

Report to: Overview Committee



Date of Meeting 21st March 2024

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Tree Strategy for East Devon District Council

Report summary:

Trees are an integral part of our environment and our treescape is a significant part of the East Devon landscape, contributing to the health and wellbeing of a population and the sustainability of our communities. East Devon DC has declared both a Climate and Nature Emergency and the role of trees is crucial in ensuring that we look towards effectively mitigating the devastating impact of emissions and changing weather conditions.

Trees provide a habitat for wildlife, a foundation for biodiversity and a basis for our ecosystem services whilst also giving intrinsic beauty to our surroundings and economic value to our neighbourhoods. From the flood risk management benefits of tree roots to the improvement to air quality, the contribution trees make to our lives cannot be underestimated. We see it as vital to protect and value trees for our communities and for future generations.

East Devon District Council also has a duty to protect its residents from harm and to ensure a safe environment for all. In order to fulfil this, it is vital that trees and woodlands in the district are managed effectively and that any potential risks from trees are identified, assessed and addressed.

The creation of a Tree Strategy for East Devon DC will help us to frame these extremely important issues and challenges within a robust and deliverable document that helps the Council to make informed and measured decisions, according to its resources, that help protect and grow our trees and woodlands into the future. The Council agreed a budget to develop the Strategy in 2022/23 and it has been delayed due to the importance of aligning our Strategy development work with the recently finalised Devon Trees and Woodland Strategy 2024.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

That the Overview Committee recommend to Cabinet

1. the development of a Tree Strategy for East Devon District Council;
2. and to procure an external resource to draft the Strategy as agreed previously by the Council.

Reason for recommendation:

To start the process of developing a Tree Strategy for East Devon DC

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Communications and Democracy
- Economy
- Finance and Assets
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information: [Devon's Tree and Woodland Strategy and Action Plan;](#)
[Devon's Tree and Woodland Strategy and Action Plan Summary](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

Report in full

1. Background

In July 2019 East Devon District Council (EDDC) committed to the Devon Climate Emergency Declaration. We followed this with the adoption of our own Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. The Council Plan prioritises climate change actions and creates a join up between our strategies and plans. This also means that actions and policies of the Council are assessed against the impact they have on climate.

We have worked on this ambition because trees, woodlands and hedges have a vital role in ameliorating climate extremes. This Tree Strategy will set out better ways of managing and increasing trees and hedgerows, in line with the recommendations of the UK Committee on Climate Change, which in January 2020 set a target of increasing UK forestry cover.

Trees are vital for our environment and for humanity beyond their key role in tackling climate change. Trees, hedgerows, and woodlands are an integral part of nature, supporting a wide range of insects, animals, birds and plant life. Having trees, hedges and woodlands in our local environment is essential for the future health of nature and of people.

Trees are a cost-effective way to improve the environmental quality of our urban areas, delivering physical, social and economic benefits as well as mitigating climate change, improving storm water management, air quality, biodiversity, visual amenity and more. In considering trees and planning for the future, we need a fundamental shift in attitude and perspective - to recognise trees as public assets, rather than liabilities.

The major focus of this Tree Strategy is to actively protect and increase the trees and woodland areas in our parks, gardens, woods, our street trees, green spaces, trees and hedges that all benefit our environment.

The Tree Strategy will look at the next ten years, but it is intended as a framework for thinking about trees, woodlands and hedgerows for the next 50 or more years and will be regularly revised and extended.

2. Outlining the ambitions of the Strategy

The purpose of the Tree Strategy for East Devon DC will be to ensure there is both continuity and synergy with the Devon Tree & Woodland Strategy 2024. The Devon Strategy provides the county-wide framework for how we can look to increase our tree and woodland cover as well as linking with Local Nature Recovery work, Climate Change adaptation and mitigation targets and also how we engage all our partners, communities and organisations in helping to ensure we manage our treescapes and woodlands.

An ambition of this Tree Strategy will be to look to set an achievable target for planting trees over the ten year period of the plan which links directly to our Climate Change Strategy and also with the planned Local Nature Recovery Plan for East Devon.

In doing so we will aim to increase the number of trees unavoidably lost with the caveat of the unknown quantity of trees which may be lost to ash dieback.

The trees that are planted will see the district's tree canopy cover significantly increase by the time they are fully grown.

We will look to adopt the principle of "the right tree for the right place" in order to ensure the most resilient tree population possible.

We will look to undertake a canopy survey of the trees within East Devon's towns so that we can better understand our tree cover. The canopy survey, including our existing TPO database, council owned tree inventory (Ezytreev) and tree planting initiatives across East Devon (EDDC, developers* etc) should be available for our residents to access on the Council's website.

We will work constructively with Town & Parish Councils, communities and environmental groups to deliver these ambitions and capture this sentiment within the 'Vision statement' for the Strategy.

3. The purpose of the Tree Strategy

Our tree purpose is to 'Value & protect our tree stock' and to achieve this we will work to the principle of – 'Right Tree, Right Place, Right Reason'

We also will aspire to:

- Ensuring that decisions and activities undertaken in relation to trees are made in a structured and consistent way;
- To protect, value and care for East Devon's existing trees, hedgerows and woodlands;
- To plant more trees on the principle of the 'right tree for the right place' and encourage appropriate natural regeneration and increased canopy cover;
- To plant, restore and maintain hedgerows in rural and urban landscapes to increase biodiversity and link this to our new duty for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) e.g. to increase biodiversity and in accordance with BNG/development management processes
- To provide a high level framework for decision making and establishing a prioritised set of actions.

