

ITEM

REPORT CONCERNING TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY – NEED FOR REVIEW?

Report of the Director of Commercial Services

SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1 In March 2001 the Council adopted the Tree Management Policy.

This report considers the need to revise this policy following a petition that has been presented to Area Panel 2 concerning trees on public open space to the rear of properties on Whitehouse Close, Shelton Lock.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2 In preparing the report the following options have been considered:

- Revising both the existing Tree Management Policy and the Woodland Strategy to take account of concerns such as those raised by the Petitioners of Whitehouse Close?
- Retention of the Tree Management Policy and Woodland Strategy without alteration.

MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 The petitioners have raised concerns relating to an infringement of amenity, for example peaceful enjoyment of possessions. Concerns have also been expressed regarding the obstruction of sunlight, loss of view and seasonal debris being shed ie leaves, twigs. At its meeting on 12 June 2002, Area Panel 2 advised the petitioners that their concerns had been considered but that no work would be carried out at this moment in time. The petitioners were also advised, that as part of routine tree management, a selective felling exercise would be carried out within the next five years to remove some of the trees, which would allow the proper development of those better specimens.

The Chair of the Panel also advised the petitioners that a review of the Tree Management Policy would be considered in the context of their concerns.

- 3.2 The petitioners refer to a hedgerow to the west side of Whitehouse Close, Chellaston. Actually, rather than a hedgerow a narrow woodland is to be found which comprises many differing species, for example ash, pine, thorn, cherry and maple. This woodland is approximately 100 metres in length and 10 metres wide. It runs adjacent to the rear boundary of several properties on Whitehouse Close. The trees comprising the woodland are approximately 7 metres in height and are located approximately 14 metres from the main dwellings. The trees are in good health and are considered an amenity, particularly to users of Whitehouse Farm public open space, which is where the trees are located.
- 3.3 No records are available to indicate when these trees were planted or why they were planted. However, it is likely that they were planted to afford privacy to the homeowners on Whitehouse Close and to screen them from users of the adjacent open space. Requests for such planting are not at all uncommon from those living adjacent to public open spaces. Tree planting on the periphery of open spaces is also common.
- 3.4 In 1995 the Council adopted a Woodland Strategy whose aim is to:
- recognise and promote the importance of woodlands in enhancing the City's landscape and natural history resources and securing an attractive and healthy environment;
 - seek to protect all existing woodlands within the City and within the vicinity of the City.

Policy W1 of the Woodland Strategy states 'The City Council will protect the integrity of woodlands within its ownership.' Policy W4 states 'Woodland planting will be carried out and promoted by the City Council within the City's green wedges, including on the edges of built up areas...' Policy W6 states 'Where opportunities arise, priority will be given to new woodland provision in the southern half of the City. This area being relatively poorly provided...'

These policies give an indication as to the possible objectives of the woodland planting to the rear of Whitehouse Close and also compliment the Tree Management Policy in determining its future management.

- 3.5 The Council adopted the Tree Management Policy only recently, in March 2001. It is stated in the Policy that in considering requests for tree work 'We will do any necessary work in line with current British and European standards' and "We will not do any work which exceeds these recommendations". It goes on to state that "Our first consideration will be the impact upon the community. For example, we do not usually do any pruning which may benefit the individual but which means a loss to the community."

On the subject of pruning the policy explains that crown thinning is often proposed as a means of overcoming issues regarding shade. It advises that this approach is "...often unsuccessful since the amount of branch wood we can remove without harming the tree is minimal..." Crown lifting is another option and can allow daylight to pass beneath the canopy. However, the European Tree Pruning Guide advises that branches from no more than the lower one third of the height of the tree should be removed; this would bring little benefit at Whitehouse Close as the trees are currently too small for this action to result in an appreciable difference. Crown lifting is, however, an option which would be considered as the trees develop and become taller, but it will need to be balanced against the loss of screening between the dwellings and the open space and the loss of cover for breeding birds etc.

- 3.6 At certain times of day and year, depending upon the position of the sun, a degree of shade will be experienced in any garden close to trees. This is very common indeed in the context of the City as a whole. Similarly the loss of a view and the shedding of debris are unavoidable when one lives close to woodland. At Whitehouse Close these factors could only be resolved by either removing completely all the trees or by drastically reducing their height to 1 – 2 metres, both of which are currently contrary to the Council's Tree Management Policy and Woodland Strategy.
- 3.7 The issues raised by the petitioners are the commonest that the Arboricultural Services Section responds to, with over 1,000 such requests declined each year. If such trees were removed or drastically reduced the entire tree-scape of the City would rapidly deteriorate and the community benefits associated with tree cover ie amenity, air quality improvement, shade from UV radiation, wildlife refuge etc would be lost.

The adoption of the Tree Management Policy has provided a means by which the Service can respond to tree work requests in a transparent, consistent and sustainable manner.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4 Were the Tree Management Policy revised so as to afford less protection of trees or abandoned completely, the costs associated with tree works would increase dramatically and additional funds would be required. If 1,000 (this being a conservative estimate of pruning requests made) trees of average height were to have their crowns thinned out a total cost of £114,000.00 would be incurred. Further costs could also be expected as the trees re-grew.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5 None arising from this report.

PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 6 None arising from this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 A Tree Management Policy is necessary to ensure a sustainable approach to the management of the City's tree-scape.
- 7.2 Were the policy revised so as to afford less protection to trees a significant proportion of over 1,000 requests for work would result in the loss of trees. Numerous trees and the character and environmental quality of the City's landscape would be severely damaged. In the case of Whitehouse Close woodland is involved rather than just one tree.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8 The Tree Management Policy provides an agreed framework within which all requests for tree work are considered in a consistent and transparent manner. This is in line with the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 To ensure all requests for tree work are considered in a consistent and transparent manner,
- 9.2 To provide protection to all trees and woodlands in the ownership of the Council and ensure best practice is observed in their care,
- 9.3 To ensure a sustainable approach to the management of the Council's trees and woodlands,
- 9.4 To limit the use of financial resources to those situations of greatest need.

RECOMMENDATION

- 10 That the Cabinet note the concerns of the petitioners and the policy background of this issue and that, in consideration of all the issues discussed above, conclude that the Tree Management Policy is appropriate and that it does not currently require revision.