

Wirral Tree Strategy

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Introduction

Trees matter to us all for a wide variety of reasons, in constructing this strategy we hope to encompass the broad range of topics which relate to trees in an accessible way. The purpose of this strategy is to provide overarching strategic guidance for trees in our Borough up to 2030. Unlike many similar strategies, it is not a strategy for Wirral Council, but for Wirral as a place, and we hope to work with a wide range of stakeholders in delivering this strategy. We value trees and the multiple benefits they bring for individuals, communities and the wider environment.

Some of our responsibilities as a Local Authority around trees are statutory, we need to make sure that the trees we manage are well maintained. No one wants to see trees being felled but we need to ensure that our trees are safe. Wirral Council will develop a risk management programme which will govern all Council trees including cyclical inspection, post storm inspections, tree failure inspection and survey review and dangerous trees on private land.

We are living through a climate emergency, the build-up of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere due to human activity traps excess heat driving unnatural climate change. Climate change is now one of the greatest threats to humanity. Severe global warming will create significant changes in our climate with damaging consequences. We are living through this. We have already experienced 1 °C of unnatural warming since the pre industrial period. Even if all greenhouse gas emissions stopped tomorrow, global warming would continue due to the greenhouse gases which have already been emitted into our atmosphere. For our planet, trees are invaluable stores of carbon captured from the atmosphere via photosynthesis.

We want to be aspirational around trees to help tackle the climate emergency. Furthermore, the benefits of trees are well recognised they perform a wide variety of vital ecosystem services which we all benefit from. These include:

- Flood risk management, tree root systems slow the flow of water through the ground and hold on to soil and other substrates, preventing them from being washed away
- Shade, providing cover and cooling for humans and animals and benefitting shade loving plants on woodland floors
- Timber, for fuel and construction purposes
- Wellbeing, trees and woodlands are associated with mental health benefits
- Health, our interest in trees and woodlands makes them leisure destinations for walking and cycling offering individuals opportunities for beneficial physical activity
- Air Quality, trees and hedgerows can trap air pollution from road traffic and other sources
- Noise control, trees and hedges can similarly block noise pollution
- Place, trees contribute strongly to a sense of place and identity both at individual sites and at a Wirral wide level. They contribute to the aesthetic appeal of an area and may benefit local pride

Whilst we have responsibility for the trees we manage, we manage them on behalf of Wirral's residents and visitors. We are custodians of them for future generations. The longevity of trees results in long term legacies for ecosystems and for the landscapes that make Wirral so special. In developing this 10 year strategy we know we not only need to consider how we manage and respond to trees now, but we also need to consider the future provision of trees in the Borough.

We of course do not own or maintain all trees in the Borough. Beyond our own trees we want to do more to encourage private landowners to afforest and maintain their stocks of trees. We hope that this strategy can provide useful guidance for future work in this regard.

Social inequalities can be seen throughout Wirral, and this is also reflected in residents' access to trees, woodland and green spaces. This strategy provides us an opportunity to identify areas of deprivation or with low canopy cover to prioritise future planting, whether this be from our own funds or when applying to funding opportunities.

Our trees, woodland and environs throughout Wirral are all key elements of our vision for the Borough in 2030. Wirral's natural environment is a key asset to the Borough. People from across the north west, and further afield come to Wirral either to visit or establish their lives around our stunning coastline and rolling leafy countryside. People love Wirral and are proud of our Borough, Wirral is a great place to live, work and relax and we know trees are key to Wirral's offer as a healthy, green and aspiring place to be. Furthermore, the value that trees

add to Wirral's sense of place is also vital for our public perception and benefits growth and inward investment into the Borough.

We therefore understand that trees and woodlands are close to the hearts of many, in this strategy we hope to put forward a clear vision and outcomes which the Council, and others, are accountable to in maintaining and investing in our trees and woodlands in Wirral.

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, published in December 2018 set out an overall national vision to leave the environment in a better state than we found it for future generations. The Plan contains two specific actions relating to trees:

- The appointment of a national Tree Champion
- Planting more trees in and around our towns and cities, with 1 million more urban trees by 2022

The Committee on Climate Change has advised that the UK should be planting 30,000-50,000 ha of woodland annually to help reach net zero carbon emissions for the UK by 2050 (CCC, 2019). Wirral has a part to play in this national picture.

Our Vision

Our vision for trees in Wirral is encapsulated below:

In the ten year span of this strategy we will raise tree cover in the Borough to at least 10% to boost the benefits of trees and woodlands. We will seek to share these benefits across Wirral. Our planting will be based on "the right tree for the right place" building a strong legacy for our tree stock. If we are forced to fell any of our trees (because of a risk to the public) we will plant at least two more. We will work constructively with individuals and groups to deliver this vision.

Outcomes

To deliver this vision we commit to the following outcomes:

- Safe management of the trees and woodlands owned or under management by the Council
- By the end of this strategy in 2030 we want to raise tree cover in Wirral by a minimum of 10%
- We will future proof our tree stock and ensure it is resilient to climate change and other challenges
- We will identify key areas for tree planting in Wirral to boost carbon sequestration and other ecosystem services.
- We will work with local, regional and national stakeholders to share best practice and knowledge around trees, woodlands and hedgerows

Supporting actions for these outcomes are detailed in the accompanying executive summary of the strategy.

