

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 22ND FEBRUARY, 2024

REFERENCE FROM ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 16TH JANUARY, 2023

“700 VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL TREE STRATEGY (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 30th November, 2023 as contained within the agendas was presented jointly by the Team Leader – Countryside Services and the Neighbourhood Services Manager.

The purpose of the report was to allow consideration of the first draft of the Vale of Glamorgan Council’s Tree Strategy024/39 prior to public consultation.

The Chair referred to page 68 of the report which highlighted that around 40% of trees in the Vale of Glamorgan were either in a poor or critical condition, and the Chair queried what was the status of engagement with landowners. In reply, the Team Leader – Countryside Services, stated that the Council did a great deal of work with local communities and local land owners in regard to hedgerows and improving nature connectivity across the wider Vale. The Team Leader referred to the Restore the Thaw project which would create extensive biodiversity links with private land owners and farmers. In addition, over the past year, the Council had planted 6,000 trees and a further 4,000 trees were due to be planted over the next month. Overall, the Restore the Thaw project would include the planting of over 40,000 trees which required the Council working exclusively with land owners and farmers and there had been a very good response. Furthermore, the Council was working well with local communities across the board through Town and Country Parks and a lot of engagement work was really positive.

Councillor Iannucci stated that in the report it was mentioned that from a flooding perspective, English Oak was the best species of tree. Councillor Iannucci therefore asked whether there was a breakdown of the benefits that each species of tree provided and whether that would work alongside proposals relating to the replacement of two small trees with one big type of tree. Councillor Iannucci’s second question was what was the Council doing to encourage people to plant trees on their own land. In reply, the Team Leader stated that the benefit of a larger tree was that it was more solid and would soak up more water. Each tree species provided a slightly different type of use, but trees planted on a flood plain had a benefit of soaking up water. In terms of encouraging people to plant their own trees, Welsh Government was currently looking into proposals around a new agricultural payment scheme which hopefully would encourage land owners to plant more trees of which the Council could be part of the advice process.

Councillor Protheroe queried the engagement process with farmers who had concerns with Ash dieback, and the Council’s long-term plans given the changes to

weather patterns and climate change. In reply, the Team Leader stated that in terms of assisting farmers and land owners, the Council would provide support and assistance if it was in the Council's catchment area for the current grant scheme. It would therefore be useful for farmers and land owners to make direct contact with the Council but there was also the Woodland Trust who could also provide assistance. One of the key pieces of legislation would be in relation to the Agricultural Payment Scheme that would encourage land owners and farmers to plant more trees. The Team Leader commented that the report recognised the challenges as a result of climate change, and so, the Council was looking to plant more native species in the natural environment such as woodlands and hedgerows. In terms of town areas, the Council would need to consider different species that could be more heat resistant and offer better solutions for flooding, sun protection, etc.

Councillor Hooper raised a series of questions, the first being around the linkages between deprivation and tree cover and whether information on that was available on a local Ward basis. The second query related to the removal of trees with a replacement tree planted but not necessarily in the same location. Councillor Hooper asked should the Council therefore be considering other drainage schemes that replaced the trees. In addition, Councillor Hooper asked if the Council had a timber strategy. For his final point, Councillor Hooper commented that although the Council was facing severe budgetary constraints it was important that the Tree Strategy be prioritised, and people encouraged to engage with it given its importance in tackling climate change.

In reply, the Neighbourhood Services Manager advised that in terms of tree cover and deprivation there was currently insufficient data in all areas particularly for the most deprived Wards. Regarding the removal of trees, it was important to recognise that when a tree was removed the Council would plant two, three or sometimes up to seven trees usually within a country park area. The Council had recognised that urban drainage systems were important and where they could, the Council would plant trees in appropriate locations. In terms of a Timber Strategy, the Committee was advised that the Council had third party contractors that used their own timber mills and there was no other connection between the Council and the Forestry Commission.

With permission to speak, Councillor Wilson, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services added that the Council had allocated additional funding to assist with tackling climate change, and the introduction of the Tree Strategy would be the first of its kind for the Vale of Glamorgan. The Council was facing some significant competing priorities, and climate change was one of those priorities. The Tree Strategy was extremely important as trees were vital for the environment and particularly in relation to capturing carbon emissions. The Cabinet Member emphasised the importance of working with stakeholders including landowners and residents, with advice on tree planting available via the Council.

Councillor Hooper referred back to the point around ward level information and stated that that was extremely important which was also linked to tackling deprivation. He also emphasised that there were other schemes available to the

Council to capture carbon other than planting trees, which would also assist with flooding.

