

Report to Cabinet

15 March 2023

Subject:	Tree Strategy and Implementation Plan 2023 – 2028
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Laura Rollins Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism
Director:	Director of Borough Economy Alice Davey
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Assistant Director: Borough Economy (Green Spaces, Green Services, Visitor Services, Events) – matthew_huggins@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

1.1 That approval be given to adopt the Tree Strategy and Implementation Plan 2023 – 2028 as set out in Appendix A, including:

- Our policy and approach to protecting, enhancing, and managing our tree stock in Sandwell.
- Our policy and approach towards trees on private land.
- Our policy and approach towards tree planting.

1.2 That the Assistant Director of Borough Economy be authorised to:

- a) Prepare a detailed action plan for the implementation of the Tree Strategy.
- b) Work with Climate Change colleagues and internal / external stakeholders to develop and implement a tree planting programme for the 2023 / 2024 planting season.



- c) Complete a baseline inspection of all trees on Council land within the red risk areas in the next 18 months, to comply with the inspection framework set out within the strategy.
- d) Work with finance colleagues to identify funds for the baseline inspection and subsequent red risk remedial works arising from this.
- e) Prepare projections for the medium-term financial plan in relation to trees, following the baseline inspections, to meet the commitments set out within this strategy.
- f) Submit a further report to Cabinet to consider on recommendations addressing Ash Dieback.



2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Tree Strategy refreshes our approach to the protection, enhancement, and management of our tree stock in Sandwell and aligns with practice in other authorities and national guidance.
- 2.2 The Tree Strategy clarifies what the Council can and cannot do in the protection, enhancement and management of our tree stock in Sandwell to maximise the benefits of trees to residents, wildlife, nature and the wider environment, and aligns with other authorities and national guidance.
- 2.3 The Tree Strategy sets out our approach to the management of risk, aligned with our duty to protect people and property under the Health and Safety Act and other legislation.
- 2.4 The Tree Strategy sets out a commitment to complete a baseline inspection for all trees in red risk areas under Council ownership. This will enable the Council to demonstrate a rigorous framework of inspection and remedial actions to fulfil our duty of care, and to identify the medium term financial commitments required to achieve this objective.



2.5 The Tree Strategy sets our approach to meeting a tree planting target of 15,000 new trees by 2030.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>People live well and age well Our tree canopy cover provides health and wellbeing benefits to residents, which enhance their quality of life and maximise the health benefits of trees on air quality.</p>
	<p>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods Trees enhance the quality of the local environment, homes, and contribute to thriving neighbourhoods in both aesthetic appearance and the overall quality of air and health.</p>

3 Context and Key Issues

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This Tree Strategy is intended as a transformative approach toward protecting, enhancing, and managing our tree stock and canopy cover in Sandwell.

3.1.2 Following recent aerial surveys completed as part of the iTree project, it is estimated that Sandwell benefits from around 265,000 trees, covering 18.1% of the borough. It is estimated that 81% of these trees are in good or excellent condition.

3.1.3 The value of these trees cannot be overstated. As this strategy will show, trees in Sandwell provide nearly £6bn in annual benefits based on carbon storage, air pollution removal, and rainwater interception. This includes removing 15.3 tonnes of air pollution each year. Just as valuable are the natural habitats our trees provide to nature and wildlife, and the noise reduction and health and wellbeing benefits to our residents.

3.1.4 Trees are also recognised as an important way of mitigating the effects and impacts of climate change. Their presence alone cannot halt climate change; but they can help to slow the rate and enable adaptations.



- 3.1.5 This strategy sets out how we will maximise the benefits and value from trees in Sandwell.
- 3.1.6 Land owners have legal responsibilities for the management of their trees, including protection to people and property from falling trees. This strategy sets out the approach the Council is taking to manage its tree stock, meet its health and safety obligations, and reducing the likelihood of harm to people or property from trees.
- 3.1.7 Trees in Sandwell can be found in a variety of locations, including highways, green spaces and open spaces, corporate property and public buildings, social housing, schools and leisure centres, nature reserves and woodlands, and on private property. This strategy builds upon and complements the following strategies and documents:
- Sandwell Green Spaces Strategy and Implementation Plan 22 – 25
 - Sandwell Climate Change Strategy 2020 – 2041
 - The emerging Sandwell Local Plan 2025 – 2041
 - Sandwell Corporate Plan – Vision 2030
- 3.1.8 There are several policies and procedures set out in this strategy that are intended to guide decisions. However, individual policies should not be considered in isolation, and all relevant policies in the context of wider strategic aims and priorities should be considered when reach a decision.
- 3.1.9 This strategy is intended to be formally reviewed every five years but will also be subject to review in light of new evidence, guidance, consultation and national policy.

