

EXECUTIVE

Tuesday 5 March 2024

Present:

Councillor Bialyk (Chair)

Councillors Wright, Denning, Foale, Morse, Parkhouse, Pearce, Williams, R and Wood

Also Present:

Councillor Jobson (as an opposition group Leader);

Councillor Moore (as an opposition group Leader); and

Councillor M. Mitchell (as an opposition group Leader)

Councillors in attendance under Standing Order No. 44

Councillor Ketchin speaking on item 8 (Minute No. 41 below)

Also present:

Chief Executive, Director Finance, Service Lead City Development, Assistant Planning Manager (HS), Service Manager Public and Green Spaces and Democratic Services Manager

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2024, were taken as read, approved, and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

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QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 19

No questions from members of the public were received.

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REVIEW OF THE CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Executive received the quarterly update report on the Council's risk management progress and the revised Corporate Risk Register which was linked to the Council's Strategic Priorities. The register had been updated by Directors in consultation with their Portfolio Holders and there were no significant risks added to the register.

Opposition group leaders spoke on the item and made the following points:-

- Cllr Mitchell – enquired on whether officers would include recommendations in future reports for the Executive to consider.
- Cllr Moore – enquired on the Portfolio Holders' role in contributing to the review of the risk register.

The Leader advised that the recommendations were on proposing any necessary actions to help mitigate the risks where it was possible, and that Portfolio Holders had already held discussions with the Directors.

RESOLVED that Executive note the Corporate Risk Register and propose any necessary actions to help mitigate the risks for which it is responsible.

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HOUSEHOLDER'S GUIDE: DESIGN OF EXTENSIONS AND ALTERATIONS SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD): ADOPTION

The Executive received the report which set out the details of a review and update to the Council's Householder's Guide: Design of Extensions and Alterations Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which was first adopted in 2008.

The updates had focussed on aligning the document with the policy and the Council's residential design guide and a 12-week consultation was held between 23 October 2023 and 12 January 2024. During this process the document title had been changed and 24 responses received. Six responses were from organisations such as the Environment Agency with a focus on flood risk and all comments had been collated to revise the document for adoption.

Opposition group leaders spoke on the item and made the following points:-

- Cllr Moore – expressed concern that cycle stores in front gardens required planning permission and that dropped kerbs wouldn't. She commented on the government consulting on permissive development rights and the potential danger of the Council policy falling out of sync with government policy.

She welcomed the biodiversity and sustainable urban drainage sections, but expressed concern that there was no mention of the increasing trend in replacing gardens with artificial grass.

- Cllr Mitchell – enquired on the ability to make future amendments to the document; and
- Cllr Jobson – welcomed the report.

During the discussion Members made the following points:-

- the work undertaken in developing the document was welcomed;
- how much influence did national regulations have on the document? and
- was there anything in the consultation feedback that changed the document?

The Portfolio Holder for City Development expressed her thanks to the officers for the work undertaken, especially around the other larger volumes of work being undertaken. She advised that:-

- cycle parking was a national matter, in which planning permission was required for building at the front of a house;
- planning permission wasn't required for a dropped kerb, and only required for flat surfaces where water could not be drained away; and
- planning permission wasn't required artificial grass, which was a permeable surface and therefore had not been included in the document

The Assistant Planning Manager advised the document could be amended as required, but it was best practice to allow time for the document to be in operation before further updates were considered.

RESOLVED that the Consultation Statement documenting the consultation responses of the Supplementary Planning Document attached as Appendix A of report be noted.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve the adoption of the updated and revised Householder's Guide: Design of Extensions and Alterations SPD attached at Appendix B of the report.

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TREE AND WOODLAND STRATEGY 2023-33

The Executive received the report on the new Tree and Woodland Management Strategy, which provided best practice in regard to the maintenance and welfare of the Council's tree and woodland estate. Adoption of the Strategy would formalise the standard operating procedures and set the vision for the development of Exeter's tree estate.

Particular reference was made to:-

- the draft strategy was subject to a public consultation, in which 330 responses were received, with strong support for the recommendations in the report;
- two objections focussed on the objectives of maintaining a comprehensive tree inventory and increasing the city canopy cover to 30%;
- there was a typo in the strategy, relating to the canopy cover, in which the actual baseline canopy was 20.2% citywide;
- the Council was already delivering tree services and operations aligned with the strategy, and was now seeking to standardise the operating procedures for the development of Exeter's tree estate; and
- no additional funding or resources were being sought at this stage.

Councillor Ketchin, having given notice under Standing Order No. 44, spoke on this item and made the following points:-

- Devon County Council needed to be engaged as a major stakeholder for areas with low tree canopy cover and for issues such as roadside improvement, air quality, and high visibility elements related to public enjoyment;
- there needed to be something in the document for stakeholders to encourage Devon County Council to be a part the vision;
- when trees were felled or badly damaged, the Tree Protection Order (TPO) could follow other local Councils in using a 3:1 ratio replacement strategy;
- the Council's 10% biodiversity rule may not be enough for areas with an absence of tree cover and the strategy would support planning matters for areas with an absence of tree cover;
- funding options for planting in new areas could be a source of capital and there were options for citizen funded routes for local communities. It cost around £800 to plant a tree and would encourage community engagement.

