of policy in relation to the Committee's functions, incorporating the assessment of outcomes, review of effectiveness and formulation of recommendations to the Council, partners and other bodies, which shall include any decision relating to the above functions.

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

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

Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy Progress Report 2022 - Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee	<b>July 2022</b>
Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy Progress Update	<b>September 2023</b>



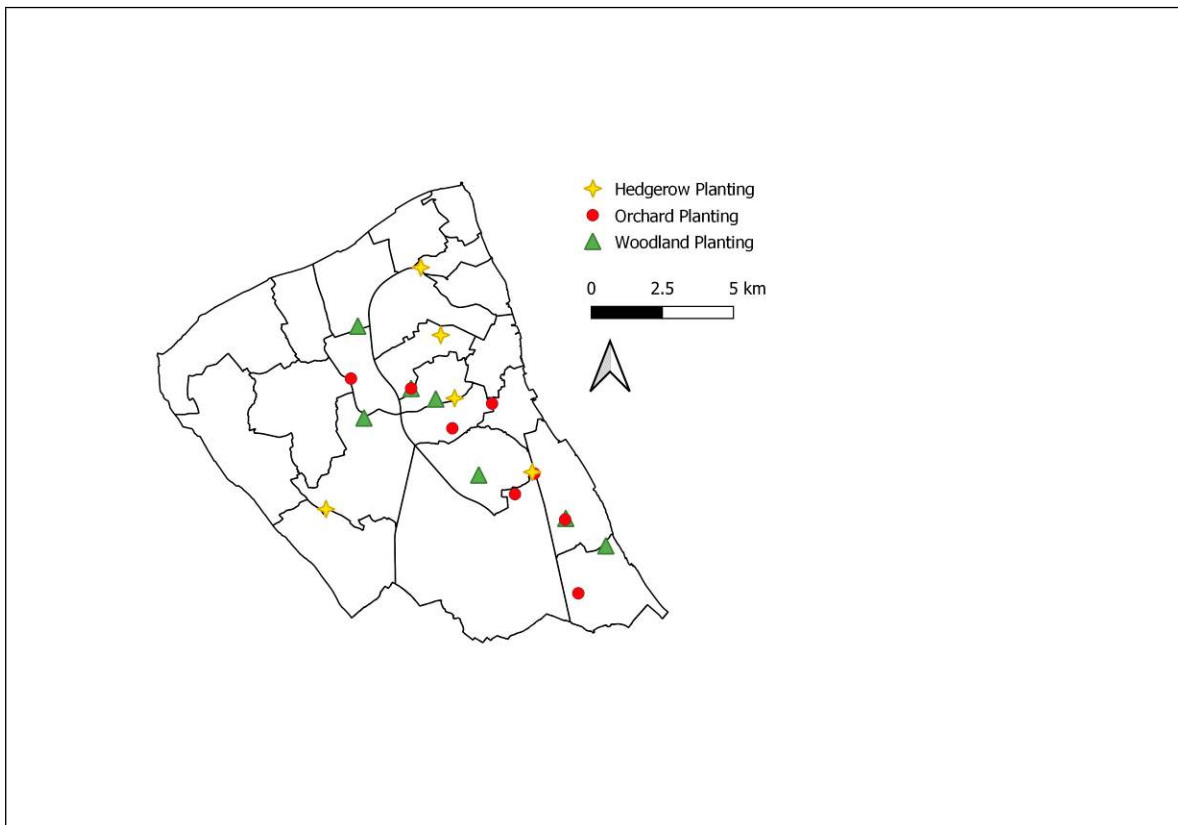
## APPENDIX 1

### Wirral Council

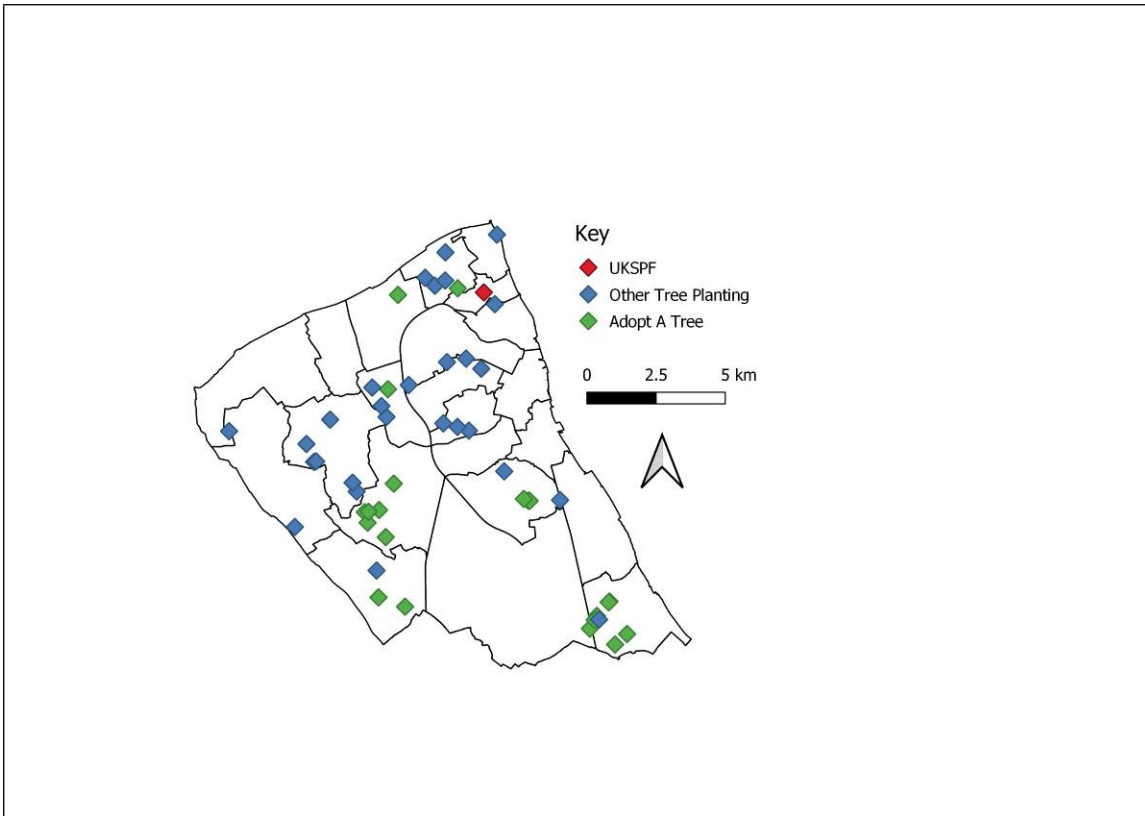
#### Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy

#### Planting Completed in 2023-2024 Season

A total of 15,141 new trees were planted and a further 1,023 given away to Wirral residents between November 2023 and the end of March 2024. A total of 12 street tree pits were reinstated and planted with heavy standards in Liscard as part of the UKSPF fund. A further 110 parkland and 89 street trees were planted. Two new 'Trees for Climate' woodlands (comprising 2.81 hectares) were created in Eastham Country Park and Duck Pond Lane Park. An orchard at Dibbinsdale was also planted as part of the Tree Council's Golden Orchards campaign to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the famous 'Plant a Tree in 73' campaign. Five micro woodlands and three orchards were planted to celebrate the coronation of King Charles III using funding from the Coronation Living Heritage Fund. In addition, over 460 metres of new hedgerow, four further community orchards and five micro woodlands were created.



