

Report subject	<b>BCP Urban Forest Strategy</b>
Meeting date	17 July 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The 2050 Urban Forest Strategy for BCP provides a vision, key guiding principles, and priorities for action so that residents, visitors and businesses in our conurbation get the most from trees both now an in the future.</p> <p>Few coastal conurbations can boast a treescape as diverse, extensive, and spectacular as BCP's. In light of the quality of this resource, the production of an up-to-date strategy focused on trees and woodlands was one of the key action points identified in the adopted Green Infrastructure Strategy.</p> <p>The strategy replaces legacy documents previously used in each of the individual former authorities and offers an up-to-date road map that will be part of the draft Local Plan. This will sit alongside the Green Infrastructure Strategy, Climate Action plan, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and forthcoming Urban Greening design guide and Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy</p>
Recommendations	<p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that:</b></p> <p><b>The Urban Forest Strategy, its vision, key guiding principles, and priorities for action are approved by BCP Cabinet.</b></p>
Reason for recommendations	<p>Supports the Corporate Strategy in sustaining and adding to our tree provision, improving our environment and places for nature.</p> <p>Supports people and communities in making our places greener, more resilient in the face of global climate breakdown.</p> <p>Supports the aims and principles of the Green Infrastructure Strategy.</p> <p>Supports service improvement in managing our tree provision.</p> <p>Increasing tree canopy supports the forthcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy and meets the council's statutory duty to biodiversity under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC)</p>

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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

## Background

1. The Urban Forest Strategy was written by a Green Infrastructure Planning Consultant, under the supervision of a working group involving multiple council departments that since January 2023, including Greenspaces, Planning policy, Planning development, Urban development, Highways, Community services as well as with representation from Public Health Dorset.
2. Wide public consultation was progressed and resulted in a Tree and Woodland Engagement Survey conducted from 24 October 2022 to 2 January 2023, which attracted 308 responses. Additionally, two half-day stakeholder workshops were held on 29 September 2022 and 10 March 2023 with a cross-sector and multidisciplinary group of over 50 participants. BCP Councillors have also been engaged, through the workshops, and in separate briefings.
3. These activities have added legitimacy to decisions taken on the design, implementation and actions planned for the strategy. The views collated have enabled the writing of a robust and coherent strategy to 2050 that sets out the Strategy Vision:

**By 2050 Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) will be home to a sustainable urban forest delivering benefits to people and wildlife in every neighbourhood, according to its character and needs.**

**Trees and woodlands, regardless of ownership, will be managed in balance with our valuable open heathland habitats as a critical infrastructure and a positive investment underpinning healthy lives in a nature-rich setting.**

**Our urban forest will attract widespread stewardship amongst residents, young and old, businesses, developers, landowners, council departments and other public, private, and not for profit partners.**

4. The strategy is guided by 6 principles:
  - Fairness. Grow the urban forest providing access to trees for all residents.
  - Benefits. Consistently utilise the full range of benefits that trees can provide.

- Resilience. Nurture a healthy, diverse, and climate resilient local tree population.
  - Responsibility. Build a committed and knowledgeable community of professionals and individuals caring for local trees.
  - Value. Coordinate and improve data and resources to optimise benefits derived from the local tree population.
  - Innovation. Use research to build a better future for trees and their uses.
5. The notion of Community, and their stewardship of trees, figures very strongly at the heart of the Strategy. Extensive consultation and collaboration with a wide range of BCP stakeholders has taken place on multiple occasions. We are committed to continuing this collaboration with key professionals across council departments and with external organisations, landowners, and residents whose decisions can have a strong impact on the tree population.
  6. Neighbourhood Tree Action Plans are planned within the strategy to be developed with residents, prioritisation will be given to those areas where fewer trees, greater socio-economic deprivation and health and wellbeing issues are identified.
  7. To support decisions taken, tree equity scores have been calculated and are generally considered as best practice management related to evidence-based decision-making principles. These will support our ability to audit how well or otherwise we are performing in terms of number and quality of trees identified in each of our wards.
  8. The prioritisation of this work will be in those wards with highest Indices of Multiple Deprivation, where it is known that the impact of Climate breakdown will be felt the most through higher summer temperatures where there is a lack of tree canopy cover and shade, and with storm flooding. Being able to target these areas will improve what is known as Environmental Justice for our residents and businesses in these parts of BCP.
  9. Once areas are prioritised planting plans, stewardship, community engagement and partnership development can take place to ensure the trees become cared for and established. It is noted that even within some wards there are disparities of canopy cover and this will also need to be taken in to account.
  10. BCP's urban forest canopy, the physical area with tree coverage, supports our biodiversity and helps respond to our Ecological Emergency. Increasing tree canopy supports the forthcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy and meets the council's statutory duty to biodiversity under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC).
  11. The council is committed to the on-going management and maintenance of the trees and woodlands found on council land. This strategy recommends the adoption of a wide range of measures designed to achieve high standards of arboriculture practice within the council's portfolio, including:
    - Proactive woodland management planning and implementation.
    - Proactive replacement planting of trees removed.
    - Enhanced tree planting specifications.
    - Enhanced sourcing and care of young trees.

