



Subject:	Consultation on Private Member's Bill relating to Tree Protection
Date:	11 February 2025
Reporting Officer:	Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control
Contact Officer:	Dermot O'Kane, Acting Development Planning & Policy Manager Mark Whittaker, Acting Principal Planning 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	To inform Members of a current public consultation relating to a private member's bill proposed by Peter McReynolds MLA on tree protection matters.
2.0	Recommendations
	The committee is requested to note the current public consultation on tree protection matters and to agree a response to the consultation questions. A draft response is attached at Appendix 1.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Peter McReynolds MLA has written to the Council as a key stakeholder in tree protection matters in connection with his Private Member's Bill that " <i>seeks to strengthen the legal protections of individual and groups of trees, as well as ancient and long established woodland in Northern Ireland</i> ". He is currently undertaking public consultation on his proposals and is seeking the Council's opinion on a number of questions relating to Tree Preservation Order (TPO) mechanisms, ancient woodlands and " <i>heritage trees</i> ".
3.2	The Private Member's Bill is being brought forward because Mr McReynolds believes that the current measures for tree protection are " <i>not adequate for mitigating against the risk of unauthorised removal of mature trees</i> ". He also is concerned at the loss of trees and

<p>3.3</p> <p>3.4</p> <p>3.5</p> <p>3.6</p>	<p>woodland, with consequent impact on biodiversity, and is seeking to better safeguard these valuable natural infrastructure and heritage assets.</p> <p>The proposed Private Member's Bill seeks new legislation that would seek to strengthen the legal protection of individual and groups of trees, as well as ancient and long-established woodland in Northern Ireland. According to Mr McReynolds, the proposed Bill would cover three key areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Strengthen existing legal protections for trees, by enhancing Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) in legislation. 2) Protect and support Northern Ireland's oldest and most significant trees by creating a new 'Heritage Tree' designation. 3) Safeguard ancient/long-established woodland and legally protected trees from building developments and/or new infrastructure. <p>The current public consultation is facilitated through a questionnaire survey relating to the three key areas above. The consultation will close on Thursday 6th March 2025.</p> <p>The proposed response to the questionnaire survey is attached at Appendix 1. The response generally acknowledges the importance of trees to the wider environment, including as an important element of our green and blue infrastructure. It sets out the Council's approach to Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and generally supports the TPO mechanism as the appropriate mechanism for tree protection. In this regard, the response questions the need for a separate designation and consenting regime alongside TPOs and also questions how and by what authority such a proposal would be administered and delivered.</p> <p>Whilst clearly in support of appropriate tree protection measures, ideally supplemented with best practice advice and guidance, the response notes that there may well be significant resource implications for whichever authority is allocated the responsibility for any new protective designations. In this regard, many of the questions are difficult to answer definitively in the absence of more detailed proposals, including in terms of duties, definitions and funding.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Appendices</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 – Proposed Response to Consultation</p>