

Report to: **CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Relevant Officer: Paul Hodgson, Service Manager for Parks and Green Open Spaces.
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Date of meeting: 20 March 2024

IMPLEMENTATION OF BLACKPOOL COUNCIL TREE STRATEGY 2021-2031

1.0 Purpose of the report

1.1 To provide the scrutiny committee with up to date details of the implementation of the tree strategy and work to plant, protect and maintain trees in Blackpool.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 To review the details of the implementation of the tree strategy.

3.0 Reason for recommendation(s)

3.1 The tree strategy and its action plan have been in place since 2021 and since then, steps have been taken to plant and maintain new tree plantings, whilst protecting our current tree populations. The tree strategy includes our statutory requirements and promotes technical and best practice through our policies. Whilst making strong links to existing strategies and current/new legislation regarding biodiversity, tree canopy cover and our legal responsibilities to their management.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy 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 None

5.0 Council priority

5.1 The relevant Council priority is:

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

6.0 Background and key information

6.1 The tree strategy was adopted in 2021 and sets the scene for our, then, current situation regarding trees, their management, our legal obligations, planning process, policies and an action plan to increase and promote a high standard of tree management and care. During its review process, the strategy was shared with internal services, councillors and industry professional bodies. In addition, the strategy was also reviewed by an external consultant as part of the risk resilience process. This feedback helped to shape the final document. The strategy highlighted four key objectives along with the promotion of eight adopted practices:

1. Implement the Tree Strategy in accordance with Blackpool's GBI Strategy, which aligns with Core Strategy Policy CS6.
2. Establish and promote a healthy tree culture and adopt the following practices:
 - Trees viewed as critical infrastructure (ecosystem service).
 - Focus on overall canopy cover and population structure and diversity.
 - Trees have equal priority to other infrastructure such as roads and services.
 - Economic value of trees recognised and valued.
 - Focus on larger longer lived canopy trees.
 - Overall tree population management.
 - Multi-purpose based design.
 - Tree population seen as a continuous resource regardless of ownership boundaries.
 - In accordance with BS 5837:2012, establish a responsible approach to developments and a re-planting specification for removed trees.
 - Manage our tree population with a proactive and informed approach, to maximise ecological, social and economic benefits.
3. In accordance with BS 5837:2012, establish a responsible approach to developments and a re-planting specification for removed trees.
4. Manage our tree population with a proactive and informed approach, to maximise ecological, social and economic benefits.

6.2 Since its adoption in 2021, the strategy has helped to shape the planning process for developers to provide better quality surveying documents such as tree surveys, habitat surveys, planting plans and landscaping specifications. It has ensured that every council owned tree removed as part of a development is replaced at a 2:1 ratio. It has highlighted to internal services and external partners the importance of trees within Blackpool's urban environment and our parks and green open spaces. The strategy also deals with legal protections for trees such as Tree Protection Orders, Conservation Areas, felling licenses and covenants, and how we as a council manage our

responsibilities and what processes we have in place. Our responsibilities regarding tree safety is vital to maintaining a healthy and safe tree population and therefore, the strategy sets out requirements for us to follow, as well as highlighting industry recognised inspection standards. As part of this, a risk guidance document was specified for creation to assist our maintenance partners, Enveco.

- 6.3 Tree planting is also another fundamental element of the strategy and throughout the document the standards of tree planting are referenced and promoted, along with the creation of a tree planting specification, both soft and hard landscaping. Funds have been generated through the development of environmental partnerships with external companies, charities and organisations. Along with contributions from ward funding and friends of groups.
- 6.4 Since 2021, 9597 trees have been planted and are part of a 3 year aftercare programme.
- 6.5 The development and adoption of the Tree Strategy also saw the funding for a Tree and Landscape Officer collaboratively funded by three services, Parks and Green Open Spaces, Planning and Highways, with the post sitting within the Parks and Green Open Spaces team. The post covers all day to day tree matters, oversees the tree survey works, as well as assisting highways, providing comment on planning applications and assisting with the implementation of the Tree Strategy actions.
- 6.6 The tree strategy action plan lists 27 actions under the 4 objectives and since 2021, the following has been achieved so far:

	Achieved	Ongoing
Objective 1	3 of 8	5 of 8
Objective 2	5 of 9	4 of 9
Objective 3	2 of 3	1 of 3
Objective 4	3 of 7	4 of 7

- 6.7 Objective 1’s actions relate to the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy with 3 actions already achieved and remaining underway or near completion, with ongoing monitoring and improvements required. Such as the ongoing TPO assessments, tree planting programmes and sponsorship schemes. The completed actions are:

1. Commission a borough wide tree survey	This was complete in 2022 and saw the data of over 11000 trees recorded along with safety requirements.
5. Continue to implement a tree planting programme that meets the needs of the strategy.	An annual tree planting programme is in place, along with an aftercare plan. Please see Appendix 8(a).

