

Report to: Overview Committee



Date of Meeting 24th October 2024

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

East Devon Trees, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy

Report summary:

The East Devon Trees, Hedgerow & Woodland Strategy (THaWS) was approved for development by Overview Committee in March 2024 and following the Devon Procurement process Treeconomics Ltd were appointed in July 2024 to start the process of leading the consultation and shaping of an East Devon THaWs.

Since the appointment has been made there have been a number of stakeholder workshops involving partner organisations such as the Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission and National Trust, as well as local land managers such as Clinton Devon Estates and also local Parish and Town Councils plus East Devon councillors.

There has also been a district-wide public questionnaire and survey to gather views on how our local residents view the value and importance of trees, woodlands and hedgerows. These workshops, consultations and surveys are very important in helping to shape the Strategy in terms of the priorities for East Devon.

The draft East Devon THaWS has been an iterative process and updated on a regular basis to ensure data, consultation outcomes etc have all been uploaded and the version being presented to Overview is the most up to date version of the Strategy. There will be an associated Delivery/Resource Plan that will identify who is responsible for taking forward the Strategy Targets, Priorities and Actions with, where possible, indicative resource costs and implications. 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 must not be forgotten that is 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 East Devon THaWS 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.

The Strategy has ensured it is also closely aligned with the recently published Devon Tree & Woodland Strategy 2024 as well as other core Council Strategies on climate change, health and wellbeing and our existing Local Plan to ensure there is synergy

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

That Overview Committee recommends to Cabinet:

- The adoption of the final draft of the East Devon Tree, Hedgerow & Woodland Strategy 2024 - 2034 which reflects the ambitions and opportunities to protect East Devon's treescape and create new opportunities for tree planting working in partnership with key stakeholders;
- Endorses the Strategy's proposal to appoint a part time Tree & Woodland Project Officer role to enable the delivery of the Strategy. The budget and costs for this role are already secured within the existing salary budget due to a vacant part time role within the Tree team;

Reason for recommendation:

To enable the draft Strategy to be presented to Cabinet for approval as its formal Trees, Hedgerow and Woodland 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 High Impact

The Strategy seeks to increase the District's tree canopy cover to a target of 30% from 22% (compared to the national average of 15%) and if achieved will help the Council meet its net zero target for 2040.

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- A supported and engaged community
- Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- Resilient economy that supports local business

Report in full

1. The ambitions of the East Devon Tree Hedgerow & Woodland Strategy (THaWS)

- 1.1 The agreed purpose of the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy (THaWS) for East Devon was to ensure there is both alignment and active delivery partner 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.
- 1.2 The East Devon THaWS is 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.
- 1.3 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 THaWS has started to define what our target tree cover should be within the lifetime of the document and also identify where the opportunities lie and who are likely to be our key partners. The trees that are planted will see the district's tree canopy cover significantly increase by the time they are fully grown.
- 1.4 Fundamental to this approach in the Strategy is to adopt the principle of "the right tree for the right place" in order to ensure the most resilient tree population possible.
- 1.5 To better understand our treescape, one of the key actions will be 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.
- 1.6 Also the Strategy has clearly identified that we cannot work in isolation and that any meaningful progress in delivering the actions will require having a constructive relationship with Town & Parish Councils, communities and environmental groups to deliver the ambitions within the Strategy.

2. The Importance of a Tree, Hedge, and Woodland Strategy (THaWS) for East Devon District Council

- 2.1 The development of a comprehensive Tree, Hedge, and Woodland Strategy for East Devon District Council is vital for promoting sustainability, enhancing biodiversity, and improving the quality of life for its residents.
- 2.2 A policy review has already been carried out to ensure that this strategy will align with International, national, regional and local environmental goals and policies, thereby meeting local community needs whilst also addressing the urgent challenges posed by climate change. [Policy review link attached]

2.3 However, whilst there already exists a plethora of good guidance, policy, research and expertise on the benefits of trees and the need for greater tree cover in the UK, it worth noting that across East Devon District one of the wards in terms of the lowest tree cover is Cranbrook with just 10.8% tree canopy cover (average of 22% across EDDC).

2.4 One of the key purposes of this strategy, with clear, measurable targets and goals, is to close the gap between the well intentioned ideals with action. Implementing a Tree, Hedge, and Woodland Strategy is not just an environmental imperative but a holistic approach to enhancing community life in East Devon. By committing to this strategy, East Devon District Council can foster a vibrant, resilient ecosystem that benefits both people and nature, helping to ensure a sustainable future for all.

