

Notice of:	Cabinet Member for Climate Change
Decision Number:	PH35/2024
Relevant Officer:	Lisa Arnold, Assistant Director of Community and Environmental Services (Community and Wellbeing)
Relevant Cabinet Member:	Councillor Jane Hugo, Cabinet Member for Climate Change
Date of Decision:	19 March 2024

BLACKPOOL PARKS CELEBRATION TREE SCHEME

1.0 Purpose of the report

1.1 To seek approval to replace the memorial bench service with a Celebration Tree service, provided by Trees for Streets on behalf of Blackpool Council.

2.0 Recommendations:

2.1 To approve the transition from memorial benches to Celebration Trees in parks as a way of local residents remembering their loved ones.

2.2 To approve the charge of £400 for Celebration Trees with effect until 31 March 2025.

3.0 Reason for recommendations:

3.1 To introduce 'celebration trees' in place of installing new memorial benches. The 'celebration trees' will contribute towards a number of council strategies including the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, Tree Strategy, Climate Change Action Plan and provide a 'living memory' for relatives.

The proposed fee represents the costs of providing the Celebration Trees and will be reviewed annually moving forward.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 An alternative option would be to continue with the bench memorial scheme, however

the number of locations available across parks is limited and the amount of officer time taken in managing and providing the service is significant.

5.0 Council Priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priorities are both:

- “The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool”
- “Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience”

6.0 Background Information

6.1 The memorial bench scheme is a service, which has been in place for several years and has been mainly focused in Stanley Park.

6.2 There are approximately 200 benches in Stanley Park with further benches placed in several other parks.

6.3 Currently, a member of the public pays for a memorial bench and once it is installed in a park, it becomes a council asset. The Council are liable for its ongoing maintenance and ensuring the bench is in good condition. Any defects or broken elements, which can cause harm, need to be repaired as soon as possible or if damaged beyond repair, the bench is removed. The maintenance costs and time requirements can be considerable. There is limited space available across Blackpool Parks to continue installing benches in line with demand, therefore it is proposed that the service transition to providing ‘celebration trees’ as an alternative, which has a number of wider benefits. The proposals do not affect the existing memorial benches and the Parks and Green Open Spaces Service will ensure existing benches are maintained to a good standard.

6.4 The Parks Service have one part- time administration officer to take enquiries and liaise with bereaved families. Sadly, due to limited resources it is not possible to dedicate the time required to provide a personalised service for relatives and loved ones.

6.5 Therefore, it is proposed to transition to offering celebration trees through our partner, Trees for Streets, who offer this service already in various locations across the UK. The benefits include;

- The tree provides a reminder and memorial of a loved one
- A more affordable service for residents
- A personalised service for residents provided by a trained individual at Trees for Streets
- Capping the costs of maintaining the existing memorial benches
- Increases the number of trees planted

- Contributes to the Council's action plans and strategies regarding Climate Change, Green and Blue Infrastructure and tree planting targets

- 6.6 The cost for a celebration tree is £400 (subject to annual tree and material cost increases), as opposed to the current cost of £1,500 for a bench and £600 for the installation (subject to annual increases).
- 6.7 The Parks and Green Open Spaces Service will provide the parks and the locations for future celebration trees to Trees for Streets and they place all the information on their website, whilst promoting our partnership work. Any individual looking to plant a tree in memory of their loved one can contact Trees for Streets and receive a full service from a trained individual.
- 6.8 Trees for Streets has a dedicated member of the team, who will liaise directly with the resident and answer any concerns they may have. Their website contains an FAQ/scheme details section, which is personalised for each council. This would provide an initial platform to answer customer questions and in addition they have 'email a question' functionality on the website. Therefore, they have the capacity and capability to engage with the customer on a regular basis and keep them up to date on progress, ensuring a smooth transition from enquiry to the planting of the tree.
- 6.9 All of their information and requirements will be taken and sent to the Parks and Green Open Spaces service, and the tree planting will be added to the planting programme in line with the planting season. The customer would receive confirmation from Blackpool Council via Trees for Streets and the maintenance of the tree will be added to the existing tree maintenance programme.
- 6.10 Due to the level of funding in environmental improvements, celebration trees will add a sustainable and viable way forward to provide a living memorial. Tree maintenance costs can be provided through external funding for approximately 3 years until the tree is fully established.
- 6.11 A total of 17 Councils have already signed up to this service provided by Trees for Streets and report that it is working exceptionally well. The success of these partnerships elsewhere has resulted in an increase in the quantity of trees planted and provided another route for the community to take part in improving the environment for the benefit of the future. Several locations in Blackpool, have already been identified where remembrance woods can be created, which would inherently become quieter, reflective places. There will also be planting locations for individual trees which will complement existing parks features.
- 6.12 Once approved, the Parks and Green Open Spaces Service would be in a position to confirm the scheme with Trees for Streets and it is anticipated the new Celebration Tree

