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Report of: Mick Crofts, Interim Executive Director of Place

Report to: Cabinet

Date of decision: 20th January 2021

Subject: **Sheffield Street Tree Partnership Working Strategy – Consultation Feedback**

Is this a Key Decision? If Yes, reason Key Decision:	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
- Expenditure and/or savings over £500,000	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Affects 2 or more Wards	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Which Cabinet Member Portfolio does this relate to? <i>Environment, Streetscene & Climate Change</i>	
Which Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee does this relate to? <i>Economic & Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny & Policy Committee</i>	
Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given? 703	
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES, give details as to whether the exemption applies to the full report / part of the report and/or appendices and complete below: <i>“The (report/appendix) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (insert relevant paragraph number) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).”</i>	

Purpose of Report

This report summarises the feedback from the consultation on the Sheffield Street Tree Working Strategy that ran for 12 weeks from Thursday 16th July until Thursday 8th October 2020.

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- ◆ Receive the feedback from the consultation
- ◆ Agree that the consultation feedback will be used in the following ways:
 - To inform the final Sheffield Street Tree Partnership Strategy to be brought to Cabinet in March 2021
 - To help shape the future arrangements for a new Sheffield Street Tree Partnership
 - To help shape the future programme of work for the partnership
 - To inform and help shape Council policies and processes.

Background Papers:

- ◆ *Sheffield Street Tree Partnership Working Strategy*, July 2020
- ◆ *i-Tree Eco Stratified Inventory Report*, Treeconomics, Nov 2019
- ◆ *Sheffield Trees & Woodlands Strategy 2018-33*, Sheffield City Council, Dec 2018

Lead Officer to complete:	
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.
	Finance: Kerry Darlow
	Legal: Sarah Bennett
	Equalities: Annemarie Johnston
<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>	
2	EMT member who approved submission: Mick Crofts, Interim Executive Director of Place
3	Cabinet Member consulted: Councillor Mark Jones
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Decision Maker by the EMT member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.
	Lead Officer Name: Karen Ramsay
	Job Title: Place Operational Services
	Date: 7 th January 2021

1. PROPOSAL

- 1.1 **The attached report summarises the feedback from the consultation on the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership Working Strategy that ran for 12 weeks from Thursday 16th July until Thursday 8th October 2020.**
- 1.2 The working strategy was approved by the Council through a Leader's Individual Executive Decision on 19th March 2020.
(<http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=2492>)
- 1.3 A designed version of the working strategy was finalised by the Sheffield Street Tree Strategy Development Group and published in July 2020 to coincide with the launch of the consultation.
(<https://www.wildsheffield.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FINAL-Sheffield-Street-Tree-Partnership-Working-Strategy-July-2020.pdf>)
- 1.4 The Sheffield Street Tree Partnership Working Strategy is a supplement to the Sheffield Trees & Woodlands Strategy 2018-22, approved by Cabinet in December 2018.
(<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/dam/sheffield/docs/parks-sports-and-recreation/trees-woodlands/Sheffield%20Trees%20and%20Woodlands%20Strategy%202018-2033.pdf>)

2 BACKGROUND TO THE SHEFFIELD STREET TREE PARTNERSHIP WORKING STRATEGY

- 2.1 The working strategy development group was formed during the summer of 2019 and began meeting in August 2019. Members of the group include representatives from Amey, the Council (two officer representatives), Sheffield Tree Action Groups (STAG) and The Woodland Trust. Tree management and valuation experts advised the group on the development of the working strategy. The group was independently chaired by the Chief Executive of Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust.
- 2.2 To ensure open and transparent development of the working strategy, the agendas, notes, presentations, and other supporting documents discussed at the development group meetings were published on the Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust website.
(<https://www.wildsheffield.com/developing-a-partnership-street-tree-strategy-for-sheffield/>)
- 2.3 In July 2019, Cabinet noted that further consultation with key stakeholder groups and with the public was planned as part of the work to develop the new street tree strategy – see paragraph 3.3, *Developing the Sheffield Street Tree Strategy*, Cabinet Report, 17 July 2019.
(<http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s35699/Street%20Trees%20Strategy.pdf>)

- 2.4 The document was published as a working strategy with the aim of engaging with people from different groups to get their views and understand how they might be affected by any of the proposals in the working strategy. In response to the consultation feedback, the working strategy is now being reviewed by the Street Tree Strategy Development Group with a view to final strategy being agreed by all partners in March 2021.

