

Report to Planning and Development Policy Development and Review Panel

Date 4 March 2014

Report of: Director of Planning and Environment

Subject: TREE STRATEGY ACTION PLAN (ANNUAL UPDATE)

SUMMARY

This report reviews the Tree Strategy Action Plan and sets out the progress across the various service and work areas following the adoption of the Tree Strategy in March 2012.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are invited to support the Tree Strategy Action Plan and make any comments they wish in terms of the annual review of the 5 year plan.

INTRODUCTION

1. In March 2012 Fareham Borough Council adopted a Tree Strategy 2012 - 2017 for the planning and management of the Borough's urban forest. The strategy will continue to deliver many benefits for Fareham such as the ongoing proactive management of the Borough's tree stock, ensuring a diversity of age and species. The document will assist in the preservation of Fareham's existing verdant character and reputation as a prosperous, safe and attractive place to live and work.
2. The Tree Strategy Action Plan can be found at Appendix A at the end of the report.

TREE SAFETY INSPECTIONS

3. The proactive inspection of the Council's tree stock continues to identify a significant amount of tree works necessary to prevent interference with or damage to property, obstruction to access / thoroughfares and hazards to the public. The type of pruning identified comprises reducing branches away from buildings, crown lifting over paths, roads and well used grass areas, removing major dead wood and remedial pruning of weak and defective branches; and other bio-mechanical defects. Other pruning to remove ivy and clear basal vegetation to enable future inspection are also necessary and can be significant along greenways and naturalised areas.
4. The 2013 expenditure on moderate priority tree works identified during tree inspections equated to 30% of the annual budget. A full breakdown of the expenditure across the tree budget can be found towards the end of this report.

HOUSING TREES

5. In March 2013 the task of surveying individual rented properties began by ward to establish the number of existing trees that are currently not subject to any proactive inspection. Portchester wards were completed in June and where appropriate those trees requiring tree safety inspections have been added to the tree management programme. The survey of Fareham wards will begin in March 2014.

NEW TREE PLANTING AND MAINTENANCE

6. This year's annual tree planting has been undertaken in accordance with the aims and objectives of the Tree Strategy.
7. The Council has planted 101 trees across the Borough this year: **20 trees** adopted by local communities, **1 tree** at a local school, **37 trees** to replace those felled in the past twelve months, **6 trees** to replace vandalised young trees and **37 trees** planted on new sites identified in the proactive planting plan.
8. New tree planting in accordance with policy TP5 has been completed during December 2013 at the following sites: Red Barn Avenue / Grindle Close - **8 trees**, Park Lane – **6 trees**, Western Court - **4 trees**, Fairfield Avenue (West End Estate) - **17 trees** and Melvin Jones House – **2 trees**.
9. Residents living in areas identified for proposed new tree planting, which directly affected their interests, were written to prior to the planting taking place on site. The purpose of this contact is to outline the proposals in broad terms and allay any concerns over species choice and tree size, whilst meeting the Council's objective to engage with local residents in terms of its tree management function.

10. This year's annual tree planting has received widespread support and positive feedback from local residents and the public.

PROTECTION OF TREES

11. The review of older TPOs has progressed throughout 2013 in accordance with the priorities agreed by the Review Panel in 2010, by focusing on older orders with 'area' designations and large multiple groups where individual species are not shown on the map. The table below summarises the number of orders served in 2013 and the reason for making them:

Order No	Order Name	Revoked	Reason
FTPO645	Land at Sarisbury Court: Sarisbury Court Gardens & woodland		Review
FTPO652	The Glade, The Copse & Kingston Gardens	TPO33	Review
FTPO654	Veryan and Haddon Close	TPO567 & TPO 82	Review
FTPO655	16 - 28 Buttercup Way, Locks Heath	TPO83	Review
FTPO656	Funtley Court, Funtley Hill	FTPO124	Review
FTPO658	Crableck Lane, Sarisbury	TPO195	Review
FTPO660	Holly Grove, Green Hollow Close & Highlands Road		Threat
FTPO681	113 Kiln Road, Timbers Red Barn Lane & 32 Holly Grove		Threat
FTPO682	Ashwood, 168 Hunts Pond Road and 114, 116, 118 & 120 Locks Heath Park Road	TPO9	Review
FTPO683	Land west of Lesanto, Little Park Farm Avenue, Park Gate		Threat
FTPO684	6 & 8 Abshot Close		Threat
FTPO685	Priestfields, Ascot Close & Locks Heath Free Church, Titchfield	TPO315, TPO154	Review
FTPO686	43 Holly Grove, Fareham		Review