3. Key Reasons for the Strategy:

Setting a Vision

A clear and comprehensive vision for the Tree, Hedge, and Woodland Strategy is crucial as it sets long-term goals and guides decision-making, resource allocation, and policy development towards cohesive and sustainable outcomes.

Enhancing Biodiversity:

Urban trees and hedgerows serve as critical habitats for wildlife, contributing to the conservation of local flora and fauna. The strategy will support efforts to increase the ecological connectivity of habitats, allowing species to thrive amidst urban development.

Climate Resilience:

Trees play a pivotal role in sequestering carbon dioxide, thereby mitigating climate change effects. Increased tree cover can significantly contribute to local carbon reduction goals.

Strategic planting can help manage urban heat, reduce flooding through improved water retention, and enhance air quality.

Public Health and Wellbeing: Access to green spaces and urban forests has been linked to improved mental health and physical wellbeing. The strategy will aim to increase public access to these natural resources, fostering a sense of community. Incorporating green infrastructure into urban planning can enhance recreational spaces and encourage outdoor activities.

Community Engagement and Education:

The strategy will actively involve local communities in tree planting and maintenance efforts, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility towards local green spaces.

Educational programs about the benefits of trees and hedgerows can empower residents and encourage environmentally responsible behaviour.

Alignment with Regional and National Goals:

The strategy will align with the Devon Tree and Woodland Strategy and national objectives outlined in the England Trees Action Plan.

By participating in broader initiatives, East Devon can secure funding opportunities for tree planting and woodland management.

Sustainable Urban Development:

Integrating trees and hedgerows into planning processes will enhance the aesthetic value of developments and contribute to biodiversity net gain requirements.

The strategy will advocate for the preservation of existing green spaces and the incorporation of trees in new developments, ensuring a balanced approach to urban expansion.

Economic Benefits:

Investing in urban forestry can boost local economies by increasing property values and attracting tourism. A healthy urban forest can reduce energy costs through natural shading, lowering air conditioning needs in warmer months.

Developing Community Partnerships

Collaborate with local organisations, schools, and volunteers for tree planting events and educational initiatives.

Integrating with Local Planning.

Ensure that tree planting and preservation are incorporated into local development plans, following the mitigation hierarchy to protect existing biodiversity.

Establishing Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms:

Set clear targets for tree planting and woodland management, with regular reporting on progress to ensure accountability and transparency.

4. East Devon THaWS progress

4.1 The progress in developing the Strategy has been impressive since work began in July with the final stages of the Strategy development now being put in place with a further set of workshops planned to “sense check” the final draft and carry out a short public consultation exercise before it comes to Cabinet for consideration.

4.2 The draft THaWS being considered by Overview is almost a final draft version of the document which has benefited from the following activity:

- Undertaken a public survey
- Led and consulted with all the key stakeholders in 2 workshops
- Led and consulted with EDDC Councillors and all local Parish and Town Councils in 2 workshops
- Developed a draft Vision
- Developed a comprehensive set of Actions and linked Key Performance Indicators that will help track future evaluation and review on low to optimal performance in delivering on the actions.
- Developed a comprehensive portfolio of datasets showing tree cover across the district and linked opportunity zones for tree planting.

4.3 Outstanding work yet to be completed:

- Development of a Delivery /Resource Plan;
- Public Consultation on the final draft Strategy;
- 2 final workshops with key stakeholders to “sense check” the final draft;

5. Summary

5.1 Good progress has been made with developing the East Devon THaWS with a wide and extensive engagement and consultation programme to enable a feeding in of views from key stakeholders. This will make the Strategy a document for a wide range of partners and not just East Devon DC which will be identified in the Delivery/Resource Plan.

5.2 The challenge all along has been to ensure that the Strategy is helping to support and align with other key documents such as the Devon Tree & Woodland Strategy 2024, East Devon

DC's Climate Change Strategy and the emerging East Devon Local Nature Recovery Plan being led by East Devon DC.

- 5.3 The clear message emerging from the workshops so far has been that we need greater engagement with our local communities. This can be achieved through a programme of tree planting, engaging in our Tree Warden initiative and working with their local parish and Town Council to help care for and protect trees their local trees and hedgerows.
- 5.4 The Strategy will enable us to work more closely with partner bodies such as the Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust to help us achieve our tree canopy cover targets and draw on available funding to enable this to happen. We will also need to collaborate with our two National Landscapes and landowners such as Clinton Devon Estates to help achieve our ambitions for nature recovery network enhancements that identify our woodlands and hedgerows as critically important to improve and better support our district's biodiversity and help to stop the dramatic decline in many of our key species.

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implications resulting from the report

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to this report