Who we need to work with

A wide range of individuals and groups have important roles and interests in the Borough's trees and we know we cannot achieve the vision of this strategy alone. In developing and delivering this strategy we want to bring people along with us. Some of the key stakeholders we will need to engage and work with are detailed below, this is not exhaustive:

Communities	Groups	Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Residents• Elected Members• Visitors• Businesses• Landowners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tree Wardens• Wirral Initiative for Trees• Wirral Parks Forum• Friends of Parks Groups• Wirral Environmental Network• The Wirral Society• Cheshire Wildlife Trust• Wirral Countryside Volunteers• Urban Beekeepers Association• Tree Council• Woodlands Trust• Forestry Commission• Merseyforest• Love Where you Live Forum• National Trust• Landmark Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Magenta Housing• Wirral Chamber of Commerce• Merseyside Ecological Advisory Service• Liverpool City Region Local Nature Partnership• Parks & Countryside• Public Health• Highways

There is a huge breadth of knowledge and expertise on trees and woodlands in Wirral, both within the Council and within communities, individuals and private/3rd sector organisations. We want to work with stakeholders and value their knowledge and experience in trees and woodlands. We all need to see trees and woodlands principally for their assets, not for the relatively few problems they may cause.

Internally we want to build strong cross departmental working partnerships and consistency in relation to trees. We know that historically siloed working has presented challenges, presently as a Council we are moving forward. Like many issues, trees are truly a cross departmental issue requiring input and expertise from officers across the Council. Trees and Woodlands provide benefits for a wide variety of Council services, from Parks and Countryside to Public Health.

We want to build meaningful and constructive partnerships with stakeholders. The trees and woodland of Wirral are not isolated, they link into the wider regional woodlands of Cheshire and the Mersey Forest. By considering tree and woodland provision at local, regional and

national levels we can engage with stakeholders more effectively and ensure we always do all we can to protect and maintain Wirral's trees and woodlands.

We are open and interested in developing partnerships with stakeholders to help build our woodlands and tree provision such as via to access funding opportunities.

Governance

It is important that this strategy remains a live document up to 2030 and is continuously used, updated and referred to. We propose that the Wirral Tree Strategy is governed by an annual review process between the Council and stakeholders.

This would cover:

- Performance of the strategy
- The relevance of the strategy in relation to local and national policy
- The need for any updated or amended content in the strategy as necessary

We are aware that government is in the process of developing a national tree and open spaces strategy. We will therefore ensure that our local strategy fits into the national strategy once developed. This may involve refocusing our existing strategy to maximise national opportunities (e.g. around funding) and local implementation.

Our Statutory Duties

As the Local Authority for the Borough of Wirral we have a wide variety of statutory duties which we are required to perform by law. All landowners have a common duty of care under the Occupier's Liability Acts (1957) and (1984) and statutory duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (1974). These duties are to take all reasonably practicable precautions to ensure the safety of those on their land.

Wirral Council will develop a risk management programme which will govern all Council trees including cyclical inspection, post storm inspections, tree failure inspection and survey review and dangerous trees on private land. The purpose of this is to provide a technical plan for how we will risk assess our trees and undertake any works required (Figure 1). Trees which require work will always be assessed for bats and nesting birds and work done in a sensitive manner.



Figure 1: Flow chart of tree risk assessment and application of any necessary works.

BOX 1 :TREE FELLING

Taking the decision to remove or cutback a tree is always the absolute last resort and one we only take when there is no other option. It's something we will only ever do when forced to, in order to keep residents and visitors safe.

We have a duty of care to make sure parks, highways and open spaces are safe for people to enjoy. Trees are only ever felled when they are dangerous and there is a risk of people being injured.

We know we don't plant enough new trees, and we know we need a plan for how we protect our existing trees. This strategy is part of our work to remedy this, and we're bidding for funding to help us. The strategy will help us manage our existing trees and make sure that when we are forced to fell a tree, we are able to quickly replace it through a planned programme of planting.

We employ an independent, professional surveyor to assess trees. This surveyor has the highest level of qualifications available in arboriculture. The recommendations made are then assessed by the Council's own, in-house expert before being signed off. There is no financial reward for our contracted surveyor or our tree works contractor to recommend healthy trees to be felled.

We do not make rash judgements when risks to safety are identified. We employ independent experts who give us their expert opinion. When we have sought an expert opinion, it is incumbent on us to act on it and not ignore it.

In line with our stated outcomes we will communicate with residents and ward councillors when we take a decision to fell.

Sometimes it may be necessary to fell trees at a site after risk assessment has been undertaken. We only undertake felling work where necessary (Box 1).

Below we summarise the actions which the council is responsible for and not responsible for in relation to trees.

Things that the council is responsible for:

- Removal of tree stumps alongside public roads, unless left in place for safety reasons
- Repairing damage to roads caused by tree roots surfacing
- Protecting council-owned trees using Tree Preservation Orders
- Sweeping and cleaning the streets to prevent excessive leaf fall and fruit causing a nuisance
- Carrying out a 24-hour tree management emergency service if it's causing a hazard
- Safety surveys and inspections of roadside trees on a regular basis
- The removal of nuisances, such as publicly-owned trees interfering with buildings
- The removal of dying or dangerous trees which belong to the council
- Tree limbs which cause an obstruction to road signs, traffic lights, etc.
- Asking land owners to trim back private trees or hedges if they cause an obstruction to public roads or pavements

-Enforcing Tree Preservation Orders

Things that the council isn't responsible for:

-Cutting back trees or hedges on private land

-Pruning or removing trees in relation to minor matters – such as light obstruction, TV reception, improving a view or to allow easier access to driveways

-Attending to minor nuisances, such as sticky sap, honeydew, birds' nests, leaf fall or the dropping of fruit or flowers

-Removing roots unless it's proven that they're causing damage to drains or structures

-Removing limbs or debris from trees growing on private land. If it causes an obstruction on the road, we'll charge the owner for the work

If you believe a publicly-owned tree is causing damage to your property:

-Contact your insurer for an independent expert's report

-For a compensation claim to be successful, you must provide evidence of the cause of the alleged damage

Tree Planting

We will create a mechanism for community groups to nominate areas of land belonging to the Council for tree planting. We will assess these sites for consideration for future planting using a clearly defined and publicly available framework, to be developed. We will publish decisions we make based upon these nominations.

