

Wiltshire Council

Council

10 July 2018

Notice of Motion No. 9 – The Inclusion of Tree Planting in Future Planning

Councillors Pat Aves and Brian Mathew

Members Briefing Note

It is recognised that appropriate landscaping within well designed developments can help to improve the health and wellbeing of residents in new housing developments in a multiplicity of ways, leading to a happier, healthier population.

The Wiltshire Core Strategy, adopted in 2015, has a suite of policies to deliver high quality design in housing developments. Consideration of landscaping, including tree planting is embedded throughout these policies in recognition of the highly valued and sensitive landscapes throughout Wiltshire and to implement Strategic Objective 5 of the Plan to protect and enhance the natural, cultural and historic environment.

CP51 (Landscape) states that development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character. The first criteria states explicitly that development should demonstrate how aspects of the character of the landscape have been conserved and where possible enhance including respecting:

‘The locally distinctive pattern and species composition of natural features, such as trees, hedgerows and field boundaries, watercourses and water bodies’.

Wiltshire Core Strategy Core Policy 52 (Green Infrastructure) is also relevant. This requires development to retain and enhance on site green infrastructure.

Core Policy 57 (Ensuring high quality design and place shaping) adds more clarity relation to what constitutes high quality design in all new development. Criteria (i), (ii) and (iii) relate to enhancing local distinctiveness and responding positively to existing landscape features such as trees

Implementation of Core Policy 57 is being supported by the preparation of a Wiltshire Design Guide. The guide will provide advice on the design of new housing developments and the appropriate use of tree planting within schemes to enhance the quality of the residential environment. Retaining trees in the landscape and introducing appropriate trees into development is generally supported by policies and the Design Guide. Trees would need to be suitably selected to suit the location, for example, large trees with relatively high water demand could increase the risk of subsidence to a building if they are not planted a minimum distance from structures.

Wiltshire has a diverse landscape with 10 different landscape character assessments. These include areas of open plain with long and often expansive views and big skies compared to the more intimate landscapes of the clay vales. As a consequence policies allow flexibility to respond to these varied landscape character areas. A blanket policy in Wiltshire could possibly be detrimental to the character of the landscape in Wiltshire.

The policy in Wycombe District Council, referred to, is a draft policy in an emerging plan and is still to be tested through examination. Wycombe District is comparably small (324.6 sqkm) compared to Wiltshire (3,485sqkm) : over 10 times the size of Wycombe District. In contrast to Wiltshire, Wycome District has less diverse landscapes where a single policy may be appropriate and more easily implemented.

A further consideration is that there is on-going pressure for more housing generally, the draft NPPF looks to make efficient use of developable land and encourages increased housing densities where appropriate. High density developments can be more cost effective and are more land efficient. However, they can also reduce the ability to accommodate trees within the built environment. Policies within the Wiltshire Core Strategy need to establish a clear and consistent approach to green infrastructure in new developments which ensures the most appropriate outcomes in each individual situation is achieved. A blanket policy may hinder this.

Consideration must also be given to the resource requirement for ongoing management of trees and the ongoing monitoring of any such policy.

References:

Manchester's City of Trees Project <http://www.cityoftrees.org.uk/why-trees-health-wellbeing>.

The Forestry Commission's:

[https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/IntroducingUrbanForest_FINAL_Sept16.pdf/\\$FILE/IntroducingUrbanForest_FINAL_Sept16.pdf](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/IntroducingUrbanForest_FINAL_Sept16.pdf/$FILE/IntroducingUrbanForest_FINAL_Sept16.pdf)

Forest Research - Kieron J. Doick and Helen J. Davies:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311582274_What_are_urban_forests_and_how_beneficial_are_they