Developing a Partnership Street Tree Strategy for Sheffield

CONFIRMED NOTES AND ACTIONS

Meeting 2: Tuesday 7th October 2019

Attending

Chair: Liz Ballard, Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust (LB)

Joe Coles, Woodland Trust (JC)

Glen Gorner, Leeds City Council (GG)

Christine King, Co-Chair of Street Tree Action Groups (CK)

Alison Holt, Natural Capital Solutions (also Trustee SRWT) (AH)

Brian Stocks, Amey (BS)

Darren Butt, Amey (DB)

Karen Ramsey, Sheffield City Council (KR)

Mick Croft, Sheffield City Council (MC)

Paul Selby, Street Tree Action Groups (PS)

Apologies:

Deepa Shetty, Street Tree Action Groups (DS)

1. Welcome & Introductions

LB thanked everyone for coming and everyone introduced themselves and the organisations they represented.

LB noted that the minutes had been circulated some time in advance and the few comments received had been included so it was assumed that everyone was happy with the minutes. All agreed.

2. Actions from 20th August minutes

- LC: meeting dates have been circulated - completed.
- LB: the web pages for the SSTS are on the SRWT website and LB circulated the link for comment – none received. MC commented that the first line of the web page could be more 'collaborative' in its approach. **ACTION: LB to revisit this (done).**
- LB: Had circulated draft vision and there had been further work done on this by email. Also on the agenda – work in progress
- GG to share the link on tree species www.tdag.org.uk - completed
- BS: to email presentation to LB/LC – completed and now on website
- **All: to seek reference for health & wellbeing value of trees – outstanding**
- KR: to feedback on SCC thinking on Woodland Strategy and carbon capture on agenda - completed. KR has found a range of documents about the Council's approach to trees and so a rationalisation of these would be of real value – to discuss under main agenda item 'Theme 2'.

- GG to circulate link from Uni to LB – completed
- LB, AH, KR, DB: to identify baseline for street trees. LB had not had any response back from Amey about in-house expertise. DB had not been able to get a response from within Amey. KR had discussed with MC that a small investment from the Council to secure a baseline was worth progressing. LB proposed that LB & KR to draw up a brief and circulate to potential providers.
ACTION: LB/KR develop and send out brief to Amey, Treeconomics and Natural Capital Solutions
- **ACTION: JC will have a discussion with Keiran Doick to establish if funding or support could be available to help with this piece of work.**

3. Theme 1: Vision, Aims & Targets

LB, proposed to move on from the vision at this point and instead turn to the numbered bullet points below 1-6. There will be the opportunity to revisit this 'Final Draft' later. Please refer to 'Final Draft' Vision document and also 'Final Draft with LB comments'.

LB, with reference to bullet point 1:
1. Sustainably and carefully managing our street trees in accordance with best practice How could we measure or know if our street trees were being sustainably and carefully managed?

The discussion that followed included:

Reference to use BS3998 – which GG advised is an evaluation standard and covers all aspects of arboriculture work. DB confirmed Amey already refer to this and meet this standard. GG highlighted that there are many aspects to it and it is likely to have a risk based emphasis in how it is applied.

It was felt something more was needed – with greater transparency and to meet our wish for the strategy to be 'exemplary'.

Consideration was given as to whether certification such as the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS) certified by PEFC & FSC could be applied to a street tree setting. GG advised it would most likely need annual review. LB noted that this approach includes external verification and oversight with stakeholder eg community feedback but would need to consider how restocking requirements of the scheme relates to this setting. DB noted that Notts are restocking 20:1, GG had indication of 15:1 needed for carbon capture.

AGREED to investigate the potential to apply UKWAS in an urban setting
ACTION: DB to seek more information from Dave Aspinall in relation to how SCC currently apply UKWAS to their woodlands. DB to email group with an update as soon as received.

LB, with reference to the following bullet points 2-4
2. Increasing/maintaining the value and benefits that flow from our street trees
3. Contributing to an equal distribution of urban forest across the city

4. Increasing/maintaining street tree canopy cover
Which is the most important value/benefit that we should focus on to lead the strategy?

