

Brighton & Hove City Council

Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

Agenda Item 10

Subject: Tree Planting Plan and Ash Dieback Action Plan

Date of meeting: 21 June 2022

Report of: Executive Director – Economy, Environment & Culture

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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 This report presents Committee with the Tree Planting Plan and Ash Dieback Action Plan (“ADAP”). Both documents set out a clear strategy for managing Brighton & Hove’s tree population.
- 1.2 The Tree Planting Plan will be consulted on and then represented to this Committee and to Housing Committee in autumn 2022.

2. Recommendations

That Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee:

- 2.1 notes the draft Tree Planting Plan, that it will be subject to consultation and that a further report will be brought to the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee and to Housing Committee with the results of the consultation.
- 2.2 adopts the Ash Dieback Action Plan and grants delegated authority to the Executive Director of Economy, Environment & Culture to make minor amendments to the Plan.

3. Context and background information

Tree Planting Plan

- 3.1 The Tree Planting Plan is in Appendix 1 and sets out the council’s ambition to replace and extend the tree cover in Brighton & Hove, whilst diversifying woodlands to ensure the long-term sustainability of the city’s tree stock and maximise opportunities to increase biodiversity and meet with our declared Climate and Biodiversity Emergency and 2030 Carbon Neutral programme. This includes:

- Increasing canopy cover, ensuring the right tree is planted in the right place for the longevity of the specimen
- Creating a diverse tree stock that has greater resilience to the threats of future pests and diseases
- Engaging residents in improving their local communities and local food production through the process of tree planting and tree care
- Supporting the city's adaptation to a changing climate through nature-based solutions.

3.2 The Plan sets out:

- The current situation, highlighting two big threats to the city's tree stock, as a result of tree disease and climate change
- How the vision will be delivered
- How the council wants to work with communities
- The benefits of trees
- Historic tree felling activities
- Tree stock data
- 2021/22 tree planting statistics

3.3 Delivery of the Tree Planting Plan has been funded by:

- £0.200m capital funding for tree planting for the street scene (i.e. a tree stump replacement scheme)
- £1.000m funding for the next 5 years (inclusive of initial maintenance costs) from the Carbon Neutral Fund for street tree planting and new woodland creation
- Approximately £0.162m external funding secured from Forestry Commission Treescapes bid in FY2021-22 to match fund street scene tree stump replacement scheme
- Approximately £0.074m external funding secured from Forestry Commission Green Recovery Challenge Fund, in partnership with Trees for Cities and Plant Your Postcode, in FY2021-22 to plant trees in areas of high deprivation/low tree cover

3.4 The council will continue to seek external funding to deliver the Tree Planting Plan. There is a risk that tree canopy cover across the city will decline if recent investment in tree planting were to cease and/or not meet the demand.

3.5 £1.00m funding for Tree Planting was allocated from the Carbon Neutral Fund at Policy and Resources Committee in October 2021. It is intended that this funding will be split equally between street tree planting and the planting of new woodlands. This will enable planting of 200 – 300 street trees and anywhere between 800 and 150,000 parkland and woodland trees. The reason for the breadth of range reflects the disparity in costs between planting a street tree, a standard tree in a park or grassed area and a tree whip. The decisions on which type of trees to be planted will depend on land availability for new woodland planting

3.6 The council has already invested in staff resources to support the delivery of the Tree Planting Plan and the ADAP by recruiting additional staff, including:

