

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 19th June 2023

Wards: All

Subject: Adoption of Merton (Phase 1) Tree Strategy for the Management of council-owned trees.

Lead officer: Dan Jones (Executive Director of Environment, Civic Pride & Climate Change)

Lead member: Councillor Natasha Irons (Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change)

Contact officer: Andrew Kauffman, Head of Parks Services

Recommendations:

- A. That Cabinet review Appendix 1 London Borough of Merton Tree Strategy 2023-2029 (Part 1), Management of council-owned trees and agree to adopt the Tree Strategy.
 - B. That Cabinet note Appendix 2 Collated feedback for Tree Strategy Initial scoping consultation that took place between (17th January 2022 - 28th February 2022) (466 responses received) Appendix 3 Collated feedback from the Draft Tree Strategy Consultation that took place between 20th October 2022- 30th November 2022 (10 responses received).
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency on 10th July 2019, and the Council and a Climate Strategy and Action Plan ([see - Climate Strategy and Action Plan](#)) which outlined the Council's response to the declaration and the importance that our trees have in mitigating climate change and shaping a greener future.
- 1.2. Under the Greening Merton element of the Climate Strategy and Action Plan on one of the key "Activities that enable things to happen" the Council Greenspaces Team were actioned with developing and implementing a Tree Strategy for the borough 2022-23.
- 1.3. In addition, the Tree Service was reviewed by Internal Audit and identified weaknesses within the service included – *'there is currently no final Strategy, Policy and Business Plan for the management and maintenance of the Council tree stock'* (14th February 2020)
- 1.4. In order to meet the requirements of the recommended audit actions and to deliver on the ambitions to support our Climate Strategy and Action Plan, the Council Greenspaces Team commissioned the services of arboriculture consultants MHP Arboriculture and have conducted scoping, consultation and developed a Tree

Strategy for Merton Council for the management of council owned trees and an associated Action Plan for the duration of the tree strategy.

1.5. The London borough of Merton Tree Strategy 2023-2029 (Part 1) Management of council owned trees, shown in Appendix 1 of this document, is now ready for review and adoption.

2 DETAILS (VISION)

2.1. For the benefit of our local environment and that of future generations of borough residents, we shall strive to achieve an optimised, sustainable Council-owned tree population that enhances our communities and protects the environment that we live and work in.

2.2. This will be a positive contribution towards the London Environment Strategy's existing target of a 10% increase in canopy cover for the city overall. In order to meet this challenge, we are going to:

- Look after our existing trees and hedges well and in a structured and consistent way. This will mean that their benefits are maximised whilst tree-related problems and inconveniences are kept to a minimum.
- Protect all our trees and hedges to ensure their resilience in the face of many challenges and threats.
- Plant, establish and cultivate to maturity as many trees and hedges as we can on our land; promoting the need for trees of large mature size to enhance our green infrastructure, contributing to our local ecology and enhancing the biodiversity of our green spaces.

2.3. Doing this will result in a multitude of quality-of-life improvements for present and future generations. It will also enable us to comply with our legal responsibilities and ensure that as a Council we are not at unreasonable risk of litigation.

2.4. Our trees contribute greatly to the character of Merton and its natural environment. They provide a wealth of benefits which are fundamental to our capacity to adapt to the climate change emergency by counteracting increasingly high summer temperatures, sequestering carbon from the atmosphere and intercepting rainfall to lower the likelihood of flash flooding.

2.5. Beyond this we recognise the principle of 'Biophilia.' This is the innate and intrinsic human need to have proximity to and contact with the natural environment. The hugely positive impact that trees and their many wildlife associations provide to our wellbeing is very widely documented and accepted.

2.6. Trees are vitally important. We need as many healthy, well-managed trees as we can to make Merton a better place to live.

2.7. The final and adopted strategy will also include a dedication page to Dave Lofthouse (Dip. Arb. (RFS), M.Arbor.A.) who worked with the Council for 33 years. He was the 'voice of our trees' for all of these years, a committed arboriculturist and his legacy is felt all around us through the trees he has planted.

3 NEXT STEPS

- 3.1. Following the formal adoption of the tree strategy for Council trees, the Greenspaces Team will be liaising with colleagues in FutureMerton to begin the scoping the Tree Strategy: Part II, as outlined in 2.2 of the of Merton Tree Strategy 2023-2029 (Part 1).
- 3.2. The next element of the tree strategy (Part II) will focus on the wider *Treescape*, which includes trees on private owned land, planning matters and how support and guidance can be provided to benefit our overall tree population.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1. No alternative options are being considered at this stage.

5 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 5.1. Two Phases of Consultation were undertaken during the development of the boroughs Tree Strategy.
- 5.2. Initial Scoping Tree Strategy Consultation was carried out between the 17th January 2022 and the 28th February 2022 -see ([Tree Strategy consultation link](#)). The consultation was widely participated in, having received a total of 466 responses, including 8 local organisations. Please see Appendix 2 for a full summary of the response provided.
- 5.3. The Tree Strategy Stakeholder Consultation, which contributed to the drafting of the strategy itself, was carried out between 20th October 2022 and the 30th November 2022. During this period, we received ten group and individual responses to the draft strategy, helping us shape and develop a strategy that can meet the needs of our local tress.

6 TIMETABLE

- 6.1. The table below details the timeline for the delivery of the London Borough of Merton Tree Strategy 2023-2029 (Part 1) Management of council owned trees.

Project Element	Timeline
Council declares Climate Emergency	10 th July 2019
Cabinet Approval of Climate Action Plan	18 th November 2020
Initial scoping phase of councils Tree Strategy	17 th January 2022 - 28 th February 2022
Draft Tree Strategy stakeholder consultation	20 th October 2022- 30 th November 2022

Final Tree Strategy Review and Design	1 st December 2022 - 27 th February 2023.
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7 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. The adoption of the London Borough of Merton Tree Strategy 2023-2029 and its associated Action Plan will have financial, resource and property implications, but those relating to core service delivery are currently covered within existing revenue and capital Budgets for tree management, maintenance and tree planting.

8 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

8.1. The adoption of the London Borough of Merton Tree Strategy 2023-2029 and its associated Action Plan will have no further legal or statutory implications at this stage.

9 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

9.1. The adoption of the London Borough of Merton Tree Strategy 2023-2029 will provide positive outcomes to the wide array of communities across the borough. Tree populations and protected greenspaces brings a wealth of benefits, including greater community cohesionⁱ.

10 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

10.1. None for the purposes of this report.

11 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1. The adoption of the London Borough of Merton Tree Strategy 2023-2029 and its associated Action Plan will directly benefit the security of our Highway network and other Council land, including parks, open spaces and schools.

11.2. Specifically, the tree policies within the strategy - *Tree Management and Maintenance (TMM1-13)*, detail how the service will legally and professionally manage our tree stock for the benefit of all users.

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

Appendix 1: London Borough of Merton Tree Strategy 2023-2029 (Part 1)

Management of council owned trees

Appendix 2: Collated scoping feedback

13 BACKGROUND PAPERS

13.1. No further papers will be submitted.

ⁱ Netta Weinstein, Andrew Balmford, Cody R. DeHaan, Valerie Gladwell, Richard B. Bradbury, Tatsuya Amano, Seeing Community for the Trees: The Links among Contact with Natural Environments, Community Cohesion, and Crime, *BioScience*, Volume 65, Issue 12, 01 December 2015, Pages 1141–1153, <https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biv151>