

Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 16th October 2013

Agenda item: 8

Wards: All Wards

Subject: Update of Progress on Action Plan from Scrutiny Review on Trees

Lead officer: Chris Lee, Director of Environment & Regeneration

Lead member: Councillor Andrew Judge, Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Forward Plan reference number: N/A

Contact Officer: Doug Napier, Greenspaces Manager. Tel: 020 8545 3657

Recommendations:

A. That the Sustainable Communities O&S Panel notes the updated position and progress on the action plan arising from the scrutiny review on trees, undertaken in the period 2011 to 2012.

B. That the Panel determines whether and when it wishes to receive a further progress update.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 To present an update on the action plan and recommendations included within the Scrutiny Review report on trees that was produced earlier this year and presented to the Panel on 10th January 2013.

2. DETAILS

2.1 The Council's Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed to establish a task group to review the management of the borough's trees in May 2011.

2.2 The Sustainable Communities O&S Panel agreed the task group membership and the project's terms of reference in September 2011

and subsequently the task group met on six occasions to review a number of tree related issues and consider relevant evidence.

2.3 The task group completed its report in February 2012 and made six recommendations aimed at improving the borough's street scene and wider environment through improvements to the management and procedures in relation to its tree stock.

2.4 The report was considered and endorsed by the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 24 April 2012.

2.5 The task group report and its recommendations were considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 11 June 2012 when it was agreed that officers, working in conjunction with relevant partners and Cabinet members, would implement the recommendations.

2.6 The Sustainable Communities O&S Panel considered an action plan in relation to the six recommendations at its meeting on 10th January 2013 and agreed to performance manage delivery of the action plan every six to nine months as part of their work programme

2.7 This report is the first update on progress on the delivery of the action plan.

3. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

3.1 In carrying out its review, the Panel task group circulated a questionnaire to members of the public in the autumn and held an information evening on the topic of trees in February 2012. The task group also raised awareness of the review through the Community Forums. 89 questionnaire responses were received from individual residents and the analysis of the responses was included in the report considered by the Panel in April 2012.

3.2 Key members and senior officers from the relevant teams and divisions were consulted and contributed to the preparation of this report.

4. TIMETABLE

4.1 The task group was established by the Sustainable Communities O&S Panel and the report was presented to the Panel meeting on 24th April 2012 for the Panel's approval.

4.2 The report was considered and endorsed by the Council's Cabinet on 11th June 2012.

4.3 The formal response in respect of the Panel's report's recommendations was presented to the Panel on 10th January 2013, including an action plan.

4.4 Details of the implementation timescales were included within the action plan.

5. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None for the purposes of this report. The financial, resource and property implications of implementing the agreed recommendations will be met by the various local authority departments and divisions concerned. The timescales outlined within the action plan reflect the fact that there is no anticipated revenue growth provision for the projects and initiatives contained therein.

6. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None for the purposes of this report.

7. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None for the purposes of this report. The subject matter of the report and its implications are borough-wide, cover all sections of the community and do not discriminate against any particular group.

8. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None for the purposes of this report.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None for the purposes of this report.

10. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

10.1 Appendix 1: Progress Update on action plan arising from the Scrutiny Review of Trees, 2011-12

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Action Plan arising from the Scrutiny Review of Trees, 2011-12

APPENDIX 1

Progress Update on action plan arising from the Scrutiny Review of Trees, 2011-12

Introduction

The following table provide an updated position of progress against the original action plan timetable in relation to each of the six recommendations of the Scrutiny Review of trees conducted in the period 2011-12 by the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel task group.

Recommendation 1:

That Cabinet lead on the development of a Tree Strategy for the Council. The Strategy should be aligned to the Borough's development aims, Local Development Framework, Core Strategy etc and Duty of Care considerations - as set out in paragraph 56.

