PLANNING COMMITTEE **11 AUGUST 2021**

SUBJECT:	**TREE PLANTING**
DIRECTORATE:	**COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT**
REPORT AUTHOR:	**STEVE BIRD, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, COMMUNITIES AND STREET SCENE**

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To respond to a request by Planning Committee to set out the Council's policy on tree replacements, and specifically to consider the planting of more trees, or larger replacement trees.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 The benefits of trees being well known, the Council seeks to find a way to balance the difficulties of growing trees in tight urban situations, and the inherent demands on space.

2.2 The Council's Open Space and Tree Management Policy currently sets out that the council will plant at least one tree for every tree removed, so as to protect the number of trees in the city.

2.3 This report defends that policy, highlighting the reasons that larger trees would not bring proportionate benefits, and why guaranteeing to plant more than one tree for each tree lost would be problematic.

3. Background

3.1 For many years the Council has had a tree planting policy of 'one for one'. That is to say, for each tree removed a tree will be planted. This is stated in the Council's existing Open Space and Tree Management Policy, 4.2 (g). Section 4.2 (f) also states that the council will give "priority to the planting of native species".

3.2 In more recent years the Council has been asked to reconsider if 'one for one' is reasonable, and if more trees, or larger trees, should be planted, so as to offset carbon footprint impacts.

3.3 This report seeks to clarify the reasoning behind the existing policy.

4. Consideration of the Options and Policy.

4.1 The questions posed are twofold after a tree is removed. Can we plant more trees? Can we plant larger trees?

4.2 Both of these questions have at their heart one aim, which is to mitigate the impact that the loss of a tree has on the ability of the city's tree population to absorb carbon.

4.3 In very simplistic terms, all plants, through the process of photosynthesis, use the energy of the sun to take in carbon dioxide (CO2) from the air, and water from the ground, to grow. In so doing they release oxygen. In trees, this growth includes forming wood which effectively 'locks' the carbon into the trunk for many years.

4.4 The absorption of carbon, and the release of oxygen are just two of the many reasons why trees are important in a city, and why the council has had a policy in place to make sure that every tree lost, for whatever reason, is replaced.

4.5 However, there are many problems with tree planting in tight urban environments, not least because they are generally hostile places for trees to grow, but also because, whilst many people like trees, they don't want them near their property, or dropping leaves in their gutters, or blocking TV reception, or encouraging insects to drop sap on their car etc. etc. Members will be aware that almost every enquiry for work to a tree usually starts with the phrase "I like trees but…."

4.6 Indeed, the recent citizens' survey showed that the amount of work undertaken to trees was seen as a measure for how well the council was maintaining trees, and conversely, the lack of annual work to trees on roadsides (even when not required), was seen as a measure of negligence.

4.7 For this reason, the city council's arboricultural staff have a difficult job, balancing the desire to encourage a healthy tree population with the needs of the urban community.

4.8 It was this enduring conflict that led to the existing council policy for trees, underpinning the basic need to maintain a difficult balance; the balance between how many we have, and how many people will tolerate.

4.9 The Council's current practice is therefore to plant trees of species and sizes that are considered to be appropriate for the conditions, based on the judgement of the arboricultural officer. The arboricultural staff will draw on their knowledge and expertise.

4.10 There is substantial evidence to suggest that there is no real advantage to planting larger trees in terms of time it takes for the trees to fully establish. In fact studies have shown that younger trees often have the ability to adapt to their environment faster than larger specimens; which may be due to a reduction in transplanting shock which is brought about as a result of the smaller trees lower demand for limiting factors , including water. As smaller trees tend to establish more successfully than larger specimens, especially in urban settings.

4.11 Larger trees do of course have greater immediate impact in a setting, so they have their place in a landscape design context, and there are factors that can be undertaken to mitigate the effects of transplanting larger trees, but not only are the larger specimens more expensive, but so is their protection and aftercare.

4.12 Very small trees, often referred to as ‘whips’, whilst widely planted in forestry and agricultural settings, are not considered suitable in most urban environments. Their small size makes them low cost, but they do not provide amenity impact, and are more vulnerable to loss due to vandalism.

4.13 As a result, the arboricultural officer will consider all options and choose accordingly, most usually selecting something between the two options above. These are referred to as ‘standard’ trees. That is to say they are a young tree of about 2m in height and have a clear stem. These are graded according to the diameter of the stem at 1m height, with the Council usually having 10-12cm stock. Others are used at times, 8-10cm, 12-14 cm. ‘Standard’ trees do have immediate presence but do require guards for protection.

