

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET: 10 JUNE 2021

**TREES AND WOODLAND MANAGEMENT POLICY AND ASH DIE BACK
MANAGEMENT**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD AND ENFORCEMENT SERVICES

**LEAD CABINET MEMBER: CLLR CAROLYN HEALY - CABINET MEMBER FOR
VISITOR, ECONOMY, HISTORIC & NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, AND CLIMATE
CHANGE**

PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS

- 1.1 The borough of Telford and Wrekin has significantly more trees than many other towns and cities; it is estimated that the Council is responsible for around 15 million trees, which gives an average Ward canopy cover of approximately 22% and a borough wide cover of 15%. The UK Government has an aspiration to increase tree cover in England from 17% to 19% of land area by 2050; Telford & Wrekin Council is well placed to exceed this target.
- 1.2 The Council's 'Right Tree, Right Place, Right Reason' ethos has been at the heart of the Council's tree management over the past three years. The Tree and Woodland Management policies were originally approved by Cabinet in 2016; as a result of emerging disease affecting the tree stock and the councils climate change commitments, these policies have now been refreshed as set out in (Appendix 1).
- 1.3 The Council recently launched the 'Trees4TW' scheme' where 8,600 trees were provided to local residents, schools and landowners to plant in their garden and land as part of the borough's fight against climate change. The council will continue to support the planting of more trees to tackle climate change while mitigating, where possible, against the loss of trees through Ash die back, other disease or storm damage. Furthermore, there is opportunity to enhance the tree stock/canopy cover as part of the emerging local plan refresh.
- 1.4 In bringing these policy enhancements forward canopy cover across the borough remains above the UK average. Additional tree planting through climate change commitments and developer enhancements (including those bought forward through the local plan refresh) provide the backdrop to invest into increasing the Borough's canopy cover.

- 1.5 The Council currently spends £487,000 a year managing Council owned trees; this paper provides Cabinet with an update on the Tree and Woodland Management policy in managing the 15 million trees across the borough, while highlighting the challenges of Ash Dieback and proposed mitigation to manage this disease through a borough wide condition survey. In summary, amendments to the policy include:
- Changes to support the Council's focus on responding to climate change;
 - Approach to managing Ash Dieback under 'dangerous trees' and;
 - 'Liveability' policies which cover the management and the maintenance of trees in residential areas

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. Cabinet approves the amendments to the Tree and Woodland Management Policy as set out in Appendix 1.
- 2.2. Cabinet notes progress to date and endorses the approach to the management of trees and woodlands within the Council's ownership.
- 2.3. Cabinet, delegates approval to the Director of Neighbourhood and Enforcement Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Green Spaces, Natural and Historic Environment and the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood, Commercial Services and Regeneration, to secure £150,000 for financial year 2021/22 only to undertake condition surveys and priority works in the management of Ash dieback.
- 2.4. Cabinet, delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Green Spaces, Natural and Historic Environment to seek funding opportunities for Ash Dieback since withdrawal of funding by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) following in March 2020.

3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Co-Operative Council priority objective(s)?	
	Yes	The proposals contribute to the following priorities: -All neighbourhoods are a great place to live -Our natural environment is protected and the Council has a leading role in addressing the Climate Emergency

	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	Yes	The Policy provides guidelines and actions which will provide clear communication for residents and manage expectations. It will also ensure Duty of Care to safeguard the safety of residents.
TARGET COMPLETION /DELIVERY DATE	<p>Ash Dieback may well be an ongoing programme of work for a number of years; this will be understood in more detail following further, more targeted, investigation as set out in this report.</p> <p>The Tree and Woodland Management Policy has been in effect since 2016, minor amendments will be implemented with immediate effect.</p>	
FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	<p>Yes</p> <p>The Grounds and Cleansing contract with idverde includes the tree and woodland service which costs £486k per year. This is funded from Neighbourhood and Enforcement Services budgets. There are also two Tree & Woodland Officers within Neighbourhood Services. These resources fulfil the majority of the policies contained within the Tree & Woodland Management Policy.</p> <p>Managing Ash Dieback will incur significant additional costs over an estimated 15 years to tackle and manage the issue. Prior to the Covid pandemic there was the opportunity for Councils to apply for funding from DEFRA to support the management of Ash Dieback. However this funding was withdrawn following the first lockdown in 2020, just as the Council was preparing to submit an application for the DEFRA grant.</p> <p>As a starting point for 2021/22, we would need to invest £150k as outlined in this report to provide a new dedicated tree team and surveyor. There will also be additional costs of traffic management which will be kept to a minimum through co-ordinating the work with the work of the Highways Team. It is intended that these initial costs to understand the impacts will be met through approved Pride in Our Community programme budgets. It should be noted that at present no other funding beyond financial year 21/22 has been identified to cover the costs of Ash Dieback or any future costs that may be identified as a result of the development of the Management</p>	

