

## **Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

**Date: 19 February 2023**

Wards: All

### **Subject: Tree Strategy Development and Nature Based Solutions to Pollution**

Lead officer: Adrian Ash, Interim Executive Director, Environment, Civic Pride & Climate

Lead member: Councillor Natasha Irons, Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Greenspaces and Climate Change

Contact officer: Andrew Kauffman, Head of Park Service

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#### **Recommendations:**

That the Panel consider the content of this report.

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#### **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. This report is intended to provide Members with and update on the development of the Tree Strategy and provide information on some of the nature based solutions to pollution that are being utilised within the London Borough of Merton's parks and open spaces.

#### **2 DETAILS**

- 2.1. In October 2021, MHP Design Limited were contracted to research, formulate and draft a Tree Strategy for the London Borough of Merton.
- 2.2. The aim of the Tree Strategy is to implement a strategic approach to the management of its trees by establishing clear aims, policies, and an action plan to maximise tree benefits and minimise tree problems, set out a clear framework to achieve consistency of decision making, along with clear aims and strategic objectives for the betterment of a tree population.
- 2.3. In addition, the Tree Strategy will ensure the Borough is taking all reasonable steps to fulfil its legal obligations in terms of health and safety and/or other liabilities.
- 2.4. Section 3 of this report covers the update of the progress of the Tree Strategy.
- 2.5. Section 4 details the consultation that has been undertaken as part of the Strategy development.
- 2.6. Section 5 Details some of the nature based solutions currently being utilised within the Council's parks and open spaces.

#### **3 TREE STRATEGY PHASE 1: COUNCIL MANAGED TREES**

- 3.1. The Tree Strategy is being developed in two phases:

- Phase 1: The development of a Tree Management Strategy for Council-owned Trees; then
- Phase 2: Using the (Council-owned) Tree Strategy as a foundation to prepare the wide-reaching strategy for the urban forest, incorporating strategy for privately-owned trees.

3.2. This report covers progress on phase 1 to date.

3.3. As you will see from the (Gantt Chart) Section 5 Timetable the project has spanned a 16 months period from procurement to final draft phase.

#### **4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

4.1. There have been 2no Consultation Phases during Phase 1 Tree Strategy for Council Managed Trees so far see (Gantt Chart Section 5 Timetable) stakeholder involvement included:

4.2. Scoping Phase of the strategy between January-February 2022 [Tree Strategy for Council-Owned Trees - Merton Council](#) and received 35 responses from individual residents as well as Residents Association, Friends of Parks Groups and Local Societies.

4.3. All stakeholder feedback was considered by LBM Tree Officers and Head of Parks Services and Assistant Director of Public Space if needed to be considered in the Scope of the Phase 1 Plan.

4.4. Stakeholder review at Second Draft Phase between October -November 2022 and received 8 detailed feedback responses from Residents Associations, Friends of Parks Groups, Local Societies (Friends of the Earth) and The Merton Tree Wardens Group.

4.5. All comments were considered by LBM Tree Officers and Head of Parks Services and Assistant Director of Publicspace (Summary of feedback specific to Tree Strategy attached) [21018\\_LBM TREE STRATEGY PART 1\\_V4\\_COLLATION OF STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK.xlsx \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

