

Forest Heath District Council

(This report is a key decision. This report has been subject to appropriate notice of publication under the Council's Access to Information Rules)

Report of the Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture

CABINET

16 SEPTEMBER 2014

CAB14/164

WEST SUFFOLK JOINT TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY (Decisions Plan Reference: SEP14/02)

1. Summary and reasons for recommendation(s)

The main aims of the proposed West Suffolk Tree Management Policy are to:

- i. Provide a clear standardised approach to the way in which both Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Councils' trees and woodlands are managed in the future and the way in which the authorities communicate their plans to the local communities.
- ii. Outline how current service specific issues/problems would be addressed.
- iii. Provides clarity around the Councils' responsibilities in maintaining its tree stock in a safe and appropriate manner.

St Edmundsbury Borough Council adopted a Tree and Woodland Strategy in 2009. The strategy proposed a four year cyclical inspection and maintenance regime and this year sees the completion of that first full cycle of inspections. It's proposed that the joint Policy will replace that strategy and see the continuation of the existing inspection and maintenance regimes.

Forest Heath District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested that a Tree Management Policy be prepared for their consideration. On 19 June 2014, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received Report No OAS14/452, which that Committee unanimously resolved to recommend to Cabinet for adoption.

2. Recommendation

2.1 That the West Suffolk Tree Management Policy (as attached to this report) is adopted by the Cabinets of both Forest Heath District Council (FHDC) and St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC).

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3. Strategic priorities

3.1 The recommendation meets the following, as contained within the West Suffolk Strategic Plan:

- Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active

4. Key issues

4.1 Both Councils receive many enquiries each year concerning trees in the public realm. The majority of enquiries relate to requests from members of the public asking that trees in proximity to their property are trimmed. Introducing and maintaining cyclical inspection and maintenance regimes across both FHDC & SEBC will help reduce the number of enquires received.

4.3 Both Councils have inherited woodlands and shelter belts which now stand within residential developments. Owing to the overcrowded nature and long term under management of some of these woodlands and their proximity to residential dwellings the work required can appear, of necessity, severe and this can cause upset to some residents. The proposed Policy sets out the procedures officers will follow in providing adequate notice/explanation whenever work risks causing sudden, substantial change to familiar outlooks.

4.4 The Councils are not the only custodian of trees in public areas. The process of identifying the ownership of trees in the public realm has now been made much simpler as a result of the trees and woodlands of both Councils being placed on a computerised mapping system and data base (Arbortrack tree management system).

4.5 By adopting the proposed West Suffolk Joint Tree Management Policy, the approach of Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council to tree management will be standardised.

5. Other options considered

5.1 To not adopt a Tree Policy – This could leave the Councils vulnerable to claims of not managing their tree stock efficiently and effectively.

5.2 Adoption of a separate Forest Heath Tree Policy – This could lead to confusion and mistakes being made by officers of West Suffolk were different tree policies adopted by each of the two West Suffolk Councils.

6. Community impact

6.1 **Crime and disorder impact** *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998)*

6.1.1 By managing the tree stock in a proper manner the authorities will contribute towards reducing the fear of crime within its communities.

6.2 **Diversity and equality impact** *(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)*

6.2.1 Officers are not aware of any negative impacts associated with the adoption of this joint policy.

6.3 **Sustainability impact** *(including completing a Sustainability Impact Assessment)*

6.3.1 Officers are not aware of any negative impacts associated with the adoption of this joint policy.

7. Consultation

7.1 In FHDC on 28 June 2012 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a scoping document (Report No OAS12/409) for the development of a FHDC Tree Management Strategy. Feedback from that initial draft has helped inform the wording of this joint policy. On 19 June 2014, the FHDC Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report and draft Policy which it duly considered and unanimously resolved that the West Suffolk Tree Management Policy, attached as Appendix A to Report OAS14/452, be recommended to Cabinet for adoption.

7.2 In SEBC a Tree and Woodland Strategy was adopted in 2009. The strategy, which introduced a four year cyclical inspection and maintenance regime, was considered by the Borough's Policy Development Committee prior to formal adoption. The proposed Joint Tree Policy will not significantly change any of the working practices/procedures deployed in SEBC.

8. Financial and resource implications *(including asset management implications)*

8.1 There are no foreseen additional revenue implications associated with implementing this joint policy. The costs will be contained within existing budget estimates.

9. Risk/opportunity assessment *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*

Risk area	Inherent level of risk <i>(before controls)</i>	Controls	Residual risk <i>(after controls)</i>
Increased Costs - associated with dealing with those trees identified as needing work in the initial tranche of inspections in FHDC.	Medium	Budgetary spend will be closely monitored. Officers liaise regularly with the relevant Portfolio holder. Should it become apparent that there is a problem it will be reported to members at the earliest convenience.	Low
Constituents' dissatisfaction - at Non urgent enquiries taking longer to be inspected as a consequence of Officers new approach to prioritising a cyclical approach to inspections.	Medium	Policy & approach will be transparent. Enquirers will be informed of estimated time scales of service and this may be subject to season variations. Cyclical inspections will be undertaken during periods when we usually receive fewer tree related enquiries.	Low

10. Legal and policy implications

- 10.1 The introduction/continuation of cyclical inspection and maintenance regimes will help provide evidence, should it be needed, of the authorities' commitment to comply with its duty of care responsibilities as a land owner.

11. Ward(s) affected

- 11.1 All

12. Background papers

FHDC

- 12.1 The FHDC OAS Committee on 28 June 2012 received a Scoping Document (Report No: OAS12/409) for the development of a FHDC Tree Management Strategy.
- 12.2 The FHDC OAS Committee on the 19 June 2014 received a report and draft Policy which it duly considered and unanimously resolved that the West Suffolk Tree Management Policy, attached as Appendix A to Report OAS14/452, be recommended to Cabinet for adoption.

SEBC

- 12.3 On 4 November 2009, the SEBC Policy Development Committee recommended the adoption of a tree strategy for the Borough (Report A292 refers).
- 12.4 Upon the recommendation of SEBC's Cabinet on 2 December 2009, SEBC's full Council adopted the Tree and Woodland Strategy on 15 December 2009 (Minutes 83 and 76 (C)(2) respectively refer)

13. Documents attached

- 13.1 Appendix - West Suffolk Joint Tree Management Policy and associated appendices.