12. The following orders were revoked as the trees affected are situated on land owned and maintained by the Council:

Order No	Order Name
FTPO17	Highlands Road, Kiln Road, The Cedars and Lynton Gardens
FTPO356	Churchyard - land adjacent to 17 Church Path, Titchfield
FTPO474	2 Knotgrass Road Locks Heath
FTPO76	Land south of Dibles Road and Warsash Common Nature Reserve
FTPO98	Brabant Close; Mustang Avenue;
HTPO469	Locksheath House Recreation Ground St John's Road Locks Heath

13. In 2014 the sequential review of older orders will continue and resources will also be focussed on the Whiteley settlement now development has been completed in north Whiteley.

TREE SERVICE REQUESTS

14. In 2013 the tree team received 262 requests for tree work from residents, 168 of which resulted in tree work. The expenditure on pruning in response to tree service requests equated to 45% of the annual budget with an average spend per job of £300.
15. This compares to 315 requests in 2012 of which 239 resulted in tree work. In 2012 the expenditure on pruning in response to tree service requests equated to 49% of the annual budget with an average cost of £237 per job. A full breakdown of the annual expenditure across the tree budget can be found below:

BUDGETS

Annual tree budget £115,000			
Key work area	2012	2013	2014 (projected)
Tree inspections (approx. 4000 pa)	£9,410.20	£7,030.25	£8,500
Tree work - inspections	£21,431.00	£42,422.82	£32,000
Tree work - service	£56,813.66	£51,610.73	£54,500
Tree planting – plant material	£9,873.40	£8,108.10	£9,000
Tree planting – labour & materials	£16,420.00	£10,440.00	£13,500
Incidental tree works	£8,823.42	£22,477.34	£15,500
Total	£122,771.68	£142,089.24	£133,000

St Jude's Day storm – 28 October 2013	£6,196.54
Winter storms 2013/14	£20,000

16. Pressure on the tree budget in 2013 was significant. The main areas of work which had the most financial impact are reactive tree inspections that result in 'good neighbour' pruning and tree work recommendations arising from proactive tree safety inspections. The latter are normally categorised as moderate priority, to be undertaken within 12 months and will avoid potential risks or damage to people and property in the future.
17. The need to undertake 'good neighbour' pruning is assessed on the merits of each case and the circumstances that prevail. The vast majority of this work does not improve the risk associated with the Council's tree stock and is not undertaken to remove hazards. The Tree Strategy clearly sets out the Council's tree management priorities in terms balancing the risks associated with trees and their value and importance as a natural asset.
18. The public expect the Council to manage the risks from trees within acceptable limits. However, residents tend to raise more general concerns regarding encroaching branches, tree related debris, shading and dominance. There is a public expectation that trees should be 'maintained properly' and the implications of doing nothing in response to such expectations would arguably have a significant adverse impact on the profile of trees and that of the organisation responsible for maintaining them.

SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

19. In spring 2013 the tree team took on the responsibility for tree work applications, which were previously assigned to planning case officers with tree officers acting as consultees. Managing the case work for tree work applications has provided greater control and accountability to the tree team and improved the promotion of pre-application advice. Additional resource has subsequently been released in the planning team who no longer determine tree work applications and conservation area notifications. The tree team were keen to pass on these improvements to the public and now on average make a decision within 5 weeks of receipt of an application.
20. Some local planning authorities have gone one step further by operating a 'fast track' system for works to protected trees. In simple terms the Council would agree low impact works such as crown lifting and shortening overhanging branches as '*de minimis*' works within ten days and simply notify affected residents of the decision, rather than canvas opinion by way of 21 day neighbour notifications. More significant works such as lopping or felling of trees, that could have a significant impact on public amenity, would continue to require a full application.
21. There is no requirement to publicise tree work applications beyond having them on a register and allowing the public to view them at reasonable hours. Officers are of the opinion that a 'fast track' system could work for Fareham Borough Council and deliver multiple benefits for both the Council and the customer.