Service will launch in late Spring. The service will commence with planting celebration trees for the 2024/25 planting season.

For further information, please see the website for Trees for Streets:

<https://www.treesforstreets.org/celebration-trees/>.

6.13 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices

7.1 None.

8.0 Financial considerations:

8.1 The scheme would cost Blackpool Council £8,000 per year and £60 per tree, which will be funded through the purchase of a celebration tree at £400 per tree.

9.0 Legal considerations:

9.1 No legal considerations

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 If the Council does not receive the level of interest expected for the 'Celebration Tree' scheme and there is a remote possibility that scheme costs would not be covered. However, the Council has approximately 85 parks and green open spaces which can accommodate 100's of trees and therefore, with a healthy joint marketing strategy, the Council would be able to promote further tree planting.

10.2 There will be customer enquiries made to parks and green open spaces and in doing so, the service will respond to all queries with an agreed response to ensure consistency. Customers will be signposted to the celebration tree scheme and this will be provided on our website and marketed appropriately.

10.3 Any memorial benches installed will continue to be maintained in line with the existing agreement.

11.0 Equalities considerations and the impact of this decision for our children and young people:

11.1 The scheme will be accessible for all members of the community and contribute in creating a greener future for children and young people.

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

12.1 The entire scheme would create further opportunities to plant trees with the help of the community, contributing to creating sustainable environments, climate change adaptations and aligns with the action plans within the Tree Strategy and the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

13.1 Whilst there has been no internal or external consultation on the proposal, it is anticipated that it will be well received due to the more cost-effective nature of the celebration tree service. Furthermore, consultation and feedback relating to sustainability and climate change has highlighted a keen interest from members of the public who are keen to support the green agenda, which this proposal would allow them to do.

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 None.

15.0 Key decision information:

15.1 Is this a key decision? No

15.2 If so, Forward Plan reference number: N/A

15.3 If a key decision, is the decision required in less than five days? No

15.4 If **yes**, please describe the reason for urgency:

16.0 Call-in information:

16.1 Are there any grounds for urgency, which would cause this decision to be exempt from the call-in process? No

16.2 If **yes**, please give reason: N/A

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

17.0 Scrutiny Committee Chairman (where appropriate):

17.1 Date informed: Date approved:

18.0 Declarations of interest (if applicable):

18.1 None

19.0 Executive decision

19.1 The Cabinet Member agreed the recommendations as outlined above namely:

1. To approve the transition from memorial benches to Celebration Trees in parks as a way of local residents remembering their loved ones.

2. To approve the charge of £400 for Celebration Trees with effect until 31 March 2025.

20.0 Date of Decision

20.1 19 March 2024

21.0 Reason(s) for decision

21.1 The Celebration Trees will contribute towards a number of council strategies including the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, Tree Strategy, Climate Change Action Plan and provide a 'living memory' for relatives.

The proposed fee represents the costs of providing the Celebration Trees and will be reviewed annually moving forward.

22.0 Date Decision published

22.1 19 March 2024

23.0 Executive Members in attendance

23.1

24.0 Call-in information

24.1

25.0 Notes

25.1