

# **Report to Stronger Place Select Committee**

**Date of meeting: 24 March 2020**



**Portfolio: Contracts & Technical Services (Councillor N Avey)**

**Subject: Update on Environmental Enhancements and Tree Planting Initiatives**

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- 1. To note the baseline data on Council managed green infrastructure and the potential for future environmental enhancement and tree planting; and**
- 2. To agree that opportunities for future tree planting initiatives be explored through the Green Infrastructure Strategy that is in preparation.**

## **Report:**

### Environmental Enhancements:

1. The Council has over the years invested in the enhancement and improvement of its local environment and biodiversity. This has resulted in a wealth of amenity and wildlife sites that are managed by the Council. There are 222 wildlife sites in the District out of which 31 % are managed by the Council, the rest are in third party ownership. The Council manages 9 local nature reserves which offer a wealth of habitat, there are approximately 45 allotments in the District with a total area of 40 hectares in addition there are 70 listed amenity greenspaces across the District.

2. There are two large public parks and gardens: Abbey Gardens and Roding Valley Recreational Area. These are managed in partnership with town and parish Councils. Across the Epping Forest District there is circa 4,000 hectares of natural and semi natural greenspace.

3. The District has 3596 Veteran Trees (trees over 300 years old). There are a further 1,233 trees that are classed as 'notable'. This means they have veteran features but aren't old enough to be classed as veteran yet. In addition, the Council manages around 15,000 public realm trees, these are tree on open spaces and public highway but does not include woodland.

### Tree Planting Initiatives:

4. During 2019/20 approximately 119 semi-mature trees were planted on amenity land and public highway. These consisted of 38 Whips (2 years old) in Chigwell Row Recreational Area and 2 semi mature Oaks (10-12 years) in Tree Top Meadow, Buckingham Road, Epping.

5. From March 2020 continuing through winter to 2021 a tree planting project is being arranged with the Woodland Trust at Loughton Recreation Ground. A further 160 trees could be planted in Thornwood Nature Reserve along the 82m fence line forming a visual barrier.

6. The delivery of the Local Plan offers a great opportunity to link aspirations for tree planting and biodiversity improvements both within the new developments as well as the wider area. Cabinet is due to consider a report at its meeting on 26 March 2020 with a recommendation to consult on a Green Infrastructure Strategy.

7. The Council has in the past produced tree planting policies and strategies and it is recommended that forthcoming Green Infrastructure Strategy consider and incorporate these. Such a strategy should include, at the least:

- The ability to utilise Tree Wardens to lead on planting in school playing fields or along fence lines;
- Encourage partnership working to identify open spaces suitable for tree planting;
- Maximise funding opportunities to increase tree planting number and species type within the district;
- Essex Forest Project: The Essex Forest Project has an aim of planting 375,000 trees by 2025 including flood alleviation tree planting schemes; and
- Green Arc: An initiative to boost green infrastructure and tree planting initiatives around the aim of 'A million trees'. The focus for activity is the top right-hand quadrant of the capital and surrounding districts area. This is where London meets the countryside (from Thames Chase through to the Lee Valley area). This area is rich in connected green space. The aspiration of the initiative is to establish a new cross border/cross sector platform to lead, champion and co-ordinate initiatives in this area. It will also focus on fundraising and external bids.

**Reason for decision:**

To update the Committee as per Work Programme and bring to Members attention the extent of existing green infrastructure and opportunities to enhance and expand further.

**Options considered and rejected:**

It is possible to ignore existing tree planting initiatives however this will not enable a recognition of the work done so far and we will not have a baseline to start a programme of enhancement and improvement works.

To not develop a District wide tree strategy and carry on as we have done so far. This has been discounted to take full advantage of the opportunities available from proposed development growth in the District.

**Consultation undertaken:**

Local Implementation Team

**Resource implications:**

None at this stage. Once a tree strategy is developed budget allocations approved by Council for Climate Change will be allocated for any works identified.

**Legal and Governance Implications:**

For any tree planting in master planning sites or larger development Planning Performance Agreements will be utilised to integrate blue and green infrastructure. Elsewhere other mechanisms will be used to seek developer contributions and/or agree long term management arrangements.

**Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:**

The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and trees offer a good opportunity to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and help mitigate the negative impact on climate change. On average a tree can absorb as much as 21 kilograms of carbon dioxide per year. This means it will sequester approximately 1 ton of carbon dioxide by the time it reaches 40 years old.

**Background Papers:**

None.

**Risk Management:**

To mitigate against the impact of climate trees have a very important role to play, however, this cannot be the only factor.