



Subject:	Tree Establishment report and 'Tree Cities of the World' accreditation
Date:	11 th June 2024
Reporting Officer:	Stephen Leonard, Operational Director, CNS
Contact Officer:	Alan McHaffie, Senior Woodland and Recreation 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"/>
Some time 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 report is to update Members regarding the progress on several key actions associated with the Belfast Tree Strategy since its launch on 5 October 2023.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are requested to note the progress on several key actions with the Belfast Tree Strategy.
2.2	Members are also asked to agree to the publication of the Tree Establishment report and to note the council's achievement on obtaining Tree Cities of the World accreditation.
3.0	Main report

Key Issues

3.1 The Belfast Tree Strategy was produced with the aim of managing and improving the city's tree-scape over the next ten years, focussing on protecting, enhancing, and expanding the Council's woodlands, hedges, and trees, connecting people to nature, and ensuring that they continue to be a major asset to everyone who lives in, works in, and visits Belfast city.

3.2 The Belfast Tree Strategy objectives are to deliver 37 key actions over the next decade with an independent review of the strategy occurring in December 2024, and thereafter, once every three years until 2033. The 37 key actions have been broken down into three main categories:

- **Trees and Urban Forest Structure**
- **Community framework**
- **Sustainable Resource Management Approach** (See appendix 1)

Since the launch of the Tree Strategy on 5 October 2023, the Council has achieved several key actions to date:

3.3 **1. Tree Establishment Planning** – The Council has completed a comprehensive tree opportunity mapping exercise. (See Appendix 2.) The Tree Establishment report aims to address several key objectives associated with the Belfast Tree Strategy and which looked at areas such as, existing tree canopy cover, tree equity, species suitability and investigated potential space(s) for new tree planting in both soft and hard landscapes and linking into the Council's One Million Tree initiative.

3.4 It must be noted however that all the sites highlighted in the report indicate 'potential' tree planting locations but would first require site investigations to establish if trees can actually be planted due to the presence of underground utilities, planning restrictions, or if the landowners have a budget to plant and maintain new trees.

3.5 Canopy cover across Belfast averages 18.6%, as measured by Google satellite data. This ranges from 20.8% in urban and suburban areas, to 15.0% in rural areas. The Ward with the highest tree cover in Belfast is Bellevue, with 43.9% tree cover and the lowest is Ardoyne with just 4.6%. The average tree canopy cover for Northern Ireland is 11.8%.

3.6 Achieving 30% canopy cover for Belfast is possible by 2050, provided tree planting continues at a consistently high rate by all the key landowners across the city. However, one issue worth highlighting, is that Ash Dieback threatens 11.3% of the overall existing tree population, which could cause the current tree cover to drop significantly.

3.7 **2. Tree Risk Management** – The Council has moved from a five year to a three-year health and condition tree inspection cycle for all semi-mature to fully mature park trees and on behalf of the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) the Council has moved from a five year to a two-year health and condition tree inspection cycle of all the Department for Infrastructures young mature to fully mature street trees.

In making these changes to the tree inspection cycles, it will ensure that Council identify any potential hazardous trees and take the appropriate action, however it must be noted that there is no such thing as a 'safe tree'.

3.8 **3. International Reputation** – On 21 March 2024, Belfast City Council received confirmation that our city had achieved 'Tree Cities of the World status'.

3.9	<p>This accreditation has been awarded by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations to 200 recognised cities in countries such as Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, India, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom, and the United States. This is the first time Belfast city has been included, due mainly to the council's commitments under the Belfast Tree Strategy.</p>
3.10	<p>The Tree Cities of the World accreditation is awarded to cities who have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) a policy/strategy which governs the management of its trees (ii) it has an updated tree inventory system (iii) It has a dedicated annual budget to manage its trees, and which is linked to a tree management plan, and (iv) A city which celebrates the importance of trees and works closely with its residents in the planting and maintenance of its tree population.
3.11	<p>This accreditation will be applied for on an annual basis, similar to the Green Flag award programme, but on an international platform.</p>
3.12	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> Resourcing of staff and additional tree budget will be necessary if the Council is to achieve the 37- Key Actions associated with the Belfast Tree Strategy over the next 10 years and maintain its position on the world stage as a 'Tree City of the World'.</p>
3.13	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> None</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Tree Strategy Action Plan Appendix 2 - Tree Establishment Report