Task	Original Timetable	Progress Update
Establish a cross-divisional and interdepartmental steering group involving relevant officers and other key stakeholders to oversee production of tree strategy	By April 2013	Established April 2013 with representation from the key tree-managing sections within the Council
Identify resources to support process	By June 2013	Resources secured
Agree timetable, scope and themes	By September 2013	Agreed
Commission strategy	By October 2013	On target
Progress review	From November 2013	On target
First draft report	By March 2014	By March 2014
Final draft report	By June 2014	By June 2014
Report sign-off by key stakeholders and members	By October 2014	By September 2014

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Recommendation 2:

That existing data collection and analysis should be established and strengthened - as set out in paragraph 60.

Proposed and Current Actions:

Task	Original Timetable	Progress Update
Implement 3-year cyclical inspection cycle within parks and open spaces	Current & ongoing	Current & ongoing
Implement 2-year cyclical inspection cycle for schools and other non-highway Council trees	Current & ongoing	Current & ongoing
Implement 3-year inspection cycle for Highways trees	Current & ongoing	Current & ongoing
Liaison with other London boroughs and partners, including via London Tree Officer's Association, to share information and data	Current & ongoing	Current & ongoing, including in relation to, for example: biosecurity threats; de-icing salt damage to trees; conflicts between trees & CCTV cameras; canopy cover; drought measures, etc.
Corporately, to utilise the improved data and analysis for the better management of the borough's tree assets	From January 2013	Data gathering exercise completed for schools sites and for highways trees in the Wimbledon Park Grid area to inform future operational strategy
Conduct i-Tree canopy assessments for the borough.	Current & ongoing	Two i-Tree Canopy datasets now exist 1. Total tree & other green infrastructure landcover: approximately 24% of the borough is under tree canopy 2. Tree and green infrastructure cover

		broken down by private & public ownership
Combine benefit and value data with i-Tree canopy assessments	From January 2013	Both data sets exist in sample format and can be combined when required and resources are available

Recommendation 3:

That Planning and Enforcement procedures are clarified and more effectively enforced - as set out in paragraph 62.

Proposed and Current Actions:

Task	Original Timetable	Progress Update
Adopt and implement recommendations of borough tree strategy in respect of planning and enforcement issues	From October 2014	From September 2014
Improve skills and knowledge of planning enforcement officers in relation to the identification of dead and diseased trees on development sites	By December 2013	By December 2013
Summary information on Tree Preservation Orders to be available online	By March 2014	By March 2014
Increased cooperation and liaison between the intradepartmental tree officers in relation to planning issues.	Current & ongoing	Current & ongoing Increased direct working between Greenspaces and Highways sections on highways tree management issues since April 2013
Provide online advice to encourage developers and applicants to seek and secure competent	By April 2014	By April 2014

professional arboricultural advice where necessary		
Review policies and procedures in relation to trees and crossover applications and amend as necessary.	By September 2013	Traffic & Highway Services will be reviewing its policies and procedures imminently and is keen to protect the location of existing trees, including vacant tree pits. This move will involve potential changes to the Council's crossover policy and as such will need to be clearly communicated to members and residents before being endorsed during the 2014/15 financial year

Recommendation 4:

That the local community are encouraged to become involved in caring for the Borough's trees – as set out in paragraph 63.

Proposed and Current Actions:

Task	Original Timetable	Progress Update
Support and promote Merton Tree Wardens and residents and friends groups on tree related matters	Current & ongoing	Current & ongoing Tree wardens remain very active in the borough on a range of practical & administrative fronts
Support learning and development needs of tree wardens and friends on relevant tree matters	Current & ongoing	Further training undertaken in relation to OPM identification
Improve the understanding of the public and local authority officers on the value,	By December 2013	By December 2013

benefits and needs of trees via the Council website		
Improve information available to ward members on local tree works in their areas	By March 2013	Information dissemination working satisfactorily
Instigate educational outreach work with local schools on trees and tree planting projects	From September 2013	Schools involvement planned for tree planting schemes in winter 2013/14

Recommendation 5:

That accessible information is provided – as set out in paragraph 64.

