

West Sussex Tree Plan (December 2020)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The trees of West Sussex are a valuable and essential element of our urban and rural landscape, contributing significantly to the character of the County, as well as providing other economic, social, and environmental benefits, all of which contribute to our quality of life.
- 1.2 Against a backdrop of changing national policy and legislation, the pressure for new housing and other development, emerging new pests and diseases, and the effects of climate change, the West Sussex Tree Plan addresses how the County Council will undertake its statutory duties and responsibilities and how it will operate as a landowner.
- 1.3 The Plan seeks to ensure that the trees within our ownership are maintained, protected, and improved for current and future generations. It also seeks to influence how the wider tree resource within the County is managed and improved. Accordingly, it has three strategic aims:
 - to **maintain** the trees and woodlands in the County Council's ownership;
 - to **protect** trees and woodlands from new development and other threats; and
 - to **improve** tree cover in West Sussex through natural regeneration, the planting of new trees, and the creation of new woodlands.
- 1.4 Although the focus of the Plan is on delivery over the next five years, the strategic aims provide a framework for the County Council over the medium and longer-term.
- 1.5 The development of the Tree Plan has been subject to critical review by key internal and external partners and informed by their contributions.

2. The Value of Trees

- 2.1 The contribution of the trees and woodlands to the landscape and townscape character of West Sussex is well-known and valued by residents, businesses, and visitors alike. However, their value extends beyond this and includes a significant number of other, sometimes multifaceted, benefits.

Economic Value

- 2.2 Trees have a wide variety of practical and commercial uses and the woodland economy has been growing over the last decade. Trees can provide wood pulp for paper and timber for fuel, building construction, furniture manufacture, tools, sporting equipment, and thousands of household and garden items. They can also benefit farming by improving the pollination of crops.

- 2.3 The woodland in the County not only provides direct employment through the need to manage the resource, it is an essential contributor to a high-quality environment that supports local economic growth by helping to attract visitors to West Sussex.
- 2.4 Notably, the social and environmental values of trees have real, if generally unmeasured, economic benefits. When these benefits are measured, the economic values can way exceed the traditional economic values given, for instance, to timber value. One study showed that although the value of England's trees and woods was about £11bn, 95% of this value was as a result of benefits provided to society, not value captured in traditional financial accounting.

Social Value

- 2.5 Trees and other forms of vegetation can have a positive impact on our health by improving air quality in urban areas. They can filter dust and absorb other pollutants such as carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide. After trees intercept unhealthy particles, rain washes them to the ground. They also help to physically separate people from major pollution sources, such as roads.
- 2.6 In addition, trees and green spaces can have a beneficial impact on our general health and wellbeing. Not only do they provide space for physical activity, regular exposure to trees can have a positive impact with regard to addressing stress, anxiety, and other mental health conditions.
- 2.7 Trees and woodlands also provide an accessible educational resource allowing learning through play, adventure, and exploration. Higher levels of exposure to green spaces can also improve cognitive development in primary school children, including improvements in working memory and attentiveness.

Environmental Value

- 2.8 Trees, and other forms of natural capital, capture and store (or sequester) carbon dioxide (CO₂), which is the most prevalent greenhouse gas in the United Kingdom. Woodland is the most effective habitat at CO₂ sequestration, as emissions are sequestered within the soil as well as the trees.
- 2.9 Trees control climate by moderating the effects of the sun, rain and wind. Leaves absorb and filter the sun's radiant energy, keeping things cool in summer. Trees also preserve warmth by providing a screen from harsh wind. In addition to influencing wind speed and direction, they shield us from the downfall of rain, sleet, and hail. Trees also lower the air temperature and reduce the heat intensity of the greenhouse effect by maintaining low levels of carbon dioxide. Trees are also noted for cooling streams and rivers.
- 2.10 Trees can play an important part in helping to reduce the impact of flooding by intercepting rainfall and soaking up excess ground water. In addition, tree roots help to hold soil in place and reduce erosion. By preventing excessive nutrients and sediment entering watercourses and

aquifers, they can capture pollutants and prevent them entering groundwater.

- 2.11 Trees and woodland, and ancient woodland in particular, provide a habitat for a diverse range of species. Strips of trees and treed hedgerows can provide links between areas of woodland, urban parks, and gardens, creating additional habitat space and allowing wildlife to move freely in and out of urban areas.