We will apply for funding opportunities to support tree planting on our own land and publicise details of funding opportunities for tree planting to encourage local landowners to apply. This includes the potential for bids in partnership with other organisations.

It is also important that we recognise where we should not plant. For example:

-Species rich grassland

-Marsh

-Lowland heathland

These habitats are valuable in their own right and are increasingly rare throughout the UK and globally We will consider the need for maintenance, thinning or regeneration of existing trees for these sites on a site specific basis being mindful of the characteristics of the site.

We will use a variety of mechanisms to achieve our planting strategy:

-Capital bids to fund new planting schemes on Council owned land

-Partnership bids with private businesses and organisations to access national funding opportunities such as via the Forestry Commission

-Signpost private landowners to schemes and opportunities such as the MOREwoods scheme from the Woodlands Trust.

-Northern Forest partnership innovation fund, from DEFRA, administered by Woodlands Trust. This aims to plant 1 million trees in the Northern Forest area by March 2022 via

plantings of new woodlands 3 ha or greater. 50% of eligible costs can be funded with an equal 50% in match funding.

-Re-establishment and promotion of the adopt a tree scheme. This scheme has focused on individual trees being funded or by homeowners. Whilst the existing scheme is of great value for boosting street trees we want to build it further, working with businesses and other organisations that want to build legacies for the local environment

-Work to encourage the development of enhanced Environmental Land Management contracts as proposed by the previous government

Appropriate funding mechanisms will be especially important for future tree legacy, we need to plant more trees.

As stated in our outcomes we are interested in planting the right tree for the right place. We, and others seeking to plant need to carefully consider site conditions now and into the future. For example:

- Soil conditions (pH, structure, drainage)
- Microclimate of site (aspect, wind)
- Setting of the site in landscape context
- Height restrictions (e.g. telephone lines on streets etc.)
- Space available to plant in and consideration of the space intended to be filled by the tree as it matures

A degree of failure is expected in tree planting schemes, however by following these principals we can do all we can to ensure longevity and success for new plantings. Adverse rates of tree failure may dispirit local communities belief in the value of tree planting.

Biosecurity is a major issue in the UK and globally, we will play our part by sourcing trees responsibly from UK suppliers.

It is important to recognise that the establishment period of new woodlands is vital. This process could take many years, depending on the species planted and conditions of the site. In the establishment period measures such as protection against grazing or watering in periods of drought may be required. The after care of planting is therefore equally important to any planting undertaken. We commit to proper after care for all of our planting schemes.

Aesthetically, newly planted woodlands can appear barren and unwelcoming before trees mature and the woodland fully establishes. Trees may take decades to mature and in this time the biodiversity of new woodlands can also be low. For larger “anchor” planting schemes we will seek to establish annual flowering woodland wildflowers as shade cover increases (between 10-40% ambient summer daylight). These plant communities are synonymous with ancient woodland and not only increase biodiversity, will also greatly enhance landscape character and public interest in new woodlands. This links into later points around community pride which we want to develop between woodlands and local residents.

Planting schemes also need to ensure diversity in species planted. A mix of species better replicates naturally seeded woodlands and provides greater resilience against disease. Monocultures of single species of trees can quickly develop and spread diseases.

Trees are available from UK suppliers in a variety of sizes:

- Whips: Small trees with little or no side shoots,
- Feathers: Small trees with a central stem with some side branches

- Standard: Larger trees with a clear head of branches

All of these sizes are of value in planting schemes. Whilst planting more mature standard trees offers more immediate visual impact, whips and feathers are cheaper to purchase, therefore being suitable for afforestation of larger areas and once established will grow into mature trees over time. Their smaller size also means they can be readily planted by community groups etc. without special equipment. The root systems of whips and feathers may develop stronger as they establish compared to larger trees also. Conversely establishment costs of feathers and whips may require additional protection such as cages to prevent grazing and vandalism.

We understand the importance of natural regeneration of woodlands, we will endeavour as far as possible to allow the natural understory layers of woodlands we manage to develop, including the natural establishment of new saplings.

Tree Preservation Orders

BOX 2: TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS (TPOs)

The Town and Country Planning Act (1991) gives Local Authorities powers around Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). These are used to protect trees which make a significant impact on their local surroundings.

TPOs can be made to protect individual trees, groups of trees or areas of woodland. They can include hedgerow trees but not hedges, bushes or shrubs.

Once a TPO is in place it becomes an offence to carry out work on the tree/s covered (e.g. felling, pruning, pollarding, wilfully damage or destroying) without prior permission from the council in its role as Local Planning Authority. If a TPO is disregarded the council can prosecute offenders.

An [online map](#) is provided to show existing TPOs in the Borough.