- Enhanced management of pest and biosecurity threats.

## Options Appraisal

12. The Strategy has been written and developed through close collaboration across services and partners. It reflects the needs across BCP in our future tree management and ambition to maintain and expand our tree canopy.
13. The option to reject the strategy and consider alternatives is available.

## Summary of financial implications

14. Revenue budgets in Environment and Planning Services do not currently support any proactive tree planting. Historic budgets would see street and green space planting take place annually to support local communities and to replace lost trees. Maintaining the current tree stock with existing resources and current pressures is becoming harder.
15. There is no budget currently available to specifically support the strategy. The council will continue to resource the management and maintenance of the trees and woodlands it owns, alongside the intention to seek external funding to deliver the priorities within the strategy.
16. Partner organisations, such as The Parks Foundation, Poole Communities Trust, Grounded Communities etc deliver improvements that include tree planting, often secured by grants that are unavailable to the council. There are also individual donations or locations where tree planting may be supported. There is no current BCP-wide donation scheme in place or able to be resourced.
17. Achieving the vision set out in this strategy depends on ongoing funding opportunities extending beyond the council and includes key stakeholders in the public sector, the private sector, including developers, businesses, and landowners as well as the wider community.
18. Potential funding sources to draw upon include:
  - Planning receipts via:
    - i. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), both for strategic use and via Neighbourhood portion.
    - ii. Planning obligations (Section 106 agreements).
  - Financing Nature:
    - i. BCP Council are bringing forward proposals to create an investment vehicle that could utilise credits secured via the implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain. With developers mandated to provide a minimum 10% uplift in biodiversity within their applications, any developers unable to meet those on-site could invest in BCP's vehicle to provide habitat improvements. A relevant report will be brought to BCP Cabinet in September 2024.
    - ii. Similarly, carbon emissions offsetting could be provided to meet the needs of the tree strategy and support the move to net zero.
  - Grants

- i. National Lottery Heritage Fund through Neighbourhood Tree Action Plans (NTAPs); Community funds or their smaller applications, below £200k.
    - ii. Local Authority Treescapes Fund (vacant tree pits identified in NTAPs)
    - iii. Urban Tree Challenge Fund (NTAPs implementation).
    - iv. Woodland Management Planning Grant (Woodland Plans preparation).
  - Sponsorship
    - i. Tree sponsorship schemes, such as Trees for Streets.
19. The draft Local Plan identifies ward-based infrastructure needs and, along with the Tree Equity Score data and other metrics, could identify ward-based opportunities for planting. These could be developed with the community to seek support and enable more planting.

### **Summary of legal implications**

20. Since the formation of BCP Council in 2019 three legacy tree management policies have been used. The policies will be amalgamated in the near future. The legacy policies can be found here: [Tree strategy policy and guidelines | BCP \(bcpCouncil.gov.uk\)](https://bcpCouncil.gov.uk/tree-strategy-policy-and-guidelines)
21. The Council is obliged to take reasonable care to ensure that its trees do not present an unacceptable risk. The legislation covering this duty is covered primarily by the following two Acts:
- Occupiers Liability Act of 1957 & 1984
  - The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- The function of these Acts places a duty on the Council to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, anyone entering or living adjacent to our land or premises (including employees) is not exposed to an unacceptable level of risk to their health and safety.
22. To manage the risk posed by trees it is recognised that a system of inspection is required. A component of this system needs to be a recorded tree assessment carried out by a suitably qualified person. Any remedial action identified must be carried out and a record made of when that was done.
23. Although an ideal tree risk management regime may be one of annual inspections, the Health & Safety Executive recognises that when managing large tree populations, it is not practicable, possible and often necessary for all trees to be inspected at the same intervals (Management of the risk from falling trees –SIM 01/2007/05). Targeting available resources to the areas where the risk is greatest is an accepted approach and one that BCP Council take, similar to other Local Authorities and public bodies such as the National Trust and Forestry Commission.
24. Additionally, tree inspection information is among the paperwork requested by our insurers in the event a legal liability claim is made against the council. It is necessary to hold data in an accessible format to evidence the council's inspection, maintenance and works systems. It is also important to ensure that the frequencies

laid out in the tree management and highway policies are adhered to. Aside from the obvious safety merits in operating sound systems, this information is very important in the defence of claims and needs to be documented properly, taking account of both retention and privacy legislation. Liability claims have a monetary and resource impact upon the council and the absence of such information can be prejudicial to the council's liability and policy coverage positions