Going round the table there were differing views:
DB felt our aims could vary by ward across the city.
BS CAVAT as it refers to tree's condition, look at increasing or retaining the value.
PS also felt that air pollution was the biggest issue we can make a true difference about. Trees will make a contribution to carbon dioxide reduction, regardless of location or species, but air pollution reduction depends crucially on species and location, and so should be our main focus.
CK felt the emotional and physiological impact were key - although difficult to measure at scheme level the fact that streets which are tree lined have increased property values demonstrates that residents instinctively value trees.
AH JC the equality and distribution of trees is important to address air pollution.
MC the 36,000 trees in Sheffield streets is a small number compared to the 3 million trees overall, it is important that we have the amenity value and the notion of monetary value identified for street trees.
GG carbon is going to be key in the future – focus for Leeds.

AH, suggested thinking about the strategy in terms of air pollution as the key driver, as the location of street trees and their proximity to the pollution means they have a particular role to play. Then have aims to also promote other benefits, particularly carbon sequestration and rain water slow down. PS, STAG have some detailed GIS air pollution data. Also available from SCC. DB, could collect more data from sensors as well.

LB summarised as our approach to the strategy will be to use:
CAVAT as key for indicating the amenity value of street trees – and particularly as street trees play such a vital role in the street scene. BS has started to calculate CAVAT.
I-Tree Eco and ward data to focus on air pollution and the specific contribution street trees make to pollution reduction, then carbon and rain water slow down.
The action agree above for LB/KR to commission baseline work will start to take this forward.

LB also highlighted that time line for each indicator needs to be considered. There was some discussion about the pros and cons of targets as different measures would fluctuate from year to year.
AGREED to seek an overall increasing trend in amenity value and contribution to reduced air pollution, carbon and rain fall slow down over 20 year period of strategy.
AGREED to review the need for canopy cover as a target/indicator – if it was easily measurable it would be useful but just for street trees it has less meaning.

The next bullet point would be considered as part of the next agenda item discussion:
5. Ensuring our street trees are more resilient through the type and age of trees we plant and also how we manage the current street tree stock

And the final bullet point would be discussed in more detail at the next meeting:

6. Involving the wider community in caring for and valuing street trees

4. Theme 2: Decision-Making

LB, we need to consider how our aims will influence the decisions made by Amey and SCC.

Tree removal

Presentations on approach used by Leeds City Council

GG discussed his presentation and circulated the LCC 'Tree Guidelines' Booklets.

ACTION: GG to send LB/LC presentation for circulation & webpage.

GG explained the tree guidelines were an attempt to provide clarity and to manage expectations for local people as LCC receive about 4,500 to 5,000 enquiries each year. Leeds city council focus on risk management as this is a statutory responsibility. Inspections occur around every 18 months, with 4 categories of work, 1. Emergency, 2. Urgent, 3. (3a, 3b) within 18 months, and 4. work not likely to be done i.e. fallen leaves.

LB asked what the decision making process was on tree removal.

GG, it is based entirely on risk, use CAVAT, the asset value (at risk of being damaged), the benefit and value the tree has against cost of potential engineering solutions identified. Decision is based against Green Streets principles.

ACTION: GG to share any decision-making process documents LCC use

LB suggested an outline of decision making process following inspection referral might be (drawing on GGs comments):

Refer to Green Street Principles?

Assess value of asset at risk

Assess value of tree – and perhaps give some sort of Green Amber Red type rating

Determine cost of engineering solutions

Evaluate and make decision on cost benefit approach

Then put in place either a Tree Protection Plan or a Removal and Compensation Plan

Publish and Consult

Finalise/Amend Decision

Notify

Deliver

Approach used by Sheffield City Council Trees & Woodlands

KR had reviewed SCC approach, there are lots of documents in draft form, not published in various places. Makes it very difficult for the public to understand the decision making process as a whole. It therefore needs a review of these documents, to make the process simple to understand, and to publish this.

DB Amey have published some documents on their website. A process map would be useful with a clear route, would give clarity.

AGREED to aim for Sheffield to have a similar Tree Guidelines booklet to LCC

ACTION: KR to draft simple decision making process based on the outline by GG and Tree Guidelines booklet

Review of SCC/Amey approach by STAG

PS delivered his presentation titled STAG feedback about the current SCC/Amey approach to tree felling. (Please refer to separate presentation).

