



ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 20 September 2023

REPORT TITLE:	TREE, HEDGEROW AND WOODLAND STRATEGY PROGRESS UPDATE
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

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 Wirral Plan 2021-2026 and its priorities for a sustainable environment.

This report provides the second update on the Council's progress in the delivery of the strategy, covering the 2022/2023 planting season.

Progress of the actions is summarised within this report and full details are provided within Appendix 1.

The report looks ahead to priority actions for the next 12 months, which includes a revision to the strategy.

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

RECOMMENDATION/S

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

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

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 forthcoming 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 and Vision

- 3.3 The vision of the strategy is to plant over 210,000 trees in the ten-year span. In doing so 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 2020-203 and a model for many years beyond that.

Progress in 2022/23

- 3.5 Continued implementation of the Council's Tree Risk Management System. A total of 11,185 tree inspection records and 3,131 work orders completed between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023.
- 3.6 Completed drive-by of all highways to ensure the highways tree inventory is up to date and accurate.
- 3.7 Completed review of the Parks & Countryside estate to ensure the Parks & Countryside tree inventory is up to date and accurate.
- 3.8 Completed review of operational assets estate to ensure the tree inventory is up to date and accurate.
- 3.9 Procurement of new tree management software to help improve contract management and performance as well as improve efficiency for tree inspectors and reduce administration for officers. The software also allows for improved access to the Council's tree inventory and tree data for all council staff and the public and allows improved monitoring of the council's treescape.
- 3.10 Completed i-Tree Eco Study in partnership with Forest Research which details the structure and composition of Wirral's tree population, and the ecosystem services the trees provide. It was also the first i-Tree Eco project to include measures of social and cultural values of trees.
- 3.11 Recruitment of a Trees and Woodland Community Officer who will work closely with local communities and stakeholders to develop and deliver projects and events that inform and inspire people to value, protect and enhance tree, hedgerow and woodland provision in Wirral.

- 3.12 Continued membership to Mersey Forest which led to £23,610.14 of grant funding for woodland planting during the 2022/2023 planting season.
- 3.13 A total of 21,040 trees planted in the 2022/23 planting season. Details of the planting are presented in Appendix 1.
- 3.14 Cira 3,600 additional trees planted during the 2022/2023 season to replace those lost in planting seasons 2020/21 and 2021/2022.

Priorities for 2023/2024

Review of Tree Strategy

- 3.15 As part of the 3-year review process, the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy will be refreshed in 2023/24 to ensure it continues to deliver on its aims, remain relevant in relation to local and national policy and address emerging priorities.
- 3.16 The refreshed strategy will include a new chapter on Trees and Development to provide information and advice on the standards expected from new developments including new planting and replacement planting guidelines. A new chapter will also be incorporated to detail the commitment to natural regeneration and the steps which will be taken to achieve successful natural regeneration. The Strategy will be updated to include the most up to date national and local policies. Case studies of community projects/activities will also be incorporated within the refreshed version to encourage more community engagement.

Establishment of Planting

- 3.17 Due to the periods of drought experienced in the last two growing seasons, the number of watering visits required for newly planted heavy standards per season has had to be increased. This increased pressure has reduced our current capacity to add additional street and parkland trees to the watering schedule. As such, the provision of heavy standards (large sized tree) in the 2023/24 season will be limited, this is to ensure our watering programme can accommodate all standard trees planted within the last three years without compromising their establishment. While the provision of new standards will be restricted in 2023/24, all standards lost over the last three seasons will be replaced as a priority. The capacity for the watering schedule to accept new trees will be reviewed annually.
- 3.18 We do not have a watering programme for sapling planting (the very small trees less than 60cm in height). Due to the volume of saplings, planted each year, it is not practicable to do so. However, young trees will adapt to natural conditions, and the provision of woodchip and mulch encourages more water retention. In addition, watering encourages roots to grow towards the soil surface rather than down towards groundwater, so it is better to allow saplings to adapt naturally. During periods of drought, newly planted saplings will suffer but to combat the drier conditions now experienced each year, these trees can be overstocked accepting that greater losses will occur and/or replacements can be provided each season at a much lower cost than the replacement of heavy standards.
- 3.19 Despite the restriction of planting heavy standards during the 2023/24 season, the annual planting target is still expected to be met through the continued provision of

new hedgerows, woodland planting and provision of free trees to Wirral communities.

