

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Planning and Development Policy Development and Review Panel

Date 06 January 2015

Report of: Director of Planning and Development

Subject: TREE STRATEGY ACTION PLAN (ANNUAL UPDATE)

SUMMARY

This report reviews the Tree Strategy Action Plan and sets out the progress across the tree service and various work areas during 2014.

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 multiple benefits for Fareham, particularly the proactive management of the Council's tree stock to maintain a safe, diverse and healthy tree population for those who live and work in the borough.
2. The Strategy promotes the sustainable management of Fareham's existing tree cover and seeks to improve the resilience of its own tree stock through the proactive tree planting program to meet the increasing pressures from climate change, pests and diseases, development and public expectations.
3. Fareham is a prosperous, safe and attractive place to live and work. The Council's Tree Strategy directly supports several of the Council's Corporate Values and Corporate Priorities. The Tree Strategy Action Plan can be found at Appendix A.

TREE SAFETY INSPECTIONS

4. The proactive inspection of the Councils tree stock continues to identify a significant amount of tree work necessary to prevent interference with or damage to property, obstruction to access / thoroughfares and general hazards to the public. The maturing tree population throughout the western wards of Fareham is beginning to have a significant impact in terms of the increased requirement for remedial tree works.
5. The most common type of tree work 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 is also necessary and can be significant along the borough extensive network of greenways and green spaces.

HOUSING TREES

6. The ongoing survey of individual rented properties to establish the number of existing trees that are currently not subject to any proactive inspection has continued through 2014. Stubbington and Hill Head wards have been completed so far this year and where appropriate those trees requiring regular inspection have been added to the program of proactive tree safety inspections.

NEW TREE PLANTING AND MAINTENANCE

7. This year's annual tree planting has been undertaken in accordance with the aims and objectives of the Tree Strategy.
8. The Council has planted 141 trees across the borough this year comprising: **11 trees** adopted by local communities, **50 trees** to replace those felled in the past twelve months **27 trees** to replace those lost in the 2013/2014 winter storms, **2 trees** to replace vandalised young trees and **51 trees** planted on new sites identified in the proactive planting plan.

9. New tree planting in accordance with policy TP5 has been completed during December 2014 at the following sites: Linden Lea open space – **10 trees**, Red Barn Avenue / Robinson Court – **1 tree**, Lancaster Close – **1 tree**, Assheton Court – **6 trees**, Redlands Lane (Solent House etc.) – **5 trees**, East House Avenue open space – **2 trees**, St Annes Grove - **18 trees** and Stubbington Paddock - **8 trees**.
10. An additional 32 new trees were planted at Portchester Park at the end of October 2014 as part of a capital project to reinstate the site of the of the old community centre building and return it to a public park.
11. Residents living adjacent to locations identified for new tree planting, which directly affect their interests, have been 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.
12. This year's annual tree planting has received widespread support and positive feedback from local residents and the public alike.

PROTECTION OF TREES

13. The review of older TPOs has progressed throughout 2014 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 2014 and the reason for making them:

Order No	Order Name	Revoked	Reason
FTPO686	43 Holly Grove, Fareham		Review
FTPO688	Land west of Westley Grove, Fareham		Development proposals
FTPO689	Mayflower Close, Hill Head		Threat
FTPO690	Fareham College, Bishopsfield Road		Development proposals
FTPO693	33 Hazel Grove, Locks Heath		Threat
FTPO694	56 Maylings Farm Road, Fareham		Development proposals
FTPO695	14 and 17 St Edmund Close		Review
FTPO696	Old Common, Old Common Gardens, Downland Close and Locks Road		Review
FTPO697	Harvey Crescent, Newbury Place and Primrose Way, Warsash		Review
FTPO698	31 Ilex Crescent, Locks Heath		Review

The following order was revoked as part of the ongoing review process:

Order No	Order Name
TPO303	96 Burnt House Lane

14. In 2015 the sequential review of older orders will continue and resources will also be focussed on the Whiteley settlement, which was scheduled to commence in 2014.

TREE SERVICE REQUESTS

15. In 2014 the tree team received 235 requests for tree work from residents and 123 from other sources such as Hampshire County Council, other internal departments and ward members. One hundred and seventy seven of these requests resulted in tree work being undertaken. The expenditure on pruning arising from tree service requests equated to 77% of the annual budget with an average spend per job of £489.59.
16. In the previous year (2013) 262 tree work requests were received, 168 of which resulted in tree work. The expenditure on pruning arising from tree service requests equated to 45% of the annual budget with an average spend per job of £300.
17. 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.
18. When site inspections are undertaken in response to tree service requests officers take proactive steps to assess the circumstances adjacent to the customer's property. The initial visit provides an opportunity to determine the impact other trees may be having on adjacent property and identify any remedial tree works. This proactive approach has contributed to the increased average spend per job in recent years.
19. A full breakdown of the annual expenditure since 2012 is set out below:

BUDGETS

Annual tree budget	£110,600	£115,500	£112,500
Key work area	2012	2013	2014
Tree inspections (approx. 4000 pa)	£9,410	£7,030	£7,615
Detailed tree inspections	£411	£1,493	£7,283
Tree work - inspections	£21,431	£42,422	40,738
Tree work – detailed inspections	£500	£1,870	£7,149
Tree work – customer requests	£56,813	£51,610	£86,657
Tree planting – plant material	£9,873	£8,108	£10,180
Tree planting – labour & materials	£16,420	£10,440	£15,900
Incidental tree works	£8,323	£20,607	£23,392
Winter storms – February 2014			£8,545
Total	£123,181	£143,580	£207,459

