

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TREE POLICY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Wednesday, 21 June 2006

PRESENT:

Councillor J Lane (Chair)
Councillor L Mason

Carl Grimmer - Corporate Manager
Paul Chambers - Street and Environment Team Leader
Steve Pointer - Planning Policy and Conservation Manager
David Stewart - Interim Development & Building Control Manager
Tracy Tiff

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jane Hollis and Christine Stevenson (Corporate Manager).

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited attendees to introduce themselves.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 JUNE 2006

Subject to the following amendment the minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2006 were agreed:-

Budget

...the budget for *tree maintenance* is £135,000.

3 EVIDENCE FROM PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL OFFICERS

The Chair clarified that the Task and Finish Group had asked relevant employees from Development and Building Control to provide information regarding new builds and the conditions that are attached to planning permission regarding issues such as the types of trees planted and the distance planted to buildings.

D Stewart, Interim Development and Building Control Manager, advised of the tree issues that development control and building control were concerned with: -

- Development Control looks at planning issues
- Building Control is primarily concerned with the safety of buildings

Development Control

Regarding new builds, staff would look at the planting scheme provided by the developer in respect of issues such as: -

- Trees with 'greedy roots' are not planted too close to buildings
- No fast growing trees are planted

Development Control Officers do not have green experience but rely on advice in all cases from the Street and Environment Team, Asset Management and the Arboricultural Officer.

Building Control

Regarding new builds, Building Control Officers have similar considerations as that of Development Control Officers such as planting a tree too close to a building, building a property near to woodland or whether a tree that was planted prior to the development could be harmed, for example, bridging the tree roots in anticipation of root growth.

Greenfield and Brownfield sites do not in the main contain trees.

S Pointer, Planning Policy and Conservation Manager, reported that M Rangeley, Arboricultural Officer, was the department's specialist in arboricultural issues and provided specific advice to Development Control Officers. The team has the authority to implement Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) if staff perceive that a proposed development could harm or damage the trees. TPOs are made under delegated authority and if a tree has a TPO formal consent from the Council is required to carry out maintenance work or cut it down. There are around 200 trees in the borough with TPOs. The Tree Panel oversees the monitoring and implementing of TPOs, it also considers any objections received in respect of an impending TPO.

The Task and Finish Group asked questions and heard: -

- Once a tree was covered by a TPO, routine checks are not generally undertaken. Often a TPO attracts local awareness and local residents would probably inform the Council of any maintenance that had been carried out. Arboricultural Contractors carry out their own checks on trees before carrying out maintenance work.
- Enforcement and follow up procedures are in place if a report is made.
- TPOs can either be implemented individually or as a group (woodland).
- Good justification is required to implement a TPO.
- There are fourteen conservation areas in the town.
- A TPO can be revoked for reasons such as the health of the tree.
- Mature trees require careful maintenance management.
- If a tree with a TPO was on private land it would be the responsibility of the landowner to maintain it at their cost.

D Stewart and S Pointer were thanked for their informative addresses.

4 FEEDBACK FROM CHESTER CITY COUNCIL'S TREE MAINTENANCE POLICY

C Grimmer, Corporate Manager, commented that he had carried out research and ascertained that very few Local Authorities had produced a Tree Maintenance Policy and that Chester City Council's was the best that he had read.

C Grimmer advised that he had liaised with departments across the Council regarding a Tree Policy for the Council using Chester City Council's Tree Policy as the baseline. NBC's Tree Policy was currently in draft format and an updated version would be emailed to the Task and Finish Group for comment prior to its next meeting on 20 July 2006. He emphasised however, that Chester City Council's Tree Policy contained a tree management strategy but NBC would not be able to deliver such a strategy. Resources would be required to develop and deliver the strategy.

The Task and Finish Group requested that in be included in the final report that *where resources permit, the possibility of introducing a Tree Management Strategy be investigated*. The report should also detail that tree maintenance is under resourced.

C Grimmer advised that the borough comprised in excess of 500,000 trees with a £135,000 maintenance budget. A bad storm could use half of the budget. Three months into the year, nearly the entire budget has been committed to essential works.

AGREED: (1) That copies of Northampton Borough Council's draft Tree Policy be emailed to the Task and Finish Group for comment prior to the next meeting on 20 July 2006.
(2) That the final report includes: -
Where resources permit, the possibility of introducing a Tree Management Strategy be investigated
That tree maintenance is under resourced.

5 FEEDBACK FROM WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL'S TREE MAINTENANCE POLICY

The Task and Finish Group agreed whilst Warwick District Council's Tree Policy had been useful, Chester City Council's was more comprehensive.

6 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting to finalise the Chair's report was noted as Thursday 20 July at the later time of 7pm.

The meeting concluded at 6:15 pm