3. Trees in West Sussex

- 3.1 From early agriculture and animal husbandry, through industrial development including charcoal works, iron smelting, shipbuilding and construction, to more recent history, such as the two World Wars, the availability of wood and the landscapes within and around them have been crucial factors in how the countryside of West Sussex has evolved.
- 3.2 Evidence ranges from the smallest artefacts uncovered by archaeologists to landscapes of ancient settlements. Distinctive types of woodland archaeology include woodland pasture boundary bank earthworks, charcoal burning platforms, hammer ponds, and sawpits. These may also preserve largely intact extensive remains of prehistoric field systems, which are recorded as ancient monuments.
- 3.3 West Sussex was once much more extensively wooded. Over the centuries, the influence of human activity has contributed to clearance and loss of woodland to the levels we see today. However, it is not a tale of continual loss; appreciation of the value of woodland has meant that there was comparative stability in extent of woodland throughout much of history. The County has a mix of deciduous semi-natural woodland with remnants of ancient woodland scattered throughout. Plantations and agricultural planting are also evident along with boundary markings and trees planted for their aesthetic appeal. Examples of veteran and ancient trees are recorded throughout the landscape, with cultural or historical references likely to be associated with them.
- 3.4 Within the landscape, watercourses have mostly developed naturally, as catchment areas for local rivers, or been shaped for industry with canals, reservoirs and drainage evident in the County's landscape. Trees are often features deliberately associated with manmade structures and earthworks as well as occurring naturally.
- 3.5 The presence of wildlife and domesticated animals influences the nature of the landscape, with wood pasture used for grazing, commons, deer parks, enclosures, forests, and holloways, all influenced by the ways that animals have been managed. Some landowners use animals as part of their management plan, with examples of rewilding, conservation management and more formal types of management such as landscape gardening all present within West Sussex. Each type of land use is likely to have heavily influenced the way that trees emerged in that local area, whether through ecological processes such as succession or spreading of seeds, or through direct human activity such as planting, hedge-laying, coppicing, or pollarding.

- 3.6 Conservation efforts today draw from understanding historical practices, taking ecology, character, heritage, and infrastructure planning into account.
- 3.7 The result is a diverse tapestry of tree and woodland management history which has shaped the economic, political, and cultural development of modern West Sussex.
- 3.8 The results from the last analysis of the Forestry Commission's National Forest Inventory by Local Authority (2013) records that West Sussex has 42,500 hectares of woodland, of which over 82% is broadleaved. This equates to woodland cover of 23% compared to 10% for England as a whole. 21,374 hectares is ancient woodland, of which 11,647 hectares is ancient and semi-natural woodland and around 9,727 hectares is plantation on ancient woodland sites.
- 3.9 The National Forest Inventory woodland map covers all forest and woodland areas over 0.5 hectare with a minimum of 20% canopy cover (or the potential to achieve it) and a minimum width of 20 metres, including areas of new planting, clearfell, windblow, and restocked areas. The map excludes all tarmac roads, rivers and powerlines where the gap in the woodland is greater than 20 metres wide. It is updated on an annual basis.
- 3.10 Many older mature trees, particularly in rural hedgerows, are now in decline and have a limited life expectancy. Dutch elm disease and more recently Ash Dieback have had, and are having, a significant detrimental effect on the County's landscape. An influx of new pests and diseases in recent years, with more likely to arrive, will exacerbate this situation together with pressures and losses from development, climate change, and habitat fragmentation.

4. Legislative and Policy Context

- 4.1 The County Council is subject to a wide range of legislation relating to trees, both as a landowner and as a service provider, covering highways (including Public Rights of Way), environmental issues, planning, heritage, and safety.
- 4.2 This Plan has also been influenced by a range of policies and guidance at national and local level. In addition to policies specific to trees and woodlands, they include policies relating to broader issues such as planning, climate change, environmental net gain, and nature recovery strategies.
- 4.3 Although such policies may change during the lifetime of the Plan, it seeks to provide a broad framework to achieve the County Council's social, environmental, and economic outcomes.