3.2 Aim and Objectives

3.2.1 The Council's overarching aim is:

“To protect, enhance and manage our tree and woodland cover in a sustainable way for the benefit of current and future generations, wildlife, and nature”



3.2.2 This strategy outlines the following Aims and Objectives for the Council:

Aims	Ref	Objective
Protect our tree stock and canopy.	P1	We will continue to protect trees that require it using Tree Preservation Orders, and develop a publicly accessible digital database of Tree Preservation Orders.
	P2	We will protect healthy trees through a policy of no evasive works unless required to maintain the trees health, ensure the immediate safety of people or property, or because we are required to through legislation or other legal approvals.
	P3	We will robustly respond to Ash Dieback and other diseases, by managing declining trees and replacing them with suitable new plants.
	P4	We will develop a multi-department / agency working group to share and further disseminate expertise, best practice, and advice on protecting our tree stock.
Enhance our tree canopy by increasing the coverage.	E1	We will increase our tree cover by 6%, planting 15,000 trees by 2030.
	E2	We will increase species diversity of trees to build resilience against pests, diseases and climate change: with no one species being more than 10% of tree stock.
	E3	We will map, track, and maximise the ecological and environmental benefits of trees in Sandwell.
	E4	We will develop and promote resources, communications, and support to residents, community groups, businesses and other stakeholders to plant the right tree, in the right place, at the right time.



	E5	We will appoint an officer for a three-year pilot to work with internal and external stakeholders to achieve our planting targets, and maximise external funding for protecting, enhancing and managing our tree stock.
Manage our tree stock to keep our trees healthy and maximise the benefits.	M1	We will maintain a set programme of inspections of all trees within risk zones.
	M2	We will work towards digitally mapping our tree stock, starting with those in higher risk zones.
	M3	We will operate an efficient and legally defensible system for monitoring and managing our tree stock.
	M4	We will develop clear and accessible communications for the public to promote our approach to protecting, enhancing and managing our tree stock.

3.4 Current Strategic Challenges and Actions

- a. **Strategic Challenge:** We do not currently have accurate and complete records of our tree stock.

The recent iTree survey gave approximate data on our tree canopy using aerial technology. We also have some recent mapping of some tree stock, primarily those on highways land.

Strategic Action: We will map and record all trees within risk categories of red within the next 18 months, and Amber within the next 3 years on a digital system, including information about the tree type, health and current condition.

- b. **Strategic Challenge:** We are largely reactive in the way we manage our tree stock.

The policies of the Council in how we manage our tree stock - including what works we will not undertake on trees - has not been



consistently applied. Alongside this, the lack of accurate tree mapping and inspections for the last decade makes it a challenge to effectively plan resources.

Strategic Action: We will use the data from the mapping and recording of our trees to more accurately plan for and budget for medium to long term service requirements.

- c. **Strategic Challenge:** We do not have a cycle of inspections and surveys, and much of our tree stock has not been surveyed within the last decade.

This strategy sets out a cycle of inspections and surveys, aligned with levels of risks and mitigations.

Strategic Action: We will have a cycle of inspections and surveys, and complete baseline inspections for all trees within risk categories of red within the next 18 months and Amber within the next 3 years.

- d. **Strategic Challenge:** Approaches to managing our tree stock have been inconsistent and not clear to the public or elected Members.

We have improved the information available online to the public about how we manage our tree out stock and the works we do and do not undertake. There is still a knowledge gap internally and externally about the value of trees and the responsibilities of those with trees on their land.

Strategic Action: We will continue to improve the resources and information available to Members and the public about how we manage our tree stock, the works we can and cannot undertake, and greater transparency about our programme of works through regular publishing of this information.

- e. **Strategic Challenge:** The budget available is not aligned with the needs of our tree stock, and the requirements going forward set out in this strategy.



The budget for the trees service has not been reviewed for some years and has not kept pace with the needs of our tree stock or legal duties for the care and maintenance of our trees.

Strategic Action: We will use the information from the mapping and recording of our trees and the baseline inspection for those in the red risk target area, to more accurately project future budget needs to inform the medium-term financial plan.

- f. **Strategic Challenge:** Historically, tree planting has been sporadic and led to structural, access, maintenance, and tree health issues.

Understandably, there is a strong public and corporate appetite for tree planting. Recent tree planting schemes in Sandwell within the last 5 years, as with elsewhere in the Country, have not been successful. There is also a low knowledge level about the right type of tree to plant, in the right place, and at the right time.

Strategic Action: We will improve the information available to the public about successful tree planting, using the Right Tree, Right Place, Right Time campaign.

- g. **Strategic Challenge:** Ash Dieback is a disease currently impacting this species, and we are likely to lose up to 20,000 trees over the next 5 years as a result.

