

Notes of a Meeting of the Tree Task and Finish Forum held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 24 March 2015

Present:

Councillors:

Mike Howe (Chairman)

David Atkins

Roger Giles

Tony Howard

John Humphreys

Tom Wright – Deputy Portfolio Holder - Environment

Officers:

David Colman – Senior Arboricultural Officer

Stuart Baker – Arboricultural Officer

Diana Vernon – Democratic Services Manager

Apologies:

Councillors

Iain Chubb – Portfolio Holder – Environment

Claire Wright

John Golding – Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment

Charlie Plowden – Service Lead – Countryside and Leisure

The meeting commenced at 12 noon and ended at 1.30 pm

25 Notes from previous meeting

The notes from the meeting on 24 February 2015 were received.

Councillor Howard reminded Members that at the last meeting the Service Lead – Countryside and Leisure had advised that resources were stretched within the tree service and this should be kept in mind during the Forum's deliberations. Councillor Howard added that he welcomed David Colman's comments on the importance of educating the public to value trees.

The Forum was advised that much of the pressure on the service was due to the lack of a Landscape Architect and this was now being addressed. In addition, the Council budget had approved the appointment of a third tree officer.

26 Public speaking

The Chairman welcomed members present.

27 Declarations

Councillor John Humphreys declared a personal interest as tree surgery was an element of his working life.

28 Exclusion of the public

There were no items which officers recommended should be dealt with in private session (Part B).

## 29 Forestry Commission

Jim Smith, National Urban Forestry Advisor has been invited to the meeting to go through the Forestry Commission's publication - 'The case for trees in development and the urban environment' to highlight the intention of the paper, its practical implementation and reference any similar publications and relevant case studies that would help the Forum in formulating its recommendations.

Mr Smith advised that the document honed in on sustainability, that trees were part of a green infrastructure and emphasised the importance of education in protecting trees and helping appreciation of their value. There needed to be greater planting of large trees and trees that would add to the canopy cover. This was important as shade within urban developments helped to ameliorate urban heat.

The Forestry Commission recommended that all local authorities adopt Tree Strategies to link with their agreed Local Plans, the strategy to be used to set out the authority's perception of trees within the area, the importance of succession planning, tree protection, and efficient management. The strategy would then be taken into account in decision-making. The Forestry Commission provides advice on how such strategies can be produced. Good examples of strategies already in place were given as Camden, Wandsworth, Kensington and Chelsea. Advice given was not prescriptive, as local factors (including resources, environment, public opinion and direction, etc) would influence the final strategy.

Mr Smith showed examples of where development had a negative effect on trees, where trees had not been fully taken into account during the development process. For example trees with inadequate root space meaning that they needed on-going irrigation (and therefore were not sustainable) and would not allow the species of tree to fulfil its potential. Urban trees were under significant stress as a town landscape was an alien environment, for example from root disturbances and climate change. The aim was for urban trees to be self-reliant, long-lived and productive as well as attractive and resilient. Appropriate species selection was crucial at the planning stage. Physical damage caused by trees to pavements and services could be moderated by a better understanding of options and species.

Mr Smith referred to a DEFRA publication on valuing ecosystems to help appreciate the benefits of urban trees. By giving trees a monetary value, benefits were quantified and could then be valued in the same way as other infrastructure, such as roads and services. Trees and green space could then be seen as an asset (rather than a liability) and invested in and given enough resource to sustain.

The Strategic approach to trees required the involvement and contribution of all relevant partners and an awareness of the need to plan. Currently increasing biodiversity by urban tree planting was not measured but was a valued by-product. The intention of the Forestry Commission was to develop national best practice.

The Chairman thanked Mr Smith for his informative and helpful presentation. In response Mr Smith advised that he appreciated the opportunity to talk to the Forum and asked if he could stay and listen to the rest of the meeting.

## RECOMMENDED

that the Council develop a Tree Strategy, when the Local Plan has been agreed, be taken into account during development and other related decision making. The Strategy to include:

- the Council's aims in respect of urban planting and the green infrastructure,
- the recognised benefits of urban forests and tree canopies to the aesthetic, economic and social well being of the area and how this could be achieved,
- authority's perception of trees within the area,
- the importance of succession planning,
- tree protection,
- efficient management,
- guidance on species choice and planting,
- how to achieve effective partnership working,
- examples of best practice,
- education

### 30 Trees and Design Action publications

The Forum had been asked to consider two useful publications in advance of the meeting. These were taken into account during the meeting.

### 31 Tree Preservation Order (TPO) – assessment procedure

A number of appendices included with the agenda helped the Forum consider the assessment and decision-making process when deciding whether a TPO was appropriate.

TPOs were not generally included as a condition of planning permission. The Council had the ability to protect trees but the service needed sufficient resource to do so and to monitor. The importance of education was reiterated with a TPO being used as a last resort – it was far better for the developer or resident to appreciate the value of the tree and understand the underlying reasoning.

Tree officers currently had some involvement in the pre application meetings but this was not necessarily a standard arrangement. Greater involvement could benefit the process and address any issues at an early stage. The current systems thinking review of the TPO process was dealing with administrative matters, legal aspects, government guidance and which process to follow. One of the key issues was the assessment of trees (visual amenity, tree health, value to the locality, special factors and expediency) and deciding if a TPO was relevant – this work could be streamlined through the current systems thinking review of the service. Options included retaining the current assessment form or option for the tree evaluation method for preservation orders (TEMPO) currently used by a number of neighbouring authorities. The benefit of TEMPO was that it included guidance notes and adopting a system already used by neighbouring authorities would provide more consistency. Other systems, including the Cornwall adopted Halliwell system, which included a financial assessment of the trees' value, would be considered as part of the systems thinking review.

## RECOMMENDED

that the decision on the choice of TPO system adopted be made by the arboricultural service but with weight being given to the importance of providing guidance notes with the form.

### 32 Remote Data capture

Stuart Baker, Arboricultural Officer gave an update on remote data capture – the Arboricultural Service was looking at new ways of working through its systems thinking review. Data on trees could be captured on smart phones with GPS to plot exact location and uploaded on site onto on-line templates with other details drawn from a drop down menu or typed in. The photograph and information, synchronised with e-map data would update office records in real time. If a data-captured tree became under threat, action could be started immediately to prepare a TPO. When established and tested, the scheme could be opened up to community groups and tree wardens to help with logging tree information across the district. Information could also be used to populate Neighbourhood Plans.

#### RECOMMENDED

that the benefits of remote data capture be supported and the Arboricultural Service be encouraged to undertake trials of the system so that it could be integrated within the service.

### 33 Monitoring

#### RECOMMENDED

that a recommendation be included in the final Tree Task and Finish report that as part of the systems thinking review of the tree service, the Development Management and Enforcement service – with technical support from the arboricultural service – look into how best to monitor trees following development on site and how to involve local councils and ward members in this process.

### 34 On-line guidance

#### RECOMMENDED

that improved guidance information should be provided on the Council's website to reduce the need for the public to contact the arboricultural service for advice.

### 35 Requirement for further meeting?

Members felt that the Forum had gathered sufficient information on which to write the final report with recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The draft report would be forwarded to all Councillors on the Forum for their comments and amendments.