

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 7 December 2023

Report of the Director of Strategy and Performance

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Protecting our environment;

Tree Asset Management Plan

(Appendix 'A' refers)

Contact for further information:

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Brief Summary

The Tree Asset Management Plan sets out the strategic approach to managing the county council's tree assets over the next ten years.

Appendix 'A' of the Plan sets out several detailed policies in relation to managing the county council's trees, including the procedure for considering requests to prune or remove trees.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to approve the Tree Asset Management Plan 2023 - 2033 attached at Appendix 'A'.

Detail

The county council is responsible for maintaining approximately 7,000km of vehicular highway, much of which has trees growing along it. There are approximately 800 hectares of accessible recreational countryside sites and hundreds of small incidental sites across the county, including greenspace around the property portfolio, which contains tens of thousands of county council owned trees.

Following on from the Tree Risk Management procedures (approved by Cabinet in November 2022) a tree management plan is required to provide direction and



guidance on how trees and tree cover owned or maintained by the county council will be managed over the next decade. This will also provide for the management of trees in line with the objectives of the Environment and Climate Strategy (2023-2025). This tree management plan will form part of a broader framework setting out how our trees contribute to:

- landscape enhancement,
- nature recovery and biodiversity,
- carbon capture, and
- countryside recreation

The development of this framework will be informed by the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy being developed during 2024 for Lancashire.

The scope of this management plan is limited to the trees that are owned or managed by the county council.

In terms of replacing trees lost on the highway, the Highways Management Plan has a policy preventing new or replacement tree planting within adopted highway verges. The Plan states:

"Replacement of trees we have felled - The county council will not replace trees we have felled for whatever reason. However, we will allow a district or parish council to fund a replacement tree..... "

The adoption of this tree management plan would remove the above no re-planting policy, and the Highway Management Plan will be amended accordingly.

This now makes available a significant amount of potential planting sites and will allow those existing street trees which have been found to have died or become unstable to be removed and replaced with young healthy trees. Design guidance is included to ensure that new planting schemes are fit for the site.

The plan sets out the type and extent of pruning which would be considered acceptable when a maintenance request is submitted and details the issues considered by staff when making such decisions to provide clarity for customers and elected members. The limited circumstances when tree felling requests would be supported are also detailed within the plan.

To ensure that the county council's woodlands meet their full potential in terms of biodiversity, habitat provision, and recreation, the management plan sets out a commitment that each woodland will benefit from the creation of a bespoke woodland management plan. These plans will detail the management and maintenance needs such as dealing with invasive exotics, restocking, coppicing or thinning operations. These will be developed during 2024.

Many thousands of trees were planted by the county council from the late 1950s through to the mid-1980s under licence, typically on land owned by district councils or other large private landowners such as United Utilities. These sites have been subject to limited woodland management regimes.



Therefore, there are risk management, potential liability, and duty of care matters to be addressed. During the first twelve months of the plan an officer working group will be established to carry out a review of these licences and propose a clear future for these sites to either surrender the trees back to the lessor; or to assimilate the trees into the county council's tree risk management regime.

The approach taken with district councils regarding tree preservation order reviews of county council owned stock is also detailed within the plan.

Appendices

Appendix 'A' is attached to this report. For clarification it is summarised below and referenced at relevant points within this report.

Appendix	Title
Appendix 'A'	Draft Tree Asset Management Plan 2023 - 2033

Consultations

N/A

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

This management plan, if approved by Cabinet, will ensure that the county council's tree assets are managed in a systematic and planned manner.

Risk management

There is reputational and liability risk to the county council in failing to systematically maintain trees across its estate and comply with the changes in legislation.

Finance

The objectives of the Tree Asset Management Plan 2023-2033 can be delivered within existing resources using a combination of county council budget and external grant funding sourced via the recently established Treescapes team.

Legal

There is also risk presented by the potential liabilities and terms of the historic tree planting licences which this Plan will address and mitigate.



List of Background Papers

Paper

Date

Contact/Tel

None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A