This fungal disease is likely to impact most Ash trees in Britain, at an estimated cost of over 180m trees. This will be a significant cost to those with trees on their land – with a heavier burden on public bodies and local authorities.

Strategic Action: We will complete an inspection of all Ash Trees in red risk areas within the next 12 months to determine the potential cost of dealing with this issue. We will also work with external agencies and other local authorities to identify and advocate for additional funding to address this issue.



3.5 This strategy sets out a rigorous framework and cycle of inspections and remedial actions for trees in red risk areas, which can be summarised as:

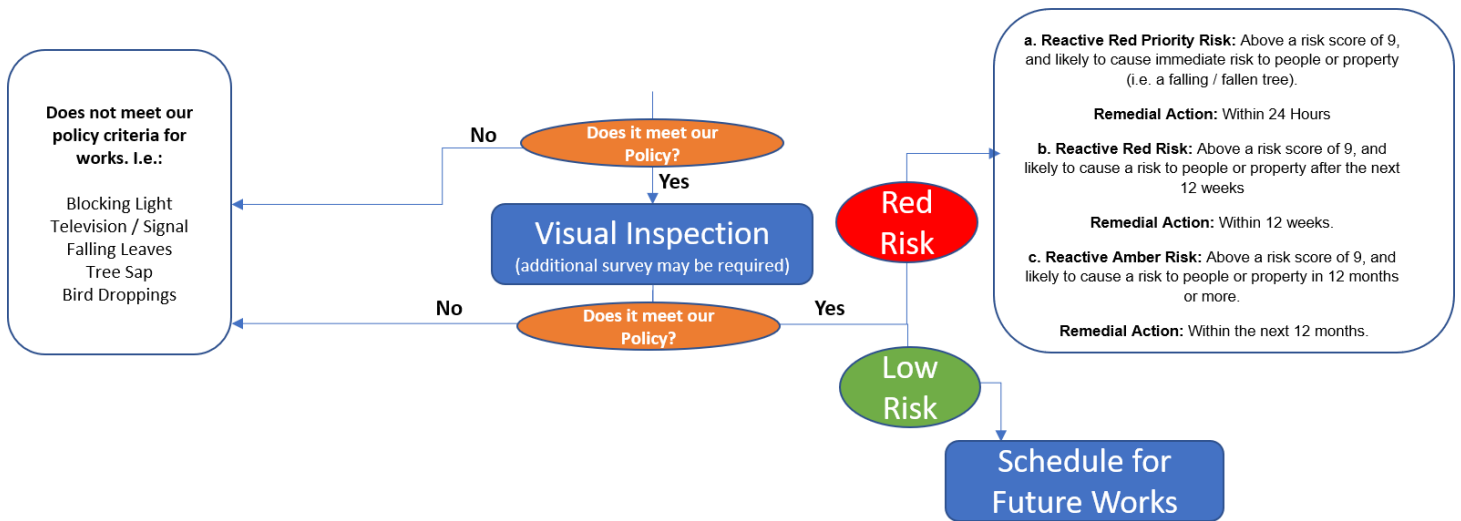
3.5.1 Proactive Inspections and Surveys:

	Red Risk		Amber Risk	Green Risk
Target Area	4	3	2	1
	Constant / High Frequency Use	Frequent Use	Variable Use (Peak)	Occasional Use
Level 2 PTI Inspection	Major Roads: constant/frequent Council Housing Play Areas Cemeteries Open spaces or green spaces on or next to sites with high people use	Busy Roads Footways or Cycleways: constant/frequent use Car Parks Public Buildings: constant/frequent use	Open spaces or green spaces near paths/adjacent to private properties / Frequent Use	Rural roads: infrequent use Woodland paths: regular use Rights of Way Restricted Green Space
	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	Reactive Only

3.5.2 Reactive Inspections and Surveys



1. Through Report It by member of public / Member.
2. Through visual inspection by Council Officer on site visit.



3.6 Financial Considerations

3.6.1 This strategy sets out an immediate financial requirement to implement the tree strategy, and undertake a baseline inspection and remedial action for trees in red risk areas. This can be summarised as:

3.6.2 The annual tree budget has not been aligned to the needs and responsibilities as set out within this strategy.

3.6.3 It is difficult to accurately project future financial needs, without the completion of baseline inspections for all trees within red and amber risk areas.

3.6.4 It is therefore proposed that the following financial considerations be made to implement this strategy:

3.6.5 The internal staff resources are aligned to the reactive needs and to implement an ongoing cycle of routine inspections.

