



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Environment & Operations
LEAD OFFICERS:	Strategic Director of Environment & Operations
DATE:	7 March 2024

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Environment & Operations
WARD/S AFFECTED:	(All Wards);
KEY DECISION:	Y

SUBJECT: Tree and Woodland Strategy

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Trees are vital to our environment for a wide range of reasons. A Trees and Woodland Strategy is a key tool for ensuring our treescapes flourish and are protected for the future.

Public, Government and industry awareness of Climate Change and the fragile state of our environments, locally, nationally, and internationally has never been higher or the importance of action so urgent. Tree planting and appropriate management of existing trees and woodlands owned by the Council are even more important as part of these concerns. There is therefore a need for a consistent and comprehensive approach to the Council's tree and woodland management.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Executive Board approves the Tree and Woodland Strategy attached at appendix 1 to the report.

3. BACKGROUND

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council owns and manages a significant amount of Green Space across the Borough. The Council has an obligation to manage these spaces in trust for the public and future generations.

Trees and woodlands across Blackburn with Darwen are making a significant contribution to protecting society from the impacts of climate change; through carbon sequestration, flood prevention, cooling and shading and nature conservation.

Woodlands are sustaining and connecting wildlife-rich habitats that are valued by the borough's residents, businesses, and visitors; for the social, economic, and environmental benefits that nature provides. A biodiversity emergency exists alongside the climate emergency and the management of trees and woodland can help support habitats to help reverse the decline in nature.

A collaborative and evidence-based approach can increase the quantity, quality, and diversity of Blackburn with Darwen's treescape that is effectively maintained and adapted to ensure its maturity and replenishment against the challenges of a changing climate.

It is necessary to take steps to enhance and improve biodiversity across our green spaces and to seek to influence other land holders to improve the environments for all our residents and visitors; whilst managing health and safety risks and improving the potential of trees/woodlands to increase their contribution to lessen the impact of climate change.

This strategy, when adopted, will set out and confirm the Council's commitment and aspirations in this area.

Although not a Planning document, this Tree and Woodland Strategy feeds into and compliments other Strategies, Policies, and guidelines across the Council and vice versa, such as:

- Local Plan 2021-2037 Climate Emergency Action Plan
- Biodiversity 'First considerations' report and objectives/actions
- Woodland management plans
- Tree Risk Management Framework
- Open Spaces Strategy

Trees also provide a host of physical health and mental wellbeing benefits by making our environment and lives more enjoyable, including:

- Providing character and a sense of place.
- Providing 'green spaces' to support recreation and leisure opportunities.
- Supporting access to nature - this was a proven benefit during the Covid-19 pandemic to reduce stress, isolation and loneliness.
- Providing historic character
- Providing views for homeowners and visitors.
- Enhancing privacy and screening undesirable features.
- Absorbing urban noise and improving air quality.
- Providing opportunities to improve health and diet through food-producing trees and hedges.
- Supporting community and reducing social isolation – for example, through group walks, tree planting volunteering programmes and litter picking in nature.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

This Tree and Woodland Strategy (TAWS) has been developed to formally acknowledge the long-term benefits that trees and woodland can bring to our local communities in Blackburn with Darwen and the commitment we have made to foster and protect it.

The TAWS sets out a vision for how we will manage our trees and woodland areas as well as provide future growth and planting opportunities. It has been produced in collaboration with various Council services, including the Environment team and the Growth team. This is to ensure it responds to the variety of needs of all its users, whether providing tree maintenance, tackling pests and disease, delivering tree planting projects, mitigating carbon emissions, conserving biodiversity, or guiding the determination of planning applications.

The TAWS presents a vision of where the Council want the borough to be by 2030 and introduces a series of objectives to achieve that vision, with those objectives then supported by a series of identified actions, set out in an Action Plan.