CHALLENGES AND PRESSURES ON THE SERVICE

22. The tree team has identified the principal demands on the tree service as follows:-
 - Trees and woodlands at the former Coldeast Hospital site.
 - New residential development / adoption of public land.
 - Threats from pests and diseases.
 - Increasing frequency and intensity of severe weather events.
 - Customer expectations remain high.
 - Maturing tree population in western wards.
 - The settlement of Welborne.
23. The Council's Tree Strategy will enable the tree team to respond to some of these challenges by delivering tree services in a proactive and sustainable manner, whilst retaining enough flexibility to adapt to the short term variability in work streams. However, pressure on the tree budget is expected to increase for the remaining life of the plan until 2017.

RISK ASSESSMENT

24. There are no significant risk considerations in relation to this report.

CONCLUSION

25. Members are invited to support the Tree Strategy Action Plan and make any comments they wish in terms of the annual review of the 5 year plan.

Appendix A – Tree Strategy Action Plan

Background Papers: None

Reference Papers: Report to Strategic Planning and Environment Policy Development and Review Panel 8 January 2013; Fareham Borough Council Tree Strategy 2012 - 2017.

Enquiries: For further information on this report please contact Paul Johnston, Principal Tree Officer (Ext 4451).

Appendix A - Action Plan

	Actions	Lead	Timescale
1	<p><u>Trees in Parks & Public Open Spaces</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete an assessment of the principal parks for replanting opportunities. • Implement a replanting programme for principal parks sites. 	Principal Tree Officer + Parks Officers	March 2013 March 2014
2	<p><u>Housing Trees</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare a schedule of rented properties with significant trees in the curtilage. • Undertake a survey and risk assessment of the trees identified and add to tree management database. • Implement a programme of tree works in accordance with the actions identified. • Complete an assessment of amenity housing areas for replanting opportunities. • Implement a replanting programme for amenity housing areas identified. 	Principal Tree Officer + Housing Officer Principal Tree Officer Principal Tree Officer Principal Tree Officer	March 2013 March 2014 March 2014 March 2013 March 2014
3	<p><u>New Tree Planting & Maintenance - Council Land</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete annual assessment of the number of trees that have been removed or felled. • Complete annual assessment of new tree survival rates from previous years planting. • Implement schedule of replacement tree planting, where appropriate, prior to undertaking any new tree planting initiatives. 	Principal Tree Officer Principal Tree Officer Principal Tree Officer	Annual target Annual target Annual target
4	<p><u>Protection of Trees</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce an annual report on the progression of the review of the Council's older tree preservation orders. • Continue to review the number of trees felled or removed with consent or under exemption. • Issue tree replacement notices where appropriate. 	Principal Tree Officer Principal Tree Officer Principal Tree Officer	Annual Ongoing
5	<p><u>Planning Policy</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site Allocation Plans - Provide arboricultural advice and guidance to Policy Officers. • Strategic Development Area and Area Action Plans - Provide arboricultural advice and guidance to Policy Officers. • Strategic Sites and Master Planning - Provide arboricultural advice and guidance to Policy 	Principal Tree Officer + Principal Planner - Strategy Principal Tree Officer + Principal Planner - SDA Principal Tree Officer +	LDF Timescales LDF Timescales LDF Timescales

	Officers and Planning Consultants.	Principal Planner - Strategic Sites & Design	
6	<u>Promotion of the Urban Forest</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce topical articles relating to trees for publication in Fareham Today. • Undertake a feasibility study into the development of a Tree Warden Scheme in Fareham. 	Principal Tree Officer Principal Tree Officer	Annual 2015
7	<u>Monitor and Review the progress of the Strategy</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare an annual update on the progress of the action plan to the Strategic Planning and Environment Policy Development Review Panel. 	Principal Tree Officer	Annual