Anyone wishing to carry out work on a protected tree must first [submit an application](#) to do so. If a tree is within a conservation area, even if it is not protected by a TPO itself, you must give 6 weeks prior written notice. The Local Planning Authority's consent is not required for any protected tree that is dead or dangerous. However, anybody proposing to cut down such a tree is advised to give five days written notice, unless it's an emergency. The removal of deadwood and broken branches is also included within this exemption.

The Local Planning Authority's consent is not required for carrying out works to protected trees if it is in compliance with a statutory obligation. This usually only refers to work carried out by utility providers and similar bodies in the interest of safety or involving the inspection, repairing or renewing of apparatus.

If you are ever unsure you should contact the Tree Preservation Officer, [contact details](#) may be found on the council website.

Wirral Council utilises a Council wide enforcement policy which is being reviewed, we will undertake a thorough and effective approach to investigation of all allegations and appropriate enforcement of offences relating to trees in line with this Policy. The

enforcement policy provides us with a transparent and fair framework for how we will conduct our enforcement activity and meets government guidance on enforcement best practice (Enforcement Concordat). All officers involved in planning inspections and enforcement will be made aware of the Tree Strategy and the Enforcement Policy to allow for effective implementation. Equally where planning permissions stipulate tree planting we will inspect to ensure they are maintained as stipulated by any relevant permissions.

Challenges to Trees

Trees face many challenges and threats to their existence, as a Local Authority we need to be aware of these and as far as possible mitigate their impacts.

Ancient Woodland and Ancient/Veteran Trees

Wirral has few ancient and veteran trees, we therefore need to maintain the assets that we do have carefully. Similarly trees of other cultural significance should be maintained with consideration and care.

The National Planning and Policy Framework has recently been updated to provide better protections for ancient woodlands.

“Development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists.” (NPPF Para. 175c)

BOX 3: COMMUNITY TREES

Individual trees may have significance to particular communities, this could be for a variety of reasons:

- The age of the tree, for mature and ancient trees
- The species of the tree, should it be a particularly rare species in the UK or a specimen sample.
- The characteristics of a tree/s as a local landmark in a community
- Local historical, cultural, ecological or social provenance of a tree
- Veteran trees, e.g. 'a tree that is of interest biologically, culturally or aesthetically because of its age, size or condition' (Natural England, 2000).

We invite communities to put forward examples of such trees to enhance our understanding of special trees within the Borough. If appropriate, on assessment, these may be brought forward for Tree Preservation Orders.

You can also submit ancient trees to be recorded on the Woodland Trust Ancient Tree Initiative, which can be found online [here](#).

Tree pests and diseases

Trees, like all plants, can be threatened by a wide variety of diseases and pests. In the UK several notable outbreaks of disease have decimated tree populations of certain species. For example, the Dutch Elm diseases epidemic in the 1970s which severely reduced the Elm (*Ulmus* spp.) population in the UK. As a Local Authority our risk management programme will consider the threat of diseases to trees which we manage including Bleeding Canker of Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*).

Ash dieback, sometimes also called Chalara dieback of ash (Box 4) has also been found in Wirral. This is a disease affecting ash trees (*Fraxinus Excelsior*) by the fungus (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) which cuts off the movement of water in affected trees. There have been several identified cases of ash dieback in Wirral in 2018 and 2019 (Forestry Commission, 2019). Infected ash trees may develop secondary infections, such as Honey Fungus, which can further weaken or kill infected trees. Ash dieback may be a particular risk for street trees of ash which are likely varietal clones lacking in genetic diversity.

Climate change will increase the range of tree pests and diseases that affect trees in Wirral. The international trade in timber and plants can also introduce new pests and diseases from elsewhere in the world. Many tree pests and diseases first occur in the south of England, where the climate may be more favourable for populations to establish. We all have a role to play in spotting new diseases and pests as they appear. For Wirral we need to know if and when any new pests or diseases spread into the Borough.

The Forestry Commission maintains an online [Tree Alert reporting tool](#). This important citizen science tool allows users to report suspected pests and diseases to the Forestry Commission. This work is vital to understand the spread and distribution of tree pests and diseases across the UK.

There are opportunities to harvest seed from Wirral's own existing tree stock. Mature trees which have naturally seeded in Wirral are likely to be best suited to Wirral's climate and growing conditions and be disease resistant. For example certain mature Wych Elms (*Ulmus glabra*) in Wirral appear to show resistance to Dutch Elm Disease. Wirral Council will work with community groups in community nursery programmes.

A range of pests and diseases exist which may be introduced into the UK in the following years or have been seen in limited outbreaks, this is not an exhaustive list:

- Asian longhorn beetle (*Anoplophora glabripennis*)
- Chestnut blight (*Cryphonectria parasitica*)
- Emerald ash borer beetle (*Agrilus planipennis*)
- Oak processionary moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*)

Box 4: SPOTTING THE SIGNS OF ASH DIEBACK

Ash Dieback is a fungal disease which affects Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) trees, a key tree species for UK woodlands. We now know that ash dieback is present in Wirral. As ash dieback presents such a significant threat it is important that we can spot the signs of the disease and report incidences.

The [Woodland Trust](#) have compiled a list of key symptoms to spot in affected ash trees

- Dark lesions – often long, thin and diamond-shaped – appear on the trunk at the base of dead side shoots
- The tips of shoots become black and shrivelled (see below)
- Blackened, dead leaves – may look a bit like frost damage
- The veins and stalks of leaves, normally pale in colour, turn brown
- Saplings have dead tops and side shoots
- In mature trees, dieback of twigs and branches in the crown, often with bushy growth further down the branches where new shoots have been produced
- In late summer and early autumn (July to October), small white fruiting bodies can be found on blackened leaf stalks.



