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| Subject: | Belfast Tree Strategy |
| Date: | 12 September 2023 |
| Reporting Officer: | David Sales, Director of Neighbourhood Services, CNS |
| Contact Officers: | Stephen Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager Alan McHaffie, Senior Woodland and Recreation Officer Maria McAleer, Performance and Improvement Officer |

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| 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"/> |

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

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| 1.0 | Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issue |
| 1.1 | The purpose of this report is to update Members on the outcome of the Belfast Tree Strategy public consultation and to seek approval for publication of the final strategy. |
| 2.0 | Recommendation |
| 2.1 | The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider this report along with a presentation on the development of the Belfast Tree Strategy and action plan from Kenton Rodgers, co-founder of Treeconomics and to give approval for the publication of the new Belfast Tree Strategy. |
| 3.0 | Main report |
| | <u>Key Issues</u> |
| 3.1 | At its meeting of the 8 November 2022 members of this committee received a report (copy at Appendix 1) on the development of the Belfast Tree Strategy. A public |

consultation commenced on 24 January 2023 and concluded on 24 April 2023. This included engagement with communities across Belfast with five workshops at the following venues:

- Girdwood Community Hub
- Falls Park Bowling Pavilion
- Avoniel Leisure Centre
- 2 Royal Avenue Belfast
- Malone House Belfast

3.2 In total over 900 people attended the workshops during the 12-week period and 500 free trees were distributed along with practical advice on planting and maintenance from Council staff.

3.3 This second phase of consultation also contained a survey delivered via the Your Say Belfast Platform on the Council Website. This received 119 responses.

3.4 The key findings from the second phase of consultation were as follows:

- 97% of respondents definitely agree or agree with the vision of the Belfast Tree Strategy.
- 103 responses came from members of the public.
- Consultation responses were received from every DEA.
- 90% of respondents definitely agree or agree with the Councils targets, priorities and action on Trees and Urban Forest Structure, community framework and sustainable resource management.
- 89% agree with the 23 commitments the Council has set out with the strategy.

3.5 The commentary and feedback during the public consultation phase also included a wider range of views and asked for Council focus on the following areas:

- More trees and green spaces within the City Boundaries and City Centre
- Encourage volunteering and adopt a tree warden scheme to support the delivery of aims of the strategy.
- Stricter targets for native planting within each Council ward
- That the strategy is ecologically vital.
- Tree parks need to be created for peace and tranquility.
- More advice for people planting trees in their own gardens.
- Council to consider the maintenance, including pruning and mixed tree planting.
- More tree planting in working class communities in North Belfast and around

the new university.

- Set aside land for orchards.
- Encourage DFI to adopt additional trees or landscaping within their schemes and address issues relating to maintenance (tree roots) in streets.
- Please remember to include native trees and wildflowers, which help pollinators.
- Strongly agree with the aim of developing a new biodiversity action Plan

3.6 Other important stakeholder engagement took place through presentations to and discussions with Belfast City Council Disability Advisory Panel and Council's Sustainability and Climate Change Board. The BBC Radio Ulster Gardening Programme also covered the development of the tree strategy and the public consultation events.

National Recognition

3.7 Belfast City Council's progressive approach to the development of the Belfast Tree Strategy has been noted at a national level and the Senior Woodland and Recreation officer has been invited to present a paper on the Belfast Tree Strategy at two conferences:

1. National Tree Officers conference – Reading, England on the 7th of November 2023
2. European i-Tree conference – Dundee, Scotland on the 20th of June 2024

3.8 The development process of the Belfast Tree Strategy was selected in July 2023 by researchers from the University of Cambridge as a case study for their research project on the Management of Physical Infrastructure Systems in Cities to Protect Public Health from Climate Change-Related Hazards.

Belfast Tree Strategy Action Plan – Development and Delivery

3.9 The Belfast Tree Strategy is accompanied by a 5 year action plan and a copy is attached at Appendix 3. This sets out in more detail the work that must be done to deliver the strategy, its aims, priorities, and commitments, including the actions and resources required for delivery starting from Oct 2023. A number of key actions are prioritised as follows:

1. Move from a 5 to a 3 year tree health and condition inspection Programme for all semi - mature to fully mature park trees, and from a 5 year to a 2 year tree health and condition tree inspection Programme for the Department for Infrastructure street trees which the Council manage on behalf of the DfI.

2. Undertake a detailed canopy cover assessment including woodlands and hedges.
3. Create an 'opportunity tree planting plan' for both hard and soft landscape areas across the city.
4. In partnership with the Woodland Trust – undertake a tree equity mapping exercise.
5. Coordinate collaborative arrangements to meet the objectives of the Council's One Million Tree initiative.
6. Set up and establish a Tree Warden scheme across the city.
7. Coordinate collaborative arrangements to meet the objectives of the plan, including skills building, potential courses and feed into apprenticeship schemes.
8. Develop and manage trees within woodlands and assign a management plan for each woodland.
9. Undertake a Capital Asset Value for Amenity trees of trees owned by the Council
10. Commit to developing a new biodiversity action plan

Equity Mapping

- 3.10 One of the actions of the Belfast Tree Strategy highlighted above will be to undertake an Equity Mapping exercise across the city.
- 3.11 Equity Mapping looks at tree canopy cover in terms of health, air pollution, education, employment etc. Typically, lower income areas have fewer trees, and this is something which is acknowledged within the Tree Strategy, and it's recognised that trees should be made available to everyone in all areas of the city. The Woodland Trust are working with American Forests to bring Tree Equity Scores to the UK. This will help cities to assess tree cover and to prioritise areas where trees can be planted to provide the greatest benefits to local communities.
- 3.12 As a result of the close working relationship between the Woodland Trust and Belfast City Council, Belfast along with Birmingham City Council has been chosen by the Woodland Trust and American Forests to test the Tree Equity scoring model before its roll out across all UK cities. It would be important to note that this project will not incur any cost to the Council. As part of the Tree Equity Mapping project, the Woodland Trust would like to mark the launch of this initiative through a tree planting event in Belfast sometime between the end of November and December 2023 with some form of commemorative tree(s) in either a

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| | <p>street, or a park such as Ormeau, Falls, Water Works or within a number of local school grounds, all of which has yet to be agreed upon and confirmed.</p> <p>3.13 Discussions are ongoing with the Woodland Trust and if a park is the preferred option to plant a tree(s) we would seek Members approval to proceed, and the Woodland Trust has confirmed they will cover all costs associated with any tree planting.</p> <p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>3.14 The development of the Belfast Tree Strategy and action plan to date has cost £30K. The Council has contributed £20k with provision for this made from existing revenue estimates in 2022. The remaining £10k was kindly provided by the Woodland Trust in the same year. Resourcing of staff and equipment required to deliver the strategy and associated activity is detailed within the action plan. Committee are asked to note that delivery of the action plan will require additional resources and investment in the Woodland & Recreation team. A subsequent bid for resources will be submitted as part of the Council budget estimates process for 2024/25.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessments</u></p> <p>3.15 There are no Equality, Good Relations or Rural Needs Implications identified at this point.</p> |
| 4.0 | Appendices – Documents Attached |
| | <p>Appendix 1: Previous Report to People and Communities Committee 8 Nov 2022</p> <p>Appendix 2: Belfast Tree Strategy – Draft for approval</p> <p>Appendix 3: Belfast Tree Strategy Action Plan (Printable Version) – Draft for approval</p> |