Proposed and Current Actions:

Task	Original Timetable	Progress Update
Provide better information on trees, tree works and tree planting projects on the Council website and to local community forums	By December 2013	From December 2013 On target. There are plans to promote details of winter 2013/14 community tree planting projects on the Council's website and via the local media when these details are confirmed Traffic & Highway Services is currently updating its web content in relation to highway trees and verges and this will be live and online by the 1 st April 2014
Provide summary of tree strategy and key Council policies and procedures in relation to trees online.	By December 2014	By December 2014 New information on satellite & digital television reception in relation to trees has

		recently been posted on the Council's website
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Recommendation 6:

That Cabinet review how tree planting and maintenance is financed – as set out in paragraph 66.

Proposed and Current Actions:

Task	Original Timetable	Progress Update
Commitment to woodland creation and improvement of the urban forest via an ongoing capital input: annual tree planting programme in open spaces and street scene	Current & ongoing	<p>Current & ongoing</p> <p>Funding allocations for tree planting projects for parks and the street scene in winter 2013/14 have been agreed. Planting locations are currently in the planning stages.</p> <p>Traffic & Highway Services continues to plant new street trees, however much of this is dependent upon funding from the London Mayor. It is extremely important that as new trees are planted the corresponding revenue budget is increased to allow the local authority to fund ongoing maintenance</p>
Ensure that any capital investment in the tree stock does not end with the planting of the tree but that tree establishment costs beyond the first year are integral to the project capital funds or that associated growth in revenue budgets is provided	By April 2013	Ongoing maintenance requirements are increasingly factored into the financial aspects of tree planting initiatives. All Merton Council funded planting projects in 2013/14 will have such provision, for example. Further work is required in respect of externally funded initiatives however,

		<p>where the focus, alas, remains more firmly upon tree planting and not after-care</p> <p>It is vital that funding is provided for the maintenance of trees otherwise there is little point providing capital money to plant new trees</p>
<p>Ensure that all tree losses are quantified in monetary terms using, at present, the CAVAT method, and that these asset values are utilised in practice</p>	<p>From April 2013</p>	<p>Progress continues in surveying and inspection with Ezytreev, which provides monetary values with the aim of providing an annual assessment of loss values for parks & schools trees, resources permitting</p> <p>The introduction of cyclical inspection for highways trees via Ezytreev will permit the generation of monetary values</p> <p>It is anticipated that a planned inspection regime for highways trees using Ezytreev will formally commence on the 1st April 2014. At present field tests are being undertaken to ensure the local authority is ready to move to this form of inspection in the new financial year</p>
<p>Provide ongoing tree asset (total stock) valuations to determine loss/gain in the</p>	<p>From April 2013</p>	<p>This is work is ongoing.</p> <p>Complete reports can be generated for</p>

<p>resource and indicate direction of travel</p>		<p>schools tree stock.</p> <p>Approximately 50% of reports can be generated for parks trees with extrapolated estimates for the total.</p> <p>Reports can be generated for Wimbledon Park Ward for highways trees following survey this year with extrapolated estimates for the total</p>
<p>Continue to support and participate in the training, information exchange and networking activities available through the London Tree Officers' Association and other professional organisations</p>	<p>Current & ongoing</p>	<p>Current & ongoing work.</p> <p>Merton hosted an LTOA seminar earlier this year and officers continue to attend workshops and provide input to the LTOA's work and to other professional arboricultural organisations as required</p>
<p>Encourage participation and maximise contribution of trained community volunteers in field survey in respect of biosecurity threats, including Oak Processionary Moth (OPM)</p>	<p>Commenced July 2012 and ongoing as required</p>	<p>Community volunteers participated in summer 2013 OPM survey efforts and the borough's tree wardens fulfil a vital role in tree planting projects and information dissemination/collection.</p> <p>Resource limitations preclude significant volunteer involvement above and beyond current levels</p>
<p>Consider what additional resources may be required to extant and future biosecurity</p>	<p>Currently under review; actions ongoing in relation to OPM and likely to remain so in the foreseeable future</p>	<p>Greenspaces' arboricultural team's input via the relevant LTOA steering group has been instrumental in</p>

<p>threats and secure these where necessary</p>		<p>securing the provision of central government funds for OPM treatment throughout London.</p> <p>Many other biosecurity threats are emerging and, generally, a rapid response will be required when threats arise, including any necessary funding</p>
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