#### **5 TIMETABLE**

5.1. Below is the current timeline for phase 1 of the development of the Tree Strategy.

Chart 1: Timeline for Phase 1, Tree Strategy

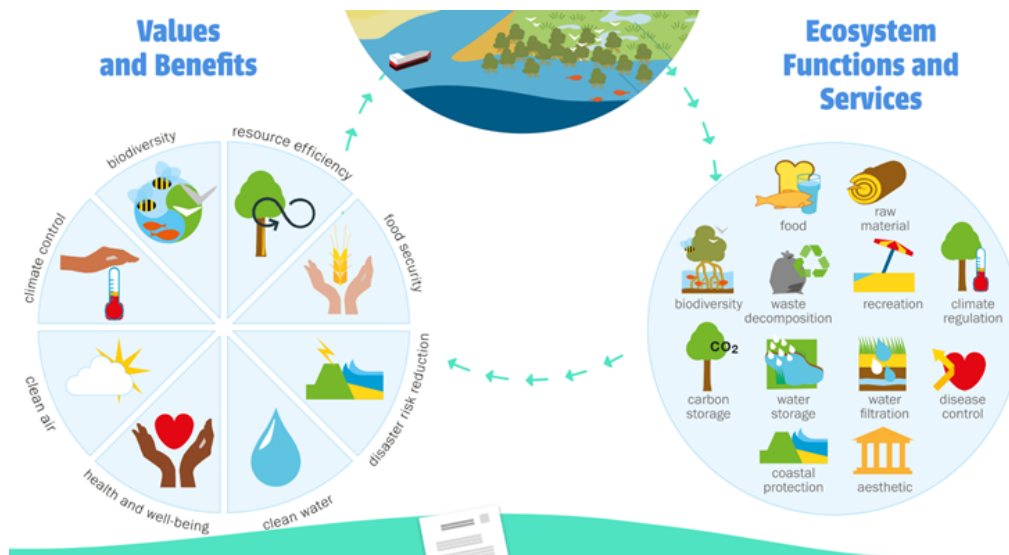
Task	Oct 2022	Nov 2021	Dec 2021	Jan 2022	Feb 2022	March 2022	April 2022	May 2022	June 2022	July 2022	Aug 2022	Sept 2022	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022	Jan 2023	Feb 2023	March 2023	April 2023
Procure Tree Strategy Arb Contractor	█	█	█																
Stakeholder Consultation Part 1				█	█														
Prepare 1 <sup>st</sup> Draft for LBM review						█	█	█	█	█	█	█							
Stakeholder Consultation Part 2 Extended												█	█						
Prepare 2 <sup>nd</sup> Draft for LBM review												█	█						
LBM Tree Contract commenced														█					
LBM Greenspace Review															█	█			
Tree Strategy Formatting Digital and Paper V																	█	█	█
Formal Tree Strategy Adoption																			█

5.2. It is anticipated that the Public Space Team will be tabling the Phase 1 Tree Strategy for adoption at the February Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel with the aim of tabling for adoption at Cabinet on 9 March 2023.

5.3. The Greenspaces Team is currently working with LBM Communications Team to develop the Draft Strategy into a corporate format with a Digital and Paper formatted strategy document being prepared.

## 6 NATURE BASED SOLUTIONS TO POLLUTION

6.1. Nature based solutions are actions for societal change that are inspired by processes and functioning of nature. By developing and implementing solutions that are supported by nature, resilience is achieved while producing societal, environmental and economic benefits in the urban setting of Merton.



- 6.2. The physical, social/cultural, political, and ecological dynamics of a city differ all over the world. Due to these differing dynamics, solutions to challenges need to be applied at the local level where the individual dynamics can be understood and sustainably addressed.
- 6.3. **Challenges:** Most city environments can be characterized by heavy resource depletion, high emissions and pollutants and high population densities. This constitutes a real challenge regarding reducing the pressures on the environment and society. Cities can face a variety of issues, such as flooding, poor waste management, high air pollution, improper heat management, extreme weather events, low food production, and minimal green space.
- 6.4. **Solutions:** Cities offer numerous opportunities for the application of nature based solutions. Such solutions can offer cities risk management and resiliency, climate change adaptation, improvements of degraded ecosystems, and sustainable urbanization. Through the integration of natural solutions into urban planning and design, improvements can be made to the overall health and well-being of citizens, as well as obtaining ecological and economic benefits.
- 6.5. Through its new Tree Strategy<sup>1</sup> and associated Green Blue Infrastructure Strategy in its Local Plan ([Green and blue infrastructure - New Local Plan | Merton Council Document publicly available](#))<sup>2</sup>, the London Borough of Merton will look to prioritise tree planting in areas where they can offer the most societal benefits and planting the most appropriate trees to tolerate the changing environmental conditions including heatwaves and increasing pollution.
- 6.6. **Capturing pollutants:** Trees and other vegetation planted (hedges / shrubs) in the right places can help improve urban air quality on a local scale by forming a barrier between people and pollutants. They also remove some