Above: Stem and shoot of ash tree infected with ash dieback (Forest Research, 2019)

If you think you have seen something unusual please report it to: info@record-lrc.co.uk

Forest Research, the research agency of the Forestry Commission also provide more detailed guidance on their [website](#).

A separate Ash Dieback Management plan provides more detail on how we will respond to the threat on Wirral. It contains measures around:

- Public and stakeholder awareness of ash dieback
- Best practice for home and landowners on ash dieback (e.g. allowing ash saplings to continue to develop to develop resilience in the local population).

Climate Change

Climate change refers to the long term changes in our climate as a result of anthropogenic emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases such as methane. These trap heat within Earth's atmosphere, over time resulting in more heat being retained and greater average temperatures.

For the UK the Met Office climate modelling states that this will result in a general trend to warmer, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers (Met Office, 2018). Similarly, it is expected that climate change will lead to a greater frequency of extreme weather events in the UK (Sambrook & Richardson, 2019).

These changes will mean not only that the range of tree pests and diseases will change, but the range and distribution of trees themselves will change. This will mean the range of some tree species in the UK may shrink while others may expand. Increasing temperatures may allow more non-native/exotic trees to survive over a wider area.

This presents a wide range of challenges for how we manage our existing trees in Wirral and challenges for our future planting:

-We need to consider the future climatic suitability of new trees we plant as the climate in Wirral changes, especially given the long life span of many trees

-We need to consider how our existing tree stocks may be affected by changing climatic conditions and potentially greater frequency of extreme weather events

Whilst trees will be affected by climate change, they are part of the solution to how we mitigate the challenges that climate change presents.

Vandalism

Vandalism is an issue that can affect trees, particularly in urban areas. Vandalism could either be caused by anti-social behaviour, or it could be caused to an individual/s objection to a particular tree or group of trees for a wide variety of reasons e.g. sightlines, car parking access. Either way, such vandalism is unacceptable and we will always take measures to prosecute individual/s who vandalise or who otherwise damage our trees. E.g. working on a tree with a TPO without our permission.

Trees may be particularly vulnerable to vandalism as they establish, particularly for smaller trees and saplings. Where appropriate we will take extra measures to protect trees e.g. reinforced cages.

Public Awareness

Certain issues around trees may be because of a lack of public understanding of trees and woodlands e.g. limited understanding of the value of trees and woodlands. For example, a poor understanding of tree diseases and safe and effective tree management may lead homeowners into taking unnecessary tree work or felling by themselves or a contractor. Equally someone may not understand why a tree needs to be felled or pollarded.

This also extends to members of the public reporting tree issues to the Council or other bodies. A key element of our ash dieback plan is to raise public awareness of the disease, it's symptoms and how individuals can report incidences to Forest Research, an agency of the Forestry Commission.

Public awareness is also important because of the risks of misconceptions around tree management. As mentioned in Box 1 tree felling is sometimes necessary and we will undertake felling when other options are not possible. Tree problems can be complex e.g. involving the history, legacy, siting and species of a tree. We have to accept that we will not always be able to satisfy all stakeholders when undertaking decisions around trees.

To raise public awareness of issues around trees and woodlands we aim to take the following approaches:

- Utilising our communications channels as a Council to publish information and guidance for members of the public around relevant tree and woodland issues (e.g. best practice, TPOs, tree diseases and pests)
- Work with national and local organisations with knowledge and expertise in addition to Council officers to share messages around tree and woodland management with the public
- Engage with our own contractors and other contractors working throughout Wirral on best practice
- Communicate better with the public, elected members, businesses and other stakeholders about the work we directly undertake or commission on our Council managed trees. This is especially important if felling is to occur as part of a scheme of works. We will undertake particular efforts to communicate with stakeholders in the immediate proximity of a site so that they are clearly informed of work, what is happening and why it is happening before it occurs.

We will also provision appropriate training and development opportunities for Council officers involved in trees and woodlands.

A wide range of consultants and contractors exist for homeowners, landlords or landowners requiring works to trees on their land. Arboriculture is a skilled profession, and for good reason, arboricultural work done improperly can be dangerous and pose risks both to people, property and trees. In the UK two accreditation schemes exist which provide assurance of the competence and skill of contractors:

- Arboricultural Association
- International Association of Arborists

Somebody may say that they are member of one of the above or similar accreditation schemes. By contacting the scheme you can check that that a contractor is registered with them.

The Arboricultural Association also provide a list of questions to ask when selecting a [contractor](#).

Tree legacy

Wirral's existing tree stock contains a mixture of native and non native species of different ages in our streets, parks and countryside. The last major Local Authority tree planting scheme in Wirral occurred approximately 40-50 years ago. Hence we lack diversity in the age range of trees that make up our stock. This can result in a poorly developed under layer in areas of woodland. This also makes the future legacy of our stock vulnerable as many of our trees are a similar age there are presently not enough younger trees to replace these into the future. Mature, larger trees are particularly important for our legacy, for their

ecological value and for the ecosystem services they provide (such as carbon stored from the atmosphere).

Certain tree species also make up large proportions of our stock. E.g. the non-native Swedish Whitebeam (*Sorbus × intermedia*) has been commonly used as a street tree in Wirral and elsewhere. In modern forestry management more care and attention is taken in selecting and cultivating a mixed tree stock. In our tree planting we need to consider how we can create a legacy of a diverse, healthy and beneficial stock of trees.