4.14 It is worth noting here that the cost of a tree is not directly proportionate to its size. Something twice the size of a 10-12 standard will be considerably more than twice the cost, not only to buy but also to transport and plant. This means that should the council set a policy of only planting larger trees than those currently selected it would have several impacts: Firstly, costs would escalate, and greater budget would be required. Secondly it would impact the number of locations where planting could be possible. Larger equipment would be required to plant larger trees. Sometimes limiting access.

4.15 For the above reasons it is not recommended that the Council move to a blanket decision to plant larger trees.

4.16 In terms of planting more than one tree each time a tree is lost, this too has real practical difficulties.

4.17 The following are taken from notes of a group currently considering how the council might undertake a large tree planting scheme, outside of the one for one policy. Examples are:

a) Finding enough suitable spaces to plant trees
b) Making sure that planting trees on an area does not damage an existing habitat
c) Making sure that planting trees does not prevent/remove another valuable use e.g. a community recreational facility or a development site
d) Finding sources of large numbers of trees with suitable biosecurity (ideally local provenance)
e) Finding funding for large scale planting
f) Finding funding for maintaining large scale plantings.

4.18 Having addressed the replacement tree question, it is worth noting here the efforts to ensure tree survival.

4.19 It is true to say that each year, due to a range of factors, a percentage of the trees planted each winter are lost. The number varies each year, but is usually down to such as drought, and vandalism. The numbers lost, whilst regrettable, are small as a percentage of what is planted. Any lost are replanted the next winter season.

4.20 Moving to the question of reducing these losses, this is something that we have in hand. Whilst loses are low, and some must always be expected, we are keen to reduce this figure to as low a number as possible.

4.21 We are currently working on a Tree Policy, and within that there will be specific mention to tree choice options, and planting /after care arrangements. Whilst the basics of tree planting will probably remain unchanged, we will be reconsidering as such our guarding and protection policy and use of such as mycorrhizal fungi when planting to try and enhance survival rates.

4.22 As a footnote to this section, members might want to reflect on the fact that all trees in the city are of course living assets, and as such they all have a life cycle. Each year the ability to absorb carbon increases naturally as existing trees get larger, so the loss of one tree specifically will automatically be offset by others.

4.23 Their life cycle is slower than ours, so we tend to imagine that trees will live to a very old age and are shocked when they have to be removed before they become over mature. In an urban setting, for safety reasons they can seldom be allowed to decay slowly, shedding branches as they might in a field setting.

4.24 They will all grow and die at some time, so having an ongoing planting plan of trees of various species and at various stages of development is an important part of having a healthy tree stock in the city.

5. Strategic Priorities

5.1 **Let's Enhance our Remarkable Place /**
Let's Address the Challenge of Climate Change.

The benefits of trees, and indeed plants and open spaces, are extensively documented. The council seeks to enhance its basic tree planting policy whenever possible. It is also giving consideration to how a larger scale of tree planting might be accommodated in the near future.

6. Organisational Impacts

6.1 Finance

Trees are not low cost to plant and maintain. Any increase in planting would require an increase in budgets accordingly long term.

The allocation of any additional resources would need to be set in the context of the council's overall financial position.

6.2 Legal Implications

As an asset of the Council trees have to be properly maintained by qualified staff to ensure safety and covered by suitable insurance.

6.3 **Equality, Diversity and Human Rights**

The Public Sector Equality Duty means that the Council must consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work, in shaping policy, delivering services and in relation to their own employees.

It requires that public bodies have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities

6.4 **Land, Property and Accommodation**

The council has extensive assets, with an enormous tree asset, not just on large open spaces, but within housing and industrial developments.

6.5 **Significant Community Impact**

Generally, trees are seen positively by communities as a whole, but negatively by individuals if they are near to a specific individual's property. Specific larger trees can become a part of a community as a meeting place or landmark and are often fiercely defended accordingly.

6.6 **Corporate Health and Safety implications**

The Council is required to have in place a tree care system that is reasonable in the eyes of the law, and acceptable to our insurers.

7. Risk Implications

7.1 **(i) Options Explored**

As set out in the report.

7.2 **(ii) Key risks Associated with the Preferred Approach**

Continuing with the existing policy does not increase carbon sink capacity (but noted that the council is considering an alternative tree planting programme rather than an adjustment to the 'one for one' policy.

8. Recommendation

8.1 That Planning Committee note the report**.**

Is this a key decision?	No
Do the exempt information categories apply?	No
Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply?	No
How many appendices does the report contain?	None
List of Background Papers:	None

Lead Officer: Steve Bird ADCSS
Telephone (01522) 873421
Email address: steve.bird@lincoln.gov.uk