Councillor Champion raised a query regarding trees pollarded in the Westgate area of Cowbridge each year. Councillor Champion also referred to a tree that had been removed and he queried whether the tree would be replaced and, in such instances, was the Council liaising with Community and Town Councils. Councillor Champion stated that the report referred to 1500 trees being planted and he queried whether there was a reliance on private planting with an element of new trees being “whipped”. The Neighbourhood Services Manager advised that pollarding of trees was undertaken on cycle usually every 5 to 7 years. Once started, the method of pollarding could not be taken away as it was a form of tree maintenance. With regard to the tree that had been removed, it was agreed for that query to be taken away by officers to respond directly to Councillor Champion. The Officer confirmed that in terms of trees being removed, the Council would not systematically go around speaking to Town or Community Councils but would discuss with community groups.

Councillor Ernest queried the total cost of trees to the Council with it being suggested that each tree cost the Council between 40p and 60p per year. In addition, Councillor Ernest queried the budget provided to tackle Ash dieback. The Councillor also asked if a survey of trees in the Vale had been undertaken. In reply, the Director of Place advised that a key part of the Green Infrastructure Strategy would be sustainability and how that linked in with existing tree and proposed tree planting. The Director stated that he believed that the Strategy would identify deficiencies by ward basis. In terms of the cost of planting trees, it was recognised that the planting of smaller trees was cheaper as they would cost less to purchase and in most cases plant. The ideal situation would be to plant the biggest tree possible that was suitable for the location but that was not always possible, so a compromise was required. In terms of Ash dieback, a specific reserve had been created to tackle the issue and that had been topped up by money available through Project Zero. It was fair to say that the largest proportion of affected trees were on private land, so the responsibility was with the land owner, but the Council would be able to provide advice and guidance. As referred to previously, Welsh Government had a tree replanting budget so farmers and land owners could apply for support for replacement schemes.

Councillor Wiliam raised a number of points, the first being that budgetary constraints were hampering the work of the Council. Councillor Wiliam commented that in some areas it was obvious that the trees needed to be cut down, but the trees needed to deteriorate further before the Council could take any action. That seemed something that required to be flagged up. Councillor Wiliam commented that he was against the planting of trees in certain areas, for example, in wide open spaces such as Porthkerry Park. In addition, Councillor Wiliam commented on the issue of trees pushing up pavements that caused obstructions for people using wheelchairs and prams. His final point was in relation to how it was determined where trees would be planted and how that decision was made and would there be consultation with residents and community groups. In response, the Team Leader advised that residents could report issues around any trees to Contact OneVale with that issue then referred onto the Council’s Tree Officers. The issue of who determined whether a tree should be felled related to the risk and size of the tree and if the tree was

diseased and if it contained any failing structures. With regard to the raising of pavements that would be reported to the Highways Team who would consider how the issues could be rectified such as the realignment of the footway. The Officer clarified that in relation to the treatment of Ash dieback there were four stages. 1, 2, 3 and 4. A tree with Ash dieback would not necessarily be removed if it was just at stage 1 or 2 because it may not move to stage 3 or 4. Most Ash trees would be monitored to assess whether they moved into stage 3 or 4 and then it would be determined if the trees could be managed or removed safely.

Councillor Perry then raised a number of points, which could be summarised as follows:

- Some of the Community Councils across the Vale would be interested to know if the Council could implement Reshaping Services by working with those Community Councils in relation to the upkeeping and planting of new trees.
- As well as planting trees the Council needed to ensure that the trees already planted were thriving particularly those young trees in the first three years.
- It would be interesting to know if the Council had any immediate plans that could assist with trees growing successfully.
- It was also interesting to know where replacement trees could be planted given that a number of mature trees had been removed in Councillor Perry's Ward which meant that there was no tree cover.
- The Council needed to ensure that new trees planted were well maintained and watered for the first three years and there was assistance available from community groups.

Councillor Hooper referred to a previous point around Ward specific information and he asked how would the Tree Strategy deal with developers that had provided a commitment to deliver a certain number of trees but then failed to meet their objectives. In reply, the Director of Place stated that the Tree Strategy was primarily focussed on the Council's own land and land which it maintained. In terms of planning applications and breaches and the failure to deliver conditions in full, then there were powers in the Planning Act to deal with those breaches.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED – T H A T Cabinet be advised of the comments of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee. The comments being:

- That the Tree Strategy be welcomed;
- For consideration to be given to engagement with Town and Community Councils that could assist with maintaining and planting trees;
- Recognition that there were capacity issues facing the Council, but it would be useful for Councillors if information on trees could be broken down into individual wards with the understanding that such a survey would be complex;
- Information within the strategy about when the Council would take action to remove or treat trees was clear, but it would be helpful if more could be done to ensure residents were aware of that;

- That an update on the Tree Strategy be added to the Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme for 2024/25.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the report and to inform Cabinet of the comments of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee.”