3 APPROACH TO THE CONSULTATION

- 3.1 The consultation went live on Citizen Space, the Council's consultation hub, on Thursday 16th July. It was publicly launched on Friday 17th July at a webinar on Sheffield's street trees as part of Sheffield Tree Week 2020. A recording of the webinar can be found online. (<https://www.sheffieldtreeweek.co.uk/>).

- 3.2 The consultation asked for views on:

- ◆ The vision
- ◆ The six outcomes proposed in the working strategy to promote and enhance Sheffield's street trees and their long-term benefits for the public, wildlife, and the wider environment
- ◆ Actions to deliver the outcomes.

It also asked respondents who they would like to see represented on the new Sheffield Street Tree Partnership and if they could help to deliver any of the actions in the working strategy. **The consultation questions are set out in appendix 1 of the attached report.**

- 3.3 In addition to the online consultation, the chair of the strategy development group wrote directly to 65 stakeholders and 49 Sheffield tenants and residents associations (TARAs) inviting a response to the consultation. **Appendix 2 of the attached report provides a copy of the letter and the list of stakeholders and associations contacted.**

4 CONSULTATION RESPONDENTS

- 4.1 282 responses were received: 271 from individuals and 11 from the following organisations:

- ◆ Abbeydale Street Trees
- ◆ Amey
- ◆ Barrell Tree Consultancy
- ◆ Council for the Protection of Rural England South Yorkshire
- ◆ Forestry Commission Urban Forestry & Woodland Advisory Committee
- ◆ Forestry Commission Yorkshire & North East
- ◆ Joined Up Heritage Sheffield

- ◆ Nether Edge & Sharrow Sustainable Transition
- ◆ Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust
- ◆ Sheffield Tree Action Groups
- ◆ The Woodland Trust.

4.2 **Section 4 of the attached report sets out the analysis of the consultation respondents.** This includes a breakdown of respondents by gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and postcode area.

4.3 Although steps were taken to contact a range of organisations and TARAs inviting a response (see para 3.3 above), most individual respondents self-selected to respond to the Citizen Space consultation indicating some voluntary response bias in the consultation response sample.

4.4 By comparing key socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity, disability, postcode) of individual respondents with the general population of Sheffield, this indicates where some members of the population are either over-represented or under-represented in the consultation response sample. The consultation response sample indicates:

- ◆ Over-representation of 55-74s; people from white backgrounds; people living in the West and South West of the city.
- ◆ Under-representation of young people aged 16-34; people from BAME backgrounds; people living in the East and North East of the city.

4.5 Broadly speaking, this type of response bias is common in consultations that are open to the general population of Sheffield, even if explicit attempts are made to boost the sample. There is a tendency for responses from less deprived/diverse areas of the city to be higher and this can be exacerbated if the survey is principally online. There was an option for people to complete a paper survey, but no requests were made.

5 CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

5.1 A qualitative analysis of the responses was carried out. Responses were grouped together where the content related to a similar issue or a common theme. Specific comments relating to corrections or additional references were also reviewed. The attached report provides a summary of the consultation feedback with comments from respondents grouped according to the consultation question.

Comments on the overall strategy

5.2 **Section 5 of the attached report summarises comments on the overall strategy.** Several respondents expressed support for the street tree working strategy. By contrast, some respondents challenged the working strategy for failing to address the problems or adverse effects that street trees can cause including:

- ◆ Negative impact of trees especially if poorly maintained
- ◆ Causing damage to or creating hazards on the pavement
- ◆ Creating access issues by limiting pavement width especially for wheelchair/mobility scooter users
- ◆ Negative mental health impact of trees blocking light from homes
- ◆ Extra maintenance costs of looking after streets trees and pavements
- ◆ Limiting parking options
- ◆ Impact of pollination on people with allergies
- ◆ Tree roots undermining foundations of buildings
- ◆ Leaf fall obscuring pavement obstructions, blocking drains and increasing flood risk
- ◆ Branches being too close to roofs, windows, wires, and aerials.

5.3 Some comments reflected concerns about the current and future role of Amey, the Council and STAG in the future management of street trees and highlighted the importance of maintaining a progressive attitude, resolving conflicts and ensuring that a wide range of views are taken into consideration.

