

North Lanarkshire Council Report

Environment & Transportation

approval noting

Ref RS/NP/VA

Date 12/02/19

Tree Asset Management Strategy

From Head of Environmental Assets

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Executive Summary

North Lanarkshire Council has a significant tree resource, much of which is mature or over mature. However, across the Council the full extent and condition of the asset is entirely unknown and not under any proactive management.

In June 2019 North Lanarkshire Council declared a climate emergency with the aim of achieving zero emissions by 2030, if feasible. Our tree assets have a role to play in helping towards this challenging target by reducing CO₂ in the atmosphere, they also bring additional benefits such as supporting wildlife and biodiversity, preserving soil and improving air quality.

Tree failure has been identified as a risk in Environmental Assets Risk Register, and undoubtedly exists as an issue across any tree asset owner, as significant tree assets also sit within other Council services such as Housing, Education and Facilities. The establishment and implementation of a centralised co-ordinated and managed tree asset management strategy would address this, and serve to minimise the liability to the Council.

There are resource implications in establishing both the inspection and management required to deliver the strategy.

It is proposed that the Council develop a draft strategy for approval and that it will include timescales for implementation and outline resources required for delivery.

Recommendations

That the Environment and Transportation committee:

- 1) Approves the approach set out in this report to develop the Tree Asset Management Strategy along the principles outlined.
 - 2) Approves the draft objectives as a framework for strategy development for trees and woodlands in Council ownership throughout North Lanarkshire.
 - 3) Approves the consolidation of budgets used across services over the last five years to perform any tree or woodland management activities.
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The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority Enhance participation, capacity, and empowerment across our communities

Ambition statement (17) Ensure we keep our environment clean, safe, and attractive

1. Background

1.1 The council has a large tree asset basis including street trees, amenity planting in parks and greenspaces and largescale woodland planting. Our trees provide many functions for local communities including improving environmental quality, improving air quality, providing habitat for a wide range of biodiversity and reducing atmospheric CO2.

1.2 The Council places a high priority on public safety and this should extend to the management of its tree assets. All landowners, public or private, have a duty of care to ensure that they have taken reasonable steps to prevent or minimise the risk of personal injury or damage to property arising from the our tree assets.

However, a number of cases nationally in recent years where damage or injury have resulted from tree failure, have provided clarification of the requirement on tree owners. An inspection regime based on target risk is generally accepted as an appropriate and reasonable response by landowners. Guidance from HSE, Forestry Commission and the Arboriculture Association endorse this approach.

1.3 Current tree management is based on reactive maintenance, and it is recognised that a management strategy that defines a reasonable inspection and maintenance regime should be introduced.

The council has in place a memorial management strategy within the Cemeteries Service that uses similar principles. Data management of the inspection and maintenance regime can be managed through the CONFIRM asset management system in the same way as memorial management.

1.4 Current information held on both the extent of our tree stock within Environmental Assets and its current condition is limited. Areas of woodland where we have undertaken recent woodland improvements through our Woodland In and Around Towns (WIAT) projects have had both recent inspection and improvement works. But other than this programme there has been no formal inspection.

1.5 A recent audit by the Head of Environmental Assets has identified there is currently little information held on the location, type or condition of our trees and work is undertaken on a limited reactive basis, as and when issues arise. This is unacceptable, and the entirety of this asset needs to be brought into scope and managed.

1.6 It is proposed that tree assets are categorised, inspected and mapped according to risk. There is considerable work required to undertake this initial mapping and additional resources will be required, in both inspection/survey, GIS mapping and subsequent asset management.

1.7 It is proposed that we identify historic spend on trees for consolidation to assist with this new consolidated management approach across the Council.

2. Report

2.1 Putting in place a tree asset management strategy will allow the council to manage its trees in a more planned and proactive manner. It is essential within our tree management principles that a balance is found between the benefits of risk reduction and the cost of risk reduction (not only financial, but also in terms of the loss of amenity

and other tree related benefits, particularly those related to health and wellbeing). The tree asset management strategy needs to focus on a proportionate strategy which recognises the benefits that our trees provide.

2.2 It is proposed the Council's Tree Asset Management Strategy will have the following objectives:

- Conserve, protect, maintain and enhance the council's tree resource
- Ensure public safety so far as is reasonably practicable and minimise damage to property
- Establish an inspection and remediation regime using a risk based approach for all trees and woodlands on Council land.

2.3 It is a particular challenge of tree management that owing to their natural and non-manmade structure, it is entirely normal (and natural) for trees to lose limbs, decay and eventually to fall. Management should therefore focus on trees and their role as a living organism, playing their part in a multifaceted ecosystem.

The Council's trees are an asset and a positive contributor to carbon capture and storage, the benefits of which could be increased through new planned planting. Our tree assets can assist in the Council's ambition to reach zero emissions by 2030.

