

Agenda Item No: **6** **Report No:** **130/13**

Report Title: **Lewes District Council Tree Management**

Report To: **Scrutiny Committee** **Date:** **20 August 2013**

Cabinet Member: **Cllr Nicholson**

Ward(s) Affected: **All**

Report By: **Director of Planning and Environmental Services**

Contact Officer(s)-

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Purpose of Report:

For Scrutiny to consider the current arrangements for the management of Lewes District Council tree stock.

Officers Recommendation(s):

- 1 That Scrutiny examines the management of LDC tree stock and considers any areas for improvement.
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Reasons for Recommendations

- 1 So that Councillors may review the way that Lewes District tree stock is managed.
- 2 **Information**
 - 2.1 The District Council owns and manages a wide ranging tree stock. These trees can be found in Parks, Open Spaces, Housing Estates, Play Areas, Cemeteries, Nature Reserves etc. These trees are managed by the Parks and Cemeteries Section.
 - 2.2 The Council also has involvement in trees that it does not own. This may be as part of a Planning Application, applications to carry out works on protected trees or trees within a Conservation Area for

example. This work is managed by the Tree and Landscape Officer within the Planning and Environmental Department.

- 2.3** Until recently, the LDC tree stock was managed less formally, with works being carried out to trees when the Area Parks Supervisors inspected the park or site where they were located and saw that work was required, or when enquiries came through from the general public or Housing Department.
- 2.4** In order to better manage the upkeep of trees on Council land, Officers identified the need to undertake a comprehensive survey, to record details of all trees. This survey is prioritising trees according to recognised risk assessment methodology whereby the relative location and condition of the tree is considered in relation to issues such as level and frequency of public access.
- 2.5** The Council has more than 200 sites across the district that will need to be surveyed including:
- Parks, Open Spaces and Recreation Grounds
 - Cemeteries & Closed Churchyards
 - Play Areas
 - Environmental Sites (woodland, nature reserves etc)
 - Housing Estates

All sites have been risk assessed to determine their priority for a tree inspection. Sites that have high levels of public access and have larger tree stock will be given a higher risk and will therefore be inspected first.

- 2.6** The tree survey commenced in April 2013 and is expected to take 12 – 18 months to complete.
- 2.7** A detailed survey specification has been drawn up by the Parks and Cemeteries Manager. The “PSS Live” software database is being used to create a record of all trees surveyed and to programme future inspections as well as manage any identified works that may arise.
- 2.8** Once the initial survey of all trees has been conducted, future surveys will be scheduled at an appropriate frequency determined by the initial results in terms of age, location and condition. It is anticipated further surveys will be conducted every 5 years on average for a healthy tree that is considered a low risk. Trees that are in decay, are identified as needing active management or are in a high risk area will need to be inspected at an increased frequency which will be determined following the initial survey.
- 2.9** There are no set guidelines on how often trees should be inspected, as it is very dependent on tree type, location, age of tree etc. The Health and Safety Executive states that there should be “a system of periodic, proactive checks”. The timescale of a general inspection every five years follows existing policies in other authorities such as Kent County Council and Chichester District Council.

- 2.10** As well as identifying trees that require work, the survey will also help maintain and preserve the health and presence of trees within the district. It will also lead to an improved management of newly planted trees that require additional attention during formative years of growth.
- 2.11** As well as trees located upon Council land, the survey service will be offered to Town and Parish Councils. A recharge arrangement will be put in place for those Towns and Parishes that wish to be included.
- 2.12** This tree survey will allow the Council to establish what tree stock it has, what maintenance is required, and to establish a maintenance regime to keep its tree stock healthy and safe.

3 Works Arising From the Survey

- 3.1** Once the survey has highlighted what works are required to bring the tree stock up to an acceptable standard, a programme of works will be established, based on health and safety risks, tree health, location etc. This work will be carried out over a period of time, funded from the general parks budgets.
- 3.2** To date, the inspections have found mainly minor issues with trees. However there have been several dead trees in more remote tree clumps.
- 3.3** The software will automatically show any trees that have gone past their next inspection date or that have any outstanding maintenance issues to be completed.
- 3.4** Appendix 1 shows a typical inspection report for trees at one of our sites.

