

VWAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL
SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
24/11/21

Title:

Update on the Tree & Woodland Policy

Portfolio Holders: Cllr Liz Townsend Portfolio Holder for Commercial Services
Economic Development, Parks, Leisure and Dunsfold Park
Cllr Steve Williams Portfolio Holder for Environment

Head of Service: Kelvin Mills – Head of Commercial Services

Key decision: Yes

Access: Public and Part Exempt

N/A

1. Purpose and summary

1.1 To inform the Services Overview & Scrutiny committee of progress to date in the drafting of the Tree and Woodland Policy.

1.2 To invite comment and feedback from the committee on the policy.

2. Recommendation

2.1 That the committee provides feedback on the current draft of the Tree and Woodland Policy to help finalising the document.

2.2 That any comments be incorporated and communicated back to the Executive Committee with a view to recommending adoption of the policy in 2022.

3. Reason for the recommendation

3.1 Public, Government and industry awareness of Climate change and the fragile state of our environments, locally, nationally, and internationally has never been higher or the importance of action so urgent. Tree planting and appropriate management of existing trees and woodlands owned by the Council are even more important as part of these concerns. There is therefore a need for a

consistent and comprehensive approach to the Council's tree and woodland management, beyond considering trees solely from a liability perspective.

4. Background

- 4.1 Waverley Borough council owns and manages a significant amount of Green Space across the Borough, circa 2200ha. The Council has an obligation to manage these spaces in trust for the public and future generations.
- 4.2 It is necessary to take steps to enhance and improve biodiversity across our green spaces and to seek to influence other land holders to improve the environments for all our residents and visitors; whilst managing health and safety risks and improving the potential of trees/woodlands to increase their contribution to lessen the impact of climate change.
- 4.3 This policy, linked to the emerging biodiversity policy and other policies, when adopted, will set out and confirm the Council's commitment and aspirations in this area.
- 4.4 Although not a Planning document, it is important that this Tree and Woodland Policy feeds into or complements other Strategies, Policies, and guidelines across the Council and vice versa, such as:
- Local Plan Part 1; Policies NE 1 & 2, Local Plan Part 2; policies DM 1 and 11 and the Planning Tree Guidelines (2018).
 - Biodiversity Policy and Action Plan (draft)
 - Climate Emergency Action Plan
 - Pesticide Policy
 - Woodland management plans
 - Tree Risk Management Framework
 - Green Spaces Strategy

5. Relationship to the Corporate Strategy and Service Plan

- 5.1 This policy directly contributes towards the corporate vision by promoting; a sense of responsibility by all for our environment, promoting biodiversity, championing the green economy, and protecting our planet.

It supports the strategic priorities of the corporate strategy:

- Supporting a strong, resilient local economy by ensuring the Natural Capital of the Borough is supported, improved, and protected.
- Acting on Climate Emergency and protecting the environment.
- working with partners to ensure the environmental stewardship of our open spaces are of the highest quality including the promotion of biodiversity, rewilding, and the phasing out of pesticide use other than in exceptional and defined circumstances.

- Our aim is to become a net zero-carbon council by 2030, encouraging carbon reduction and the promotion of biodiversity and sustainable homes, businesses, and transport across the borough.
- Improving the health and wellbeing of our residents and communities.

5.2 This policy also supports the delivery of the Councils service plan outcome CS11.3

- Write an overarching Greenspaces Strategy to bring together all relevant policies under one umbrella. Write and adopt a Tree and Woodland Policy that encompasses all aspects of tree management.

6.1 Resource (Finance, procurement, staffing, IT)

Should the Council adopt this policy there will be a need to identify sources of income, external funding and possibly internally funded capital budgets to allow for the delivery of the Tree and Woodland Policy action plan in the longer term.

- Revenue budgets currently exist to manage ongoing tree inspections and addressing identified tree safety issues
- A capital budget exists for addressing the cost of dealing with Oak Processionary Moth and the impact of Ash Dieback disease
- There will be a need to secure annual budgets for woodland management in order that all our woodlands are managed proactively to mitigate the effects of climate change.
- Officers are pursuing alternative ways of funding through Defra and the Forestry Commission as well as CIL and S106 monies. The effectiveness and reliability of the latter funding sources will need to be kept under review and future bids for internally funded capital budgets may still be necessary to achieve the goals set out.

There will also be a requirement for existing staff resources to be allocated towards the delivery of each of the action plans and occasionally, external consultants may be required to assist. When external support is required, budgets will be sought.

6.2 Risk management

- The Council currently only has a Tree Risk Management Guide (TRMG), which, as the name suggests, mainly addresses the Council's approach to its duty of care as it relates to trees under its management.
- Without having more comprehensive and up to date policies, the Council will struggle to deliver its Climate Change promises and be able to demonstrate this
- There is a risk of reputational damage if the Council does not act responsibly and decisively to support the environment and fulfil its commitments

6.3 Legal

The preparation of this policy is being undertaken in order to support compliance with the Council's statutory obligations and its corporate strategy aims and objectives. The report provides details of the Council's consultation process and provides an update on that consultation and the policy's development.

6.4 Equality, diversity and inclusion

"There are no direct equality, diversity or inclusion implications in this report. Equality impact assessments are carried out when necessary across the council to ensure service delivery meets the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010."

6.5 Climate emergency declaration

The Tree and Woodland Policy directly contributes to the Council's environmental and sustainability objectives as contained in the Corporate Plan. The Policy will ensure that the natural environment, and carbon sequestration are prioritised, protected, enhanced and embedded in all our projects and works.

7. Consultation and engagement

7.1 The draft Tree and Woodland Policy has been shared with the Portfolio holders Cllr Townsend and Cllr Williams for comment and is also in the process of being shared with stakeholders such as Country Council, Parish and Town Councils, Forestry Commission and special interest groups, for comment.

7.2 Feedback from these consultations have been and will continue to be considered and included as appropriate in the final draft Policy.

8. Other options considered

- Do nothing is not an option as the writing of a policy and action plan is already identified in the service plan and Climate emergency action plan. The development of the Tree and Woodland Policy is part of the first important steps in understanding the natural resources in the Borough and building climate resilience for the future

9. Governance journey

- 9.1 The policy will be considered by the Services O&S committee . Following further drafting of the policy document, the policy will be presented to Executive Committee later in the year to be recommended for adoption by the Council in February 2022.

Annexes:

Annexe 1 – Draft Tree and Woodland Policy **Background Papers**

There are / are no background papers, as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972).

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Agreed and signed off by:
Legal Services: date 28/10/21
Head of Finance: date 27/10/21
Strategic Director: date 19/10/21
Portfolio Holders: date 11/11/21