8. Ensure Planning follow the Tree Strategy and places conditions on proposed development outcome notices.	This resulted in an updated Supplementary Planning Document with clear specifications from the Tree Strategy.
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6.8 Objective 2's actions is establishing and promoting a healthy tree culture with 5 actions completed. Many of the actions relate to ongoing actions and monitoring, and are part of our ongoing commitment along with utilising existing and up and coming legislation, and most of all education through the ranger service and community engagement. The complete actions are:

2. Ensure Local Development Plan sets clear policy on trees and green infrastructure to ensure cross compliance with the Tree Strategy and to give clear guidance to developers.	Again, this resulted in an updated Supplementary Planning Document with clear specifications from the Tree Strategy.
4. Follow best practice biosecurity and create a sustainable supply of locally sourced trees, to reduce the spread of pests and diseases and in accordance with BS 3936-1:1992 Nursery stock.	Data collected as part of the tree survey on notable pests and diseases, along with working partnership with tree nurseries, who have biosecurity policies.
6. The promotion, learning and benefits of trees through Forest School activities by the Park Rangers.	Embedded in the Park Ranger's teaching and forms part of their annual forest school programme.
7. Implement the Park Rangers to carry out tree planting with groups of children as part of Plant for the Planet and involve the local community as volunteer Tree Planters.	This forms part of our annual tree planting programme, where we log our planting numbers and promote schools to do the same via Plant for the Planet. This accounts for approx. 4000 of our trees.
8. Volunteer Pack is created providing several roles to assist with Parks Service and to promote the importance of parks, trees and wildlife	Please see Appendix 8(c).

6.9 Objective 3' actions relate specifically to British Standards (5837), Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction and ensures we take a proactive approach retaining, protecting and planting trees, along with mitigating any loss. 2 of the objectives have been achieved with the third an ongoing assessable action. The completed actions are:

1. Parks Service and Planning to ensure Parks Service Flowchart for BS 5837:2012 Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition & Construction. Recommendations is followed.	Planning agreed to adhere to the flowchart and it has been in effect since 2021, shown at page 27 of the Tree Strategy.
3. Development sites aim to enhance tree canopy cover by retaining existing tree populations and by replacing removed trees at a 2:1 ratio.	This is part of the planning conditions via a review from the Tree and Landscape Officer and specified within the Supplementary Planning Document.

6.10 Objective 4 relates to how we manage our tree stock with 3 actions completed and many of the actions ongoing such as instigate a rolling review of the tree programme, ongoing tree protection measures and survey requirements. Therefore, we've achieved 48% of the action plan within the first 3 years of a 10 year action plan. The completed actions are:

1. A works programme to be developed from the tree survey to utilise the practices from NTSG – Common Sense Risk Management of Trees.	This forms part of the specification for the survey and the Tree Risk Management guidance provided to Enveco, please See Appendix 8(b).
2. Protect trees and woodlands through the implementation and use of local planning policy, TPOs and planning conditions where amenity is a consideration or the trees are under threat.	Policy and guidance is adopted, forms part of the Supplementary Planning Document and monitored by the Tree and Landscape Officer.
6. Create useable data from the tree survey to provide guidance on how to further develop our tree population.	This has informed several elements such as trees for biodiversity, air quality, pests and disease resilience, climate change adaptations and many more.

6.11 What's next? The tree strategy is set to be reviewed this year and will aim to set more ambitious targets regarding its objectives, as it was wrote during Covid and therefore, there was an element of unknown with timeframes and resources. It will align further with existing strategies, update elements in light of new legislation, account for non-identified actions and proactively account for up and coming guidance, legislation and best practices. This will also include the online live data tree survey map, which can be updated as and when safety works are carried out by Enveco, ensuring we have a continuous up to date record. The Parks and Green Open Spaces team will continue to drive the strategy forward and further establish and promote collaborative work, to improve our tree management and population.

6.12 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of appendices

- 7.1 Appendix 8(a) – Tree Planting Specification
- 7.2 Appendix 8(b) – Tree Risk Management Document
- 7.3 Appendix 8(c) – Volunteer Booklet

8.0 Financial considerations

8.1 Many of the actions outlined in the plan will require external funding. Any external funding bids will consider the financial commitment required from Blackpool Council on a bid-by-bid basis.

9.0 Legal considerations

9.1 The strategy and action plan align with current legislation highlighted at 7.4 National Policies at page 30 and 31 of the Tree Strategy. The review to take place this year, 2024 will add further details in accordance with the updated Environment Act 2021, The Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006 and emphasise further requirements regarding statutory biodiversity net gain requirements.

10.0 Risk management considerations

10.1 None.

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

11.1 None.

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations

12.1 The entire document and its implementation details contributes significantly to sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations. Furthermore, the details provided reflect and complement the council's ambitions in this area, with the review to take in 2024 to enhance this item further.

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken

13.1 A thorough consultation process took place in 2020 prior to the strategy being adopted in 2021.

14.0 Background papers

14.1 None.