

**EXETER CITY COUNCIL**  
**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – COMMUNITY**  
**10 NOVEMBER 2009**

**EXECUTIVE**  
**24 NOVEMBER 2009**

**TREE MANAGEMENT IN EXETER**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To present to Members recommendations for the safe, effective and sustainable management of trees within the Council's care.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Council has specific responsibilities regarding tree management within the city, and in particular it has a legal duty to look after its own tree stock in a manner that does not expose people and property to unnecessary risk. The recently adopted Tree and Woodland Strategy identifies how best to manage existing and future trees within our care in a sustainable and sensitive manner.
- 2.2 To enable the correct levels of management the Council needed to know the extent and condition of trees and have a system of data management in place. Members previously agreed the introduction of a Tree Management Plan in order to obtain the necessary data and put in place a system of delivery that was robust and effective.
- 2.3 The Council also controls the care and management of trees in non-council ownership through various planning controls. It manages Tree Preservation Orders, trees within Conservation Areas or with covenants, and those affected by construction and similar works to ensure they are also afforded protection. Planning staff also advise on development issues regarding both retention of trees, and trees within landscaping proposals. This role is excluded from this report.
- 2.4 The Council's Parks and Open Spaces team also manage trees in Exeter on behalf of Devon County Council, the Highways Authority. For the purpose of this report the management of highways trees is also excluded. However, it is the intention to manage highways trees in an identical manner to the Council's trees, subject to certain variations required by the Highways Authority.
- 2.5 In 2002 the Council began to develop a robust and defensible tree management system. At that time the Council had no comprehensive knowledge of the tree stock. Random surveys had been undertaken of main parks, but this data was not linked to a programme of proactive care. Additional funding was provided for a pilot survey and in a subsequent report to Members in 2004 an eight-year survey programme, the Tree Management Plan, funded for five years was approved.
- 2.6 The aims of the Tree Management Plan were to:
- develop further a quantifiable and practical survey approach,
  - establish the extent and condition of the Council's tree stock
  - allow for immediate remedial works the surveying would uncover
  - allow for cyclical inspections
  - fund replacement and new tree planting, catching up on losses from previous decades

- identify and populate a suitable database system with GIS links to allow mapping of individual trees and woodland.

2.7 It was the intention to bid for further funding to complete the survey work however in the event it is now thought we are in a position to manage trees without the need for further detailed survey work and hence no additional funding is required.

2.8 As a result of the survey work a risk matrix has been developed, which shows the frequency of ongoing inspections judged appropriate following the initial inspections undertaken. This is contained in Appendix I of this report.

2.9 The Tree and Woodland Strategy was adopted in January 2009. As might be anticipated, it was logical that the development of both the Strategy and the Tree Management Plan had progressed in tandem. The Tree Management Plan is coming to an end so a framework for future tree management needs to be approved.

### **3. KEY POINTS OF TREE MANAGEMENT**

3.1 There are many tree management systems that can be used however they must demonstrate responsible proactive management where the scope of inspection is defined and the recommended actions are acted upon. The documentation must be present and the whole programme must be systematic so as to be able to demonstrate to a judge in the case of an accident that the Council has exercised reasonable care and taken appropriate avoiding action as necessary to protect those who are reasonably likely to be affected by a tree.

3.2 The tree management system proposed in this report seeks to provide:

- Affordable and practical tree maintenance
- Appropriate risk reduction to people and property
- Comprehensive customer enquiry handling to meet Council quality standards
- Good standards of tree husbandry
- Management standards that meet the requirements of the Tree and Woodland Strategy
- A planned tree planting programme
- A sustainable tree warden scheme
- Accessible and educational tree information

### **4. OPTIONS FOR TREE MANAGEMENT**

4.1 There are three main approaches to tree management:

- 1) Fully in-house - this tends to be found only in the larger organisations where there is sufficient work to enable at least one full time working team, under the direction of arboricultural officers. This has been considered, but estimated costs are considered unacceptably high.
- 2) Hybrid - usually strategic management is in-house, and operational work is undertaken by contractors. This is the method the Council has used since 1994.
- 3) Fully contracted out - there is potential for a conflict of interests where the contractor is identifying and recommending the work undertaken. However, partnering invariably leads to a very close working relationship which tends to preclude such problems. Two separate contractors, one on the client side and one on the operational side may be an option, but this is not as cost effective and has a potential for contractual issues to arise.