The Leader advised that questions had been received from Councillor Moore, which the Executive had considered wouldn't change the recommendations. The Leader advised that he would circulate the responses and would also be appended to the minutes.

Opposition group leaders spoke on the item and made the following points:-

- Cllr Moore – had submitted questions, which the questions and responses are appended to the minutes. She also enquired on whether the strategy had enough funding to be progressed.

- Cllr Jobson – welcomed the report and thanked the officers involved.

During the discussion Members commended the report and made the following points:-

- thanks were made to the officers for the work undertaken in writing the report and to the Portfolio Holder for Place & City Management;
- the consultation was welcomed and reflected the importance of trees to residents, and their environmental, well-being and economic benefits;
- the strategy addressed how the Council tackled the ecological crisis in the city;
- Exeter had a higher canopy cover than most other authorities, with some wards having nearly double the national average of 3%;
- engagement with Devon County Council would be welcomed particularly for ensuring CCTV cameras were not obscured by tree cover and preventing fallen leaves blocking drains;
- was the 3:1 replacement scheme or tree sponsorship viable?
- were any reasons or alternative options given, from those who responded against increasing the tree canopy cover? and
- Exeter had a community lottery, which community groups could subscribe to for fundraising to purchase trees for their local community.

The Portfolio Holder for Place & City Management commended the report and highlighted that the city's trees were a fantastic resource for improved air quality and absorbing harmful gases. Trees were beneficial to mental health and increased property values. She further highlighted the excellent work of the team in collating the consultation responses and endorsed the strategy.

The Service Manager Public and Green Spaces in responding to points made by Members, advised that:-

- Devon County Council were developing a Devon wide tree strategy, in which Exeter City Council was a partner and contributing to;
- the Council operated 2:1 planting ratio based on success levels of bringing specimens to maturity;
- Exeter City Council was a statutory consultee for planning developments and contributed towards the wider planning policy development; and
- there were five consultees who disagreed with the principle of canopy increase, but didn't elaborate on their reasoning.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the adoption of Tree and Woodland strategy 2023-2033.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.10 pm)

Chair

The decisions indicated will normally come into force 5 working days after publication of the Statement of Decisions unless called in by a Scrutiny Committee. Where the matter in question is urgent, the decision will come into force immediately. Decisions regarding the policy framework or corporate objectives or otherwise outside the remit of the Executive will be considered by Council on 23 April 2024.

Questions and Responses from Opposition Leader

Executive Committee - Tuesday 5 March 2024

Item 8: Tree and Woodland Strategy 2023-33

From: Councillor Moore

1. The 2023-24 approved budget for Ash Die back is: “Ash Die Back Tree Replacement £237,630 (GF Capital programme)”

“Reduction in Ash Dieback Budget HRA (£153,000)(HRA MTFP)”

Please can you clarify if £302,000 is an accurate figure to be rolled forward and the budget book components that make up that figure?

Response:

The General Fund Ash Die Back capital budget 24/25 was originally set at **£201,700** however, expenditure in quarter three was lower than anticipated so we will be rolling over more than **£201,700**. General Fund Capital doesn't change unless an underspend is declared which it hasn't been.

The HRA budget is a combined budget covering all tree and hedge works costs, including but not exclusively Ash Die Back. The **£153,000** reduction in the HRA MTFP relates to a change in the spending profile. It is not a reduction in the overall budget. The rate of Ash decline in Exeter has not been as fast as originally predicted, but the levels of infection are expected to remain the same and the programme will need to last longer. As a result, the budget has been profiled out to provide adequate Ash Die Back funding beyond 23-25FY. There was an underspend in the HRA budget in 22/23 of £300k, which got carried forward, but early in 23/24 officers reported that **£300,000** wasn't needed in year and has now been profiled out to provide budget of **C. £100,000** pa in 2027/28, 2028/29 and 2029/30.

Collectively its anticipated that General Fund and HRA budgets for 2024 -25 will exceed **£302,000**.

2. How much has been spent on ash die back from each of the General Fund and HRA budgets during 2023-24?

Response:

General Fund Ash Die back expenditure is being reported in Q3 at £30,000. Costs for Ash Die Back are not separated out in the HRA Tree works budget, but the total expenditure set out in Q3 of 2023-24 is reported at **£167,000**.

3. How much is allocated in the HRA budget for ash die back management in 2024-25?

Response:

Approved budgets for 24/25 are **£201,700** for general fund and **£132,770** for HRA, but these will be updated by any underspend in 2023/24.

4. Please provide a breakdown on the expenditure for each year on the Northbrook Wild Arboretum?

Response:

Work on Northbrook Arboretum started in earnest this financial year with DWT undertaking a mixture of ground work to level out the artificial features of the former golf course, bulb and tree planting and ground preparation for wild flower meadows. So far invoices have been paid to the total of **£16,096** (exc. VAT). A further invoice is expected shortly for the remainder of the work completed during this financial year.