4. Proposed format for the East Devon DC Tree Strategy

It is proposed to follow best practice guidance from the Tree Council and their examples of Tree Strategies that are currently meeting the challenges being faced. Therefore it is proposed that the Strategy is set out in three parts:

- Part One – A Tree Policy which sets out the Council’s strategic objectives (and is synergised with Devon’s Trees & Woodland Strategy 2024) that will guide and influence the decisions we will take;
- Part Two – Tree and Hedge Management Guidelines which will provide the detail around sourcing, planting and establishing and managing trees under the Council’s ownership;
- Part Three – A Tree Risk Management Plan which outlines processes the Council will use to manage the risks trees can cause.

Aligned to the Tree Strategy will be the policies within the Local Plan and the existing Trees and Development Supplementary Planning Guidance that is accessible on the Council’s website under Planning Policy.

5. Proposed scope to be met within the Tree Strategy

The Tree Strategy as outlined in the report will cover a wide range of issues and challenges and therefore it is imperative that the scope of the work is carefully considered so that it is a document that can be delivered through existing resources. The ambitions implicit in the Strategy are currently recognised within the existing and draft refreshed Council Plan such as our commitment to Climate Change, Nature Recovery, health and wellbeing and also protecting our trees through the development process.

It is therefore proposed the following areas should be addressed within the Tree Strategy to enable the Council to be able to make meaningful progress once it is adopted. These areas have been drawn from the Tree Council’s advice on best practice for developing Tree Strategy’s drawing from existing Strategy’s from around the country:

Part One – Tree Policy

Introduction, Background & Context (to include climate change, nature recovery and linkages to Devon Tree & Woodland Strategy 2024)

1. Issues affecting our tree and hedge resource :

- 1.1 Challenges
- 1.2 Climate change
- 1.3 Pests and diseases
- 1.4 Poor species diversity
- 1.5 Trees and development
 - Retention of existing trees
 - Loss or damage through development
 - New and replacement tree planting
- 1.6 Permitted Development Rights
- 1.7 Work associated with installation and repair of utility services.
- 1.8 Specification, planting and maintenance
- 1.9 Damage and vandalism
- 1.10 Capital Asset Valuation of Amenity Trees (CAVAT)

2.0 The future of East Devon's trees

- 2.1 Understanding our tree population
- 2.2 Canopy cover targets
- 2.3 How we will increase our canopy cover
- 2.4 Tree planting - what we will do
 - Guidance
 - Species diversity selection
 - Trees in hard landscapes
 - Community Woodland
- 2.5 Consultation and Engagement

3.0 Management of Council owned trees

- 3.1 Application
- 3.2 Tree pruning and removals
- 3.3 Replacement trees
- 3.4 Establishing new and replacement trees
- 3.5 Trees in green space
- 3.6 Tree related damage claims
- 3.7 Tree management plans
- 3.8 Staff skills and training
- 3.9 Risk Management

4.0 Trees on private land

- 4.1 Overview
- 4.2 Trees and development
- 4.3 Protected trees
- 4.4 Implementation of planning conditions
- 4.5 Influencing landowners
- 4.6 Unsafe trees on private land

5.0 Hedges

- 5.1 Value of hedges
- 5.2 Council hedges
- 5.3 Hedges on private land
- 5.4 Enforcement
- 5.5 High Hedge Legislation
- 5.6 Applications for work to hedges

6.0 The Policies

- 6.1 Tree Strategy Policies

7.0 Delivery, monitoring and review

Part Two - Tree and Hedge Management Guidance

Part Three - Tree Risk Management Plan

6. Summary

This Tree Strategy will be developed through employing an external resource as already agreed by Members and will involve a consultation programme to ensure that as the Strategy develops it is done in an open and transparent manner.

It is also recognised that there may be actions identified within the Strategy that go beyond 'business as usual' for our existing resources and capacity and these will need to be carefully

considered before any additional resources can be identified to help their delivery. It will be a ten year Strategy to enable the targets that may be set for tree planting to be achieved and also to link in with our Climate Change and Nature Recovery work. We will need to report on the progress of delivering the Tree Strategy and it is likely that some of the targets will only be visible within that ten year timeline.

Currently the Council's internal tree related resources are deployed on tree protection and liaison with planning through the Arboricultural team and the management of the Council's owned trees and woodlands by Streetscene and Countryside teams in our parks, gardens and Nature Reserves.

This Tree Strategy will need to set out the Council's aspirations (vision), clearly identified aims and policy objectives that are robust, SMART and can help to clarify the challenges that are being faced with climate change, impacts of pests and diseases and the resources required to protect and also enhance the district's treescape.

The Tree Strategy for East Devon DC will draw on the recently published Devon Tree & Woodland Strategy 2024 to ensure there is synergy and not duplication of the two documents and also draw from around the country other Tree Strategy's which are examples of best practice.

Financial implications:

There is a £50k budget approved for this work

Legal implications:

The external procurement support, if approved, must be procured in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.