



Subject:	Belfast Tree Strategy Survey and Draft Strategy
Date:	8 November 2022
Reporting Officer:	David Sales, Director of Neighbourhood Services, City and Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officers:	Stephen Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager Alan McHaffie, Woodland Management Unit Manager Maria McAleer, Performance and Improvement Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this summary report is to update Members on the outcome of the Belfast Tree Strategy Survey and final steps in the development of the Council's draft Tree strategy.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to consider the report and: 1. Note the results of the tree strategy survey and summary of respondent comments. 2. Note the draft strategy and the final phase of consultation and engagement on it.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<u>Key Issues</u>

Following a procurement exercise, Council appointed Treeconomics to work with to produce a Tree Strategy for Belfast. Company details can be viewed via this link [About - Treeconomics](#) Treeconomics works internationally with community groups, research organisations, public bodies, municipalities, and private business to complete projects which highlight the value of trees. They have a wealth of experience in this area of work having worked on similar projects with Birmingham City Council producing The Urban Forest Master Plan [Birmingham's Urban Forest Master Plan - Treeconomics](#) ,The London Borough of Ealing and a tree study for the Royal Parks in Hyde Park , London.

3.2

The draft strategy focuses on the maintenance and development of the natural environment. Produced in accordance with national guidance, it is designed to provide robust and objective justification for future tree provision across Belfast.

3.3

In order to produce the draft strategy, we have engaged with key stakeholders through a series of workshops. Details of the stakeholders are acknowledged in the draft strategy and listed in Appendix one of this report.

3.4

As an initial step and on the advice of key stakeholders, we invited the public to fill in a survey so we could capture people's views as to what they wanted to see in our tree strategy. This survey (attached as Appendix 3) ran via Your Say Belfast from 27 July to 27 August 2022 and received 615 responses which will help inform the strategy and future policy.

3.5

The strategy will have a 10-year lifespan from its launch date and will set out a commitment to delivering key priorities and actions in a fully resourced action plan which will be reviewed at approximately three yearly intervals starting from February 2023. The strategy will incorporate the aims of council and key city partners and will reflect existing programmes such as Belfast One Million Trees, the Belfast Local Development Plan, the Belfast Agenda and clearly links tree planting and management with Belfast's climate ambitions and the benefits that trees provide to health and wellbeing.

3.6

The proposed Belfast Tree Strategy lays out a clear vision:
"That Belfast is a city which focuses on protecting, enhancing and expanding its woodlands, hedges, and trees, connecting people to nature, and ensuring that these continue to be a major asset to everyone who lives, works, and visits our city."

3.7

C&NS had hoped to issue the draft strategy in September 2022, but the volume of responses received was higher than anticipated and the project team needed more time to

	<p>consider the views of the public and incorporate them into the final draft strategy which is attached at Appendix 2. Consultation on the draft strategy will include its publication in December 2022 on Your Say Belfast and all stakeholders will have 12 weeks to comment on the document. This will be supported by several tree management webinars and education events aimed at community groups during that period which will be publicised in the local media.</p>
<p>3.8</p>	<p>The Council received 615 responses to the initial public survey which ran in July and August of this year. A summary of the responses to the survey questions can be found in Appendix 4. A synopsis of the headline results included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Council received 615 responses from in total with the District Electoral Area (DEA) with the three highest number of respondents as follows. - Botanic (Blackstaff,Central , Ormeau Stranmillis, and Windsor) with 160 respondents. - Lisnasharragh (Cregagh, Hillfoot, Merok, Orangefield, Ravenhill and Rosetta) with 120 respondents - Balmoral (Belvoir, Finaghy, Malone, Musgrave and Upper Malone) with 116 respondents. - 95% of all responses came from the members of the public and every DEA returned a response. - 93.5% of all respondents felt there are too few trees in Belfast - 81.1% of respondents could see a tree from their property - 92.7% of all respondents felt that Belfast would benefit from having a dedicated tree strategy in place. - Approx.33% of all respondents disagreed/somewhat disagreed that street trees seemed well cared for in Belfast - Approx. 88% of all respondents felt that trees are worth the financial cost of maintaining them. - Approx. 78% of all respondents agreed that planting new trees on private property in Belfast is important.
<p>3.9</p>	<p>In addition, to answering questions there was an opportunity to provide commentary and many respondents took time to do this providing feedback and insight about trees and what they mean to both Belfast’s residents and visitors alike. A synopsis of the comments received included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protecting Belfast’s Tree’s, woodlands, and hedges for future generations

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Producing a comprehensive tree strategy for the city and moving forward with its delivery - Environmental education, community, and volunteer opportunities to get involved with the delivery of the strategy - Concerns regarding tree felling, tree management, health and safety, woodland, and hedgerow maintenance - Tree provision and planting to ensure equality of distribution across the City - Planning advice and concerns regarding trees - Biodiversity and concerns for native species - Environmental and climate change concerns
3.10	<p>Treeconomics will be present at committee and will deliver a short presentation to members that will provide the committee with a summary of the key aspects of the work to date and future actions needed to deliver the strategy. The presentation will cover</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the history and current state of the Urban Forest • the future vision for Woodlands, Hedges and trees provision in the city • the action plan in particular the Targets, Priorities and Actions identified to deliver the strategy
3.11	<p>The Belfast tree strategy 2023 -2033 and the associated action delivery plan will be taken forward by relevant staff from City and Neighbourhood Services and Council partners as identified in the action plan that will accompany the strategy. It is proposed that this action plan will be independently evaluated in February 2024 following year one and at three yearly intervals thereafter. The reports produced will be presented to elected members of this committee for review and comments post evaluation and review by CNS DMT. Council will also comply with any associated monitoring requirements as set out by external funders of the strategy and agreed by council.</p>
3.12	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The project total to date is £30k. The Council has contributed £20k and provision from this was made from existing revenue estimates. The remaining £10k was kindly provided by the Woodland Trust.</p>
3.13	<p>Resourcing of staff and equipment required to deliver the strategy and associated activity for Years 1 to 3 will be included in the Action plan which will be reported to members in February/March of 2023</p>
3.14	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>

	An equality screening exercise and rural needs assessment will be carried out and approved by the Council's Equality and Diversity Officer for issue with the draft strategy.
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4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 List of stakeholders Appendix 2 Draft Tree Strategy - Click to Download Appendix 3 Tree Strategy Survey Questions Appendix 4 Survey results Summary