20. Pressure on the tree budget in 2014 was again significant, a trend that has continued since 2012. Two main areas of work represent the largest spend: Reactive tree inspections that result in 'good neighbour' pruning and tree work recommendations arising from proactive tree safety inspections, which are normally categorised as moderate priority and undertaken within 12 months. The purpose of these works is to reduce potential risks to people and damage to property in the future, the main priority for the Council.
21. The public expects local authorities to manage the risks associated with trees within acceptable limits. However, on a day to day basis residents tend to raise more general concerns about encroaching branches, tree related debris, shading and dominance that have a direct impact on the enjoyment of their property. Officers acknowledge there is an expectation from residents that our trees should be 'maintained properly' to reduce the impact on their property to a reasonable degree.
22. Requests to undertake 'good neighbour' pruning are 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. The Strategy also acknowledges that a conflict of interest can exist in some circumstances where trees become a source of frustration for some residents.
23. It has become apparent that the implications of doing nothing in response to public expectations is likely to have a negative impact on the profile of trees in general and the image of the Council in terms of providing a tree service that is sympathetic to residents' needs. The presumption is that trees are good and should be protected and managed responsibly to ensure they continue to deliver multiple benefits to our communities, often referred to as Ecosystem Goods and Services. Examples of ecological goods and services include purification of air and water, maintenance of biodiversity, partial stabilisation of climate and providing aesthetic beauty and stimulation of health and wellbeing.
24. Therefore any work or activity that could be considered harmful to trees is generally deemed unnecessary and should be avoided. However, the majority of requests for tree work from householders are not unreasonable or likely to be harmful to the trees concerned. Therefore in most cases residents pruning requests can be undertaken without conflicting with the objectives of the Tree Strategy or indeed the corporate objective to protect and enhance the environment of Fareham.

CUSTOMER SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS - VANGUARD

25. In spring 2013 tree officers took on the responsibility of dealing with tree work applications; these applications were previously assigned to planning officers who consulted with tree officers. The potential for further streamlining was identified at the time in terms of transferring the whole tree work application process across to the tree team to provide more continuity and greater focus on the customers' needs whether they are the applicant or an adjoining property owner.

26. Throughout 2014 Vanguard interventions have taken place in Development Management. During the intervention officers 'mapped' the journey of a number of applications, which revealed the considerable number of steps in the process. It revealed that many applications were being handled by several different officers, multiple times throughout the course of an application. It became clear that the current process lacked continuity and the many links in the work flow added unnecessary delays to the time it took to make a decision.
27. In December 2014 the tree team took on the whole tree work application process from registration through to determining the application and issuing the decision. In most cases applications are now being determined shortly after the 21 day neighbour notification period expires resulting in a decision being issued within four weeks. Applicants now receive decisions on their applications consistently faster than was achieved at the beginning of 2014.
28. The tree team have also been promoting pre-application advice since 2012 and the take up from applicants is very high, which has also improved the quality of the application process.
29. Many local planning authorities have gone one step further by operating a 'fast track' system for works to protected trees. Tree officers approve low impact works such as crown lifting and shortening overhanging branches as '*de minimis*' works within several days and let nearby residents know what work is going to be carried out, rather than canvas opinion by way of 21 day neighbour notifications. More significant or harmful tree work such as reducing or felling protected trees, that could have an adverse impact on public amenity, would continue to require a full application.
30. Officers are of the opinion that a 'fast track' system could work for Fareham Borough Council and improve the quality of the application process for the customer. This proposal will shortly be explored further with the Southampton and Fareham Legal Partnership.
31. In the New Year Vanguard will begin working with Officers on reviewing the requests for tree work to see how well this service works, and the scope which exists to improve it for our customers.

CUSTOMER SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS - TPOs

32. The Council's TPO records are now completely electronic and since August 2014 all TPO documents are accessible on this Council's Website through the TPO Register and Local View – mapping system. There is no charge for downloading these documents.

SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS – COUNCIL TREES

33. In January 2015 the tree team will begin using a tablet pc on site. The device will enable many tasks to be undertaken directly from site including updating tree records, auditing tree works, tree surveys and inspections, tree service requests, plotting new trees and TPO review work. Recording data just once will significantly improve the accuracy and quality of information gathered; and increases the efficiency of the many tasks undertaken out in the field.

34. EzyTreev is the Council's tree management system that contains the records of trees under our control. The system acts as an asset register of the trees we maintain and a tree risk management system to coordinate and prioritise tree safety inspections.
35. Work is currently in progress to link tree service requests from residents to individual tree records adjacent to their property. This will enable direct cross referencing between tree inspections, customer enquiries and tree work completed by contractors.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLICITY.

36. In 2014 tree officers delivered two community tree talks to the Fareham Local History Group in March and the Catisfield and District Horticultural Society in September.
37. A Fareham Today article on the Council's tree service will be published in the spring 2015 edition.

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PRESSURES ON THE SERVICE

38. The principal demands on the tree service have been identified as follows:-
 - New residential development / adoption of public land.
 - Trees and woodlands at the former Coldeast Hospital site.
 - Increasing frequency and intensity of severe weather events.
 - Maturing tree population in western wards.
 - Threats from pests and diseases.
39. 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

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

CONCLUSION

41. 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 4 March 2014; 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	Complete Ongoing
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	Complete Ongoing Ongoing Complete Ongoing
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 Officers and Planning Consultants. 	Principal Tree Officer + Principal Planner - Strategy Principal Tree Officer + Principal Planner - SDA Principal Tree Officer + Principal Planner -	LDF Timescales LDF Timescales LDF Timescales

		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