- A full-time Arboriculture Manager who has been in post since March 2020 and is the lead for the Arboriculture department
 - A full-time Arborist Team Leader who has been in post since October 2021 and is the operational lead for the team of BHCC Arborists (aka Tree Surgeons)
 - A full-time Statutory Tree Officer who has been in post since January 2020 and reviews planning applications with respect to Arboricultural matters and manages Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)
 - A full-time Tree Planting Officer who has been in post since February 2021 and coordinates, plans and procures all tree planting schemes plus leads on bids for external funding and works alongside community groups to deliver new planting schemes
 - A part-time Tree Surveying Officer who has been in post since January 2021 and supports the Tree Planting Officer by surveying planting sites, arranging donation trees and facilitates community schemes.
 - A full-time Ash Dieback Coordinator who has been in post since November 2021 and coordinates the council's response to ADB by identifying, prioritizing, planning, procuring, and monitoring all ADB works, applying for felling licenses, engaging with stakeholders and the public and delivering the replanting commitments for the woodland areas affected
 - A full-time Housing Tree Officer who has been in post since October 2021 and provides technical arboricultural support to HRA to manage their entire existing tree stock appropriately and proactively, and also to advise HRA and liaise with the Tree Planting Officer to deliver tree planting upon HRA land
 - A full-time Tree Enforcement Officer, which is a new permanent post, funded for recruitment in financial year 2022-23 to work with the Statutory Tree Officer to improve TPO protection is yet to be filled
- 3.7 Prior to this team being in place the council did not have the financial or staff capacity to undertake large scale tree planting. The council allocated a budget of approximately £0.015m to new tree planting annually which was supplemented by community donations and volunteer labour. In the 5 years prior to 2021/22 the number of new trees planted averaged at 80 trees per annum.
- 3.8 In 2021/22 with the Tree Planting Officers in place and the wider arboriculture team, 425 trees and 2530 whips were planted:
- 93 trees planted to replace street tree stumps
 - 112 trees planted on council housing land (includes green space and street scene planting)
 - 30 trees planted through parks donations
 - 190 trees planted through resident, community and Green Spaces Forum-led schemes (includes street scene and parks planting)
 - 2400 whips planted to create new woodland
 - 130 whips planted as replacement Highways screening
- 3.9 The council intends to maintain this level of new tree planting annually as a minimum but as more land is identified for woodland planting the numbers of

trees planted could greatly exceed this. Over an above this we will be replanting where we have lost trees to Ash Die Back disease. It should be noted that as new tree planting increases resources are needed to care for them and ensure that they thrive. This will need to be factored in future resource allocation.

- 3.10 Brighton & Hove City Council declared climate and biodiversity emergencies in December 2018 and have responded to these by developing the Carbon Neutral 2030 programme which is a corporate priority. Implementing nature-based solutions for adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change and enhancing the resilience of the city's biodiversity is a key element of the programme, with tree planting identified as an essential tool to deliver this.

Ash Dieback Action Plan

- 3.11 The ADAP is in Appendix 2, setting out the challenges in relation to the loss of tree stock and how the council will address it. The two main objectives of the Plan are to:
- Reduce the risk to the public and property because of Ash Dieback
 - Replace the trees that are removed due to Ash Dieback
- 3.12 The council will be removing trees which may look healthy to the public, and some residents may be concerned by the works, but all trees have been surveyed by a professional Arboriculturist. The disease is not only affecting ash trees in Brighton & Hove, but also killing ash throughout the country, with the worst affected areas being in the south-east where major works have already taken place, removing hundreds-of-thousands of trees.
- 3.13 This approach allows the council to effectively manage the risk to public safety posed by diseased ash trees across the city via a programme of large-scale tree felling. It also ensures the regeneration of council-owned woodlands and areas with ash trees affected by the disease via an extensive replanting and on-going maintenance programme to improve tree species diversity, resilience and general biodiversity
- 3.14 Elm disease is also a problem, and the council is tackling this too by continuing with the long running programme of identifying and disposing of any infected elm trees, regardless of ownership, within the city as well as other control measures such as root trenching.
- 3.15 Delivery of the ADAP and the on-going control of Elm Disease during the current financial year 2022-23 is funded by £0.600m one-off funding which will be used primarily for tree felling operations.
- 3.16 The council has also invested in resources to support the delivery of the ADAP through an Ash Dieback Officer. Their role incorporates the delivery of the regeneration of sites affected which includes the planning, arranging and delivery of the extensive replanting requirements in our woodlands also applying for any available grants to assist the council financially in managing ADB.