It is always important in planting that we select the right tree for the right site. This is particularly true in planting street trees where we need to ensure their growth and habit will not have adverse effects such as damage to pavements, blocking sight lines for road users etc. This is why we may select non-native tree species for particular sites, because of their characteristics in relation to the characteristics of the site.

However, we recognise the benefits of planting native trees, particularly for biodiversity and in our planting schemes we will endeavour to plant native trees where this is possible as each individual site permits.

Finally, in relation to tree legacy many trees and woodlands in Wirral belong to private landowners. As a council we do not have any special powers to influence the management of trees and woodland on private sites, beyond those in relation to the planning system (e.g. granting and enforcement of TPOs, where appropriate) Therefore we can only have limited influence on such trees and woodland. However, we know that many landowners in Wirral, large and small, greatly value trees and woodland which they maintain.

Development

Development and other changes in land use can place pressure on trees, if trees are lost to development it may be impossible to replace them. It is also important to note that such biodiversity mitigation measures, where trees, woodland or other habitat is replaced away from the site where it has been removed from may not be like for like. E.g. some species of trees such as Oaks (*Quercus*) may live for hundreds of years. The ecological, social and cultural value of a newly planted oak sapling is not the same as a mature oak. The value of mature, old trees is greatly significant and has been documented in literature (Lindenmayer & Laurance, 2017).

BOX 5: GREEN & BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE

Green infrastructure refers to gardens, parks, verges, hedges, trees, productive landscape, green corridors, ponds, lakes, rivers, streams, floodplains and sustainable drainage systems. This infrastructure provides a range of 'services' that can play an important role for humans and the wider environment. These services include: managing surface water and river and coastal flooding by reducing surface runoff, providing natural storage and slowing water movement; managing temperatures through evaporative cooling and shade; species adaptation providing networks through which species can move; and reducing soil erosion. A single tree whether in a park, garden or road is not alone, forming part of our green infrastructure network and contributing with benefits that are felt across Wirral and beyond.

As with all new plantings, trees planted as part of developments need consideration of “right tree for right place”. Inappropriate trees planted in developments may quickly outgrow their intended space or become weak and die. Under our planning enforcement work we need to better check that planning conditions around trees are adhered to.

If trees are removed or destroyed as part of a planning application, it may be a condition of planning consent that such trees are replaced by the applicant. Development in Wirral is currently guided by the Unitary Development Plan (2000) (UDP). Policy GR7 (Box 6 & 7) is the key policy in relation to trees and developments. UDP Policy GR5 also affects trees “*provide for new planting and for the protection, replacement or enhancement of existing features such as ponds, trees, bushes, shrubs or hedges...*” In the lifetime of this strategy Wirral Council as the Local Planning Authority will be bringing forward a new Local Plan which will replace the Unitary Development Plan. This strategy will be updated accordingly to the new Local Plan. Conservation of trees and hedgerows in the Borough will remain a priority of the new Local Plan.

BOX 6: GR7 TREES AND NEW DEVELOPMENT POLICY

In assessing the protection to be given to trees on development sites the Local Planning Authority will consider the general health, structure, size and life expectancy of trees, their visual value within the locality and their value for nature conservation and will require that buildings, structures and hard surface areas are sited in order to:

- (i) substantially preserve the wooded character of the site or of the surrounding area;
- (ii) provide for the protection of trees of greatest visual or wildlife value and other vigorous healthy trees;
- (iii) ensure that trees to be retained have adequate space in order to prevent damage to their canopy or root structures during construction and to allow for the future growth of canopy and roots to normal mature sizes;
- (iv) prevent the removal of trees by occupiers of the development to obtain reasonable sunlight to habitable rooms, secure an open unshaded garden area, or to remove perceived dangers to life and property; and
- (v) protect trees on adjacent land which may be affected by the development proposed;

Applications should include detailed plans showing the location of individual trees to be affected by the development proposed, together with information related to trunk girth, species mix, height, canopy spread and general health and condition. Trees to be felled should be clearly indicated.

Where development involving the loss of trees is to be permitted, the Local Planning Authority will, as a condition of planning consent, require replacement trees to be planted elsewhere on the site where this is required in order to protect or preserve local amenity.

Planning conditions will include provision for the future maintenance of newly planted stock, including the replacement of failures, until the newly planted stock is established and capable of normal unaided growth; and during the construction period, measures related to the protection of trees to be retained.

Work to trees, including felling, removal, thinning and crown lifting should be completed prior to construction commencing in accordance with a scheme of work agreed in advance with the Local Planning Authority.

BOX 7: REASONED JUSTIFICATION FOR POLICY GR7

8.35 Trees form a prominent part of the Wirral landscape and comprise an essential feature in the special character of many of Wirral's residential areas. Indeed, even where tree cover is not a distinctive characteristic of a neighbourhood, a single large tree or group of trees can have a significant visual impact within the surrounding area.

8.36 Policy GR7 forms part of the Local Planning Authority's wider responsibility to conserve the natural beauty of the area and to provide for physical improvements to the environment. It also reflects the statutory duty to, wherever appropriate, specifically provide for the preservation and planting of trees when granting planning consent. Policy GR7 does not, however, provide a blanket protection for all trees. Instead, it provides for the circumstances of each site to be considered in terms of its importance within the surrounding area. The objective of Policy GR7 is to ensure that issues related to the health, size, visual significance and the wildlife value of trees are properly assessed before development is permitted or refused.

