

Draft Interim Corporate Tree and Woodland Strategy

To: Environment & Green Investment Committee

Meeting Date: 13 October 2022

From: Steve Cox, Executive Director, Place & Sustainability

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Forward Plan ref: n/a

Outcome: The draft Interim Corporate Tree & Woodland Strategy is approved into Council policy.

Recommendation: Committee is asked to:

- a) Note the interim nature of the draft Tree & Woodland Strategy
- b) Note the increased level of ambition incorporated into the draft Strategy
- c) Approve the draft Interim Tree & Woodland Strategy

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1. Background

- 1.1 The England Trees Action Plan 2021 – 2024 sets out the Government's long-term vision for the country's treescape. It sets the ambition to deliver 30,000 hectares of tree planting annually to 2024 to deliver biodiversity and carbon sequestration benefits.
- 1.2 The Joint Administration Agreement identified Climate Change and Biodiversity as a key priority for the Council. It identified the environment is to be valued equally alongside social and financial impacts and a Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach is being developed to help improve environmental decision making.
- 1.3 Council approved an updated Climate Change and Environment Strategy in February 2022, which outlines how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to extreme climate driven events, improve Cambridgeshire's natural environment and improve the health and well-being of Cambridgeshire residents. It describes our policy priorities for several actions, including the development of a Tree and Woodland Strategy to guide tree and hedgerow planting and management on Council assets.
- 1.4 Tree planting and their management across the authority's asset portfolio is disparate with each service being responsible for the management of trees in their own way. Increasing tree planting is a Joint Administration (JA) priority, requiring a corporate "one team" approach to trees as a long-term asset for the Council.
- 1.5 Across our asset portfolio, we have an opportunity to deliver improvements to tree numbers and quality of our planting and management, contribution to our own and governments ambitions for trees. This Strategy will provide a framework for this activity to ensure the best and most appropriate approaches are used and opportunities are maximised.

2 Main Issues

- 2.1 Setting a Vision for our Tree Strategy to deliver: Trees and hedgerows can deliver benefits across the Council's triple bottom line. The proposed vision is to:

“Expand, protect and improve our trees, woodlands and hedgerows
and how they can connect people to nature, support the economy,
combat the climate crisis and recover biodiversity.”
- 2.2 Trees and hedgerows bring wide ranging benefits to our communities. These include supporting climate mitigation and adaptation; air quality improvements; flood mitigation; biodiversity enhancement; mental health and wellbeing benefits; supporting education and opportunities for financial benefits. The section on “Benefits from Trees and Woodlands” within the draft Strategy outlines these benefits in greater detail. The challenge is how to realise their benefits for the Council and its communities through planning and optimising the planting and management of trees and hedgerows.
- 2.3 The Strategy considers how we can best deliver these benefits across our asset portfolio, splitting it into three categories:
 - Urban: Land and trees around our buildings – CCC offices, schools etc;
 - Rural: Our County Farms estate and important wildlife sites; and

- Highway: verges and other connected land

2.4 Three key policy areas/themes are introduced:

- a) *“Right Tree in the Right Place”*: Not everywhere is appropriate for tree or hedgerow planting – especially when considering planting at scale. The selection of location(s), tree form (i.e., standalone, woodland, hedgerows), function and species must all be brought together to ensure planting is successful and provides benefits without unintended consequences.
- b) *Trees as functional assets*: Trees can help manage climate impacts, for example through alleviating flood risk by storing water and improving air quality, however we currently do not fully consider this active functioning role in decision making – instead, trees and hedgerows often remain aesthetic optional extras. Re-thinking our approach to trees, considering them as actively supporting our services opens opportunities to re-design and deliver service improvements while also reallocating space for trees and significant hedgerows to ensure they can provide important functions central to our corporate priorities.
- c) *Tree Management Policy*: Sets out our overarching position on tree management, identifying situations and parameters for when we will and will not consider different management actions regarding trees – both for our own service delivery but also in response to residents’ queries. It also sets out our minimum requirements for providing tree replacements which service areas are encouraged to exceed.

2.5 *Current understanding*: Our understanding of what trees and significant hedgerows we have and where they are located is incomplete. This means work is required to identify the condition and value of our tree stock and scope areas for improvements and new planting. Without this information targets for planting and biodiversity improvements cannot be set and measured. Filling the data gap will take at least 12 months due to the seasonality of environmental survey work. Once complete, this will be shared and used to update the Strategy and Action Plan.