- 3.17 In 2021/22, diseased trees at six sites were removed, including: Abinger Road, Mouslecoomb Way (Stage 1). Three Cornered Copse (Stage 1), Westdene Woods, Wild Park Woods (Stage 1) and Withdean Park (Stage 1). Table 3 in Appendix 2 details the planned works for 2022/23.
- 3.18 Appendix 3 sets out the actions that will be taken to deliver both plans.
- 3.19 The purpose of this report and the associated documents is to identify and clarify how we propose to meet these challenges but also what level of on-going funding is expected to be required, based on current forecasts, to achieve the recommendations considered as beneficial for the city, its residents and the council.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

Tree Planting Plan

- 4.1 Alternatives for not continuing with the scale of tree planting, as detailed within the Plan, will result in a steady decline in tree canopy cover as tree loss continues year on year. A decline in canopy cover will result in a loss of ecosystem service benefits which trees provide such as cooling effect, pollution capture, carbon capture, soil erosion protection, wildlife habitats etc., a loss of amenity and social benefits and a change in character of the city. There is a risk that tree canopy cover across the city will decline if recent investment in tree planting were to cease and/or not meet the demand.

Ash Dieback Action Plan

- 4.2 Given the location of most the city's ash trees is within woodland type areas, alternatives were discussed during the planning of the large scale works which have been completed so far. These included a non-intervention approach which would result in allowing infected ash trees to collapse over time. This would require no public access to all affected woodland areas, with extensive fencing/barrier infrastructure required to mitigate the risk to the public. This was considered not feasible given the open access nature of almost all of the city's woodland, the impact to residents in not having access to these spaces for multiple years, and also the inability to regenerate areas via replanting within a reasonable timeframe.
- 4.3 Furthermore, much of the early Ash Dieback felling works relate to high risk areas along the boundaries of woodland where roads and properties are under threat from declining ash trees. There is no other feasible option other than tree felling to mitigate the risk to substantial static structures and key pieces of infrastructure.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 Working with the community, resident and expert volunteers is critical for the council to manage the challenges and to achieve the objectives set out in the Tree Planting Plan and Ash Dieback Action Plan.

- 5.2 Consultation with council teams, cited within the Tree Planting Plan, has been incorporated within the Plan. Tree planting schemes led by City Parks do impact and involve many other teams/departments. Where potential resource / cooperation requirements have been identified from other teams, this has been presented for comment which has been largely positive, in principle.
- 5.3 Consultation on the Tree Planting Plan itself will primarily take place through the Tree Forum and will also involve Housing consultation forums.
- 5.4 Engagement and consultation with community groups, Councillors and volunteers is on-going with regards to tree planting. Tree planting days involving volunteers and Councillors are arranged during the planting season for appropriate schemes. Larger scale planting schemes have been funded and delivered in partnership with Plant Your Postcode and Trees for Cities through the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. Consultations regarding placement of trees and species selection are undertaken for community driven schemes in partnership with Plant Your Postcode. Discussions with respect to planting specifications, constraints and where trees can be planted, with all stakeholders, both internal and external, are ongoing and an important aspect of the engagement as this can be complex and limit where we can plant trees sustainably.
- 5.5 External engagement with regards to the council's management of ADB has been improved with the appointment of the dedicated ADB Coordinator. Although the management of ADB is not considered appropriate for consultation given the public safety implications, community groups, Councillors and members of the public are effectively responded to with details for individual sites when information is sought. Furthermore, information regarding upcoming works and details of Felling Licenses are published which includes tree species selected for any replanting conditions, as part of the Forestry Commission felling licenses issued prior to felling trees, which will apply to the majority of the ash to be removed.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The Tree Planting Plan has been developed to ensure the council can deliver on its ambitions to be carbon neutral by 2030 by having an extensive tree planting programme to enhance the benefits the city's trees provide (which include environmental, financial, societal, ecological and cultural) by ensuring tree canopy cover does not cumulatively decrease annually for future generations.
- 6.2 The Ash Dieback Action Plan ensures the council is meeting its duty of care to the public by managing the risk of diseased trees to public safety and preventing canopy loss through the woodland regeneration programme of replanting lost ash trees.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The draft Tree Planting Plan is supported through a series of funding streams outlined in section 3.3 of this report. Costs associated with the consultation for the Tree Planting Plan will be contained within existing City Parks Budgets. Any significant variations to budget will be reported as part of the council's monthly budget monitoring process.
- 7.2 The Ash Dieback Action Plan is funded from £0.600m one-off service pressure allocation in 2021/22 and 2022/23 respectively. The service pressure funding covered Ash and Elm Disease management. With the Ash Dieback Action Plan setting out works into 2023/24 additional one-off funding may be required and raised as part of the councils budget setting process. Costs of the Ash Dieback Action Plan in the current financial year (2022/23) will need to be managed within the approved funding. Any significant variations to budget will be reported as part of the council's monthly budget monitoring process.
- 7.3 Costs associated with the Ash Dieback Action Plan in relation to Housing Revenue Account owned land would be funded from existing resources within the HRA.