The actions within that plan can then be monitored to regularly review performance against the aims of the strategy. At this early stage of the strategy development, actions are intentionally high-level to outline the broad actions required to support our trees and woodland. It is intended that further work

will then be undertaken, with relevant partners, to identify the necessary detailed interventions that can be made – for example, the identification and prioritisation of specific tree planting sites. A more-detailed Action Plan, for implementation and management, will then be developed to ensure that performance against the strategy can be maintained and tracked.

Without having more comprehensive and up to date strategy, the Council will struggle to deliver its Climate Change promises and be able to demonstrate this.

There is a risk of reputational damage if the Council does not act responsibly and decisively to support the environment and fulfil its commitments. The Council also has legal duties under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (as amended), since strengthened by the Environment Act 2021, towards the conservation and enhancement of nature.

A benefit of having a current TAWS is that this will aid with grant submissions for the future planting and management of trees within the borough.

Trees and woodlands across Blackburn with Darwen are making a significant contribution to protecting society from the impacts of climate change through carbon sequestration, flood prevention, cooling and shading and nature conservation. Woodlands are sustaining and connecting wildlife-rich habitats that are valued by the borough's residents, businesses, and visitors for the social, economic, and environmental benefits that nature provides.

A collaborative and evidence-based approach will help increase the quantity, quality and diversity of Blackburn with Darwen's treescape that is effectively maintained and adapted to ensure its maturity and replenishment against the challenges of a changing climate.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The TAWS supports the corporate vision by promoting a sense of responsibility by all for our environment, promoting biodiversity, championing the green economy and protecting our planet.

It supports the strategic priorities of the corporate strategy:

- Supporting a strong, resilient local economy by ensuring the environment of the Borough is supported, improved, and protected.
- Acting on the Climate Emergency and protecting the environment.
- Working with partners to ensure the environmental stewardship of our open spaces is of the highest quality, including the promotion of biodiversity, rewilding and the phasing out of pesticide use other than in exceptional and defined circumstances.
- Improving the health and wellbeing of our residents and communities.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Should the Council adopt this Strategy there will be a need to identify sources of income, external funding and possibly internally funded capital budgets to allow for the delivery of the Tree and Woodland Strategy action plan in the longer term.

Revenue budgets currently exist to manage ongoing tree inspections and addressing identified tree safety issues, but mainly working on dead, dangerous or dying tree stock.

A revenue budget exists for addressing the cost of dealing with the impact of Ash Dieback disease.

There will be a need to secure additional funding for woodland management in order that all our woodlands are managed proactively to mitigate the effects of climate change. This will initially be identified via grant funding and collaborative funding bids with partners, where available.

There will also be a requirement to secure budgets and funding for tree and woodland planting schemes. Whilst success has been achieved with grant funding bids, the use of the Climate Change budget in developing additional tree planting has been successful and may need to be revisited in the future.

Officers are pursuing alternative ways of funding through Defra, Forestry Commission as well as Section 106 monies and any other available external funding source. The effectiveness and reliability of the latter funding sources will need to be kept under review and future bids for internally funded capital budgets may still be necessary to achieve the goals set out.

Where it is not possible to obtain external funding to support the delivery of the Tree and Woodland Strategy, there may be a need for the Council to consider additional budget provision – over and above what is currently in the Council’s base budget - whether that is revenue, capital or a combination of both. Should this be the case, approval for this additional funding will be obtained in line with the requirements of Financial Procedure Rules.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The preparation of this policy is being undertaken in order to support compliance with the Council’s statutory obligations and its corporate strategy aims and objectives. The report provides details of the Council’s consultation process and provides an update on that consultation and the strategy’s development.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The Tree and Woodland Strategy will initially be managed within existing resources, but should additional resources be required, additional funding will be requested.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA link here*)

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA attachment*)

10. CONSULTATIONS

The Lancashire Woodland Partnership was consulted on the content of the TAWS. Consultation with the respective management teams has taken place to identify the best option going forward to deliver the service.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council’s Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION:	2
-----------------	----------

CONTACT OFFICER:	Tony Watson
-------------------------	--------------------

DATE:	16-01-24
--------------	----------

BACKGROUND PAPER:	
------------------------------	--