<sup>1</sup> Document not currently available

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.merton.gov.uk/planning-and-buildings/planning/local-plan/newlocalplan/green-and-blue-infrastructure>

particulate pollution from the air by catching the tiny particles on their leaf surfaces.

- 6.7. Air pollution has harmful effects on the health of humans, wildlife and our environment. It's caused by a variety of sources - in the UK, the biggest threat to clean air is traffic emissions.
- Particulate matter. A mix of solids and liquids suspended in the air. Some are visible to the naked eye, for example as soot or smoke.
  - Reactive nitrogen. Nitrogen is a stable element which makes up 70% of Earth's atmosphere, but its other forms, including ammonia (NH<sub>3</sub>) and oxides of nitrogen (NO<sub>x</sub>), are constantly in flux in the environment.
- 6.8. Poor air quality is linked to many health conditions, including cancer, asthma, stroke, heart disease, diabetes and obesity. In addition to the personal cost of mortality and ill health, the impacts of air pollution also have a high cost to society. Air pollution isn't distributed evenly, and often the poorest neighbourhoods suffer the worst air quality.
- 6.9. The links between local air quality, climate change and the biodiversity crisis mean that acting on air pollution can offer a 'win-win-win' strategy for the climate, people and nature. Trees can play several important roles in this scenario.
- 6.10. Silver birch, Yew and Elder trees were the most effective at capturing particles, and it was the hairs of their leaves that contributed to reduction rates of 79%, 71% and 70% respectively.
- As part of the annual planting programme, The London Borough of Merton will look to target the planting of the most appropriate trees in borough pollution hot spots<sup>3</sup>.
- 6.11. **Beating the Heat:** Trees will be essential in helping us adapt our cities and landscapes to the climate impacts which are now inevitable. Green spaces with trees in cities provide shade and reduce the ambient temperature through the cooling effect of evaporation of water from the soil and through leaves – crucial during frequent severe heatwaves.
- 6.12. Tree canopy is our first line of defence against the heat impacts of climate change. Tree canopy can help reduce surface temperatures by up to 40 degrees Fahrenheit and reduce air temperatures by nine degrees Fahrenheit.
- The London Borough of Merton will look to increase canopy in the cover by 10% over the life of the strategy and will target the planting linked to National / Regional and Local Programs.
  - The London Borough of Merton Climate Action and Greenspaces Team are working with partners from Kingston University on the Urban Re-leaf Scheme, the Urban Re-Leaf project is looking to

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to: Tree Strategy; Benefits of Trees

identify privately owned grey or under-utilised greenspaces in Merton as areas that could potentially be used for planting.

- Merton's Climate Action Group has partnered with Kingston University who are doing an initial mapping exercise to identify potential spaces that could be considered for the next phase of the project and in tandem with LBM Greenspaces tree team capturing data on vacant tree pits in the borough as well as new Highways locations for tree planting.<sup>4</sup>

6.13. **Havens for Wildlife:** Planting and protecting native trees as well as planting and maintaining our hedgerows will also provide vital homes for wildlife, supporting biodiversity. They provide food and shelter for a myriad of species, from mammals and reptiles to birds and butterflies.

6.14. Just a single tree is capable of supporting hundreds of different species – birds nest within the branches, lichens grow on the trunks, blossom attracts lots of insects in spring, and the fruits and seeds provide a food source for birds and small mammals. Nooks and crannies within the bark of older trees are an excellent home for invertebrates and even small bats.

