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Report of: *Laraine Manley, Executive Director - Place*

Report to: *Cabinet*

Date of Decision: *17 July 2019*

Subject: *Developing the Sheffield Street Tree Strategy*

Is this a Key Decision? If Yes, reason Key Decision:-	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
- Expenditure and/or savings over £500,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	
- Affects 2 or more Wards	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Which Cabinet Member Portfolio does this relate to? *Environment, Streetscene and Climate Change*

Which Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee does this relate to? *Economic and Environmental Wellbeing*

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?	597	

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:-		

Purpose of Report:

This report seeks to update Cabinet on the steps taken since the Council issued the Street Trees Joint Position Statement and adopted the Sheffield Trees and Woodlands Strategy in December 2018 and to seek endorsement for the proposed process and timescales for developing a new Street Tree Strategy.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- Notes and endorses the positive progress made following the issue of the Street Trees Joint Position Statement and the adoption of the Sheffield Trees and Woodlands Strategy in December 2018 including:
 - the establishment of the Street Tree Strategy development group, including the appointment of Liz Ballard as its chair; and
 - the adoption of the new joint inspection and assessment process for street trees.
- Agrees to receive a draft of the Street Tree Strategy for consideration in January 2020.
- Notes the recommendations made by Amey to the Council in respect of the trees assessed to date as part of the new process, and advocates the continuation of this approach for future tranches.

Background Papers:

- Sheffield Trees and Woodlands Strategy (adopted by Cabinet in December 2018)
- Street Trees Joint Position Statement

Lead Officer to complete:-							
1	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 45%;">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.</td> <td>Finance: <i>Paul Schofield</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Legal: <i>Sarah Bennett</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Equalities: <i>Annemarie Johnston</i></td> </tr> </table> <p><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></p>	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: <i>Paul Schofield</i>		Legal: <i>Sarah Bennett</i>		Equalities: <i>Annemarie Johnston</i>
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Lead Officer Name: <i>Mick Crofts</i>	Job Title: <i>Director of Business Strategy and Regulation</i>						
Date: <i>27 June 2019</i>							

1. PROPOSAL

- 1.1 The Streets Ahead initiative to upgrade and then maintain the city's roads, pavements, street lights, bridges and other items on or around our streets, is the largest investment in Sheffield's highways ever seen, and will result in around £2 billion being spent over the lifetime of the programme.
- 1.2 Sheffield is home to around 4.5 million trees and 36,000 of these are street trees (on the roadside or public highway). As part of the Streets Ahead programme, the city's street tree stock will be managed and maintained over a 25-year period to ensure a varied, suitable and safe stock of street trees for generations to come.
- 1.3 Prior to the start of the Streets Ahead programme in 2012, unhealthy or damaging street trees were removed without being replaced. The Streets Ahead programme allocated funding for the maintenance of all of our street trees. This funding enables the council to prevent a decline in our street tree stock and maintain a healthy age profile across the city.
- 1.4 Aspects of the street tree element of the Streets Ahead programme have proved controversial amongst some communities in the city, particularly regarding the removal and replacement of healthy street trees that were causing damage to the highway.
- 1.5 In an attempt to resolve the dispute around street trees, in September 2018, together with our contractor Amey, the Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment, Streetscene and Climate Change met with members of the Sheffield Tree Action Group (STAG) steering group for mediated talks conducted by the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution and chaired by the Bishop of Sheffield, Rt Revd, Dr Pete Wilcox.
- 1.6 The outcome of these talks is set out in the Street Trees Joint Position Statement, which was jointly agreed by Sheffield City Council, Amey, and representatives from Sheffield Trees Action Group.
- 1.7 Within this, all sides agreed a shared set of statements about the value of street trees to the city, as follows:
 - *Street trees bring benefits to the people of Sheffield and to the individual communities that they live in, and that we want those benefits to be enjoyed by people now and in the future*
 - *Mature tree canopy cover is a valuable asset, and we believe that canopy cover is beneficial to the physical and mental health of*

residents, as well as having environmental and ecological benefits. It should be retained wherever possible.