Legislation

- 4.4 In common with other landowners, the County Council has a responsibility to ensure that the trees in its ownership are managed appropriately and that they do not pose a danger to the public or property as far as is reasonably practicable. In common with other landowners, it also has to

- ensure that it complies with legislation relating to the protection of trees and tree removal, even if they are diseased. There is also a legal obligation to protect wildlife (not just birds and bats, but also invertebrates and rare lichens) when undertaking works to trees.
- 4.5 Some trees in the County Council's ownership are subject to Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), which protect specific trees, groups of trees, or woodlands in the interests of amenity. TPOs prohibit wilful damage and destruction of such protected trees and, in most cases, the cutting down, topping, lopping, and uprooting of them requires the written consent of the local planning authority (LPA).
 - 4.6 Similarly, some of the County Council's trees are in Conservation Areas and have a degree of protection under legislation. Prior notice needs to be given to the LPA before such trees can be cut down or work carried out to them; this is to give the LPA an opportunity to consider whether a TPO should be made.
 - 4.7 Felling growing trees in the County Council's ownership may require a felling licence issued by the Forestry Commission. Although certain types of felling and tree works are exempt, a licence is usually required for the felling of growing trees where more than five cubic metres of wood are to be felled in any calendar quarter.
 - 4.8 Although there is no statutory duty on the County Council to replace any diseased trees that are removed, there is a general duty on local authorities to 'conserve biodiversity'. Furthermore, replacement may be required for trees that are subject to Tree Preservation Orders and in Conservation Areas, or it may be required by a felling licence.
 - 4.9 In addition to its responsibilities as a landowner, the County Council has specific duties and responsibilities in its role as a planning authority and the local highway authority.
 - 4.10 The County Council is responsible for determining planning applications for mineral and waste development (outside the South Downs National Park) and for the Authority's own development. When determining a planning application, the impact of the proposed development on trees is a 'material consideration' that must be taken into account by the authority in reaching a decision. There is national guidance for both planning authorities and developers about the successful retention and integration of existing trees within new development. If planning permission is granted, planning conditions can be attached to protect trees and there are national guidelines to ensure that trees are adequately and effectively protected during the construction process. Ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees need special considerations – see paragraph 4.13.
 - 4.11 In addition to its responsibilities relating to trees on highway land, the County Council has a role in helping to ensure that trees in private ownership adjacent to the highway, do not pose a danger to users. As necessary, the County Council can serve notice on private landowners to undertake works to dangerous trees in their ownership; if such works are not carried out, it can undertake the works itself and recover the cost.

National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 4.12 The NPPF is a 'material consideration' in planning decisions. Paragraph 170 states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, amongst other things, recognising the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including of trees and woodland. It also states that they should minimise impacts on and provide net gains for biodiversity.
- 4.13 There are strong protections for ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees, which are recognised in the NPPF and accompanying guidance as being irreplaceable habitats. The Framework requires that any development resulting in the loss or deterioration of such irreplaceable habitats should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and only if a suitable compensation strategy exists (paragraph 175).

25-Year Environment Plan and Environment Bill

- 4.14 The Government's 25-Year Environment Plan (2018) includes the following goals relevant to trees and woodlands:
- encouraging larger scale woodland and forest creation and planting 180,000 hectares of new woodland by 2042, on the way to 12% woodland cover in 2060;
 - creating or restoring 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat (outside protected sites) as part of a Nature Recovery Network (see paragraph 4.19);
 - increasing the number of woodland Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in favourable condition to maximise the range of benefits they provide; and
 - taking action to recover threatened species.
- 4.15 The Plan also recognises the importance of the 'urban forest' – all the trees in urban areas, in public and private spaces – as a key part of 'green infrastructure'. This forest not only contributes to the attractiveness of our towns and villages, it improves biodiversity, it provides other environmental, social and economic benefits, and it can help with climate change adaptation, for example, by reducing flood risk and damage. Therefore, the maintenance of existing trees in urban areas and the planting of new urban trees is an important part of the national plan.
- 4.16 The Environment Bill, in its current form, was first introduced in October 2019, reintroduced in January 2020, and then updated in February 2020; the progression of the Bill has been halted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Bill includes a requirement for development to achieve biodiversity net gain and introduces the duty to consult regarding removal of street trees. The Government hopes that that this will help to discourage the loss of woodland to development, reduce the risk of pre-emptive habitat and tree clearance, and help to ensure that any losses are properly compensated for.

