

<b>CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL</b>	<b>Cabinet</b> <b>22 January 2020</b>
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<b>Report title</b>	Tree and Woodland Strategy for Wolverhampton		
<b>Decision designation</b>	AMBER		
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Steve Evans City Environment		
<b>Key decision</b>	Yes		
<b>In forward plan</b>	Yes		
<b>Wards affected</b>	All Wards		
<b>Accountable Directors</b>	Ross Cook, Director for City Environment Richard Lawrence, Director of Regeneration John Denley, Director of Public Health		
<b>Originating service</b>	Regeneration/ Public Health/ City Environment		
<b>Accountable employee</b>	Ric Bravery Tel Email	Strategic Health Lead (Planning) 01902 552177 <a href="mailto:ric.bravery@wolverhampton.gov.uk">ric.bravery@wolverhampton.gov.uk</a>	
<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>	Regeneration Leadership Team Meeting	4 June 2019	
	Public Health Leadership Team	11 June 2019	
	City Environment Leadership Team	11 June 2019	
	Sustainability Advisory Group	4 July 2019	
	Regeneration Leadership Team Meeting	15 October 2019	
	Public Health Leadership Team	15 October 2019	
	City Environment Leadership Team	15 October 2019	
	Better Homes Board	16 October 2019	
	Strategic Executive Board	5 November 2019	

#### **Recommendations for decision:**

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy.
2. Endorse the principles of the Charter for Trees, Woods and People (the Tree Charter).

## 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek Cabinet's endorsement of the Charter for Trees, Woods and People (the Tree Charter) and approval of a Tree and Woodland Strategy for Wolverhampton.
- 1.2 The City of Wolverhampton Council declared a Climate Emergency on 17 July 2019. Some of the key benefits of trees and woodland are that they provide cooling, reducing flooding and absorbing carbon dioxide, thereby helping to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The Tree and Woodland Strategy will therefore make an important contribution to meeting the strategic aims of the Future Generations: Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy.
- 1.3 Other benefits of trees and woodland include:
  - Promoting physical activity and health and wellbeing, including mental health
  - Helping to improve air quality and reduce noise pollution
  - Supporting wildlife and promoting biodiversity
  - Helping to create a 'sense of place', local distinctiveness and attractive townscapes
  - Helping to attract new residents and investment and enhancing property prices
- 1.4 Adopting the Tree and Woodland Strategy and its Action Plan will support the protection and improved coverage of trees in the City. Adopting the Tree Charter helps raise the profile of trees in the City and complements the other actions in the Action Plan. Both support action in response to the Climate Emergency as well as helping to meet the strategic aims of the Council Pan.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Woodland Trust is the UK's largest woodland conservation charity and initiated the Charter for Trees, Woods and People (the Tree Charter), which was launched in November 2017, in response to the issues facing trees and woods in the UK. In October 2017, the Cabinet Member for City Economy invited the Regional External Affairs Officer of the Woodland Trust to speak at the Sustainability Advisory Group which recognised the importance of trees and woodlands and requested that employees investigate what activities the Council could undertake.
- 2.2 An initial Action Plan on trees and woodland was produced by employees. In December 2018, the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) published a consultation, *Protecting and enhancing England's trees and woodlands*, one of the recommendations of which was that councils produce a tree and woodland strategy. As a result of this and continued interest from residents, councillors and employees in issues around the management of trees in the City, the Vibrant and Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel on 6 December 2018 and the Sustainability Advisory Group on 31 January 2019 endorsed the production of a Tree and Woodland Strategy for the City.

### **3.0 The Charter for Trees, Woods and People (the Tree Charter)**

- 3.1 The Charter for Trees, Woods and People, or Tree Charter for short, was produced as a result of joint working between a range of bodies to highlight the importance of woods and trees and was launched in November 2017. The Charter has been signed by over 140,000 individuals and endorsed by a range of organisations which have pledged to support its aims.
- 3.2 The Tree Charter has 10 principles for a society in which people and trees can stand stronger together. These principles are:
- Sustain landscapes rich in wildlife
  - Plant for the future
  - Celebrate the power of trees to inspire
  - Grow forests of opportunity and innovation
  - Protect irreplaceable trees and woods
  - Plan greener local landscapes
  - Recover health, hope and wellbeing with the help of trees
  - Make trees accessible to all
  - Combat the threats to our habitats
  - Strengthen our landscape with trees
- 3.3 While the Council cannot take detailed action on every principle, by endorsing the Tree Charter it can show its recognition of the importance of woods and trees and demonstrate a commitment to their protection, improvement and provision where possible. Endorsement of the Tree Charter is a statement of intent but not a commitment to any specific actions. It does, however, support both the aims of the Council's proposed Tree and Woodland Strategy and action on the Council's Climate Emergency.
- 3.4 A summary of the Charter for Trees, Woods and People (the Tree Charter) is included as Appendix 1 and a link to the full Charter is provided here: [The Charter for Trees, Woods and People \(the Tree Charter\)](#).

