



### **3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:**

- 3.1 Former Councillor Joyce Edmond-Smith requested a Scrutiny Review in December 2006. The request was considered at the 15 January 2007 meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, where it was resolved to establish a Scrutiny Panel.
- 3.2 The Scrutiny Panel's brief was to consider the maintenance, management and future survival of street trees in Brighton & Hove, and to make recommendations for the future management of street trees.
- 3.3 The Panel held scoping meetings, three public meetings and undertook site visits. In addition, the Panel considered written evidence from various expert sources as well as submissions elicited from members of the public with a particular interest or expertise in the subject of Street Trees.
- 3.4 The Panel examined a range of factors relating to Brighton & Hove's tree stock, with particular reference to trees on the public highway. Because of the wide-ranging and complex issues regarding trees, the Panel chose to focus on specific subjects, which formed the basis of individual recommendations.
- 3.5 Officers have been progressing the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Panel, including the completion of the city's Tree & Woodland Strategy, over the past year.
- 3.6 Officer actions on these recommendations are summarised briefly below, with more detailed information and progress reports contained in Appendix 1.

#### **▪ Budget**

The Arboricultural Service has instigated various ways of maximising budget in order to provide an efficient maintenance and planting regime. This has included a change to the method of pruning in Hove and setting up a new Tree Trust for public donations. In addition, the Arboricultural service has worked on planting schemes with residents in particular streets in 2007/08 and currently in 2008/09.

The Arboricultural Service continues to explore ways of promoting timber sales, and commercially sells timber where possible.

Further value for money has been achieved by collaborating with Highways to use chipped, mulched timber to temporarily fill tree pits awaiting new planting, or to provide a good base for verge re-seeding, rather than purchasing supplies via the Highways contractor.

- **Strategic**

The Tree & Woodland Strategy has now been completed and is in the process of final consultation with relevant council sections. See Appendix 2.

Joint work with other sections has been moving forward over the past year in line with various recommendations from the Scrutiny Panel.

Highways have met regularly with the Arboricultural Service, resulting in revised highway policies on street trees, agreement to jointly fund an in-house stump grinder and strategies regarding removal, replacement and new planting of street trees. The “Public Life, Public Spaces” strategy group, led by Sustainable Transport oversees all major projects and schemes throughout the city and aims to ensure consistent high quality public realm, including enhancement of the street tree stock. Officers will ensure that joint work/consultation is expanded to include other small-scale initiatives relating to the city’s public highway.

Meetings are also taking place with Senior Housing Managers to inform and promote good tree management and encourage residents to become involved in “Tree Warden” schemes.

The Planning service has initiated new methods to gain additional street trees in areas near to where developments are taking place, with the Arboricultural service making appropriate recommendations.

The Arboricultural Service has produced various educational media, and has been involved in television and festival work that promotes the importance of trees, and specifically our heritage elm collection.

- **Operational**

Wherever possible, street trees will be nurtured on the public highway. This may mean that tarmac rather than slabs needs to be used around the tree root system, in order to ensure safe pedestrian access. However, Highways will not permit this up to the base of the tree except where absolutely necessary. Regular reminders are sent to contractors and inspectors regarding this, and action will be taken to re-instate properly if in-house works around trees have been carried out incorrectly.

Utility companies have recently brought out new guidance for dealing with street trees and any specific issues for the city can be raised at the request of the Arboricultural service at the regular council/utility co-ordination meetings.

There will be a presumption against the removal of trees which are healthy but subject to complaint, unless the basis of the complaint has an overriding justification, no alternative management or engineering practice can be implemented or that statutory (including health and safety) requirements are unable to be met.

## 4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 During the Scrutiny Panel of 2007, evidence was taken from a variety of sources, including public questions, written submissions and information from council officers. The resulting document has informed many of the developments summarised above.
- 4.2 The recommendations attached at Appendix 1 and the Tree & Woodland Strategy attached at Appendix 2 have been subject to extensive consultation between relevant council sections.
- 4.3 The revised Highway Policies relating to tree management were consulted upon internally and underwent an equalities impact assessment before being presented to Environment Committee in January 2008 for approval and adoption.

## 5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

### Financial Implications:

There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations. As set out in the report and Appendix 1 the budget allocated to Street Trees has been reviewed and some operational changes have been implemented to ensure the budget offers value for money.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Patrick Rice*

*Date: 20 August 2008*

### Legal Implications:

The 'Operational' section in Part 3 of the report correctly points out that certain statutory obligations will occasionally leave the Council with no option but to remove trees.

There are no human rights issues arising from the report

*Lawyer Consulted: Oliver Dixon*

*Date: 20 August 2008*

### Equalities Implications:

The hazards posed by street trees, especially low branches and surface roots breaking the surface, are particularly hazardous to less mobile members of the public and to people with sight problems.

### Sustainability Implications:

Trees are important in providing shade, sound barriers, pollutant absorbers and carbon balancers. They provide wildlife havens and contribute to the visual amenity.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

None

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

Poorly maintained trees will result in injury to the public and/or damage to property. Raised or uneven tree roots can constitute a trip hazard to members of the public.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

One of our principal street tree species is elm; the city holds an internationally important collection of elms. Properly maintained, trees have a positive impact on the majority of the city's residents and visitors.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

1. Report on progress against recommendations made by the Scrutiny Panel 2007
2. Tree & Woodland Strategy

### **Documents In Members' Rooms**

1. None
- 2.

### **Background Documents**

1. OSOC Street Trees Scrutiny 2007