England Tree Strategy

- 4.17 In June 2020, the Government launched a consultation to inform a new national tree strategy that will be published later this year. The strategy will set out policy priorities to 2050 to deliver the Government's tree planting programme. It will focus on expanding, protecting, and improving woodlands, and on how trees and woodlands can connect people to nature, support the economy, combat climate change, help to reduce flood risk, and recover biodiversity. Significantly increasing tree establishment and woodland creation is seen as vital to support nature recovery, clean growth and the Government's commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.
- 4.18 In the March 2020 Budget, the Government announced the creation of a £640m 'Nature for Climate Fund' that will include significant funding for tree planting. The new Tree Strategy will identify how the Fund will be used to best effect the change that the Government wants to see, including its commitment to increase woodland cover in England from 10% to 12% by 2060. The Fund will integrate with the new Environment Land Management Scheme (ELMS), which will replace the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP).
- 4.19 The creation of a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) is a goal in the 25-Year Environment Plan; it will be progressed through the upcoming national Nature Strategy. The aim is to restore existing sites and to create or restore an additional 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat to support a coherent, national ecological network. This will be funded through a Nature Recovery Fund investment of up to £25 million, which may be used to create new woodlands that provide space for nature.
- 4.20 Local Nature Recovery Strategies will be taken forward in the Environment Bill. The strategies will map the most valuable existing habitat for nature across the whole of England, set out proposals for creating or improving habitat (including woodlands) for nature and wider environment goals, and establish priorities for nature's recovery.

Tree Health Resilience Strategy

- 4.21 Pests and diseases, such as Ash Dieback (see paragraph 5.8), can have a devastating impact on trees and woodlands. Accordingly, there is a need to strengthen biosecurity and build resilience to protect and enhance trees, woods, and forests, and to establish and manage diverse and healthy treescapes for the future. The Tree Health Resilience Strategy sets out an action plan to reduce the risk of threats occurring, for example, using native tree stock, and to strengthen natural resources to better withstand future threats.

National Tree Guidance

- 4.22 In June 2020, the Forestry Commission published guidance for local authorities and land-owning businesses about the key role that trees, woods and forests can play in mitigating the effects of climate change. 'Responding to the climate emergency with new trees and woodlands' encourages woodland creation to be placed at the heart of responses to

climate change given their efficient and effective capture of carbon. It provides advice on creating and managing woodland, reducing the use of non-renewable resources through wood and timber products, and sources of further information on grant funding.

Local Policy

Climate Change Strategy

- 4.23 The County Council's Climate Change Strategy is aligned with our ambitious target to be carbon neutral by 2030. The Strategy sets out commitments to achieve both this vision and the wider national commitment to be carbon neutral by 2050 and to strengthen the UK's preparedness for climate change. It addresses the County Council's direct roles and responsibilities and the part that it can play more widely in West Sussex by enabling and inspiring others to take action.
- 4.24 One of the five commitments in the Strategy is to "adapt and be resilient to a changing climate", which includes: adapting and building resilience to extreme weather events, such as heatwaves and flood; exploring and bringing forward natural capital solutions; and increasing opportunities to achieve biodiversity net gain.
- 4.25 This Tree Plan has an important role to play in helping to meet this commitment, including the sequestration of carbon in the natural environment.

Planning Policy

- 4.26 The West Sussex Waste Local Plan 2014 and the West Sussex Joint Minerals Local Plan 2018 are the most up-to-date statements of the County Council's land-use planning policies for waste and minerals and they provide the basis for consistent decision-making about planning applications. Both plans form part of the statutory 'development plan' for West Sussex and include criteria-based policies that seek to protect and, where possible, enhance the natural environment and resources of the County, which include trees and woodlands.
- 4.27 The statutory local plans prepared by the district and borough councils in West Sussex and the South Downs National Park Authority also seek to protect the natural environment and include policies relating to development affecting trees and woodlands, consistent with the policies in the minerals and waste local plans.

Transport Policy

- 4.28 The West Sussex Transport Plan 2011-2016 sets out the County Council's strategic approach to maintaining, managing, and investing in transport. In exercising functions as the local transport authority for West Sussex, the Plan recognises the need to understand the potential impact of transport schemes on the natural environment, including important habitats. Accordingly, measures will be taken to minimise any negative impacts and opportunities will be sought to enhance biodiversity.

5. Key Issues

- 5.1 This section identifies the key issues facing the County Council with regard to the management of the trees in its ownership and the management of trees more widely in West Sussex.

Data and Intelligence

- 5.2 Nationally, recent injuries and fatalities resulting from failing trees and the outcome of subsequent litigation have placed an increasing obligation on tree owners to manage their trees more stringently but within what is considered 'reasonably practicable'.
- 5.3 Accordingly, there is an urgent need for the County Council to maintain an accurate record of the trees in its ownership. This requires surveying to locate the trees followed by inspections by specialists at appropriate intervals and records being maintained about their condition. Such inspection intervals need to be proportionate to the degree of risk posed by trees and will vary according to the level of use on each site. Any recommended maintenance work resulting from the inspections needs to be implemented and, again, records maintained of any work carried out.
- 5.4 Furthermore, given the duty as local highway authority to ensure that trees in private ownership do not pose a danger to users of the highway, there is a need to survey and record defective trees, and ensure that their owners take appropriate action.