2.6 *Why an Interim Strategy?* Ahead of the completion of a tree canopy mapping study, that is about to start, this Strategy remains an interim document. It sets out the policy framework to which all tree and hedgerow management and planting on the Council’s land should be delivered, states our vision for our tree assets and outlines the steps we can take now, ahead of the audits, to make improvements.

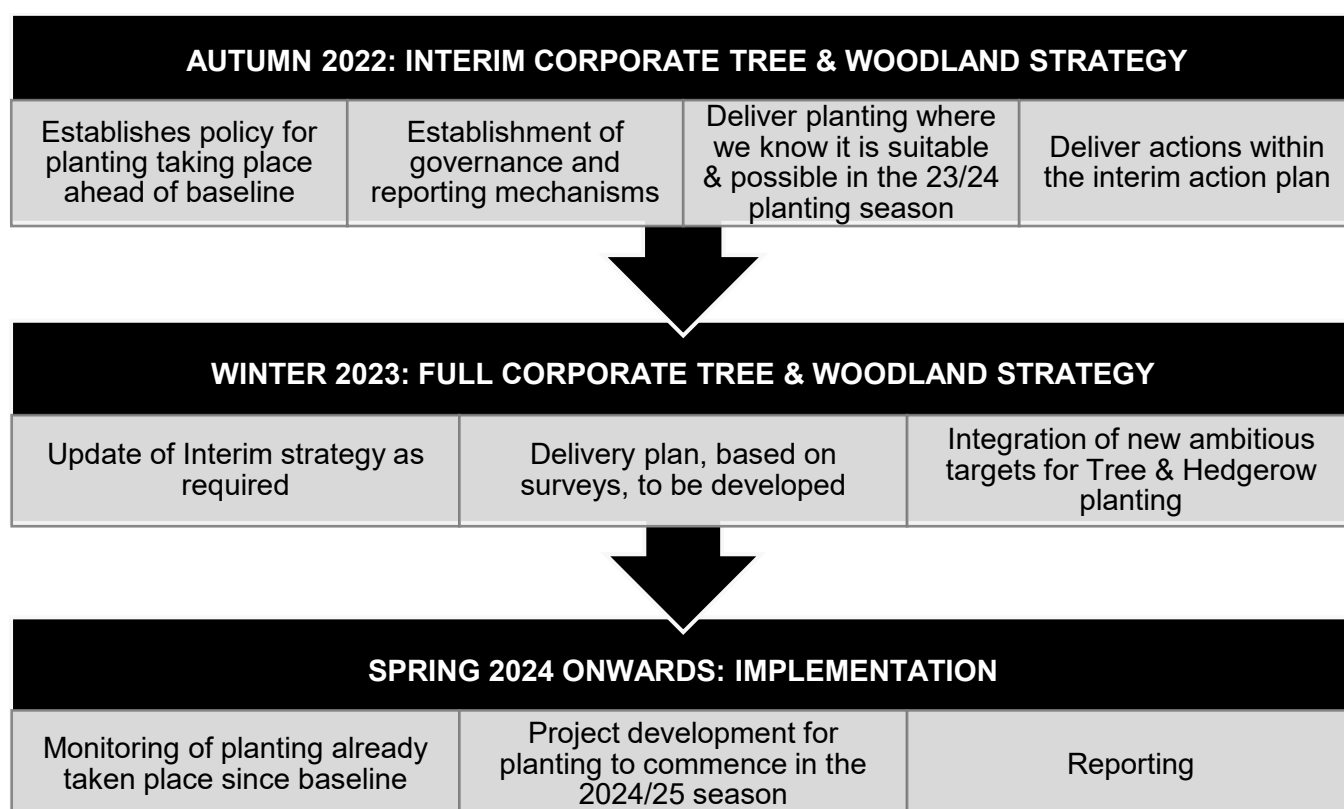
This strategic vision is required to enable access to government funding for tree planting which increasingly requires authorities to have Strategies in place. The interim strategy describes:

- The benefits trees and significant hedgerows can provide the council and our communities;
- Our current understanding of our tree assets across our portfolio;
- The opportunity trees provide and the principles we are implementing to grasp this opportunity;
- How we will work with our communities and partners to deliver our ambitions;

- Our tree management policy – a baseline position for how we will manage our trees, particularly providing transparency for residents who may contact us about tree related issues; and
- An action plan, detailing the steps we will implement now to begin action ahead of our baseline being established.