The Proposed Tree Asset Management Regime

2.4 The proposed tree inspection regime comprises four stages and will determine the rate of inspection within a cycle of 1 – 4 years. The stages being:

An assessment of risk

Initially a desk based exercise to identify and map risk zones (in relation to location), based on the two principles of target (people or property) and frequency of use (of the site). This will enable the focussed allocation of resources to areas most in need.

An assessment of hazard

Relating to the tree itself and its potential for failure (based on physical and physiological defects). Visual Tree Inspections will be carried out from the ground, by qualified and experienced personnel.

A plan for remedial action

Where the likelihood of a hazardous event is raised, managing the risk at an acceptable level (prioritising and undertaking work according to level of risk). Where tree removal is chosen as the only available option then this stage will also include tree replacement at the same or another suitable location.

A plan for recording and ongoing inspection

Using the Council's CONFIRM system.

2.5 The National Tree Safety Group (Common Sense Risk Management of Trees) sets out the requirement under health and safety legislation as having a suitable and sufficient risk assessment and to apply measures that are reasonable and practicable.

Proposed Risk Zones:

Level of Priority:	Description:
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High - inspected every 2 years (and reactively)	Where the likelihood of harm or damage to people or property being caused or not by tree failure is equal e.g. Trunk road and A road corridors and high use open spaces
Moderate – inspected every 3-4 years (and reactively)	Where the likelihood of harm or damage to people or property being caused by tree failure is unlikely e.g. Less well used open spaces and routes, cemeteries
Low – inspected on a reactive basis only	Where the likelihood of harm or damage to people or property being caused by tree failure is highly unlikely e.g. remote woodland blocks and rarely visited sites

- 2.6 Strategy implementation will be phased. There is considerable work required to undertake this initial mapping and in inspection/survey, GIS mapping and subsequent asset management.

As we do not have information on the numbers of trees on council land, potential numbers of trees in each risk category or current state of the tree resource it is hard to effectively predict the resources required to both inspect the asset and to deliver appropriate management practice following inspection. It will not be possible to inspect and remediate all relevant trees in year 1.

- 2.7 As a pilot approach, the first risk zone will be inspected in spring 2020, the results of which will inform the resource required to deliver remedial works associated with that inspection and furthermore to complete the programme of inspection and remediation work across the tree asset. Even with additional resources it will be a number of years before all trees in Council ownership have been inspected for the first time. As the inspections progress a process of review will be built into the programme to allow for resource allocation to be reviewed as more relevant data based on target areas becomes available.

Benefits to the Council

- 2.8 Putting in place a tree asset management strategy will allow the council to manage its trees in a more planned and proactive manner including the ability to grow its asset as one response to its declaration of a climate change emergency. It will reduce risk to the public and risk of liability to the council. It will also allow better forward planning of resources for tree management as we improve our knowledge of our tree stock.

The Tree Asset Management Strategy will allow trees to be managed in a pro-active way in line with other assets such as memorial headstones, roads, bridges, buildings and lighting columns.

- 2.9 Following the strategy development and implementation of basic management and proactive maintenance of the Council's tree asset, further work will be undertaken to develop a tree asset response to the Council's Zero Carbon aspiration. Research suggests that even moderate increases in canopy cover within towns and communities can aid adaptation to the adverse effects of climate change. Proactive tree planting strategies will be developed, guided by the strategy (the UK is to plant 30-50,000ha of woodland per year to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050), assisting in protecting North Lanarkshire's communities against the effects of Climate Change.

3. Equality and Diversity

- 3.1 Fairer Scotland Duty
Not applicable
- 3.2 Equality Impact Assessment
Not applicable

4. Implications

- 4.1 Financial Impact
Delivery of the strategy will require additional resources with new posts being required for inspection, management and tree expansion plans, particularly if the council wants an effective and positive response to the declaration made in June on climate change. The level of additional resource will be informed by the pilot in spring 2020. The initial development of a Tree Asset Management Strategy will require additional consultancy support to develop and resources will need to be identified across asset owners to undertake this.
- 4.2 HR/Policy/Legislative Impact
It may be necessary to create specialist future and on-going roles for tree inspection and resource management planning, this will be confirmed following the Tree Asset Management Strategy pilot inspection in spring 2020.
- 4.3 Environmental Impact
The tree asset management strategy will improve tree management without resorting to large scale tree removal, so maintaining and expanding tree cover and carbon capture benefits.
Specialist solutions may be required for veteran and ancient trees to protect this important biodiversity resource.
- 4.4 Risk Impact
A tree asset management strategy will reduce the current liability risk of property damage or personal injury from falling trees and branches.

5. Measures of success

- 5.1 Development of a Tree Asset Management Strategy to proactively manage and grow the Council's tree assets.
- 5.3 Assessment and identification of resources required to deliver this strategy across all tree assets.



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Head of Environmental Assets