
**Decision Session – Executive Member for
Culture, Leisure and Tourism**

18 December 2017

Report of the Assistant Director, Transport, Highways and
Environment)

Update on the Arboricultural Management of Council Trees**Summary**

1. This report details how the Council manages its own or “public” trees as well as proposing updates to the Council’s policy for the maintenance of public trees.

Recommendations

2. The Executive Member is asked to agree the updated policy for the management of the Council’s public trees.

Reasons:

- To ensure that the Council’s duty of care toward tree management and protection remains consistent and transparent and that resources are used to the best effect.

Background

3. A healthy and sustainable tree population plays a major role in creating an attractive and vibrant landscape where people want to live. In addition, trees provide a range of social, economic and environmental benefits including:
 - a) Combating climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere
 - b) Mitigating the effects of climate change by reducing floodwater run off through interception and absorption and providing shade
 - c) Offsetting air pollution by removing particulate matter
 - d) Providing a habitat for wildlife
 - e) Contributing to a quality of environment that promotes physical, social and psychological wellbeing.

4. Council owned trees have an estimated replacement value of £200 million based on the Capital Asset Values for Amenity Trees (CAVAT) methodology. See <http://nato.org.uk/cavat> for more details. York's highway or street trees are valued at approximately £89 million alone.
5. 25,000 Council trees have been indentified, surveyed and mapped. Data from the tree survey can be found on the Council website maps for public use https://www.york.gov.uk/info/20058/trees_and_hedgerows/544/trees_in_conservation_areas ; this includes location, species and "owning" service department. The trees map layers now provide vital public information on private protected trees in conservation areas and covered by Tree Preservation Orders. Property developers and arboricultural contractors are now able to see where our protected trees are in York.

Current Management arrangements

6. The Council has a responsibility for the care and safety of trees on the land it directly manages. This includes highway verges, car parks, housing estates, parks, gardens, amenity spaces, river banks, sports grounds, nature reserves, closed churchyards and several woodlands.
7. Responsibility for the management of the Council's trees sits with the Arboricultural Manager who is based in the Public Realm Service. Day to day tree work is then carried out by 3 council employees and suitable specialist arboricultural contractors. The cost of using external CHAS arboricultural contractors continues to increase year on year. (CHAS is a health and safety accreditation scheme used by public bodies). There are currently only two available in York with CHAS registration. One concentrates on the annual stem clearing work each summer; the other will carry out dangerous pruning and dismantling work.
8. The Arboricultural Manager provides help and technical advice to our Design and Conservation staff. Advice on private tree protection in relation to the planning process, Tree Preservation Orders and Conservation Areas is provided by our Design and Conservation service.
9. The majority of the Council trees are inspected on a four yearly cycle; this takes place between April and December. Trees that are part of woodland planting are generally not actively inspected unless

they are along footpaths. In addition to the four year inspection, specific trees may be re-inspected following gales or when issues are passively spotted by staff or reported by members of the public.

10. The four yearly inspections regime informs the EZYTREEV database work programme, together with reactive concerns which arise during the year. Based on the adopted Policy prioritisation is given to work of an urgent nature where the risk of tree failure or accident is greatest. For example in early November 2017 the outstanding EZYTREEV database work programme included:

Priority	Nature of work / task	Timescale	Number of tasks
Emergency	Storm damage, road blockages,	As necessary to make safe	none
1 a	Very Urgent. Dangerous high risk hazards. Predicted failures imminent. Full collapse, limbs, decay, defects in	To be done within 3 months	2
1 b	Dangerous hazards. Predicted failure attention needed within 6 months. Full collapse, limbs, decay, defects	To be done within 6 months	42
1 c	As above but within 12 months in low risk areas, plus recognised maintenance issues e.g. stem Clearing, crown lifting, bus shelter clearance etc	To be done within 12 months	161
2	As above but within 24 works to benefit the trees such as formative pruning, guard removal.	May be required within 12-24 months time	691

3	Recommended works to benefit the trees such as formative pruning, guard removal.	May be required within 24-48 months time	1,024
---	--	--	-------

This ongoing EZY programme does not include the weekly unforeseen work which often requires urgent attention. These tasks can include 24 hour emergency call outs for tree failures, police and public reports, highway obstructions, and storm damage during and after bad weather. Neither does it include the cyclical as and when required works as trees grow. For example each year epicormic growth is removed from up to 2,600 limes which affect highway visibility. Work also includes improving clearances over footpaths, cycle routes, road signs, street lamps, traffic lights and along bus routes when required.