		<p>Plan. Any additional funding requirements will need to be considered when developing future service and financial planning strategies if not covered by Government.</p> <p>MLB & KC 08.03.21.</p>
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes	<p>As a significant landowner, the Council owns and manages many trees and woodlands in the borough and has certain legal responsibilities to manage these.</p> <p>The Council also has a number of statutory powers and responsibilities in relation to trees which include the powers to protect trees and to respond to manage trees which present a danger. The Council as local planning authority also has responsibility to make and amend Tree preservation Orders (TPO's). The local planning authority powers relating to TPO's are not an executive function i.e. they are not exercised by Cabinet. However, Cabinet can encourage the exercise of these powers.</p> <p>The recommended policy document is the Council's response to its powers, duties and responsibilities in the context of our particular borough circumstances, including management of the Ash dieback problem.</p> <p>In addition, the Climate Change Act 2008 (as amended) establishes a legally binding target to reduce the UK's greenhouse gas emissions by 100% by 2050 when compared with the 1990 baseline. At a local level, Section 19(1A) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires local planning authorities to include in their local plans, policies designed to secure that the development and use of land in the local planning authority's area contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change and this will be a consideration when the Council's Local Plan is reviewed.</p> <p>Legal advice will be provided to officers, as required, to ensure that these responsibilities, powers and proposals are exercised and implemented lawfully.</p> <p>IR – 14.02.20</p>

OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	<p>Ash Dieback will pose a significant risk to tree safety which the Council is required to manage under health and safety legislation.</p> <p>In some areas the removal of trees will change the look of the landscape so the programme will be aligned to the Council's communications plan to develop awareness of the ash die back problem which is UK wide.</p> <p>The Council will work with partners to manage Ash Dieback where possible.</p> <p>In terms of replanting there are funding streams available. However, there are opportunities to be gained from natural regeneration. Therefore, the strategy for this will be regeneration and review of sites for replanting taking a pragmatic approach to each site.</p> <p>A part of the management of trees within the borough, there is potential to produce timber and chippings to sell for use in biomass boilers. This will include an opportunity for an invest to save in a wood yard for Ash Dieback. The main gain from this would be the avoidance of additional disposal costs. Where it is possible, wood which is not diseased will be chipped and spread around at the felling site, but diseased wood will be chipped or brought as large pieces to the wood yard for onward sale for biomass.</p> <p>There is the opportunity to increase the amount of CO₂ the borough's trees and woodland absorb through actions defined within the Council's Climate Change Action Plan and Developer contributions through planning policy.</p>
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	Yes	<p>Borough wide impact.</p> <p>There are 15 million council owned trees in the Borough which have an impact on every ward. Of these around 35% are ash trees. By far the greatest majority of the Council's trees and woodland are located within the Telford urban area and although the rural hinterland makes up two-thirds of the borough, the Council has very few rural trees to manage in comparison.</p>

		A communications plan will be developed and delivered so that the issue can be understood by residents. This will include direct communication with residents where work is scheduled to be undertaken in close proximity to their living environment.
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4. PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 4.1. Telford & Wrekin Council is currently estimated to own an estimated 15 million trees. Most of these trees were planted during a 10 year period in the 1960's/70's as part of the new town development.
- 4.2. The updated approach provides a methodology to deal with a range of tree and woodland management issues across council owned assets. The updated management policy will support the ambition to become an Urban Forest while supporting the Council's focus on responding to climate change to ensure the trees and woodland provide a positive impact to reduce our carbon footprint through carbon sequestration.
- 4.3. Together with greenspaces, trees are acknowledged by the community as indicators of a quality environment; they improve air quality and create places where people can exercise to support their physical and mental well-being. The Council recognise this and have worked hard with communities to protect green spaces, which are valued by local communities, from development under a Green Guarantee for sites within the Council's ownership. Such sites are managed for biodiversity, leisure and recreation. As part of our climate change commitments, the Council will continue to designate more sites which will, in-turn, protect even more trees.
- 4.4. The Pride in Our Community programme has enabled tree work that would not routinely be carried out, such as removal of overhanging branches, pollarding and felling of some trees in response to concerns raised by residents. This has allowed reactive maintenance to take place in an efficient managed way. Such work has been carried out by the dedicated overhang tree team secured though our Grounds and Cleansing contractor; this operation will continue where resources permit and through our partnership working with town and parish councils.
- 4.5. In managing the tree assets, the Council has a proactive and reactive approach to tree management as set out in the Tree and Woodland Policy. This policy sets out the Council's operational approach to tree and woodland management and also focuses on dangerous and diseased trees. As part of the grounds and cleansing contract there are three teams of tree operatives and a dedicated tree surveyor.