- *Work to improve the city's highways, which have suffered from a long period of under-investment, is welcome and needed. We believe that improved highways will bring benefits to the people of Sheffield.*
- *Street trees are an asset and their value as an asset will be weighed against the requirements of highways maintenance work and the Streets Ahead programme when determining what action to take*

1.8 These values have guided the work undertaken following the publication of the statement.

Street Tree Strategy

1.9 The Joint Position Statement reaffirms the Council's commitment to developing an exemplary new Street Tree Strategy to guide the management of the city's street tree stock over the coming decades. It was agreed that the development of the new Street Tree Strategy would complement the broader Trees and Woodlands Strategy agreed by Cabinet in December 2018, and would be undertaken under the auspices of an independent chair.

1.10 The new Street Tree Strategy will explore a number of issues such as the long-term aims for street tree numbers and canopy cover, management and maintenance of the tree stock, and how communities can become more involved in the future.

1.11 Following the publication of the Joint Position Statement, a number of constructive discussions have been held with representatives of STAG to agree the approach to be adopted for the development of the strategy.

1.12 Following these discussions, Liz Ballard, Chief Executive of Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust has been appointed to the role of independent chair of the group that will oversee the development of the strategy. The group will consist of representatives of Sheffield City Council, Amey and STAG, as well as other stakeholders, such as the Woodland Trust. The group will draw on expertise from specialist practitioners as needed and will be assisted in their work by an SCC officer, who will provide research and drafting support.

1.13 The Cabinet Member for Environment, Streetscene and Climate Change will be kept fully informed of the work of the group as it progresses.

- 1.14 Cabinet is asked to note and endorse the establishment of this group, including the appointment of Liz Ballard as its chair, and to agree to receive a draft of the strategy for consideration in January 2020.

Joint Assessment/Inspection approach

- 1.15 The Joint Position Statement also describes a new approach to street tree maintenance being adopted by Amey which is intended to help the city retain more street trees on a longer term basis and to stagger the replacement of others to reduce the impact on individual streets.
- 1.16 As set out in the Joint Position Statement, this approach consists of the following:
- *Through the use of a range of solutions that would not previously have been considered, the Council and Amey have identified a significant number of healthy street trees that would have been removed and replanted that can now be retained indefinitely.*
 - *For those trees that do still need to be removed and replanted because no long-term solution can be found that still allows the contract specification to be delivered, the removal and replanting will happen over a much longer period (up to a decade). This will allow a phased approach on individual streets.*
 - *Where a tree is still due to be replanted, an assessment/investigation will take place before any work begins to confirm that this remains the only practical and/or economic course of action.*
 - *The outcome of the review, including the detail of the assessment/investigation will be published on the council's website for each tree.*
 - *That there are some streets and trees (e.g. war memorial avenues) that should be treated as special cases.*
- 1.17 It was acknowledged that this new approach could result in some temporary disbenefits (including the use of different paving materials, temporary gaps in the kerblines etc.) and that therefore there should be dialogue with residents and, wherever possible, 'tailored solutions' should be found for individual trees.
- 1.18 It was further acknowledged that given the significant investment already being made by the council, it would be inappropriate for the costs of these new measures to fall on the taxpayer. Instead Amey have been meeting the costs of the new approach.