Climate Change

- 5.5 Planting trees has been considered to be one of the cheapest and most effective ways of taking CO₂ out of the atmosphere. However, for sequestration to occur, new trees need the right conditions to grow to maturity and that can take many years. Furthermore, the rates of CO₂ sequestration are affected by a number of factors including the species, the location, and the physiological and physical condition of the tree, as well as the underlying air and water pollution levels. It is also worth noting that 70% of woodland carbon is in fact in the soils, typically built up through the process of decay, and that soil management greatly affects its storage capacity.
- 5.6 It is also important to note that trees are dynamic and can release, as well as capture, CO₂; for example, if the tree is burnt, then the CO₂ stored within it is released back into the atmosphere.
- 5.7 Furthermore, although tree planting and the creation of new woodlands has a role to play in addressing climate change, it is important to recognise that other types of natural capital may be established more quickly than new woodland as 'carbon sinks'. Therefore, there may be better options than woodland creation when considering how best to use land in the County Council's ownership.

Ash Dieback

- 5.8 Chalara dieback of ash, also known as 'Chalara' or 'ash dieback' (ADB), is a disease of ash trees caused by a fungus. Once infected, the disease is usually fatal, either directly or indirectly by weakening the tree to the point where it succumbs more readily to attacks by other pests or pathogens. Typically, the tree becomes very brittle, snapping at the base.
- 5.9 The disease has been identified by Defra as an invasive fungus with significant potential risk to health and safety. It kills young ash trees quite quickly and although older trees can resist it for some time, prolonged exposure or another pest or pathogen attacking them in their weakened state, causes them to succumb. Although there is no treatment, a small percentage of ash may be resistant to, or tolerant of, the infection.
- 5.10 Just over 20% of all trees in West Sussex are ash. It is the most widespread and common tree in the County, with the greatest concentration being on the chalk substrate – the South Downs. The disease has the potential to kill 95% of the ash trees over the next 10-20 years. This will have a major impact on the county's landscape, the wildlife it supports and other ecosystem services that trees provide such as: filtering the air, storing carbon, reducing flooding, providing shade, and protecting soils.
- 5.11 In addition to the direct costs of removing diseased trees and replanting, there will be a significant cost to the economy resulting from full and partial road closures for tree removal.
- 5.12 An assessment of the ash tree population indicates that the County Council owns, manages, or has a legal interest in around 7,000 urban (WSCC highway (including Public Rights of Way), schools, property), and 45,000 rural ash trees. Although only 5% of these trees are on County Council-owned land, we do have a role in helping to ensure, where possible, that trees in private ownership do not adversely impact on the highway.
- 5.13 ADB will have an increasing impact on the County Council, posing a risk to people, property, and the delivery of services. Accordingly, an Action Plan has been prepared, which seeks to manage the impacts of the disease on our estate and the threats from diseased trees in adjoining landownership. It identifies the need for reactive works to address risks arising from diseased trees, together with the need for evidence-based, service-specific responses to managing such risks.
- 5.14 Delivery of the ADB Action Plan will require significant levels of funding (in addition to existing revenue budgets for day-to-day arboricultural work) to undertake the reactive works, to undertake surveys and analysis, and to prepare and deliver proactive programmes of tree removal and, where appropriate, replanting.

Biodiversity Net Gain and Nature Recovery

- 5.15 The Government's 25-Year Environment Plan includes a number of initiatives that will have an impact on existing woodlands and the creation of new wooded habitats.
- 5.16 As outlined in paragraph 4.16, the Environment Bill includes a requirement for development to achieve 'biodiversity net gain'. If a proposed development would result in the loss of existing trees and woodlands on a site, there would be a need for the developer to compensate for this biodiversity loss. This may be achieved through the creation of replacement habitats elsewhere on the site (particularly for larger sites) but it may also involve offsetting the loss through financial contributions towards the creation of new habitats off-site.
- 5.17 The Government's proposals to create a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) and put Local Nature Recovery Strategies in place (see paragraphs 4.19 and 4.20) may have an impact on land in the County Council's ownership, particularly where there is a need to improve existing woodlands or the opportunity to create new woodlands to support nature recovery.
- 5.18 Accordingly, land in the County Council's ownership may have a role to play to helping developers to achieve biodiversity net gain and/or as part of nature recovery initiatives. This may be through the creation of new woodlands but, as identified above, there may be better uses of the land to not only address any losses of biodiversity but also to help tackle climate change.