6.15. The London Borough of Merton will look to target the planting of the most appropriate trees within the Borough's pollution hot spots.

- Merton Council obtained funding through round 2 of the Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCFF)<sup>5</sup> to plant a total of 1,200 whips (unbranched young tree seedlings) along the perimeter of Morden Park and Pollards Hill Recreation Ground. In February and March 2022 (delayed due to Covid-19 restrictions from the previous year), the planting took place and was led by the Merton Tree Wardens.
- In addition, Merton Council also obtained funding through round 3 of the Urban Tree Challenge Fund to plant 194 standard trees (tree with a single stem with clear trunk at least 1.8m (6ft)) across ten (10) parks in Merton with a further 110 trees to be planted in the 2022/23 planting season.
- All UTCFF funded trees are within areas of low to medium canopy cover which has highlighted in the tree strategy regarding targeted planting in Low Canopy areas as a matter of priority.
- The council are also working with Trees for Streets [Trees for Streets - Let's fill our streets with trees](#)<sup>6</sup> and will be launching Merton's street tree sponsorship project in February 2023 which will allow residents, groups and local businesses to sponsor trees in Merton, which has some with £15,000 worth of funding for planting in Merton School Street and Playgrounds as part of the Mayor of London Cool Spaces Initiative [Cool spaces | London City Hall](#)<sup>7</sup> which Merton Councils

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<sup>4</sup> Refer to: Tree Strategy; Benefits of Trees

<sup>5</sup> [Urban Tree Challenge Fund - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.treesforstreets.org/>

Library and Greenspace Services have been involved with 2022 and will continue to support Cool spaces are indoor spaces and outdoor areas where Londoners can take respite on hot days.

6.16. **Protecting irreplaceable habitats:** Strategically placed, new native woodland creation can help provide a buffer around precious ancient woodlands. This will protect these fragile ecosystems from the worst of the nitrogen pollution and buy time while we fight to cut the emissions at source.

- The Councils Greenspaces Team are currently working with Trees for Cities [Urban Trees | Trees for Cities](#)<sup>8</sup> on an exciting Community Woodland Creation Project for Cramner Green in Mitcham (See Project Plan below). The team have secured £45,800 from Trees for Cities and we will see the community planting of over 6000 whips 12 standard trees and 500 square meters of underplanted naturalised woodland bulbs.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/climate-change/climate-adaptation/cool-spaces>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.treesforcities.org/our-work/urban-trees>

**UFO54 CRANMER GREEN**

**7 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**  
None for this report.

**8 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

8.1. The Council as an occupier of premises under the Occupiers Liability Act 1957 and 1984 respectively, has a duty to take reasonable care to ensure that visitors on premises owned by it or over which it exercises control are reasonably safe; and in relation to persons others than visitors, a duty in respect of any risk of their suffering injury on the premises by reason of any danger due to the state of the premises or to things done or omitted to be done on them.

8.2. The development of a Tree Strategy will ensure the Borough is taking all reasonable steps to fulfil its legal obligations in terms of health and safety and/or other liabilities.

**9 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

9.1. The Tree Strategy will support the targeting of tree planting in areas of the borough where canopy cover is less and therefore impacting on quality of life. Capturing pollution, beating the heat and creating havens for wildlife.

9.2. This will also work towards levelling up for residents in the East of the borough which currently has the lowest canopy cover.

**10 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

10.1. None for this report.

**11 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

11.1. None for this report.

**12 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**

12.1. None for this report.

**13 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

13.1. Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel , 16<sup>th</sup> October 2013, Update of Progress on Action Plan from Scrutiny Review on Trees - [Update](#)

Revision	Notes	Date
A	General Arrangement	28/11/2022

Project:	UFO54 Cranmer Green	
Drawing title:	General Arrangement	
Drawing number:	UFO54/01	Rev. A Date: 28/11/2022



of Progress on Action Plan from Scrutiny Review on Trees.pdf  
(merton.gov.uk)

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