

Economy & Environment Scrutiny – 23 November 2023

Tree planting strategy

Portfolio: Councillor Flint – Wellbeing, Leisure and Public Spaces

Related portfolios: Councillor Murphy – Street Pride

Service: Healthy Spaces - Place & Environment

Wards: All

1. Aim

- 1.1. Trees and open green spaces have a positive impact on wellbeing, connect communities to nature and, support carbon reduction.

2. Recommendations

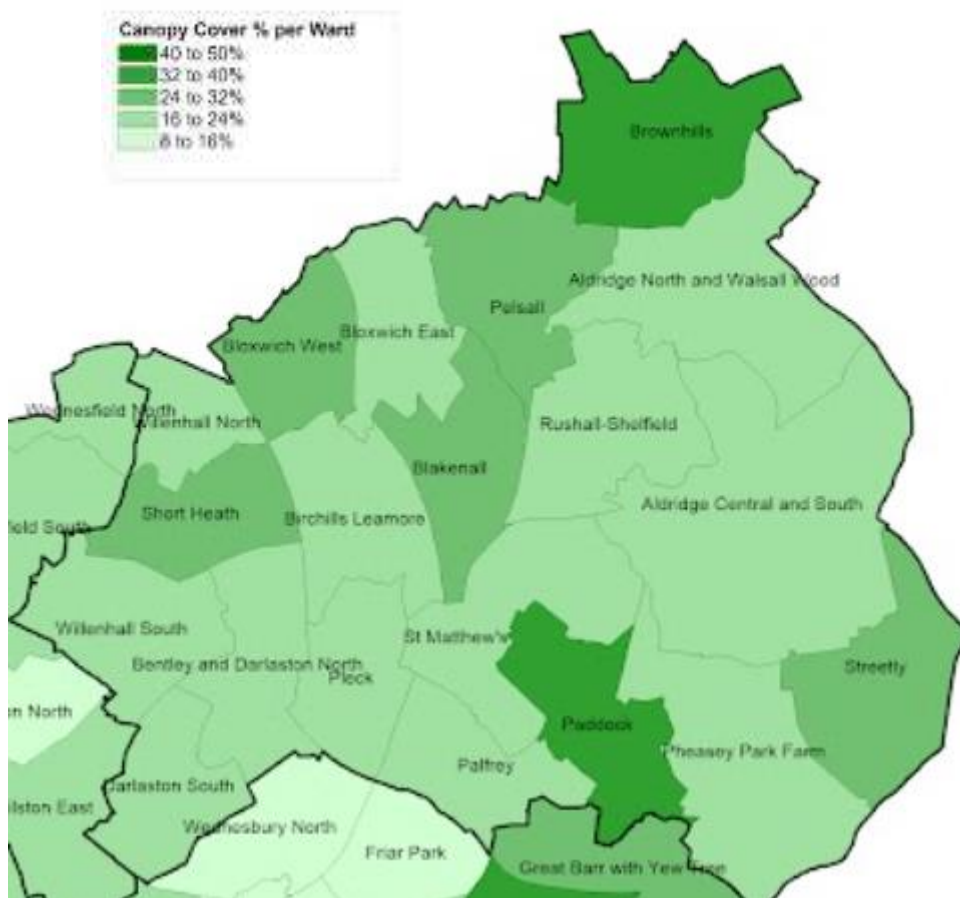
- 2.1. The committee is asked to note the work being carried out in respect to tree planting across the borough.

3. Report detail – know

- 3.1. Walsall is geologically and topographically diverse, comprising leafier suburbs across the eastern side of the borough with denser tree canopies and a more rural landscape within a patchwork of farmland, green spaces and parks to the west, defining the industrial heritage of the town.
- 3.2. All local authorities have a responsibility to protect their natural heritage. Walsall is no exception to this in managing large numbers of trees, both directly and indirectly to ensure their preservation for future generations and contribute to tackling wider implications of climate change and biodiversity loss.
- 3.3. In 2017, the average tree canopy cover, measured across 283 towns and cities in England, was 16%. There is significant variability in tree canopy cover across England's towns and cities, ranging from 3% in Fleetwood, Lancashire to 45% in Farnham, Surrey.¹
- 3.4. The graphic below sets out canopy cover across the borough of Walsall.

¹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b03d59340f0b65a2d82ce17/FR_FC_TreeCanopyData_leaflet.pdf



3.5. The Urban Forestry Strategy 2016 – 2026 was approved by Cabinet on 8 February 2017. It sets out a strategic framework for the management of trees in the borough and was prepared with reference to legislative drivers along with local, regional and national policies.

3.6. In delivering the strategy, the council has committed to:

- Ensure that the tree population is protected, developed and expanded for the future.
- Ensure the health and safety of both people and property are protected through risk management and pro-active maintenance of our tree stock.
- Ensure that maintenance of our trees is managed in a professional manner undertaking appropriate works giving due consideration to health and requirements of the trees.
- Promote a greater sense of community ownership, awareness and education on the importance and management of our trees and the benefits to people's wellbeing.

- Consider the wider impact of trees at a regional and national level and how Walsall’s approach has an impact on the wider global climate.