8.37 In accordance with Policy GR7, trees or woodlands possessing significant visual or wildlife value will normally be retained. However, where it proves necessary to permit the loss of trees, Policy GR7 also requires applicants to undertake replacement planting, especially in order to preserve the wooded character of a site or neighbourhood or in order to protect the amenity of adjacent property.

8.38 The protection, planting and subsequent preservation of trees will normally form the subject of conditions attached to planning consent. These conditions will include provision for the future maintenance of newly planted stock until newly planted trees are properly established and measures to prevent root damage to existing trees from trenches for foundations, cables and other utilities.

8.39 It is not, however, only the development process itself that can lead to the loss of trees. Trees planted too close to buildings or site layouts which are too cramped to provide for the normal growth of trees to maturity can often lead to pressure for their subsequent removal. Policy GR7, therefore, also provides that the siting and layout of new development and new planting is carefully regulated in order to prevent the need to remove trees once the development is complete and occupied.

8.40 While Policy GR7 will mainly apply to trees affected by development proposals located within the urban area, it will also be held to apply to applications for development within the Green Belt. Indeed, within the Green Belt it will often be more important where the need to preserve rural character and protect the wider landscape from the impact of new development is a priority.

8.41 In addition to the powers and duties outlined above, the Local Planning Authority also has the power to issue Tree Preservation Orders where it is "expedient in the interests of amenity". Such an Order provides additional protection to selected trees and woodlands where their removal or cutting would have a significant impact on the environment. While Policy GR7 does not represent a definitive strategy for Tree Preservation Orders, the criteria related to health, size, visual value and nature conservation value will form primary considerations in the issue of new or revised Orders.

8.42 Further advice in relation to Tree Preservation Orders and the presentation of proposals affecting trees is contained within Supplementary Planning Guidance Note 17.

Benefits of Trees

Trees for health

Trees are good for both our mental and physical health and wellbeing.

More and more evidence shows that trees are beneficial for our health:

- Their aesthetic and natural appeal benefits our mental health and reduces stress (Grahn & Stigsdotter, 2003)
- Woodlands have leisure value allowing people to get out into nature, particularly for woodlands close to urban areas. This allows people to exercise, e.g. running, walking or cycling in woodlands, in addition to mental health benefits (Ellaway, Macintyre, & Bonnefoy, 2005).
- Trees and hedgerows intercept particulate matter and absorb gaseous pollutants in the air, benefitting air quality (Nowak, Hirabayashi, Bodine, & Greenfield, 2014).
- Trees and hedgerows also reduce noise pollution, acting as barriers, e.g. from road noise (Bolund & Hunhammar, 1999).
- Trees can provide shade cover and reduce the overall urban heat island effect often found in built up areas (Gómez-Baggethun & Barton, 2013).

BOX 8: SCHOOLS AIR QUALITY PROJECT

In a collaboration between officers in Public Health, Eco Schools, Environmental Health and academics from Liverpool John Moores University a project investigated air pollution from particulate matter around schools in Wirral.

Pupils and teachers were engaged as citizen scientists, measuring particulate matter pollution around the perimeter of their schools. These were used to produce “heat maps” of air pollution from particulate matter for each site.

Mersey Forest became involved in the project and worked on hedge planting schemes with pupils to create green barriers around schools to reduce the effect of particulate matter pollution. In total around 60 schools on Wirral were involved with the project. Aside from this practical benefit, the pupils involved learned about air pollution.

Although Wirral is a beautiful Borough with good provision of green and open space. We know that this is not equal across the Borough. Woodland Trust calculations suggest that 10-20% of the population of Wirral lives within 500m from woodland of at least 2 ha in size (Woodland Trust, 2016). If we want the health benefits of our trees and woodland to be appropriately shared we must consider how we can improve access to our trees and woodlands. We are fortunate to have sites such as Birkenhead Park offering access to woodland and green space in the heart of Birkenhead. Furthermore, many of our sites are

reachable via public transport. We want to examine the areas of the Borough where new tree planting may bring the greatest additional benefit.

Trees for our planet

Trees are a vital element of our local ecosystems, beyond this trees have global significance. They provide a wide variety of services that are of value to us and the environment.

In July 2019 Wirral Council declared a climate emergency in a motion which received broad cross-party support. This declaration is an official statement of the urgency around climate change. Local Authorities across the UK have declared climate emergencies throughout 2018 and 2019. The declaration of a climate emergency in Wirral is a clear signal that tackling climate change is a corporate priority for our elected members.

The climate emergency motion calls for a wide range of actions, reflected in the Climate Emergency Action Plan and the “quick wins” of the 100 Day Action Plan. Trees are vital for our environment and for humanity and will be key in tackling climate change. Via photosynthesis trees capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in wood and other growth. This carbon is therefore sequestered, locked up out of the atmosphere (Nowak & Crane, 2002). The instigation of a climate emergency is therefore a key driver in the need for Wirral to develop this strategy and have a joined up vision for trees and woodland within the Borough.

Amongst other actions the motion called for:

- Cabinet is requested to ask officers to initiate a major tree-planting initiative, ensuring that they...
 - discuss the opportunities for additional tree planting in Wirral with the major landowners
 - identify land for tree planting to create a range of sites and wildlife corridors to tackle climate change and
 - add to the biodiversity of Wirral and involve local schools

For afforestation to have net carbon sequestration and therefore reduce carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, trees need to be planted at a rate greater than which they die or are felled etc. This is why our aspirational planting strategy is so important. The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) which independently advises government on climate change sees afforestation, along with other land use changes as a key element of the UK meeting it's climate goals. A November 2018 report from CCC calls for the UK to increase its forested land cover from 13% to 19% by 2050 (Committee on Climate Change, 2018).

