

## **Briefing Note**

### **Background**

Cllrs Lay, Dean, Sturgis and Wayman discussed in December 2018 how the Council could landscape trees on new estates so that:

- a) The spread of pests and diseases is limited
- b) The best trees are planted in the most appropriate areas.

The Cllrs then asked the Environment Select Committee's (ESC) Scrutiny Officer to undertake further research in this area, to help ascertain whether this topic is an area where Overview and Scrutiny (OS) can help to add value.

The above Cllrs asked the Scrutiny Officer to research into the following areas\*:

- Policies in relation to A and B above in all of Wiltshire's neighbouring authorities
- Policies that the Council's Landscape Officers (within Spatial Planning) work to
- Wiltshire Council's Highways approach to the landscaping of trees
- Stourhead's policies for the landscaping of new trees

This meeting has thus been arranged to discuss the research collected from the above and to agree whether OS engagement would help to add value.

*\*The views of the Council's Tree Officers had already been considered, at December's discussion.*

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### **Wiltshire's Neighbouring Authorities**

In summary, the majority of Wiltshire's neighbouring authorities do not appear to have specific policies directly related to A and B above.

Oxford City Council has a Biodiversity Action Plan and North Dorset has a 'Tree Warden' scheme. Interestingly, Christchurch and East Dorset do have a policy setting out that trees should be planted in the most appropriate location and Stroud District Council's 'Tree Management Policy', points I, K and P, are relevant to Wiltshire; as they talk about appropriate tree planting and the enhancement of the landscape and habitat creation.

### **Wiltshire Council's Landscape Officers**

*How does Wiltshire's Council's Spatial Planning team work to limit the spread of pests and diseases among trees in new developments across Wiltshire?*

- The Council's Landscape Officers advise on the appropriateness of new tree planting within new development proposals, utilising various published guidance
- The Council's Tree Officers work to ensure that there is always adequate space for trees, in line with guidance from the arboricultural association

- Forestry Commission: the lead body for managing the spread of pests and diseases among trees. The Council would refer any trees with pests/diseases to the Forestry Commission, who would then inspect, monitor and advise on any necessary appropriate control measures (such as movement controls, planting restrictions and felling orders etc)
- The Council (as a local planning authority) has limited scope to prevent the spread of pests and diseases among trees, as the Forestry Commission take ownership of this task with support of horticultural industry e.g. Horticultural Trade Association (HTA), British Association Landscape Industries (BALI), Landscape Institute (LI), Arboricultural Association(AA) etc
- Climate change presents a potential future threat to the life of trees – for example, the Common Beech tree may disappear from our upland chalk landscape, due to issues around changing ground water levels. The Forestry Commission are leading on work to trial the tolerance of various tree species' ability to cope with the effects of climate change etc

*How does Wiltshire's Council's Spatial Planning team work to ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places?*

- Character: the character of a development always needs to be considered. Although tree planting is always welcomed, there are exceptions to this where the tree planting would not be in keeping with the area's character or presence of underground constraints (utility/services) would preclude planting.
- Space: Government have set house building targets around density, in other words, land for development must be as densely built on as possible. This presents an issue for tree planting, as trees require a lot of space. Many mass house builders build standard house types with very small gardens and frontage parking thus, there is little that Spatial Planning can do to insist that developers create more space in their development plans for street tree planting, because it would juxtapose with Government targets, and potentially impact upon developer viability; as developers' profit is based on final numbers of houses delivered.
- Officers' negotiate to reinforce street hierarchy place making, by encouraging space for new tree planting alongside retention of green infrastructure corridors (which include retained trees), together with centrally located areas of POS and multi-functional 'Sustainable Urban Drainage schemes' within new development. They do this through securing acceptable outline 'Development Parameters' in tandem with 'Design and Access Statements'. These parameters are then carried forward to the detailed 'Reserved Matters' applications for compliance checks.
- Trees in public areas – maintenance and adoption: trees are expensive to maintain and public open spaces within new development will be adopted by a management company for the estate. The Council has committed to no longer adopting any more public open spaces and Highways often report that adopting a tree within highway land is costly for the Council

## Summary

In terms of limiting the spread of pests and diseases among trees, the Council would always refer such issues on to the Forestry Commission, who take ownership of this matter.

When it comes to planting trees in the most appropriate places, the key issue is space. As Government are requiring land to be as densely developed as possible, Spatial Planning do not have a strong argument when they ask developers to re-consider their development plans, to allow for greater greenery. Additionally, as house building is such a priority for Government, any requests to reduce the number of houses in a planned development, to purely accommodate for more greenery, are rarely met with support. There can also be a reluctance to provide and adopt street trees due to high maintenance costs.

### **Wiltshire Council's Highways Officers**

Highways have outlined that in regard to limiting the spread of pests and diseases, the Council manages risks through tree inspections. If there is a high risk that the tree is diseased or infested with pests, then necessary work would be carried out to decrease this risk.

In regard to trees being planted in inappropriate locations, Highways would only carry out remedial works to a tree if it was placing an unacceptable level of risk on public safety or property. Some examples of unacceptable levels of risk are where a branch has split/broken in a gale and is hanging in the tree, or where a tree has begun to uproot and is likely to fall.

### **Stourhead**

*How do Stourhead work to ensure that the spread of pests and diseases are limited?*

- There is a concrete plan for landscaping of trees on the estate, which lasts for 5 years and is regularly reviewed. This plan must be adhered to at all times and is monitored and managed by a Woodland Specialist
- The plan for trees is agreed in line with the historical data of the estate
- Trees are always planted young, as they need less maintenance

*How do Stourhead work, to ensure that the most appropriate trees are planted in the most appropriate location?*

- Stourhead only buy British grown stock and each tree must have a certification – nothing is ever brought from abroad
- Trees arriving on the estate are placed into a quarantine area (outside of the garden) for six weeks and are monitored, before being planted inside the garden
- Trees are always bought in winter, so that it is easier to see the condition of the plant (bare branches)
- Stock is constantly checked and if anything is found, the tree is burnt and Stourhead report back to the place from where they bought the tree, with photographic evidence

- If Stourhead are ever unsure about a tree's health, then they would seek professional advice

### **Conclusion**

When it comes to local authorities, it appears that Councils have limited scope to influence both where trees are planted, as well as reducing the spread of pests and diseases among trees. Central Government guidelines prioritise density of housebuilding over increasing greenery and thus, until these priorities shift, Wiltshire Council has minimal ability to ensure more trees are landscaped on new estates.

Secondly, as the Forestry Commission take ownership for managing and monitoring the spread of pests and diseases among trees; the Council's resources are not naturally aligned to allow them to lead in this area.

Whilst improving greenery in an area is to be encouraged, the reality is that power to make this change is not in the hands of local authorities. Indeed, the lack of policy/strategy documentation on Wiltshire's neighbouring authorities' websites could be taken as a reflection of this circumstance.

Unless the Government re-prioritise improving greenery over house-building, it is advised that OS engagement would not help to add value.