Natural Capital

- 5.19 'Natural capital' is the way that elements of nature, such as woodlands, rivers, soils, and seas, offer value to people, society, and the economy in various ways. The stocks of natural capital (referred to as 'natural capital assets') include all ecosystems on land and at sea.
- 5.20 In October 2019, the Sussex Local Nature Partnership (of which the County Council is a member) produced a 'Natural Capital Investment Strategy' to guide its approach to directing investment in nature across the terrestrial, coastal, and marine environments for the next five-year period and beyond.
- 5.21 The Strategy includes promoting a strategic approach to new tree planting and natural regeneration in Sussex to ensure it is located where it will provide other benefits (e.g. for wildlife, accessible nature and so on) and where it will not result in loss of other natural capital assets, such as heathland. A 'woodland heatmap' identifies existing four large-scale areas where investment should focus on protecting and improving the condition of existing woodlands and on expanding them and connect woodland fragments to strengthen their ecology. Outside these areas, the focus should be on protecting existing woodland and new planting where this will not damage existing habitats of value.
- 5.22 Again, land in the County Council's ownership may have a role to play in delivering this strategic investment in natural capital.

Resources

- 5.23 The County Council employs a small number of arboriculturists to help the Authority meet its statutory responsibilities and duties. However, these skilled officers also contribute more widely by providing specialist advice to internal services, such as land-use planning, and working with key external partners on issues such as ADB. Therefore, there is a limit to how much can be achieved by the staff resource over and above the delivery of the 'business as usual' and, therefore, this needs to be reflected in identifying other priorities for action.
- 5.24 Similarly, operational revenue budgets to undertake surveys, inspections, and works to trees are severely constrained. This situation is unlikely to change given the pressure of local authority budgets. Furthermore, as identified in paragraph 5.14, the delivery of the ADB Action Plan will require significant levels of additional funding over the next 10-20 years to identify and deal with the risks posed by diseased trees. No funding from the Government is currently available to tackle this issue.
- 5.25 Given the ambitions sets out in the 25-Year Environment Plan, it may be that there are opportunities to access Government funding to improve existing woodland or to create new woodland, for example, through the proposed Nature for Climate Fund. However, it is difficult to plan at this time given the current uncertainty about levels of funding and qualifying criteria.
- 5.26 There may also be opportunities to access other sources of funding from external parties. However, even if such Government and other funds are available, there will still be a cost to the Authority, given the need to identify and develop schemes, prepare business cases and funding bids, and to administer the delivery of any schemes that secure funding.
- 5.27 Furthermore, there may be opportunities for other parties, including landowners, communities and individual members of the public, to access external sources of funding for tree planting that are not available to the County Council.

6. Strategic Objectives

- 6.1 We recognise the need to improve the way that we operate and the need to build the capabilities, processes, and resources within the Authority that are necessary to support the delivery of a data-led, responsive, adaptable, and sustainable approach to the stewardship of our trees and woodlands.
- 6.2 In addition, we also recognise the need to enable and inspire others to be progressive in the management of the trees in their ownership and, where appropriate, to use their landholdings to increase tree cover in the County.
- 6.3 To deliver the longer-term strategic aims identified at paragraph 1.4, five shorter-term strategic objectives have been identified:
- Objective 1: Better data management and evidence-based decision-making;

- Objective 2: Establishing and embedding policies and processes;
- Objective 3: Managing the impacts of Ash Dieback and other tree pests and diseases;
- Objective 4: Identifying opportunities for investment and income generation;
- Objective 5: Working with partners and supporting communities and individuals;

6.4 Key actions to be undertaken by the County Council over the next five years are identified below under each objective.

Objective 1: Better Data Management and Evidence-Based Decision-Making

6.5 This is a commitment to improve our data collection through routine surveys and data harvesting from third parties, to undertake regular evaluation of the data, and to facilitate data-led decision making.

6.6 Key actions to deliver Objective 1 include:

- (a) reviewing how **tree data** is currently organised, managed, and stored across the Authority and, where possible, implementing recommendations for improvement;
- (b) undertaking **regular surveys** of trees on land for which we have responsibility, excluding trees that are the legal responsibility of tenants on County Council land;
- (c) continuing to work with Framework Partners to develop and implement rapid tree **assessment methodologies** for trees on and adjacent to the highway; and
- (d) undertaking regular **evaluation** of survey data to inform strategic and operational decision-making.