**Insert 1:** 2023/2024 Planting Highlights



**Insert 2:** 2023/2024 Planting Highlights



**Photograph 1:** Coronation micro woodland – Mount Road



**Photograph 2:** Coronation Orchard – Heygarth Road



**Photograph 3:** Trees for Climate Woodland – Eastham CP





**Photograph 4:** Coronation micro woodland – Upton Park



**Photograph 5:** Golden Orchard - Dibbinsdale

## APPENDIX 2

### Wirral Council

### Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy

### 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.	Max Bell & Daniel Ely	
<b>Progress to date:</b> Desktop review methodology has been devised, but the review was delayed during migration of new IT systems for planning. Review expected to commence in early 2025					
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, three in 2022 and three in 2023					
4	Establish the overall value of	Measure, map and project ecosystem	Annual projection of cumulative	Nicola Wallbank	

	<p>Wirral's trees, to show what condition and size they are, and how much they benefit the environment and ecosystem.</p> <p>Establish the overall value of Wirral tree population and describe its profile in quantitative, qualitative, and functional terms.</p>	<p>services (carbon storage, air purification, water purification, pollination, local climate regulation, noise regulation and access nature) using EcoserveR or I-Tree.</p>	<p>carbon sequestration rates of new woodland.</p>
<p><b>Progress to date:</b> Wirral's I-Tree Eco Study now complete which provides current ecosystem service provision, new tree management software (TreePlotter) will provide ecosystem service data for individual trees which will be combined with calculations from woodland carbon code assessments for inclusion in future carbon budget performance reports.</p>			
5	<p>Establish a cycle of tree risk assessment and update management and action plans on an annual basis.</p>	<p>Rolling cyclical inspection of Councils tree stock.</p>	<p>Number of sites inspected annually. Nicola Wallbank</p>
<p><b>Progress to date:</b> Ongoing action –most recent cyclical inspection of highways trees completed in early 2023, latest inspections now taking place on operational asset and park and countryside sites.</p>			
6	<p>Use and evaluate the Council's Tree Risk Assessment Management tool in making decisions.</p>	<p>Implementation of risk assessment matrix.</p>	<p>Number of LA codes produced annually. Nicola Wallbank</p>
<p><b>Progress to date:</b> Ongoing action</p>			
7	<p>Implement an Ash dieback policy and pre-empt or manage any other diseases that will adversely affect Wirral' existing, replacement and new tree cover.</p>	<p>Deliver communications to internal and external stakeholders regarding identification and management of Ash dieback.</p> <p>Application of risk assessment matrix on incidences of Ash dieback and other diseases.</p>	<p>Number of Council owned trees felled because of Ash dieback per year. Nicola Wallbank, Max Bell and Daniel Ely</p>
<p><b>Progress to date:</b> Ongoing action</p>			
8	<p>Deliver a training program for staff within the affected service</p>	<p>Delivery of presentations and email bulletins to internal colleagues.</p>	<p>Number of colleagues who attend Tree Strategy webinars per year. Nicola Wallbank, Max</p>

	areas on the value of trees, TPO's and the tree strategy vision.		Number of Tree Strategy bulletins sent per year.	Bell and Daniel Ely
<b>Progress to date:</b> Training programme to commence in 2024/2025				
9	Improve utilisation of communications channels between the council 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.	Nicola Wallbank, Max Bell and Daniel Ely
<b>Progress to date:</b> Ongoing action				

<b>Aims 2 and 3:</b> 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. Annual programme of community planting events				
11	Establish a working partnership with private, community and charitable owners of land, businesses, and	Implement Mersey Forest membership and partnership agreement.	Annual net gain of Council and partner trees, hedgerows and	Nicola Wallbank

	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.	Engage with external partners to identify suitable land for planting and help facilitate both tree sourcing and planting.	woodland.	
<b>Progress to date:</b> Ongoing action				
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
<b>Progress to date:</b> All woodland and hedgerow plants are sourced from only suppliers that raise trees from seed sourced and grown solely within the UK. A project is in progress to identify and register existing seeds stands in Wirral to assist seed collection efforts. Priority for 2024/25 is creation of a micro community tree nursery at Dibbinsdale LNR to enable the delivery of community workshops on seed collection and growing.				
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
<b>Progress to date:</b> Ongoing action – indicator values not yet available				
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	TSAB



working group.

**Progress to date:** TSAB has been created and the public evaluative report expected by the end of 2024

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

**APPENDIX 3**

**Wirral Council**

**Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy**

**Strategy Revision**