- 4.2 Exeter's trees have been largely managed on a reactive basis in the past. This is an inefficient way of working but one that was unavoidable due to the lack of information regarding the tree stock. One of the objectives of the tree management project was to identify all the trees owned or managed by the Council and, from this, identify and budget for maintenance needs. The earlier approaches and development to the proposed tree management system are detailed in Appendix II.
- 4.3 Following consideration of the key tasks that need to be undertaken within tree management as a whole and where it is best to place these (See Appendix III) it is proposed that the third option in 4.1 is followed. We would develop and extend the existing tree management contract between Parks and Open Spaces and the current arboricultural contractor into a partnering arrangement. The existing contract is in place until 2011 therefore enabling this approach to be developed. The aim is to improve tree management by having a closer working arrangement between client and contractor. The objectives will be to:
- Reduce communication chains
  - Work to a performance criteria as opposed to individually specified inputs and outputs
  - Use the contractor to provide the arboricultural elements of the client role including work prioritisation, liaising with the public and elected members and updating databases.
- 4.4 Under the partnering arrangement the contractor will provide:
- A working arborist dedicated to the Exeter city area.
  - A two-tier consultancy service, a full service with association professional indemnity insurance cover and informal opinion
  - Regular attendance at the Council's Belle Isle depot with desk workspace made available
  - Database and GIS updating capacity
  - Surveying service
  - Inspection and investigation service
  - Quantitative tree risk assessment style skills and service
- 4.5 Enquiries, whether originating from the public, officers, elected members, inspections or surveys will be logged and managed at Belle Isle. The workload will be generated by the Council and moderated with negotiation with the contractor.
- 4.6 This will be a developmental partnership, with specific interests and skills evolving over time. Advantages include a greater element of continuity as the contractor will inevitably have a larger workforce than is required by ECC, and will therefore be able to cover staff changeover more readily. Preliminary discussions have been held with the contractor, and this is a partnering development they wish to see. It benefits them in their accreditation for both ISO9001 and Arboricultural Association membership. The contractor has already gone beyond a pure contractual arrangement by collaborating with parks staff on other initiatives. These include a trees and ropes training course for Exeter and adjacent authority play rangers, the TREEmendous days out with tree climbing and abseiling in St Bartholomew's Cemetery and St Thomas Pleasure Ground, and controlled equipment sharing to reduce hire costs. There is no additional premium to the existing contract costs, and day work charges should reduce as a consequence of better work planning.

## **5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Parks and Open Spaces structure includes the post of Arboricultural Officer (CE11109), which is currently vacant. In addition a temporary post of Assistant Arboricultural Officer (CE11148) was funded from the budget identified in the Tree Management Plan as its role was to carry out much of the survey work associated with the plan. This post is also

currently vacant, and we have not tried to fill this post prior to consideration of this report. It has previously proved difficult to fill both posts with suitable candidates.

- 5.2 It is therefore proposed to delete the post of Arboricultural officer (CE11109) and that of the Assistant Arboricultural Officer (CE11148) A new post of Parks Tree Administration Support Officer is proposed which will yield revenue savings (subject to Job Evaluation) as the post does not require the same level of qualifications as an arborist. The role of this post is as identified in Appendix III.
- 5.3 Arboricultural work undertaken for external agencies incurs a recharge for management costs, and this will continue under the proposal. An additional advantage to this proposal is that it is future-proofed in respect of fluctuations in workload occasioned by any structural changes.
- 5.4 Appendix IV shows the existing and proposed total costs for tree management. The introduction of the proposal will result in a saving of approximately £30K depending on job evaluation outcome and assumes tree maintenance being continued at the same level of spend as now. Clearly greater savings could be achieved by reducing the funding identified for tree work however this would increase the risk to the Council of claims for injury and damage and in the light of recent tree-related incidents in other Local Authorities and our current knowledge about trees in the City is not recommended at this point.

## **6. RECOMMENDED**

- 1) that Scrutiny Committee Community approves:
- the revised funding proposals contained in the report,
  - the deletion of the posts of Arboricultural Officer (CE11109) and Assistant Arboricultural Officer (CE11148),
  - the appointment to the post of Parks Tree Administration Support Officer (CE11109) at a grade to be determined by Job Evaluation,
  - developing the existing contractual arrangement to a partnership approach as detailed in section 4 of the report and
  - supports the move to planned from reactive maintenance
- 2) that Scrutiny Committee Community recommends approval by Executive.

## HEAD OF CONTRACTS AND DIRECT SERVICES

S:PA/LP/Cttee/1109SCC11  
30.9.09

### COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**  
**Background papers used in compiling this report:**

Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2005 Exeter City Council  
Trees and Woodlands Strategy 2009 Exeter City Council

The Law of Trees Forests and Hedgerows Charles Mynors ISBN 0-421-590 408

Treeline Conference 2004 David Dowson

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf> HSE Website