3.7. The ambition to protect, develop and expand the tree population has been the primary aim of the council’s tree planting work and is delivered alongside effective risk management and pro-active maintenance:

- Protection and maintenance of the existing urban forest is achieved through the council’s tree inspection and cyclical works programme. Tree inspections take place every 5 years and are completed on a ward by ward basis.
- The council take a risk-based approach to prioritisation of both planned and reactive tree maintenance work. Action, in the form of maintenance or removal, will generally be taken in the event that a tree is dangerous, dying or diseased. The council does not routinely do work to mitigate nuisances such as falling leaves, sap or birds or squirrels.
- The council’s tree policies are set out in appendix 5 of the urban forestry strategy.
- Wherever possible, works will be planned to take place at an appropriate time of year, following the routine inspection.

3.8. Regarding street trees specifically, the code of practice Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure [“the code”], provides comprehensive guidelines and standards for the management of highway infrastructure, including the management of trees.

3.9. The code emphasises the importance of regular inspections and prompt action to remove safety critical risks. However environmental responsibility is also acknowledged. Trees play a vital role in mitigating air pollution, providing shade, and supporting wildlife. Proper tree management is essential to preserving these environmental benefits.

3.10. The following table sets out tree planting and tree removal over the last five years:

Year	Planting				Felling	
	Woodland (no. trees)	Area planted (Ha)	Heavy / standards (no. trees)	Orchard (no. trees)	Area felled (ha) / number of trees	m3
2018 / 2019			no data		2 ha	65
2019 / 2020	3000	1.25	45	22	0.4 ha	27
2020 / 2021	5500	3.4	221	20	0.52 ha	26

2021 / 2022	21900	13.7	360		120 trees + 4.9 ha	185
2022 / 2023	16700	6.6	450	20	675 trees + 2 ha	90

NOTE: Not all trees removed are counted - scrub clearance work from heathlands is not included in these numbers; some other smaller scale works are not included in these figures. The areas felled (ha) relate to clear felling to create open habitat - any numbers relate to thinning of woodlands / plantations.

3.11. In 2023/24 the council plans to plant 19,754 trees. Details of the six funded programmes are set out at appendix A.

4. Financial information

4.1. Tree planting in the borough is primarily funded through grant funding and agreements with partners to facilitate tree planting. Current funding sources include the following:

- Urban Tree Challenge Fund – Forestry Commission
- Trees for Climate - Forestry Commission / Forest of Mercia
- MOREwoods – Woodland Trust / WMCA
- Coronation Living Heritage Fund – Defra
- Local community organisations – e.g. Aldridge Rotary / local schools, and tree planting funded by businesses e.g. Severn Trent Water / Sylvagen also fund tree planting in the borough.

5. Reducing Inequalities

5.1. Trees improve air quality by absorbing pollutants, providing cleaner air to breathe. This directly benefits disadvantaged communities, often more exposed to pollution, by reducing respiratory illnesses and associated healthcare costs.

5.2. The presence of trees enhances the aesthetic appeal of public spaces, attracting investments and boosting property values. This economic development can create job opportunities in low-income areas, reducing unemployment and income disparities.

5.3. Trees can help mitigate the urban heat island effect, offering relief from extreme heat, which can disproportionately impact vulnerable populations. Access to green spaces with trees contributes to better mental and physical health, reducing healthcare expenses and improving overall well-being.

6. Decide

- 6.1. The committee is asked to note the work being carried out in respect to tree planting across the borough.

7. Respond

- 7.1. The 2023/24 tree planting programme is scheduled for completion by the end of March 2023.
- 7.2. Commitments in respect to future tree planting and the replacement of trees that need to be removed, will be set out in the council's climate change action plan in 2024.

8. Review

- 8.1. The council's urban forestry strategy is scheduled for review in 2025 prior to expiry in 2026.

9. Appendices

- 9.1. Appendix A: The 2023/24 tree planting programme.

10. Background Papers

- 10.1. Urban Forestry Strategy - Cabinet Report 8 February 2017 [item 13]

<https://cmispublic.walsall.gov.uk/cmis/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/2342/Committee/328/Default.aspx>

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Appendix A

2023/24 Tree Planting Programme

Tree planting plans for planning season 2023 -24 are detailed in the tables below. The majority of the sites selected for tree planting funded through Trees for Climate fund have been allocated from the sites designated for rewilding.

Total number of tree planting planned for 2023/24: 19,754

Coronation Living Heritage Fund - Orchards	
Sites	Trees
Winterley Lane Allotments	80
Goscote Lane Allotments	10
Millfield Primary School	5
Delves Green Allotments	33
Leighswood Primary	32
St Giles C of E Primary	27
North West Primary Academy	10
Total	197
Tree for Climate 2023/24	
	Trees
Hundred Acre Wood	40
Leyland Farm	1000
	250
Moreton Avenue Open Space	24
Redhouse Play Area	27
Ryecraft Community Hub	40
Fibbersley	760
Park Lane	663
Stubbers Green Open Space	6000
Vigo Common	938
Brookmeadow	1523
Festival Avnue	194
Sandland Road	335
Rushall Manor (private)	1250
Bently Lane	1240
Sneyd Lane	2670
Total	16962
Coronation Living Heritage fund – Micro Woods	
Sites	Trees
King George V	600
Reedswood Park	600
Total	1200
Urban Tree Challenge Fund	
Site	Trees
Bradbury Park	39
Trevor Road	11

Highfield Road North	25
Nest Common Play Area	32
Greenwood Road	30
Brockhurst Crescent	20
Link Road / Castle Road	15
St Lawrence Way	20
Fisher Road	52
Bradley Lane	16
Total	260
Albert Jagger funded tree planting	
Site	Trees
Green Lane – Old Birchills	135
Total	135
MOREwoods – Woodland Trust /WMCA	
Site	Trees
Cavendish Road	1000
Total	1000