These dedicated teams respond to safety issues including risk of damage to property.

- 4.6. The dedicated tree surveyor undertakes detailed surveys throughout the year in order to understand the condition of our tree assets. This information is being utilised to develop maintenance programmes alongside responses to concerns raised by communities and the impacts of storm damage.
- 4.7. In accordance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act, careful consideration is given to work that is undertaken through the bird nesting season. Where trees pose a risk to highway, property or pedestrian safety, work will take place if required and prior to doing so a nesting bird survey is undertaken with the results informing the approach taken thereafter.

Ash Dieback

- 4.8. Ash Dieback is a highly destructive fungus that is sweeping across the UK and is likely to result in a loss of all ash trees in the UK over the next 15-20 years. Like many areas across the country, ash dieback is a major threat in the Borough and it is estimated that around 35% (c5 million) of the tree population is ash, rising to around 42% in some areas.
- 4.9. The disease was first reported in the UK in 2012, and the first case in the borough of Telford and Wrekin was reported in 2013. As ash is naturally a brittle tree, there is a danger from falling branches as the tree begins to weaken from the disease. As a result, there is the possibility, subject to risk assessment and severity of disease, that there will be a need to fell many ash trees where they are in proximity to roads, paths, and property.
- 4.10. In 2018, Telford & Wrekin Council commissioned a tree survey to log the locations of all trees on Council-owned land. While still on-going, this survey captures details of their height and spread, overall health and proximity to buildings. A risk rating is then applied to establish the extent of the safety concerns which is largely based on the tree's proximity to the public highway, areas of public use or nearby buildings.
- 4.11. The Council's tree team have continually monitored the health of known trees in poor condition and have progressed with surveying and monitoring through our grounds and cleansing contractor since 2019. In managing the risk, work has been undertaken where there is highest concern or an opportunity to undertake the work in co-ordination with other partners such as highways.
- 4.12. Up until March 2020, funding was available from Defra for Councils to manage ash dieback. Unfortunately, this funding was withdrawn by Defra during the Covid lockdown without replacement funding being provided. In response, the Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Green Spaces, Natural and Historic Environment wrote to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to request urgent support for managing Ash Dieback. Unfortunately, the response

provided limited detail on available funding, other than the ‘Treescapes Fund’ that launched in April 2021 for which a bid is being prepared. This fund will help build back greener from the Covid-19 pandemic and will target landscapes that have been neglected in the past, ecologically damaged or affected by tree diseases such as ash dieback.

- 4.13. Further letters have also been sent to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities, Local Government (MHCLG) and the Local Government Association (LGA), and APSE requesting investigation into financial support for managing Ash Dieback.
- 4.14. As a result, engagement with APSE is now underway and APSE recently published a survey to all councils on the 4th May 2021 to establish the impact of ash dieback on other councils and if they have, or they intend to, seek financial support from government.
- 4.15. However, in order to proactively manage Ash Dieback in the borough in the absence of government support, the Council will utilise £150,000 of its own funds (through Pride in our Community) to provide a new dedicated tree team and surveyor. This team will be funded for one year in order to survey ash trees and undertake priority safety works; data obtained from this will be used to support the development of a detailed Ash Dieback Management Programme that will set out plans for the future. At this stage, it is envisaged that this will outline:
 - Natural regeneration of areas where ash trees are removed to re-establish canopy cover;
 - Replanting to re-establish canopy cover with the ‘right tree in the right place’;
 - Opportunity for partnership working through established groups including (but not limited to) Severn Gorge Countryside Trust, Small Woods and Shropshire Wildlife Trust;
 - Engagement with private land owners for managing ash trees in proximity to Council owned land/assets;
 - Bulk timber disposal.
- 4.16. While the scale of the disease is pending the outcome of the survey work being carried out through 2021/22, it is recognised that there will be a need for additional funds to effectively manage this risk while providing mitigation for the potential loss of up to 5 million trees. The Council will continue to explore alternative funding streams available such as the Defra Treescapes Fund, developer contributions as part of environmental enhancements and as part of the local plan refresh.

5. **IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Not applicable

6. PREVIOUS MINUTES

Cabinet 21 April 2016. The Tree and Woodland Framework

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