25. The Strategy does not alter any policies on Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). Any work to a tree with a TPO on it, or a tree within a Conservation area, requires BCP Council's permission as Local Planning Authority to undertake the works. TPOs are made to protect trees that provide visual amenity to the locality where it is expedient to do so. This is a duty that is placed on all Local Planning Authorities. Information relating to the TPOs that are currently in place in BCP can be found on the Council Website. We are currently operating three legacy TPO systems, to be transferred into a single system in due course. The TPO system could be used to support the management of the urban forest when/if necessary.

### **Summary of human resources implications**

26. The Greenspaces Development team working with the (Planning Services) Landscape and Arboriculture Team will lead the actions in the strategy. A working group engaging with key representatives from BCP including Countryside, Greenspaces, Highways, Planning Policy, Community Services and Public Health will take forward the strategy recommendations.
27. There is currently no budget to support the development and implementation of this Strategy, so the team will progress activities to engage with external funds that have been available including with National Lottery, Research Councils and DEFRA for examples. Until such time that external funds are available, the work required in this strategy will draw upon existing officers time and skillsets.
28. A Community Engagement Officer is being recruited for the Greenspace team and will have a role in supporting the Strategy.

### **Summary of sustainability impact**

29. A Decision Impact Assessment was submitted and has been supported by colleagues. Sustainability is at the heart of the Urban Forest Strategy and indicators and targets of sustainability measures have been devised within the strategy.

### **Summary of public health implications**

30. Public health and wellbeing is at the heart of this strategy, seeking the most health benefits for the investment. It is universally agreed that nature, and specifically trees are a fundamental part of our Natural Health Service and therefore play a major part in safeguarding the health of our communities.
31. The Strategy seeks to harness environmental and social justice for our communities, reducing inequalities in terms of access to nature and specifically to trees and the health benefits they provide. A Tree Equity Score has been compiled in the Strategy, and this has been progressed across BCP identifying the greater socio-economic deprivation the fewer trees. No other greenspaces strategy to date can quantify to the degree that our Urban Forest Strategy has been able to calculate, just how equitable / inequitable our activities have been across BCP and will inform the direction of our activities moving forward.

32. Public Health Dorset comment: The environment in which people live, work and play is a key determinant of health and wellbeing and we are delighted to lend our support to the Urban Forest Strategy. Trees and urban forests are a key feature of health promoting environments that support population health and wellbeing. Trees can deliver and contribute to several positive health outcomes including mental health, restoring cognitive function and mitigating the effect of higher temperatures that pose the greatest risk to vulnerable members of the community. Protecting and enhancing BCP's urban forest offers opportunities to increase the positive impact trees have on the health and wellbeing of local people today and adapt for changing risks climate change will present

### **Summary of equality implications**

33. A full EIA has been completed and been approved on 26th April 2024 by the EIA panel (See Appendix 3)
34. The EIA Executive Summary states that: one of the underlying features of this strategy concerns the focus on ensuring equality for all residents, and other key stakeholders to trees and the multiple health and economic benefits they can provide.

Tree equity analyses have been conducted identifying as an audit of where locations are benefitting well from trees and other areas, frequently amongst the most socio-economically deprived where tree equity needs to be redressed as a priority.

This strategy has been a first step in auditing inequalities, in providing for solutions and following its approval at Cabinet, once the working group is set up, will then provide for solutions to overcome challenges in being able to implement the Strategy's priorities.

The Urban Forest Strategy is a positive piece of work that should improve the quality of our spaces for all users, and indirectly for non-users. It is therefore not felt to contain any significant negative equality implications. However, future work should ensure that as elements of the Strategy are delivered, they consider individual impacts and return to further EIA assessments.

### **Background papers**

#### **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Urban Forest Strategy Executive Summary

Appendix 2: Urban Forest Strategy

Appendix 3: Equalities Impact assessment