2.7 For the reasons set out in 2.5 we have defined our ambition in this Interim Strategy and have not put forward specific targets at this time. The intention is to set these once we have established our baseline position. This will enable us to set targets that are demonstrably ambitious, aligning with our vision statement.

2.8 Next Steps: To support implementation of this draft Strategy and Action Plan, additional resource is being secured. The timeline for next steps is set out below.



3 Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 Environment and Sustainability

The report above sets out the implications for this priority in 2.1

3.2 Health and Care

The report above sets out the implications for this priority in 2.1

3.3 Places and Communities

The report above sets out the implications for this priority in 2.1

3.4 Children and Young People

The report above sets out the implications for this priority in 2.1

3.5 Transport

There are no significant implications for this priority.

4 Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

Additional resource is being secured through the phase 1 Enabling Net Zero Programme (or the Forestry Commission's Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund – *still awaiting decision outcome*) to support delivery of the Strategy action plan.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

There are no significant implications in this category. The Tree Survey work will be procured following a compliant process. The specification for this work is being finalised currently.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

There are no significant implications in this category.

The Tree Management Policy will provide a framework for officers dealing with legal or insurance related queries regarding our trees. This will help to manage these sometimes-challenging situations. The policy follows established best practice seen across the public sector. The legal implications and issues of potential council liability are set out in Appendix 1 of the strategy

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications in this category.

The Strategy seeks to make our trees, hedgerows, and woodland as accessible as possible. New planting schemes will incorporate designs that allow all users to physically access them as well as intellectually through appropriate interpretation.

There may be some sites, that due to ecological sensitivity or difficulties of providing physical access due to their remoteness where it will not be possible to provide access for all user groups.

With existing woodlands, work will be undertaken to make them as 'accessible' for all again, recognising that due to topography or other site restrictions, it may prove too difficult/expensive to create appropriate access.

However, overall, our ambition for this strategy is that it will lead to improved and increased access to our woodland/greenspace estate.

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

There are no significant implications in this category.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

There are no significant implications in this category.

4.7 Public Health Implications

The report above sets out the implications for this priority in 2.1

4.8 Environment and Climate Change Implications on Priority Areas:

4.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: positive

Explanation: Greater numbers of trees around our buildings may support decreased energy demand from cooling systems through their natural effect on heat-island effect.

4.8.2 Implication 2: Low carbon transport.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: n/a

4.8.3 Implication 3: Green spaces, peatland, afforestation, habitats and land management.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: Positive

Explanation: The policy and ambition outlined in the Strategy will improve ecological outcomes from the council's tree and woodland assets and encourage increased planting of trees and hedgerows.

4.8.4 Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: n/a

4.8.5 Implication 5: Water use, availability and management:

Positive/neutral/negative Status: positive

Explanation: The strategy puts forward the policy of "right tree in the right place". consideration of existing water dynamics at sights for significant planting should be included within this policy to ensure planting does not adversely affect existing water systems. Conversely, planting can also be delivered as part of sustainable drainage approaches to mitigate flood risk.

4.8.6 Implication 6: Air Pollution.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: positive

Explanation: The Strategy promotes increase of canopy cover, particularly in urban settings and along highways. These will support mitigation of air quality challenges.

4.8.7 Implication 7: Resilience of our services and infrastructure and supporting vulnerable people to cope with climate change.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: positive

Explanation: Trees act as important green infrastructure, improving air quality, providing cooling and reducing flooding. These will support our wider infrastructure networks (e.g., highways) to cope with extreme weather events and improve our resident's resilience to climate change.

4.9 Officer Sign offs

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance?

- Yes Name of Financial Officer: Sarah Heywood

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the LGSS Head of Procurement?

- Yes Name of Officer: Clare Ellis

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or LGSS Law?

- Yes Name of Legal Officer: Fiona McMillan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?

- Yes Name of Officer: Elsa Evans

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?

- Yes Name of Officer: Amanda Rose

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact?

- Yes Name of Officer: Sheryl French

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?

- Yes Name of Officer: Iain Green

If a key decision, have any Environment and Climate Change implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer?

- *Not applicable*

5 Source documents

5.1 Source documents

- Climate Change & Environment Strategy - <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/climate-change-energy-and-environment>
- England Trees Action Plan 2021 to 2024 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/england-trees-action-plan-2021-to-2024>