Objective 2: Establishing and Embedding Policies and Processes

6.7 This is a commitment to establish agreed operational policies, procedures and standards across the Authority in accordance with best practice.

6.8 Key actions to deliver Objective 2 include:

- (a) adopting an **operational tree policy** that sets out an agreed set of standards and best practice for inspections, maintenance, and other matters, including tree replanting or natural regeneration in accordance with the 'right tree, right place' principle;
- (b) reviewing **contracts with tenants** on County Council land to ensure that they are aware of their legal responsibilities with regard to trees under their stewardship;
- (c) developing and publishing **guidance notes** for property managers, tenants and others (such as contractors) with responsibility for managing trees and hedgerows on County Council land;

- (d) reviewing and, as necessary, strengthening land-use **planning policies** in the Minerals and Waste Local Plans, development management requirements (including the 'Local List'), and other statutory policies (including the Local Transport Plan); and
- (e) protecting our tree stock from **third-party development**, seeking compensation for any loss (using CAVAT (Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees) and/or iTree to value the loss), and ring-fencing any compensation to support the delivery of the Tree Plan.

Objective 3: Managing the Impacts of Ash Dieback and Other Tree Pests and Diseases

- 6.9 This is a commitment to respond quickly and decisively to predicted and identified high impact pests and diseases.
- 6.10 Key actions to deliver Objective 3 include:
 - (a) monitoring the spread of pests and diseases and maintaining a **plant health risk register** for the County;
 - (b) adopting an **invasive species protocol** that includes a triage response to high impact pests and diseases;
 - (c) working with Defra and other partners, such as the Forestry Commission's Plant Health Forestry Unit and the Tree Council, to continue developing **best practice** for the management of tree pests and diseases;
 - (d) implementing the corporate **ADB Action Plan**, including the delivery of reactive works and preparation of proactive programmes of tree removal and, where appropriate, replacement planting; and
 - (e) taking action to manage impacts arising from **other pests and diseases**, including Oak Processionary Moth (OPM).

Objective 4: Identifying Opportunities for Investment and Income Generation

- 6.11 This is a commitment to identify and develop opportunities for income generation and other investment in tree management and, where appropriate, the creation of new wooded habitat.
- 6.12 Key actions to deliver Objective 4 include:
 - (a) investigating sources of **income from trees** on the County Council's estate, including the potential to manage wood products in-house (for example, processing cut trees into pellets, chips, planks, firewood, and stakes);
 - (b) identifying potential opportunities to use County Council **land for tree planting or natural regeneration** as part of fee-based, carbon/biodiversity offsetting programme, and using the income to support the delivery of the Tree Plan;

- (c) identifying the role that County Council land can play in delivering the LNP's proposed strategic **investment in natural capital** and as part of nature recovery initiatives;
- (d) promoting emerging **Government funding streams**, such as the Nature for Climate Fund and the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), to County tenants; and
- (e) working with major landowners and other stakeholders to understand how investing in woodland products and the creation of new woodland can support local economic growth, including diversifying the rural economy.

Objective 5: Working with Partners and Supporting Communities and Individuals

- 6.13 This is a commitment to promote high standards of tree and woodland management, to enable others to manage and protect trees in their ownership, and to support them in delivering their ambitions to increase tree cover in the County.
- 6.14 Key actions to deliver Objective 5 include:
- (a) working with **key partners** such as the Forestry Commission, major landowners, and other statutory bodies to share knowledge and experience and to promote best practice in woodland management within the County;
 - (b) reviewing the operation of the existing **tree warden scheme**, including benchmarking with similar schemes across the country;
 - (c) enabling members of the public to plant a tree outside their property on highway land through our '**Donate a Tree**' scheme and investigate the viability of an 'Adopt a Tree' scheme for all street trees;
 - (d) supporting local communities and individuals by using our **website** to direct them to guidance and best practice about the management of trees in their ownership, including the planting of new trees; and
 - (e) investigating how the County Council can best support communities to develop and deliver **tree planting programmes**, including the creation of new woodlands.

7. Implementation, Monitoring, and Review

- 7.1 The focus of this Plan is on the delivery of the key actions identified above over the next five years. A high-level delivery plan is attached as 'Appendix A: Delivery Plan'; it identifies the senior responsible officer, the internal services and external partners/parties that will be involved in their delivery, and likely sources of funding.
- 7.2 Given the constraints on the County Council's resources, it may be that some actions cannot be progressed or that they need to be delivered in a different way. However, they demonstrate the ambition of the Authority

to effect positive change with regard to the trees in its ownership and more widely within the County.