- 1.19 Since the agreement of the Joint Position Statement, significant activity has been undertaken to assess and investigate individual street trees. This assessment and investigation has been led by Amey with the participation of STAG. Final decisions on individual street trees continue to rest with the Council as the statutory Highways Authority.
- 1.20 As part of this process, a specialist Amey team has been seeking to identify possible solutions to retain trees through physical examination, tarmac and kerb removal or other techniques as needed. In many cases, this team has implemented identified, viable solutions immediately or has made a temporary repair. This has resulted in Amey either reconfirming the classification of the tree or recommending to the Council that the classification needs to change. Following endorsement of the approach set out in this report by Cabinet, the outcome of the assessment/investigation and decision will be published for each tree.
- 1.21 While these on-site investigations are being carried out, STAG Steering Group and Amey welcome residents and other interested parties to observe the activity and to talk to the team about the options for a tree.
- 1.22 The assessment and investigation process is an ongoing one; however as at 19 June 2019, of the 309 street trees remaining from the core investment period of the Streets Ahead programme, 191 have been identified as being able to be retained on a longer term basis. A further 26 require bespoke solutions to be designed, but are, in principle, capable of being retained, and one has been identified as needing to be removed and replaced as part of the phased process. A further 91 trees were still to be investigated.
- 1.23 The above statistics demonstrate that the new approach adopted, and the additional funding being made available by Amey for bespoke solutions, is having a significant positive impact.
- 1.24 Cabinet are asked to note the recommendations made by Amey to the Council in respect of the trees assessed to date, and to note Amey's adoption of the revised approach both for the remaining 91 trees from this phase, and for future street trees that would previously have been identified as requiring removal and replacement. Cabinet are also asked to reconfirm that street trees that are dead, dying, diseased or otherwise dangerous should be removed and replaced to ensure the safety of the general public.
- 1.25 Once the new Street Tree Strategy has been developed and adopted, the approach to street tree management and maintenance will be tested to ensure that it is compliant with the new strategy. Should any changes be required to the Streets Ahead contract as a result, these will be processed in

accordance with contract change process with the private and public sector funders fully involved in the change process.

2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?

- 2.1 This decision is fully aligned to the Council's priorities. It seeks to ensure that there is a well-managed and maintained street tree stock to be enjoyed by all communities and residents both now and for future generations, recognising the important ecological and environmental benefits that this brings. This is particularly critical in the context of the Council's recent declaration of a climate emergency and the important role that trees can play in supporting physical and mental health.

3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

- 3.1 There has been substantial engagement with Sheffield Trees Action Group through the development of the Joint Position Statement, upon which this report builds.
- 3.2 There has also been extensive dialogue and discussion during the joint investigation and assessment process that has been taking place on street around individual street trees. This has resulted in a more collaborative and consensual approach with significantly enhanced understanding of the actions being taken and any constraints.
- 3.3 Further consultation with key stakeholder groups and with the public is planned as part of the work to develop the new Street Tree Strategy.

4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

4.1 Equality of Opportunity Implications

- 4.1.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for this report. It notes that there may be some negative implications for some groups associated with the new approach to street tree management when compared to the previous approach – particularly for older people and disabled people – but that these will be mitigated through the careful consideration and deployment of the range of engineering and other options available to Amey.

4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

- 4.2.1 There are no direct financial implications arising out of this report. The Council officer resource which is required to effect this strategy is already funded through existing budgets. Any additional incidental costs of supporting the new strategy development group will be absorbed within existing budgets.

4.2.2 This report addresses the strategy and policy issues concerning highway trees. Subject to Member approval, once the recommendations of this report are put into effect, the recommended solutions may result in additional costs for the Council depending on the commercial provisions of the contract. Officers will attempt to mitigate such cost increases wherever possible.

4.3 Legal Implications

4.3.1 There are no direct legal implications arising out of this report. Any legal implications that may arise from a subsequent recommendation to adopt a Sheffield Street Tree Strategy will be addressed in the report to Cabinet making that recommendation.

4.4 Other Implications

4.4.1 None noted

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 The only other options that are open to Cabinet are to reject the outcomes of the new approach and to revert to the previously agreed policy for the street tree element of the Streets Ahead programme. It is considered that this would not be in line with the commitments set out in the Joint Position Statement agreed with STAG members, and would be likely to result in substantial loss of trust for the authority, as well as placing the successful completion of the Streets Ahead programme in significant doubt.

5.2 Similarly, Cabinet could decide not to endorse the approach to the development of the Street Tree Strategy and to rely on the existing Five Year Tree Management Strategy (produced by Amey) and the council's current Highway Tree Replacement Policy. This would also be out of line with the commitments set out in the Joint Position Statement and the Trees and Woodlands Strategy agreed by Cabinet in December 2018.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 It is considered that the approach set out in the report will enable the Council to make good on the commitments it has made in the Joint Position Statement and the Trees and Woodlands Strategy. It is also felt that the approach being taken by Amey that Cabinet are being asked to advocate continues to represent an acceptable balance between the benefits of mature street trees and the need to maintain the highway programme for the benefit of all Sheffield communities without additional expenditure on the part of the Council.

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