PS gave the background context of the PFI contract and the obligations and summarised the current approach to reviewing the remaining trees under consideration for felling. PS felt that the key issues that need dealing with in the Tree Strategy document include:

- Ensuring the draft lessons learned from the recent joint Amey/STAG/SCC tree investigations are formalised in the new strategy.
- Full transparency to the public in relation to all future Amey recommendations to fell (including photographic evidence why and how and why SCC agreed or disagreed.
- A sufficient time period between a felling decision and the actual felling (except for emergency felling's' for safety reasons) to allow community groups such as STAG to scrutinise and ask questions.

LB suggested that the previous discussion and agreement to produce a Tree Guidelines type document for Sheffield could resolve quite a few of the issues in the last slide – this would be a good test. Along with potentially transparent accreditation process.

AH, once the value of street trees is established we can carry out a cost benefit analysis, perhaps bringing in a RAG system to help with decision-making.

MC asked when LCC did not replace kerbstones. GG, in Leeds the policy is not to touch kerbstones due to the damage which can be done to the tree root system, making trees unstable.

PS There are issues within the current contract that may need SCC to vary the contract with Amey.

LB by using a RAG system and clear procedures it could help give more transparent approach to decision making and when, for examples, exceptions might be made for particular trees.

5. Theme 2: Decision-Making

Tree replacement

BS gave a PowerPoint presentation on the decision making process and approvals. (Please refer to presentation in separate file).

Steps to identify when to fell a tree there are four phases, 1 Inspect tree. 2 Agreement of job with Amey Arboriculture team, 3 Submission to SCC for approval for work, 4, Notice of intention to remove tree. The judgement to fell a tree will be made on inspection.

At phase 2, the replacement tree, species will be put forward currently planting on a 1:1 basis. Amey use CONFIRM system to carry this out.

Phase 4 a notice will be placed on the tree and the local area will be letter dropped with the intention to fell. No work will be carried for 2 weeks to allow any objections.

DB informs any local action groups including STAG on any decision to fell.

PS felt that trust has been built with Amey and STAG since the felling pause began in March 2018, with Amey informing STAG of necessary of fellings, with STAG only very rarely needing to question the decision to fell.

Discussion focussed on how decision are made in terms of which tree replaces one removed. Reference was made to the previous slides BS provided which gave an over of the species profile and aim to diversify species in order to increase resistance to disease etc. BS, we are currently trying to plant like for like trees wherever possible, to enable the tree planted to reach its full potential. It is the responsibility of individual inspectors to determine which tree, although there is some internal discussion within the team.
PS gave examples where the decision on which tree to plant seems flawed.
PS gave a presentation on the species choices currently being used by Amey. (Please refer to Powerpoint in separate file).
PS referred to a long list of species - about 83 – currently used by Amey and the potential to add species that would be better for wildlife, fit better in a particular location, smaller varieties etc. CK mentioned species choices in Peak District National Park should be considered differently to urban street.

After some discussion about the approach Amey used for tree selection and how this might be influenced by the draft strategy vision & aims, it was proposed that the tree selection process could be made more explicit. AH, perhaps we should integrate other values including carbon mitigation, canopy size etc. CK, perhaps a checklist to document the choices made.
For example: use current species selection database to narrow options, consider soil available for a tree to reach full potential, location, other trees nearby and street scene, species contribution to key benefits/aims of strategy
ACTION: BS to draft out the key questions he and his assessors ask themselves as they work through tree selection.

LB, we have run out of time but BS had also worked on the slides from last time to add in data about ash dieback, vandalism areas, spread across the city as well as estimate CAVAT based on 17% sample.
ACTION: LB/BS to circulate these additional CAVAT slides for a 'sense check' from the group. NB not to be distributed beyond the group at this stage as work in progress only.
ACTION: ALL to review additional slides from Amey and feedback on email.

6. Next Steps
Next meeting: Theme 3 Community Involvement as well as a follow up to this meeting.
JC offered a presentation on approaches to community involvement from other areas. PS also offered to present suggestions. LB welcomed these but requested these be kept short so that the focus is on learning and recommendations for the strategy.
ACTION: PS and JC to provide brief presentations on community involvement ideas and recommendations.
LB thanked everyone for coming and for their contribution. Meeting Closed 1:25pm.