5.4 **Sections 6, 7 & 8 of the attached report summarise the comments on the vision, proposed outcomes, and actions.**

Consultation Themes

5.5 **Section 9 of the attached report summarises the themes that have emerged from the consultation:**

- ◆ **There is a need to engage with the community through education from nurseries through to universities, to increase awareness of tree benefits.** Educational engagement is seen as a means of creating opportunities for community members to share their knowledge and enthusiasm for the natural environment, whilst ensuring that Sheffield's street trees are acknowledged and protected by future generations.
- ◆ **Many respondents highlighted the aesthetic value of trees and the importance of living in a green, natural environment to positive physical and mental health and wellbeing.** Street trees are an opportunity for people to be connected to the natural environment 'on their doorstep' and make local areas more appealing and attractive.

- ◆ **Several respondents believe that biodiversity and wildlife protection should receive greater centrality within the strategy.** This includes the suggestion for biodiversity value to be included as a criterion within species selection processes and the assessment of the value of a tree.
- ◆ **The Street Tree Working Strategy could be an opportunity to be pioneering, to cement Sheffield's 'Green City' status, and boost the local economy.** Local pride in being a green city oozes out of the consultation. This is coupled with a desire to be a pioneer, showing the way for other cities to follow. Some responses linked urban greening strategies with attracting talent, investment, and raising the city's profile.
- ◆ **Some responses to the consultation called for decision making processes, and decisions taken, to be made transparent, and for public feedback loops to be established.** This includes regular updates online or through a public information campaign, and clear channels through which members of the public can voice their concerns.
- ◆ **Some respondents felt that the working strategy did not recognise tree maintenance concerns.** Amidst widespread appreciation for street trees and agreement with the aspirations of the strategy, some concerns were raised that by focusing on maximising street tree benefits, those experiencing legitimate issues relating to street tree maintenance feel unheard or that their concerns are not recognised.
- ◆ **Concerns exist around the safety of streets for those with disabilities.** The consultation recommends taking action to include and elevate the perspective of the disabled community on this issue.
- ◆ **Many people value trees as community heritage assets and recognise their role in creating a sense of local identity and belonging.** Trees can tell a story of a local area and through their longevity, they become part of the history of a place. They are perceived to belong to the community and not the individual.
- ◆ **There is an appetite for local involvement and shared custodianship of street trees, and a corresponding need to establish new ways of engaging.** Suggestions put forward include starting a tree nursery; setting up tree sponsorship schemes for businesses; creating tree trails and wildlife corridors; establishing an interactive tree map.
- ◆ **Views towards street trees were sometimes underpinned by a seemingly uneasy relationship between pedestrians and traffic.** Some responses refer to benefits of street trees in tackling the nuisance of verge parking and reducing traffic noise and pollution.

Sheffield Street Tree Partnership

5.6 **Appendix 3 of the attached report provides a list of suggestions made in response to question 9 of the consultation:**

- ◆ What individuals* or organisations people would you like to see represented on the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership?

**Names of individuals have not been included in the report. Suggested individuals will be contacted by the Partnership.*

5.7 Based on the consultation responses, the Street Tree Strategy Development Group is considering options for the arrangements and membership of the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership. This includes looking at arrangements in other UK cities.

Other issues

5.8 **Section 11 of the attached report highlights other issues raised in the consultation related to the ambitions of the working strategy that are not specifically about street trees, along with a summary of the current actions to address them.** These issues include environmental policy, the definition of 'Important Landscapes', low traffic neighbourhoods, nature highways and byways, Sheffield Local Plan, verge parking, and wildflowers.

6 HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?

6.1 The vision, outcomes and actions in the working strategy will be refreshed to reflect the feedback from the consultation. The final street tree strategy will contribute to the following Council priorities:

- ◆ *Climate Emergency/Carbon Neutral City* – Improving the city's air quality, mitigating carbon emissions, and helping to protect against the effects of flooding.
- ◆ *Highway Network* – Street trees considered as natural capital assets with a value, to be assessed alongside the costs of maintaining the safety and integrity of the city's highway network.
- ◆ *Health & Wellbeing* – There is growing evidence to support the physical and mental wellbeing benefits of being near trees.
- ◆ *An In-Touch Organisation* – The working strategy has emerged from the mediated talks between representatives of Amey, Sheffield City Council and the STAG steering group. These talks enabled work on the strategy to progress through true collaboration, discussion, and dialogue, demonstrating the value of listening, being connected and responsive to a range of people, organisations, and ideas.

