

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 24th October 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director - Environment and Regeneration

PORTFOLIO: Environment and Urban Renewal

SUBJECT: A Strategy for Halton's Trees and Woodlands

WARD(S) Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to ask Members to consider and approve an updated Halton Trees and Woodlands Strategy.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

Executive Board approve the updated Trees and Woodland Strategy attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 At the meeting on 13th December 2018, the Council's Executive Board considered a report on the adoption of a Strategy for Halton's Trees and Woodlands. Executive Board was advised that the intention of the Strategy was to clearly articulate how the Council would manage its trees and woodlands and help to identify priorities for its work programme.

3.2 The draft Strategy presented to Executive Board followed the principles developed by a Member-led Tree and Woodland Working Group that was established under the Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board. At the meeting on 13th December 2018, Executive Board approved the adoption of the Strategy that set out the Council's Policy for the management of Halton's trees and woodland assets (Minute EXB71/2018 refers).

3.3 A review and updating of the Council's adopted Trees and Woodland Strategy has recently been undertaken as one of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan objectives ES10. A proposed new draft Strategy is attached as Appendix 1

3.4 Members are advised that there are no material changes to the Council's Policy since the adopted Trees and Woodland Strategy was approved by Executive Board in December 2018. The primary updates to the proposed new draft Trees and Woodland Strategy

are limited to those matters set out below:

- The refreshed Strategy acknowledges the new burdens to local government authorities under the Environment Act 2021, namely:
 - The UK Governments target to increase tree cover from 14% to 17%.
 - The introduction of a 'Duty to Consult' on the Felling of Street Trees which are not exempt.
 - Biodiversity Net Gain during the planning process on applicable sites.
- New data that has become available which has allowed the following to be included:
 - Introduction of a Borough-wide target for tree canopy cover of over 23%; an increase of over 7.5% from 2022 levels by 2030 - This will be monitored through Bluesky National Tree Map dataset.
 - Mapping of Canopy cover down to Ward level to allow targeting of resources where constraints allow and the identification of 12 priority wards.
 - Reports from the Woodland Trust's Tree Equity Score highlighting the effect of Halton's urban forest on communities living on low incomes and others disproportionately impacted by extreme heat, pollution, and other environmental hazards.
- Emerging information relating to tree pests and disease, and the effects of climate change on species selection.
- The draft Strategy makes references to updated Council Policy and Plans, such as:
 - Delivery and Allocations Plan (DALP) 2022
 - Climate Change Action Plan 2022 – 2027
 - Big Halton Forest Project.

3.5 The draft Trees and Woodland Strategy has been shared with external partners for comment, including The Mersey Forest, The Woodland Trust and Tree Equity Score. The draft Strategy has also been shared with the Council's Planning, Highways and Property Services Teams from comment.

3.6 Members are asked to consider and approve the updated draft Trees and Woodland Strategy attached as Appendix 1.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no new Policy implications as a result of this report.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no new Financial implications as a result of this report

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

Maintaining healthy Trees, and Woodlands for people to enjoy, will contribute significantly towards health and wellbeing.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

Trees and woodlands have a significant positive impact on the attractiveness of the Borough. An attractive environment encourages inward investment and development.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Trees and Woodlands contribute towards the positive development of children and young people by creating pleasant environments in which to play and learning can take place.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

No direct impact

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

Please see comments in 9.0 below.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

As per 6.3 above, all residents can enjoy the pleasant environments that our woodlands provide.

Further, the strategy contributes towards a 'safer Halton' as it sets out how the Council will inspect and maintain its trees to ensure a safe environment for all.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 There is a risk in not having an up to date and fit for purpose Strategy to guide the Council's approach and actions for the management of its Trees and Woodland. Maintaining existing Policy, allied to an updated Strategy, would mitigate the risks associated with these assets.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 There are no equality or diversity implications as a result of this report.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The management and improvement of the Council's trees and woodlands, and the extension to the planting of trees via the Big Halton Forest, will have a positive impact upon the Council's climate change Action Plan, objectives and targets.

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Executive Board Report- 13 th December 2018: A Strategy for Halton's Trees and Woodland	Municipal Building Kingsway Widnes	Jimmy Unsworth – Head of Environment Services
Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board - 23 rd March 2016: Findings and recommendations of the 2015 Tree Working Group	Municipal Building Kingsway Widnes	Jimmy Unsworth – Head of Environment Services