Wirral Tree Wardens

- 3.20 Wirral Council has recently been appointed by the Tree Council to act as co-ordinator for the Wirral Tree Wardens. Over the next year, a hub at Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve will be established to facilitate Wirral Tree Warden meetings, citizen-led science projects, planting events and other borough wide tree activities.

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 £130,000 has been secured through the Mersey Forest for the planting and establishment of eight woodlands in the first three planting seasons (2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23) and further Trees for Climate applications will be submitted in the coming months to secure additional woodland funding for 2023/2024 season.
- 4.3 A total of £85,857.40 was secured through the DEFRA Woodland Creation Acceleration Fund for the recruitment of a Trees and Woodland Community Officer for two years.
- 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. In addition, a Trees and Woodland Community Officer has been recruited for two years.

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 The failure to manage and maintain the trees planted so far as part of the Strategy also poses a reputational risk. Other UK local authorities have received criticism in the last 12 months for carrying out mass planting schemes and not ensuring their establishment by implementing follow up maintenance works. As one of the priorities for the coming year, focus will be given the re-stocking of newly planted woodland and hedgerow sites, replacement of failed heavy standards and reduction in new heavy standards to alleviate pressure on the watering programme.
- 7.3 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.
- 7.4. 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 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. 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 (July 2023)
Appendix 2 Tree Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy Metric Progress to Date (July 2023)

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy 2020-2023
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 & 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)