7 HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

7.1 The feedback from the consultation will be used in the following ways:

- ◆ To inform the final Sheffield Street Tree Partnership Strategy to be produced by spring 2021
- ◆ To help shape the future arrangements for a new Sheffield Street Tree Partnership
- ◆ To help shape the future programme of work for the partnership
- ◆ To inform and help shape Council policies and processes.

7.2 Although the consultation on the working strategy is closed, the ongoing way of working will be to continue to engage with stakeholders and communities on the outcomes, actions, and programme of work of the new street tree partnership. The strategy and actions will be kept under review and updated as circumstances evolve or change.

7.3 It is proposed that progress on the delivery of the actions in the strategy will be published in the form of annual report produced by the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership. In addition, to monitor progress, options under consideration are providing regular updates on progress against baseline and outcomes, setting clear timescales for delivering actions, and establishing targets where this might be helpful in achieving measurable change.

8 RISK ANALYSIS & IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

Equality of opportunity implications

8.1 The proposed outcomes and actions in the Sheffield Street Tree Working Strategy set out to balance sustaining and enhancing the benefits of the city's street trees with the need to maintain the integrity and safety of the highway network. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), this will help to protect all members of the public, including those with protected characteristics, from any hazards presented by street trees.

8.2 The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) highlights:

- ◆ Positive and negative impacts: Health
- ◆ Positive impact: Age; disability; pregnancy/maternity; race; poverty & financial inclusion.

8.3 Along with the strategy itself, the EIA will be kept under review and updated as circumstances evolve or change, and in response to engagement work undertaken by the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership. The EIA will be updated as required to take account of any potential negative impacts and the mitigations needed to address these.

Financial and commercial implications

8.4 Based on the current proposals in the strategy, it is not envisaged that there will be any significant financial costs or commercial implications for the current Streets Ahead contract.

8.5 However, some of the proposed actions in the strategy are likely to incur modest expenditure and/or require the input of some human resources by the Council and partners, for example:

- ◆ Establishment and support for the proposed Sheffield Street Tree Partnership
- ◆ Stakeholder and partner engagement activities
- ◆ Recalculation of ecosystem benefits using i-Tree Eco every five years so that progress can be monitored
- ◆ Some limited engagement of tree management and valuation experts
- ◆ Independent accreditation of our approach to street tree management in line with best practice.

8.6 There is an existing budget which could be used to fund modest expenditure.

8.7 The financial and commercial implications will be kept under review as the final strategy and action plan evolves.

Legal implications

8.8 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. The implementation of the working strategy and the final strategy may be subject to further decision-making in accordance with the Leader's Scheme of Delegation, and the legal implications of any proposal would be fully considered at that time.

9 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 Two alternative options are:

- ◆ No new street tree strategy
- ◆ Maintain and manage the highway network without taking account of the value of the benefits provided by street trees in decisions about whether to retain or replace them.

9.2 Neither of these options would be in line with the commitment set out in the Joint Position Statement agreed between Sheffield City Council, Amey and STAG to develop an exemplary new street tree strategy for Sheffield.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- ◆ Receive the feedback from the consultation
- ◆ Agree that the feedback from the consultation will be used in the following ways:
 - To inform the final Sheffield Street Tree Partnership Strategy to be brought to Cabinet for sign off in March 2021
 - To help shape the future arrangements for a new Sheffield Street Tree Partnership
 - To help shape the future programme of work for the partnership
 - To inform and help shape Council policies and processes.

11 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 The recommendations are made on the basis that:

- ◆ This honours the commitment made by the Council, Amey and STAG in the Joint Position Statement to develop an exemplary new street tree strategy for Sheffield.
- ◆ This honours the commitment that further consultation with key stakeholder groups and with the public would be part of the work to develop the new street tree strategy.
- ◆ Along with other city and Council strategies that are already in place, the street tree strategy will be instrumental in helping to develop and shape guidance and policies that determine the future of the city in a range of areas including climate emergency; development of the city centre, district centres and local neighbourhoods; and the health and wellbeing of residents.

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