### **4.0 A Tree and Woodland Strategy for Wolverhampton**

- 4.1 A Tree and Woodland Strategy, including an Action Plan, has been produced through joint work by employees across service areas, led by the Strategic Health Lead (Planning). As this Strategy and Action Plan are cross-directorate, key support has been given by Environmental Services while other service areas involved include City Housing, Wolverhampton Homes, City Transport, City Planning and City Development. The Tree and Woodland Strategy will form an important element of the Council's Future Generations: Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy and is intended to form part of its High Level Action Plan. It also supports the Council Plan's strategic aims of strong, resilient and healthy communities and of a vibrant, green city.

- 4.2 The Strategy is proposed to cover the period 2019-2029. It outlines the importance and benefits of trees to Wolverhampton, including in mitigating and adapting to climate change, plus the current approach to managing trees across the City, followed by an Action Plan. It is estimated that the City of Wolverhampton Council, including Wolverhampton Homes, is responsible for up to 450,000 trees in the City with many more on private property.
- 4.3 The objectives of the Tree and Woodland Strategy are to:
1. Protect existing stock of trees and woodland and length of hedgerows across the City, replacing trees and hedges when they are removed with planting of equal or greater value in as close a location as possible
  2. Increase coverage of trees, woodland and hedgerows by additional planting in line with targets to be established alongside the Council's Climate Emergency declaration
  3. Ensure coverage of trees and woodland and length of hedgerows across the City is in a breadth of locations including: street trees; new and existing residential areas; the city centre, town and district centres; commercial areas; and open spaces; with a focus on areas with low overall coverage and areas with high levels of deprivation and ill health, where residents have limited access to green infrastructure
  4. Preserve Ancient Woodland, ancient and veteran trees and other trees, woodland and hedges of ecological, cultural, historical, recreational and amenity value to the City
  5. Improve the amenity value of new and existing trees, woodland and hedges through species selection, location and management
  6. Contribute to climate change mitigation by increasing carbon capture by trees and woodland in the City
  7. Help the City adapt to climate change and reduce both the urban heat island effect and effects of surface water flooding by tree, woodland and hedgerow planting, particularly in areas of low tree coverage
  8. Improve biodiversity through planting and improved management of the City's trees, woodland and hedges, using a diverse range of UK sourced and grown species, including native species and those adapted to climate change
  9. Support regeneration and improve the image of the City, in both the public realm and private developments, to residents, visitors and investors
  10. Tackle social exclusion and improve public health by providing access to trees and woodland, along with other open space, for all sectors of the community
  11. Recognise the cultural and historical importance of trees and educate the public about their benefits including developing skills in wood working and woodland management
  12. Support sustainable procurement of timber and timber products, including recycled products
  13. Improve partnership working within and outside the Council to achieve these objectives

14. Contribute to the development and delivery of wider initiatives at a Black Country and West Midlands level including the Nature Improvement Area, emerging Nature Recovery Network, Natural Capital Vision and Investment Strategy and Black Country Garden City.
- 4.4 The Action Plan contains a series of actions aimed to meet these objectives under four headings:
- Policy
  - Engagement and promotion
  - Delivery of new trees and woodlands
  - Maintenance and future delivery of existing trees and woodland
- 4.5 The first action proposed in the Action Plan is to endorse the Tree Charter. Others have already been implemented, including introducing the Ecosia search engine as an option for staff and councillors on Council IT equipment, launched in September 2019. The Actions also include reference to the emerging Future Generations: Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy.
- 4.6 A six-week consultation with selected partners and the public was carried out in August and September 2019. 89 responses were received including detailed comments and suggestions from Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust, Friends of the Earth West Midlands, Natural England and the Woodland Trust. The responses to these and to the Council's Climate Emergency declaration, to which a number of responses referred, are reflected in the final recommended draft. The Strategy now includes aspirations to increase tree cover in the City. Among its Actions are proposals to survey tree cover in the City, set targets for increasing tree cover and a stronger reference to developing a tree planting programme. The final draft was approved by the Climate Change Advisory Group on 17 December 2019.
- 4.7 A copy of the final draft Tree and Woodland Strategy is included as Appendix 2 and an analysis of the consultation results and recommended responses as Appendix 3.
- ## 5.0 Evaluation of alternative options
- 5.1 The alternative option regarding the Charter for Trees was to not endorse the Charter. Given the support from and interest taken by the Woodland Trust, and the positive publicity available from endorsing the Charter, which complements the Tree and Woodland Strategy, plus the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency, it was considered that it is appropriate for the Council to endorse the Tree Charter as the first action in the Action Plan.
- 5.2 The alternative options regarding the Tree and Woodland Strategy were, one, to do nothing and, two, to just produce an Action Plan.