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

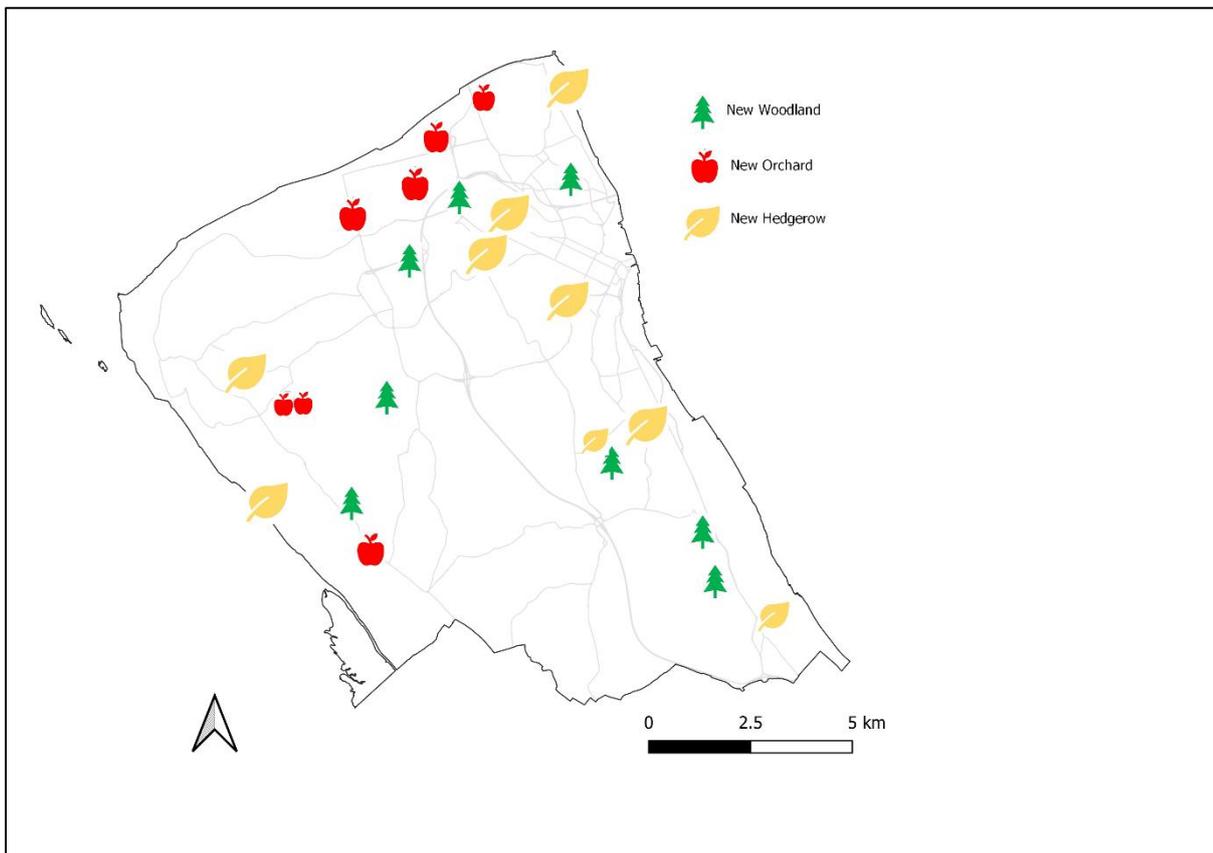
APPENDIX 1

Wirral Council

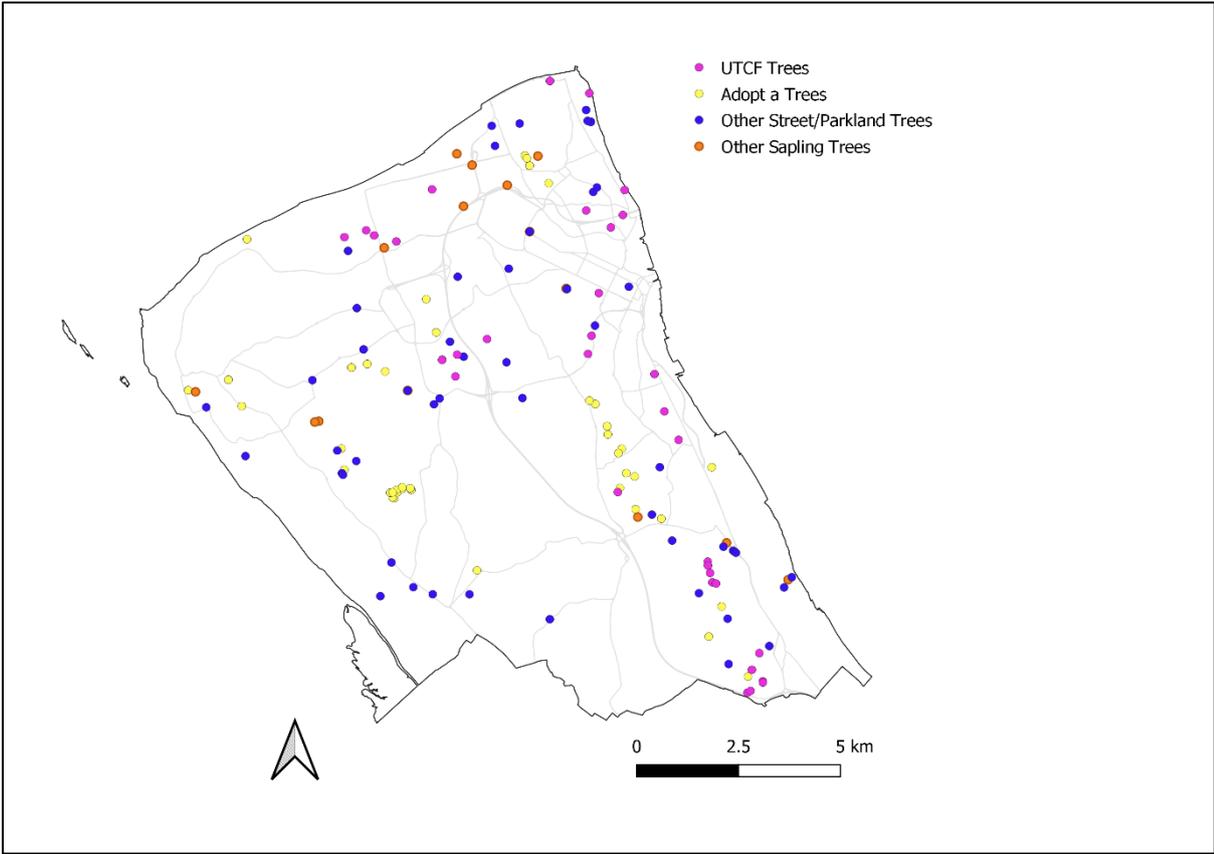
Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy

Planting Completed in 2022-2023 Season

A total of 10,752 trees were planted and a further 10,288 given away to Wirral residents between November 2022 and end of March 2023. Of those planted, a total 549 extra heavy standard street/parkland trees were planted as part of the Forestry Commission's Urban Tree Challenge Fund. A total of 13 street tree pits were reinstated and planted with heavy standards in Birkenhead as part of the UKSPF fund. A total of 40 heavy standard parkland trees were planted adjacent to Carr Bridge Road play area as part of the Levelling Up Parks Fund. Two new Trees for Climate woodlands were created in Central Park and Upton Park. In addition, over 600 metres of hedgerow, seven new community orchards and a new arboretum was created.



Insert 1: 2022/2023 Planting Highlights



Insert 2: 2022/2023 Planting Highlights



Photograph 1: Trees for Climate Woodland Upton Park



Photograph 2: Levelling Up Parks Fund Planting Carr Bridge Road



Photograph 3: Arboretum Arrowe Country Park



Photograph 4: Free Tree Giveaway Event Royden Park



Photograph 5: Royden Park Community Orchard

APPENDIX 2

Wirral Council

Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy

Strategy Metric

Aim 1: To protect, regenerate and care for Wirral's existing tree, hedgerows, and woodland					
Ref. No	Outcome	Action	Indicator	Reporter	
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	
Progress to date: 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	
Progress to date: 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 2024					
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	Number of reported incidents of tree loss or damage from vandalism that have occurred annually. Number of tree related planning enforcement notices issued	Nicola Wallbank and Steve Lacey	

		where applicable.	annually.	
Progress to date: Ongoing action - Six reported incidents of vandalism in 2021 and three in 2022				
4	Establish the overall value of Wirral's trees, to show what 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.	Measure, map and project ecosystem services (carbon storage, air purification, water purification, pollination, local climate regulation, noise regulation and access nature) using EcoserveR or I-Tree.	Annual projection of cumulative carbon sequestration rates of new woodland.	Nicola Wallbank
Progress to date: 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.				
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
Progress to date: 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. Total 11,185 tree assets inspected in 2022/23				
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
Progress to date: Ongoing action – 1,916 LA codes issued in 2022/23				
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	Number of Council owned trees felled because of Ash dieback per year.	Rob Rainford

	on incidences of Ash dieback and other diseases.			
Progress to date: Ongoing action -total of 30 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
Progress to date: Training programme to commence in 2023/2024				
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
Progress to date: Ongoing action - First customer satisfaction survey published between 24 th August and 23 rd September 2021 with 10 responses. Community engagement policy has been created and a further customer satisfaction survey will take place by the end of 2023				

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	Creation and implementation of a	Number of annual	Nicola Wallbank

	community engagement programme to put the strategy into practice.	Community Engagement Policy and Action Plan.	community planting and maintenance events.
Progress to date: Ongoing action - Engagement policy and action plan has been created. Total of 10 community planting events and 5 school planting events took place between November 2022 and April 2023			
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 Nicola Wallbank Council and partner trees, hedgerows and woodland.
Progress to date: Ongoing action - Net gain of 66,599 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 Nicola Wallbank local provenance planted annually on Council or partner land.
Progress to date: All woodland and hedgerow plants are sourced from only suppliers that raise trees from seed sourced and grown solely within the UK. A recent grant application has been submitted to the Forestry Commission to fund the recruitment of a qualified individual to conduct a comprehensive study of land within the Wirral area, identify existing stands and design and implement appropriate seed stand/species strategies. In addition, grants are being sought to establish 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	Apply the 'selection criteria' defined within the 'Urban Tree Manual' when implementing all new planting.	Annual change in Nicola Wallbank Council trees (to be

	public amenity value and encourage appropriate natural regeneration.		review once latest street tree survey is completed on Insight)
Progress to date: 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 working group.
Progress to date: TSAB has been created and the public evaluative report is due by the end of 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
Progress to date: Preparations for forthcoming biodiversity net gain roll out are underway			