4 Tree Planting

- 4.1** The Council does not have a tree planting policy, however we aim to plant new trees each autumn as well as helping other organisations wherever possible:
- (a)** We are currently working with the Seaford Community Partnership with regard to tree planting in Walmer Rd and Chalvington Field Recreation Grounds in Seaford
 - (b)** Discussions are under way with the Friends of Lewes as to how we may help with a tree planting project across Lewes. Initially this will be focused on Landport Estate in consultation with the Landport Residents Association.
 - (c)** We have recently planted a “mini arboretum” at a new open space in Seaford.
 - (d)** We continue to work with ESCC to carry out tree planting using Section 106 monies from the Energy from Waste facility in Newhaven. Planting has taken place at Meeching

Down, Avis Way Rec, Denton Rec and Lewes Road Rec. Proposed planting works at Riverside Park are likely to take place this autumn.

- (e) We regularly plant trees that have been donated by the public, often in memory of family and friends..
- (f) Wherever possible, we will involve the local Community in any tree planting initiative. For instance, at Mickelfield in Seaford, we held a planting event to plant both standard trees and a hedgerow. This event was very well attended by local residents – both young and old.

5 Tree Works on Housing Estates

- 5.1 The Parks Section of LDC manage trees on Council owned housing estate areas on behalf of the Housing Department. This may involve trees in communal areas, open spaces, sheltered housing, estate car parks etc.
- 5.2 Works on these trees are generally carried out via requests from the Housing Department and / or when site inspections by Parks Supervisors identify a problem.
- 5.3 Regular requests are received from council tenants to prune or remove trees as they *“drop leaves all over the residents garden”*, *“Create too much shade to the property”* or *“stop them getting a good tv reception”*. Although each request will be considered sympathetically, trees will not normally be pruned or removed for these reasons.
- 5.4 Trees on LDC estate areas will be included in the LDC Tree Survey, but trees in individual tenants’ gardens will not.

6 Environmental Considerations

- 6.1 When carrying out any tree works, environmental considerations will be taken into account. This will include:
 - Possible bat nesting – certain trees make great habitats for bats. Bats are a protected species and great care needs to be taken if there is a possibility that bats may be present. In this case, we would have an approved bat expert on site whilst works are carried out
 - Nesting Birds – During the nesting season, trees works are limited as much as possible to those requiring works because they create a health and safety hazard.
 - Ivy removal – Although ivy does not normally cause problems to trees, it can hide tree defects and problems making them difficult to inspect. Where trees are in a high / medium risk area / position, then Ivy will normally be removed to allow proper inspection of the

tree. However, in low risk areas, such as tree groups, nature reserves etc, Ivy would be left as it is great as a bird habitat.

- Dutch Elm Disease (DED) – The Council often has to deal with trees on its land that have DED. These trees are removed by specific contractors who are aware of how these trees need to be dealt with to prevent the spread of the disease into the environment.

7 ESCC Tree Maintenance Policy

7.1 ESCC has a Tree Policy that was revised in 2012. However this policy is specifically for the maintenance of Highway trees which have to be carefully monitored due to the risks of accidents on roads.

7.3 The purpose of this policy is to “Regulate the felling, planting and maintenance of trees on the highway”, and its principles are:

- To provide a consistent approach to the conservation and enhancement of the County’s asset of roadside trees.
- To ensure the County Council meets its duty to maintain highways cost-effectively and ensure the safe passage of users

7.4 As Lewes District Council does not manage street trees, this particular policy is not specifically relevant to our councils work.

8 Lewes District Council Trees and Landscape Section

8.1 The Trees and Landscape Section of LDC are responsible for dealing with issues concerning trees on non council land, and for tree issues that form part of a Planning Application. Applications to carry out works on protected trees or trees within a Conservation Area are also managed by this section, along with hedge disputes.

8.2 The Lewes District Website has excellent information for the public on such issues as:

- (a) Tree Preservation Orders
- (b) Employing a Tree Work Contractor
- (c) High Hedge Disputes
- (d) Dangerous Trees
- (e) Tree Diseases etc.

9 Financial Appraisal

There are no specific financial implications resulting from this report.

However, for information, during the 2012 – 13 financial period, the Parks and Cemeteries Section procured tree maintenance works to the value of £85,455.00. This includes tree works in housing areas, nature reserves, cemeteries as well as parks and open spaces.

10 Sustainability Implications

I have not completed the Sustainability Implications Questionnaire as this Report is exempt from the requirement because it is a progress report

11 Equality Screening

Equality Screening is not considered necessary as this is a service report where no changes are proposed at this time.

12 Background Papers

None

13 Appendices

Appendix 1: Sample Tree Inspection Report