3.6.6 The current budgets will continue to address the current reactive requests for remedial works on trees.



3.6.7 There is a need to complete a baseline inspection for all trees under the responsibility of the Council within the Red risk areas within the next 18 months. This will provide a starting point from which future inspection and remedial works can be planned for and projected. It is estimated that the cost of completing baseline inspection will be:

- a. 60,000 trees on housing land, at an estimated inspection cost of between £300,000 - £360,000.
- b. 10,000 trees on highways land, at an estimated inspection cost of between £50,000 - £60,000.
- c. 8,000 trees in red risk areas for green spaces, at an estimated cost of £25,000 - £35,000.
- d. 2,000 trees in red risk areas on Council land linked to Council Buildings, at an estimated inspection cost of between £8,000 - £12,000.
- e. A total baseline inspection of c. 80,000 trees in red risk areas, at an estimated inspection cost of between £383,000 - £467,000.
- f. £300,000 - £360,000 of this amount is required to come from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), as a landlord responsibility.
- g. A total estimated requirement of between £83,000 and £167,000 is therefore required for the Council to complete a baseline inspection of all red risk areas.

3.6.8 There will be a need to complete remedial works for those with the highest risk rating arising from the baseline inspections. Given the starting point of these inspections, it is estimated that:

- a. 10% of housing trees will require remedial works, at an estimated cost of around £1.5m.
- b. 20% of highways trees will require remedial works, at an estimated cost of around £500,000.



- c. 20% of green spaces trees will require remedial works, at an estimated cost of around £300,000.
- d. 10% of council buildings trees will require remedial works, at an estimated cost of around £50,000.
- e. A total baseline of remedial works arising from inspections is estimated to cost £2.35m.
- f. £1.5m of this amount is required to come from the Housing Revenue Account, as a landlord responsibility and works will be subject to the approval of the landlord through the HRA process.
- g. A total estimated requirement of £850,000 is therefore required to be set aside for remedial works over the next 2 years.

3.6.9 The immediate budget requirement, in addition to the budget already set for reactive works and routine works, is **between £933,000 to £1.17m** for baseline inspections and remedial works to be undertaken by the Council within the next 2 financial years (23/24 and 24/25).

3.6.10 The ongoing budget requirement is expected to need to increase to maintain a cycle of inspections and tree maintenance. This is difficult to project, without the completion of baseline projections and accurate mapping and recording of our tree stock in red risk areas. We will work with finance colleagues to provide a more accurate projection for the medium-term financial plan.

4. Implications

Resources:	There is an immediate financial need above base budget for 23/24 to undertake baseline inspections and any remedial actions required for trees in red risk areas. Due to Covid and other factors over the last 5 years, an inspection of red risk areas is overdue and the current base budget will not meet this requirement. There is an estimated financial cost of between £933k and £1.17m to complete this (outside
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	of HRA related works), which will be proposed to be part or fully funded through Covid recovery grants and other funding.
Legal and Governance:	The Council has a legal duty to protect trees, but also have a rigorous cycle of inspections and remedial actions for trees in red risk areas. The Tree Strategy sets out the Council's approach to meeting these legal requirements.
Risk:	There are two significant risks that the strategy seeks to address: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The risk of Ash Dieback and other diseases affecting up to 20,000 trees within the next 5 years. 2. The risk of a tree causing harm to people or property. Whilst this risk is low (1:10,000,000 nationally), this risk increases when there is not a rigorous cycle of inspections and remedial actions for trees in red risk areas.
Equality:	There are no direct implications on equality.
Health and Wellbeing:	There are significant benefits to the health and wellbeing of our residents provided by trees. This strategy seeks to maximise these through the effective protection and management of our tree stock, and through enhancing our tree canopy cover with the right tree, in the right place, planted at the right time.
Social Value:	The trees in Sandwell are valuable. The replacement cost of Sandwell's trees is estimated at £684m and the amenity value is even higher: £9.4bn. The largest proportion of this amenity value arises from trees growing in parks (29.7%), followed by residential areas (21.3%).
Climate Change:	Three main environmental benefits accrue from the trees. Annually, they provide benefits valued at nearly £6m based on their carbon storage, air pollution removal and rainwater interception. Sandwell's trees store 361,000 tonnes of carbon (a service valued at £328m), sequestering 5,500 annually (£5m), equivalent to 1.6% of the borough's annual emissions; and they remove 15.3 tonnes of air pollution annually,



valued at £828,000. They also intercept 130,000m³ of surface water annually, saving an estimated £128,000 in treatment costs. Other services provided by trees were not measured, including soil conservation, habitat provision and noise reduction.

The planting of 15,000 new trees by 2030 will seek to enhance these benefits towards climate change.

6 Appendices

Appendix A: Tree Strategy and Implementation Plan 2023 – 2028

Appendix B: iTree Technical Report for Sandwell

7. Background Papers

None