Aside from their role in the carbon cycle, trees form a hugely important part of Wirral's ecosystems:

- Trees are valuable as biodiversity in their own right.
- They provide food for invertebrates, both larvae and adults, birds and mammals.
- They provide shelter for invertebrates, birds and mammals.
- They support mosses, liverworts, lichens and higher plants, which in turn provide habitat for other wildlife.
- Much of our UK wildlife needs trees at some stage in its life.

Trees and hedgerows are noted for their important role in flood risk management. They intercept rainfall via their branches and leaves. By also slowing the flow of water in the ground via their large root systems, rainfall does not reach drains and rivers so quickly. Root

systems also have further benefits of holding soil and other substrates in place. This can reduce the risk of soil erosion, caused by flooding or other factors (Roy, Byrne, & Pickering, 2012).

Deadwood, if safe, can provide a hugely important contribution to naturally succeeding woodland habitat. By leaving more deadwood in place, where it is possible and safe to do so, will create habitat for a wide variety of invertebrates and other organisms.

BOX 9: GREEN CORRIDORS

Green corridors are patches or strips of landscape which join together larger patches of green space. Such green corridors can take a wide variety of forms, e.g. strips of hedgerow, urban parks, lines of street trees, verges, river banks etc.

By joining up separated patches of green space, including woodland, plant and animal species can expand their ranges and colonise new areas of land.

In our planting we will look to identify and strengthen existing green corridors via tree planting. We will also look to consider where we could create new green corridors and join up existing areas of woodland via our planting.

BOX 10: COOL WIRRAL PARTNERSHIP

Wirral maintains a climate strategy partnership and associated strategy, Cool Wirral. This provides an overarching view as to how we will tackle climate change and mitigate its effects in the Borough into the future.

In relation to trees and woodland, the government sees afforestation as being a key part to how we respond to climate change in the UK.

- Trees capture carbon from the atmosphere and store this in their wood (carbon sequestration)
- The cooling effect of trees will benefit as global average temperatures rise
- The root systems of trees alleviate run off and can reduce flooding risk, extreme weather events are predicted to become more frequent as average temperatures rise

Afforestation in relation to climate change mitigation is covered in more detail in the Cool Wirral Strategy.

Trees for People

Trees are key to sense of place, identity and pride in local communities

Trees are known to have wider community benefits:

- Positively influencing property value (Tyrväinen & Miettinen, 2000)
- Fostering a sense of safety in communities (Kuo, Bacaicoa, & Sullivan, 1998)

There have even been studies investigating links between well maintained trees and lower crime rates (Kuo & Sullivan, 2001).

Wirral's sense of place is incredibly important, it's why so many people choose to live in the Borough. Wirral offers relaxed living conditions with ready access to countryside and coast whilst being close to major employment centres in Liverpool, Chester and beyond.

As Wirral develops into the future it will be of great importance that the Local Authority protects this sense of place and identity that makes Wirral so unique. We need to create a Borough that today's children will want to continue to live and work in, contributing to our local economy. Likewise we want more businesses to consider establishing themselves in Wirral and we know our trees and countryside is a huge part of our offer as a place.

Community involvement will be of great importance in building a future legacy for trees and woodland in Wirral, this could take many forms:

- Encouraging and promoting existing tree and woodland interest groups such as the Wirral tree Wardens
- Working within Wirral's existing eco-schools programme to build interest and knowledge of trees and woodlands in younger generations
- Recruiting volunteers, both as individuals and groups in citizen science projects such as recording the spread and progress of ash dieback
- Recruiting volunteers in tree planting schemes
- Encouraging further uptake of the council's adopt a tree scheme for private individuals and organisations
- Providing guidance, opportunities and training for those who volunteer in Wirral to develop their skill sets further and thank them for their efforts
- Working with local Colleges and Universities in the region

This support is vital because:

- A wealth of knowledge and experience exists in Wirral's communities around trees and woodland which we need to tap into
- Members of the public on the ground are in the best position to spot signs of tree disease, vandalism etc. or other woodland issues in their local areas
- Community involvement in tree planting, whether it be the council's planting proposals or those of community or private sector interests will create a sense of ownership for new and expanded trees and woodlands. A sense of community pride will protect new trees and woodlands from vandalism

BOX 11: WIRRAL TREE WARDENS

The Wirral Tree Wardens are a voluntary group dedicated to the planting and care of trees across Wirral. The group hosts a regular series of events for volunteers to get involved. This includes the management of a demonstration orchard at Brimstage.

The Wirral Tree Wardens have also built important partnerships with the Tree Council, Forestry Commission and other national and regional groups.

The work of the group benefits trees and woodland across Wirral, in delivering this strategy as a Council we want to work more closely with Wirral Tree Wardens and other groups with interests in our trees and woodland. Working together we can achieve more.

To find out more please see below:

<http://www.wirralenvironmentalnetwork.org.uk/wirraltreewardens.htm>

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Appendices

The following will be developed and provided as appendices to the main strategy

Appendix 1: Frequently Asked Questions

Appendix 2: Wirral Ash Dieback Action Plan

Appendix 3: Document for Planning Officers