

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Choose an item.

17 June 2021

Report Title: Progress Report on Tree Management

Submitted by: Executive Director – Operational Services

Portfolios: Environment and Recycling

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To provide the committee with a report on progress with the management of the Council's tree stock and associated risks

Recommendation

That

1. The committee receives the report and acknowledges the current approach to tree management and associated risks
2. The committee endorses the proposed mechanism to enable Parish Councils and other organisations to implement and fund tree work which is considered to be a local priority

Reasons

To ensure that the Council is managing its tree stock and associated risks appropriately, within the resource constraints which apply

1. Background

- 1.1 The Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee has received reports in the past on the Council's approach to tree management. The Chair has requested an update report.

2. Issues

As at 1st April 2021 an assessment of the Tree Management System (TMS) database has revealed that there are a total of 4,489 trees awaiting attention by way of pruning or felling. This includes all trees that are the responsibility of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, and includes all identified work from low risk/low priority pruning to high risk/high priority work.

In addition, 80 locations have been identified where woodland thinning is desirable, but these are large tasks of relatively low priority.

The figure is deemed to be as accurate as possible and has been achieved following a detailed assessment of every entry within the TMS that contains outstanding work.

At the end of March 2020 a total of 2,951 trees were estimated to be awaiting attention, so the 2021 figure of 4,489 represents an increase of 1,538 trees, although the updated interrogation of the TMS has resulted in greater accuracy in the figure this year.

Although this may appear to suggest that the backlog of work is increasing, rather than decreasing, it is important to note that while this is the case overall (as more trees are inspected and added to the system faster than the existing work programme can remove cases), good progress is being made in dealing with the high priority work, which in risk management terms, offers the best possible protection to the community and the council. The majority of the backlog work is therefore rated as low risk.

In order to improve the council's tree management approach, the following progress has been made:

The Streetscene Arboriculture team moved from a seasonal team (operating 7 months per year) to all year round in April 2020. Year-round working, coupled with the acquisition of a MEWP (Mobile Elevated Work Platform) has had a positive effect on work completion times despite the impact of COVID, severe summer weather and a large number of emergency call-outs. A three-operative tree team has now been assembled to operate throughout the year, to replace the traditional seasonal approach, and this has had a positive effect on work output.

The council's contractual relationship with Hamps Valley has continued, assisting with previously unplanned and more complex jobs on the tree work programme where extra equipment is required with the hire of cranes, traffic management, power line outages, and cable-bracing trees. A budget of £30,000 per annum is available for this contract and is fully utilised each year. It is planned to re-tender for tree work support in 2021/22 to ensure the council continues to achieve value for money in relation to this budget.

As previously reported, tree work continues to be prioritised using the following criteria:

- Health & Safety
- Trees causing nuisance
- Routine works largely as a result of public requests or complaints.

Lower priority work, such as woodland thinning, cannot realistically be programmed yet and is not added to the work list.

The total number of tree works completed during the financial year 2020/21 was 793, an increase of 214 over financial year 2019/20. Of these, 697 were completed by the Streetscene Arboriculture team and 96 by Hamps Valley Ltd. The number for Hamps Valley is considerably lower than previous years as they have been engaged for complex tasks requiring specialist input.

Numbers of operations attended to were as follows:

Streetscene:

- ☐ 163 tree fells
- ☐ 445 tree prunes
- ☐ 84 fallen trees/branches cleared away.
- ☐ 2 woodland thinning tasks
- ☐ Other tasks including control of ivy on trees and removing ropes from trees

Major Streetscene interventions were at: Parkhouse Industrial Estate; Brampton Park; Silverdale Mineral Line; Madeley Pool; Grosvenor Roundabout; Priory Road Woodlands; The Three Parks; Hillwood Road Open Spaces; Bathpool Park; Lyme Valley Park.

Hamps Valley:

- ☐ 20 tree fells

- ☐ 66 tree prunes
- ☐ 2 fallen trees cleared away
- ☐ 2 trees braced
- ☐ 6 stump-grinds

Major Hamps Valley interventions were at: Harriseahead Park; Clough Hall Wood; Kids Wood; Newcastle-under-Lyme Town Centre (CCTV Project).

As identified above there is still considerable outstanding demand for tree work comprising 4,489 known pruning and felling tasks. However with the realignment of staffing resources, purchase of a MEWP and engagement of external support the council is reducing exposure to litigation claims and/or damage to property and/or persons by addressing high risk issues as a priority. It should be noted that even with this risk-based approach in place, the council has an extensive, maturing tree stock that will always pose an element of risk for the local authority.

The agreed approach to low risk/low priority work which is unlikely to be programmed due to the ongoing identification of higher risk work via the inspection regime, is to offer residents the opportunity to pay for work to be brought forward.

The resident payment scheme has been running for two years. This enables residents to pay for tree work, using our negotiated tendered rates (+VAT), for works to council-owned trees with a view to reducing waiting times for non-urgent work. Such work is undertaken by the council's contractor, Hamps Valley. In 2020/21 one resident and one parish council took up the offer to finance work. The protocol for charging residents for tree works that would otherwise be subject to delays is currently being expanded to enable a slightly different approach for parish councils to engage competent contractors other than the council's nominated contractor.

The proposed protocol is attached to this report at Appendix 1.

It should be noted that although the council is reducing the risk of litigation by undertaking intervention to an increased number of trees, should the current levels of resources not be maintained, the risk factors will increase.

3. **Proposal**

That

3.1 The committee receives the report and acknowledges the current approach to tree management and associated risks

3.2 The committee endorses the proposed mechanism to enable Parish Councils to implement and fund tree work which is considered to be a local priority

4. **Reasons for Proposed Solution**

4.1 To ensure that the Council is managing its tree stock and associated risks appropriately, within the resource constraints which apply

5. **Options Considered**

5.1 The options considered are set out in the body of this report.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1 The council has a duty to maintain its tree stock safely.

7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 No negative equality impacts have been identified as part of this report.

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

8.1 There are no new financial and resource implications arising from this report.

9. **Major Risks**

9.1 There are major risks associated with the council's tree stock, and they are managed via the Tree Management System which provides a recognised and defensible regime of inspection, risk assessment and intervention..

10. **UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)**

10.1

The council's tree stock and management approach contributes towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals 3, 13 and 15 and the council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy.

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

LGA Guidance is here:-

https://30312f94-9adb-4918-80dd-708c590bada3.usfiles.com/ugd/30312f_79b08331d11e44bc888e1ee08c05474e.pdf



11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 This report does not require a key decision.

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

12.1 None

13. **List of Appendices**

13.1 Appendix 1 – Procedure for Enabling Parish Councils to Fund Tree Work on Borough Council Land

14. **Background Papers**

14.1 None