Name of finance officer consulted: John Lack Date consulted: 07/06/2022

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 As noted in the report, licences will be required for the felling of the majority of the ash trees. These licences are issued under the provisions of the Forestry Act 1967, section 9 of which states that save where statutory exemptions apply a felling licence is required for the felling of growing trees.

Name of lawyer consulted: Hilary Woodward Date consulted: 24/05/2022

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 There are no equalities implications arising from this report.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 The sustainability benefits arising from appropriate tree planting are numerous, including:
- Removing CO₂ to create a carbon sink
 - Improving air quality
 - Providing support to wildlife and increasing biodiversity
 - Creating valuable nature corridors between areas of green space
 - Moderating temperatures
 - Reducing damage by tree roots to infrastructure
 - Intercepting rainwater to help prevent localised flooding
 - Increasing resilience to future pest and diseases
 - Improving biodiversity and habitat creation

- 10.2 The Tree Planting Plan will create a diverse tree stock that has greater resilience to the threats of future pests and diseases, making it more sustainable.

11. Other Implications

Social Value and procurement implications

- 11.1 The social value benefits of trees are extensive and set out in Appendix 1 of the Tree Planting Plan.
- 11.2 The council is aiming to grow the in-house arboriculture service and reduce reliance on contractors over time. Apprenticeship posts have been built into the Cityparks Service.
- 11.3 However, given the volume of work, seasonal fluctuations and some of the specialist work required some contracted services will be required. The council is currently in the process of reprocurring the arboriculture works contract and the council's Social Value Procurement Framework will inform the contract specification.

Public health implications

- 11.4 Trees provide a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing, especially as they can be the only connection with nature in some built up areas of Brighton & Hove. Trees also help improve air quality, reducing the chances of asthma and other respiratory conditions by removing harmful particles. Trees also provide shade, which can help reduce the risk of skin cancer.
- 11.5 The reduction of the heat island effect provided by the shade and insulation trees provide especially in urban areas with large amounts of hard surfacing which reflects and also stores then releases solar heat; will become an ever more important benefit to public health as extremes in temperatures are predicted to become more common as the planet warms. Trees can also insulate buildings to lessen the effects of low temperatures, where present. More frequent extreme temperatures can negatively affect many with health vulnerabilities, especially where fuel poverty issues are a factor.
- 11.6 The wider health benefits of Tree cover are extensive and set out in Appendix 1 of the Tree Planting Plan.

Supporting Documentation

Appendices

1. Tree Planting Plan
2. Ash Dieback Action Plan
3. Tree Action Plan