- 5.3 Option one, doing nothing, was not considered to be an option following the request made by the Sustainability Advisory Group for action to be taken and, reinforced by the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency.
- 5.4 Option two, producing an Action Plan was the initial response which was developed by employees. Following further consideration, as outlined in 2.2 above, it was decided that the best option was to produce a Tree and Woodland Strategy. If the Council does not produce a Strategy now, to its own requirements, it may be required in the future to produce one to a more prescriptive model dictated by Defra. The Council's subsequent adoption of a Climate Emergency has given additional value to the production of a Strategy which is likely to form an important element of the Council's Future Generations: Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy.

## **6.0 Reasons for decisions**

- 6.1 Endorsing the Tree Charter and adopting the Tree and Woodland Strategy would be positive for the Council and would support the aims of the Council Plan, Climate Emergency declaration and of several wider strategies, such as the Joint Public Health and Wellbeing Strategy. These actions would have a positive result for the City and help concentrate action to improve the cover and condition of trees and woodland in the City.

## **7.0 Financial implications**

- 7.1 There are no financial implications from endorsing the Tree Charter. The Tree and Woodland Strategy contains an Action Plan covering both maintenance and planting of trees, the financial implications of which will be addressed separately as individual actions are progressed and relevant approvals sought.  
[SM/21052019/N]

## **8.0 Legal implications**

There are no direct legal implications of endorsing the Tree Charter or approving the Tree and Woodland Strategy. The Tree and Woodland Strategy contains an Action Plan, the legal implications of which will be addressed separately as individual actions are progressed and relevant approvals sought.

[LW/21042019/A]

## **9.0 Equalities implications**

- 9.1 An Equalities Analysis has been completed for the Tree and Woodland Strategy and has identified several actions which can be taken as part of the Action Plan. These include, as part of the review of design guides, to ensure that the design of tree and woodland projects allows access for all sectors of the community, including groups with protected characteristics. They also include ensuring schemes are designed to take account of personal security and that events and their publicity take account of the needs and barriers to participation in protected groups.

- 9.2 The public consultation responses have been analysed by different groups with protected characteristics and no additional equalities issues have been identified.

## **10.0 Climate change and environmental implications**

- 10.1 As outlined in the main report, implementation of the Tree and Woodland Strategy's Action Plan would support mitigation of climate change, as trees remove carbon from the atmosphere, and help adapt to the effects of climate change by helping reduce flood risks and overheating and providing habitat for wildlife. It would also bring about a range of other improvements to air quality, biodiversity, open spaces and visual amenity. The Tree and Woodland Strategy will therefore form an important way of meeting the strategic aims of the Council's Future Generations: Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy which is currently under development.

## **11.0 Human resources implications**

- 11.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

## **12.0 Corporate landlord implications**

- 12.1 There are no corporate landlord implications arising from this report.

## **13.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

- 13.1 As outlined in the main report, implementation of the Tree and Woodland Strategy's Action Plan would bring about a range of improvements to air quality, flood risk, the urban heat island, open spaces and visual amenity which would have a positive effect on health and wellbeing.

## **14.0 Schedule of background papers**

- 14.1 None

## **15.0 Appendices**

- 15.1 Appendix 1 – Tree Charter Principles
- 15.2 Appendix 2 – Tree and Woodland Strategy for Wolverhampton
- 15.3 Appendix 3 – Consultation Comments and Responses
- 15.4 Appendix 3a - Consolation Comments and Responses Table 2
- 15.5 Appendix 3b - Consolation Comments and Responses Table 3
- 15.6 Appendix 4 - Tree and Woodland Strategy Objectives poster