

Surrey Heath Borough Council

Executive

18 April 2023

Tree Strategy and Action Plan

Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Rebecca Jennings-Evans
Strategic Director/Head of Service	Nick Steevens
Report Author:	Sue McCubbin and Rosie Cox
Key Decision:	Yes
Date Portfolio Holder signed off the report	17 March 2023
Wards Affected:	All

Summary and purpose

Following a notice of motion at Council in December 2021 the Council has developed a Borough-wide Tree Strategy and Action Plan. This acknowledges the Climate Emergency and the Ecological Emergency declared by the Council. The Tree Strategy falls under action ENV04 in the Council's Annual Plan 2022/23.

This Strategy acknowledges how important trees are to the local community, the benefits they bring, and the way that they help to mitigate for the effects of climate change.

Trees are a valuable resource. They contribute to the quality and character of Surrey Heath's unique environment, and to improving air quality, climate amelioration, conserving water, preserving soil, and supporting wildlife. For these reasons and for their intrinsic value, the Council places great weight on the retention of existing trees wherever possible.

The action plan provides direction on how to achieve and maintain high tree coverage within in the borough.

Recommendation

The Executive is advised to resolve that the Tree Strategy and Action Plan, as set out at Annex A to the report, be adopted.

1. Background and Supporting Information

- 1.1 On the 9 of October 2019, the Council declared a Climate Emergency and pledged to become carbon neutral by 2030 across its own estate and

operations, including contractors used, and support the actions being taken by Surrey County Council in this area.

- 1.2 Surrey Heath is committed to showing leadership, working with partners, businesses and residents to undertake local action on the environment. In doing so we will work to protect and enhance our natural environment for future generations.
- 1.3 Surrey Heath has estimated 36.1% of tree cover which is the highest of any local authority in the UK. This strategy acknowledges the importance of trees to the local community, the benefits they bring, and the way that they help to mitigate for the effects of climate change.
- 1.4 Proper planning and maintenance creates healthy and robust woodland which is better able to thrive in our changing climate, provide important habitats, and deliver the multitude of benefits we all appreciate.
- 1.5 Tree Strategy and Action Plan has been developed with the Senior Green Space Officer, the Greenspaces team, the Climate Change Officer, the Arboricultural Officer, and the Planning Policy Team.
- 1.6 The Tree Strategy and Action Plan has been reviewed and endorsed by the Climate Change Working Group and the Villages Working Group.

2. Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 The Strategy and Action Plan describe how Surrey Heath Borough Council will approach the management of trees and woodland. It is important that the benefits of trees, hedgerows and woodland are considered in relation to the need for development and, that existing trees are safeguarded and opportunities are taken to increase provision.
- 2.2 The aim of this Strategy is to reinforce the Council's role as a responsible tree owner and to encourage residents and partners to be responsible tree owners. It promotes the planting of trees in new developments, provides direction for the increase of canopy cover, and highlights the environmental importance of trees.

3. Proposal and Alternative Options

- 3.1 The Tree Strategy and Action plan are the first iteration of a strategy which will continue to be amended and enhanced. The actions and objectives will continue to be expanded upon.
- 3.2 The Tree Strategy will be monitored via the Climate Change Action Plan. There will be an annual review of the strategy and any changes proposed will need to be approved by the Strategic Director for Environment and

Community, the Climate Change Portfolio Holder, and the Climate Change Working Group.

3.3 The actions will be delivered within existing resource.

3.4 The executive is invited to suggest any amendments.

4. Contribution to the Council's Five Year Strategy

4.1 **Environment** – Enhancing and improving access to the borough's green spaces and natural environments for the enjoyment of generations to come. The Tree Strategy is part of our commitment to Climate Change alongside local communities and partners.

4.2 **Health and Quality of Life** – Improving health and wellbeing as trees and green spaces are well-known to have a positive impact on health and wellbeing.

5. Resource Implications

5.1 Actions in action plan may be dependent on additional funding being secured to deliver against targets.

6. Section 151 Officer Comments:

6.1 Any request for funding will have to follow the Council process of budget bid at budget setting time, or an in-year supplementary estimate.

7. Legal and Governance Issues

7.1 Adoption of the Strategy is an Executive decision.

8. Monitoring Officer Comments:

8.1 None

9. Other Considerations and Impacts

Environment and Climate Change

9.1 The Tree Strategy and Action Plan promote the protection and maintenance of trees in line with the Council's environmental goals.

9.2 Trees and hedgerows provide a valuable resource in terms of biodiversity, amenity and for climate change adaption and mitigation, providing habitats for a range of wildlife, and forming a "carbon sink". They reduce the risks of flooding and can help to reduce the Urban Heat Island effect where urban areas experience higher temperatures than non-urban areas.

Equalities and Human Rights

9.3 N/A

Risk Management

9.4 N/A

Community Engagement

9.5 The Strategy and Action plan will be publicly accessible on Surrey Heath Borough Council's website to encourage residents to be responsible tree owners. It will also promote an awareness of the Council's role as a responsible tree owner.

Annexes

Annex A - Surrey Heath Borough Council Tree Strategy and Action Plan 2023-33

Background Papers – None