11. The existing staff structure, available budget and the need to delivery wider service priorities (for up to six months arboricultural staff can be called up to supplement the summer grounds maintenance workforce) meaning that only Priority 1a tasks are attended to. For example during November averages of 15 tasks per week were undertaken. Over the course of the year some 400 Priority 1 tasks are completed
12. Priority 2 tasks from the preceding year will also be added to the work programme, depending on the reassessment of risk by the Arboricultural Manager.
13. The adoption of the Policy in 2016 has helped explain how work is prioritised and why work is often categorised of being low priority. For example, there is a perception amongst some residents that trees can be dangerous just because they are large. Requests for work to reduce the size of a tree and complaints about perceived tree nuisance are received several times a day. On inspection the majority of this requested work is non urgent low priority – Priority 3. Accepted nuisance issue work found is put on the work programme as priority 1 to be completed within 12 months.
14. On hearing that the work is of low priority or would be damaging to the trees, residents are often left disappointed with this level of service provided by the Council. To mitigate this, a number of Ward Committees are now seeking to directly fund work to trees. In

recognition of this and experiences of using the policy over the last 18 months a number of updates are proposed. These are detailed in the following paragraphs.

Proposed Policy Updates

15. Policy Statement 3 – Risk Assessments this has been updated to provide more details on the outcome of inspections and how this affects whether work is carried out to a tree or not.
16. Policy Statement 17 – this is a new policy and creates a mechanism for Ward Committees to fund work to trees which would not normally be carried out by the service as it is of a lower priority based on the inspection regime set out in Policy Statement 3.
17. Policy Statements 18 and 19 are new statements that set out the management of trees in woodlands and formal parks and gardens. For example, the previous policy was silent on the need to manage trees in relation to the historic design of a formal park.
18. Policy Statement 20 - this is a new policy that sets out a mechanism for the Assistant Director (Transport, Highways and Environment) to approve a decision to fell a tree which is in contravention of the Policy e.g. tree for road widening. Under such circumstances the decision will be taken in consultation with Ward Members and the Executive Member, and recorded in the Officer Decision Log.
19. The full policy and the proposed amendments and additions are provided as Annex 1.

Options and Analysis

20. For the reason set out in preceding paragraphs careful management is required if the Council's tree stock is to be maintained in a safe and sustained manner for future generations. The options open to the Executive Member are:

Option a) to accept proposed amendments.

Option b) to suggest other amendments.

Council Plan

21. The Arboricultural management policy contributes to the following Council Plan priorities:
 - Delivering frontline services for residents is the priority
 - Residents are encouraged and supported to live healthily

- Focus on the delivery of frontline services for residents and the protection of community facilities.
- Focus on cost and efficiency to make the right decisions in a challenging financial environment.

Implications

22. **Financial:** The management of the tree stock is funded through existing service budget.
23. There are no **Equalities, Crime and Disorder, Human Resources, Legal, Information Technology, Property** or **Other** implications arising from this report.

Risk Management

24. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified associated with the areas of work covered by the policy proposed in this report are those which relate to governance, i.e. stewardship of the Council's tree assets, and legal and regulatory, i.e. relating to health and safety. Measured in terms of impact and likelihood, the risk score has been assessed at 10 which equates to "Low". This is acceptable but means that regular monitoring is required of the operation of the new arrangements.

Annexes

Annex 1 –Arboricultural Policy for the management of City of York Council trees.

Background Papers

Decision Session – Executive Member for Culture Leisure and Tourism 24 June 2016 Review of Arboricultural Management of Council Trees

<http://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=736&MId=9549&Ver=4>

Contact Details

Author:		Chief Officer responsible:			
Dave Meigh Operations Manager – Public Realm Tel 01904 553386 Harvey Lowson Arboricultural Manager – Public Realm Tel 01904 551316		James Gilchrist Assistant Director, Transport, Highways and Environment			
		Report Approved	✓	Date	08.12.17.
Specialist Implications Officers:					
Wards Affected:				All	✓
For further information please contact the author of the report					