

## EXETER CITY COUNCIL

### SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – COMMUNITY 4 MARCH 2008

#### DRAFT TREE AND WOODLANDS STRATEGY

#### 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of proposals to introduce a tree and woodland strategy for the city and seek approval of a draft for consultation.

#### 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The following text is from the City Council's web page -

*Trees are one of the most important and impressive features of the English landscape, and here in Exeter our topography and climate encourage a wide range of species.*

*Views into and out of the city are dominated by this rich treescape, and it makes the City a green and pleasant environment in which to live and work. Amongst the many benefits of trees are their ability to alleviate noise from traffic, screen tall buildings and large industrial areas, provide shade and of course habitats for a vast number of bird, insect and animal species.*

- 2.2 In addition to recognising the wide ranging benefits trees bring to our city, as a significant land owner the Council has a duty to ensure the trees in its care are managed in a safe manner. In 2002 the Council approved a Tree Management Plan for trees in the Council's care, which framed a methodology to ensure the Council met this duty of care.
- 2.3 The Council has a wider role in influencing tree management through the Planning and Development Control process. Trees in private ownership can be protected through Tree Preservation Orders, or by being within a designated Conservation Area. Trees within new developments can also be protected by specific conditions being laid down as part of planning permission being granted.
- 2.4 The Council also brings influence to bear on landowners within the Valley Parks. As well as specific conditions and agreements being in place, the Countryside Service offers advice on the value of trees and woodlands as habitats, and how these might be enhanced.
- 2.5 Despite these measures, many of the most important tree owners fall outside the influence or legislative powers of the Council. These include many hundreds of householders with trees in their gardens; large landowners such as Devon County

Council; farmers; and bodies such as the Forestry Commission who own trees outside the city boundaries, but whose trees have a significant impact on the city.

- 2.6 Last year the Council consulted the general public and major stakeholders about trees and woodlands in Exeter, how they would like to see trees and woodland develop in Exeter, and the Council's role in this development. Over 120 individuals responded. Analysis of the responses is attached at Appendix I.
- 2.7 In general, the people of Exeter would
- like to see more trees and woodland in Exeter;
  - particularly like to see more trees on streets, in industrial areas, and on public open space,
  - like the Council to play an active role in encouraging others to plant and carefully-manage their trees,
  - support the Council acquiring land in order to plant woodland,
  - like the Council to invest resources to ensure successful tree establishment on difficult sites,
  - like to the Council to invest in sustainably re-using timber and other arisings from tree maintenance.

### **3. PROPOSALS**

- 3.1 Arising from the consultation, a draft tree and woodland strategy has been developed and is attached at Appendix I. The aim of the strategy is to determine a long-term programme to deliver specific goals. In more detail, the strategy:
- provides a framework for the management of all trees and woodlands within the city and the surrounding areas.
  - lists the key strengths and weakness of the present tree stock.
  - recognises the differing needs of the various stakeholders.
  - clarifies roles and responsibilities
  - provides a vision for the future
  - and sets out how this can be achieved through the Action Plan.
- 3.2 To achieve this, we need to determine
- Where we are now
  - Where we want to be
  - How we are going to get there
  - How do we know when we get there
- 3.3 Potential outcomes include:
- A consensus amongst stakeholders on the future management of trees and woodlands
  - A comprehensive policy framework for the protection, and enhancement of trees and woodlands within the city and its immediate surrounds

- Creation of a framework to encourage and facilitate the involvement of communities and individuals in the care of trees in their neighbourhood

3.4 To this end a working party has been convened consisting of elected members and officers from Contracts & Direct Services, Planning and Leisure & Museums. This group met initially on 28 January 2008 to agree the outline structure of the tree and woodland strategy and plan the development of the strategy.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

4.1 Those areas directly under the control of the Council are obviously relatively easy to manage, though clarity of purpose and long term goals need to be defined.

4.2 The challenge comes in engaging with and procuring the active involvement of other landowners in securing good tree and woodland management for the future. However, without a strategy in place this remains a near impossible aim.

4.3 The tree and woodlands strategy will provide a means of planning the key decisions for the long term management of what is, by necessity, a long term objective

#### **5. RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) Scrutiny Committee Community supports the proposal to produce a tree and woodlands strategy for Exeter, and
- 2) approves the draft tree and woodlands strategy attached at Appendix I as the basis for wider consultation with stakeholders; and
- 3) following consultation the final version of the tree and woodlands strategy be presented to a future meeting of this committee.

### HEAD OF CONTRACTS AND DIRECT SERVICES

S:LP/Committee/308SCC4  
21.2.08

#### COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

#### **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

#### **Background papers used in compiling this report:**

1. Exeter City Council Tree and Woodlands Strategy 2008/13 DRAFT OUTLINE
2. Tree Management Report Scrutiny Committee – Community 22 October 2002
3. Tree Management Report Scrutiny Committee December 2006
4. Biodiversity Strategy