

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TREE POLICY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Tuesday, 9 May 2006

PRESENT:

Councillor Jamie Lane	(Chair)
Councillor Brendan Glynane	Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Carl Grimmer	Corporate Manager
Paul Chambers	Street and Environment Team Leader
Tracy Tiff	

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hollis and Pritchard.

2. INTRODUCTIONS AND PROTOCOL FOR THE MEETING

The Chair introduced everyone to the meeting advising that this Task and Finish Group had been set up to continue the work of the previous Tree Policy Working Group that had originally been set up by the previous Health and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Working Group had held one meeting and had been informed that a Tree Policy was being written. The Group had looked at tree maintenance, tree types in Abington Park and the Mayoral trees.

3. CURRENT POSITIONS

Councillor Pritchard had asked that her comments be relayed to the Task and Finish Group that her ward, Lumbertubs, is badly affected by the planting on unsuitable trees close to housing which have grown too big, producing problems with roots raising pavements, foliage covering lights and reducing daylight to houses. It was acknowledged that more trees had survived than were initially expected at time of planting.

Councillor J Hollis had asked that her comments be relayed to the Tree Policy Task and Finish Group. She is concerned that when Planning Applications are submitted developers do not put in rampant growing trees and shrubs so that they become attractive quickly. She suggested that the list of plants that the WNDC recommends for planting be looked at to ensure that the right amount of slow growing foliage is planted.

The Chair advised that this review would be short with the end result being the production of a Tree Maintenance Policy for the Council.

Carl Grimmer advised that tree maintenance was a high-risk area to the Council. A maintenance schedule and regime had now been developed. Tree maintenance had not been carried out systematically previously. Full surveys on trees are now carried out and an annual maintenance programme is in place. There is no value to the Council from the removed tree; it is more cost effective for a contractor to remove trees for the Council. Tree inspections are carried out in house by NBC Tree Inspectors. The inspectors will

inspect each tree within two years but this should be carried out annually, which indicates a lack of resources. Claims from damage caused by Council owned trees are very rare but in the case of a claim the Council would have to prove that maintenance had been carried out on that tree over the last 12 months. Minor maintenance works are carried out in house but the larger elements are completed by contractors, appointed through a countywide partnership.

The Task and Finish Group expressed its concern regarding the trees planted on the Eastern district. For every four trees planted, only one was expected to live but the majority had survived. It was noted that 90 trees in this area had been marked for removal. If a nest is observed in a tree marked for removal, this is taken into consideration before the tree is removed. Presently, the Council is only planting mayoral trees; no other trees would be planted. The Council now plants slow growing trees and Councillors suggested that the final report could make recommendations to the West Northants Development Corporation (WNDC) regarding tree planting and maintenance.

The Group heard that NBC carries out grass cuttings on the highways verges and NCC undertakes shrub maintenance. NCC pays NBC to carry out four to six grass cuts per year; but significantly more cuts are done to ensure that these verges are maintained to a high standard. This is heavily subsidised by NBC. NBC does not maintain trees or grass verges on high-speed roads.

4. SCOPING EXERCISE

The scope of this Task and Finish Group is attached at Appendix A to the minutes.

The Group suggested that Planning and Building Control Officers be asked to attend the meeting on 21 June regarding issues such as the landscaping of developments, the planting of trees close to buildings. Carl Grimmer confirmed that his service area was now consulted by Planners on the planting of trees, foliage etc.

It was further suggested that a site visit with the tree maintenance inspectors and Paul Chambers would be beneficial to the review. The Tree Panel would be invited to attend.

The Tree Inspectors would be asked to attend the meeting on 1 June to give a presentation on trees in the Borough and problems incurred.

Carl Grimmer undertook to provide examples of Tree Maintenance Policies from other Local Authorities to the next meeting.

It was agreed that hard copies of the agenda would not be issued. Agendas, minutes and supporting papers would be issued by email. Spare copies would not be available at the meeting.

- AGREED:**
- (1) That Christine Stevenson and relevant Planning Officers and Building Control Officers be asked to attend the meeting on 21 June.**
 - (2) That a site visit be arranged for 1 June commencing at 12noon at Kingsthorpe Recreation Ground. Tree Maintenance Inspectors, P Chambers and T Tiff would accompany the Group. The Tree Panel would be invited to attend.**
 - (3) That the Tree Inspectors would be asked to attend the meeting on 1 June to give a presentation on trees in the Borough and problems incurred.**
 - (4) That hard copies of the agenda would not be issued.**

**Agendas, minutes and supporting papers would be issued by email. Spare copies would not be available at the meeting.
(5) That examples of Tree Maintenance Policies from other Local Authorities be provided to the next meeting on 1 June.**

5. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

Thursday 1 June 2006 commencing at 5.30pm

Wednesday 21 June 2006 commencing at 5.30pm

The meeting concluded at 6.30pmd

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

TREE POLICY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

REVIEW SCOPE

1 PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES OF THE REVIEW

To review the current tree maintenance operations.

2 POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

- Development of a clear Policy on maintenance and removal.

3 INFORMATION REQUIRED

- Details of current arrangements for tree maintenance
- Typical associated problems with tree maintenance

4 FORMAT OF INFORMATION

Presentations
Baseline data
Visits

5 METHODS USED

- Witness Interviews
- Site Visit
- Desk top research

6 CO-OPTION TO THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Suggestions:

- Northampton Borough Council Tree Panel

7 TIMETABLE

Site visit scheduled for 1 June 2006
Review to be completed by the end of July 2006

8 RESPONSIBLE OFFICERS

Lead Officer	Carl Grimmer
Co-Ordinator	Tracy Tiff

9 RESOURCES AND BUDGET

From existing budgets
Officer from Street and Environmental Services to support the Group

10 FINAL REPORT

Anticipated completed by mid August 2006. Presented by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then to Cabinet.

11 MONITORING PROCESS