- 7.3 The financial implications of taking forward the actions in this Plan must be considered in the light of the ongoing difficult financial circumstances facing this and all councils, exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19 on the Council's budget and the wider economy.
- 7.4 As identified in Section 5, operational budgets to undertake routine tree work are severely constrained and no money is available from the Government to help the County Council address the significant financial pressures of managing the threat of ADB. Furthermore, at present, no Government funding is available to improve existing woodlands or to help the Authority develop and take forward a plan to help deliver the national ambition to increase woodland cover.
- 7.5 Where possible, the opportunity will be taken to secure external sources of funding and to generate additional income to deliver this Plan. The opportunity will also be taken to continue working in partnership with other Councils, agencies, statutory bodies, landowners, and other key stakeholders to share and make the best use of staff and other resources.
- 7.6 Delivery of the Plan will be subject to monitoring and annual review; as necessary, it will be amended in response to changing circumstances.

Appendix A: Delivery Plan

Objective 1: Better Data Management and Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Action	Senior Responsible Officer	Lead Service	Other Services	External Partners/Parties	Funding Mechanism/s
(a) Tree Data	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations	Property, IT		Base budget
(b) Tree Surveys	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations	Property		Base budget
(c) Assessment Methodologies	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations	Property	WSP	Base budget
(d) Evaluation of Survey Data	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations	Property		Base budget

Objective 2: Establishing and Embedding Policies and Processes

Action	Senior Responsible Officer	Lead Service	Other Services	External Partners/Parties	Funding Mechanism/s
(a) Operational Tree Policy	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations	Property, Legal Services		Base budget
(b) Contracts with Tenants	Director of Property and Assets	Property	Legal Services	WSCC tenants	Base budget
(c) Guidance Notes	Director of Property and Assets	Property	Legal Services	Property managers, WSCC tenants, contractors	Base budget
(d) Planning Policies	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services	Legal Services		Base budget
(e) Third Party Development	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services	Local Highways Operations, Property, Legal Services		Base budget

Objective 3: Managing the Impacts of Ash Dieback and Other Tree Pests and Diseases

Action	Senior Responsible Officer	Lead Service	Other Services	External Partners/Parties	Funding Mechanism/s
(a) Plant Health Risk Register	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services		Defra, Plant Health Forestry Unit	Base budget
(b) Invasive Species Protocol	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services		Defra, Tree Council, Plant Health Forestry Unit	Base budget
(c) Best Practice	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services		Defra, Tree Council, Forest Research	Base budget
(d) ADB Action Plan	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations	Property	Adjoining landowners	Base budget plus in-year budget bids to address pressures
(e) Other Pests and Diseases	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services	Local Highways Operations, Property	Adjoining landowners, Defra, Plant Health Forestry Unit	Base budget

Objective 4: Identifying Opportunities for Investment and Income Generation

Action	Senior Responsible Officer	Lead Service	Other Services	External Partners/Parties	Funding Mechanism/s
(a) Income from Trees	Director of Property and Assets	Property	Local Highways Operations, Finance, Economic Growth Team	Local Economic Partnership	Base budget
(b) Land for Tree Planting	Director of Property and Assets	Property	Planning Services	District and Borough Councils, SDNPA	Base budget
(c) Investment in Natural Capital	Director of Property and Assets	Property	Planning Services, Sustainability, Economic Growth Team	Local Nature Partnership	Base budget Indirect: Government funds
(d) Government Funding Streams	Director of Property and Assets	Property	Planning Services	WSCC tenants	Base budget Indirect: Government funds

Action	Senior Responsible Officer	Lead Service	Other Services	External Partners/Parties	Funding Mechanism/s
(e) Local Economic Growth	Executive Director Place Services	Economic Growth		Major landowners, Coast2Capital LEP, area economic partnerships x3	Base budget

Objective 5: Working with Partners and Supporting Communities and Individuals

Action	Senior Responsible Officer	Lead Service	Other Services	External Partners/Parties	Funding Mechanism/s
(a) Key Partners	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services		Forestry Commission, major landowners, District and Borough Councils, SDNPA	Base budget
(b) Tree Warden Scheme	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services		Tree wardens	Base budget
(c) 'Donate/Adopt a Tree' Scheme	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations		Members of the Public	Base budget Indirect: private contributions
(d) Website	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services			Base budget
(e) Tree Planting Programmes	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services		Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, Sussex Wildlife Trust	Base budget Indirect: external funds