REPORT TO:	HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 9
DATE OF MEETING:	20th AUGUST 2020	CATEGORY: RECOMMENDED
REPORT FROM:	ALLISON THOMAS, STRATEGIC DIRECTOR – SERVICE DELIVERY	OPEN
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SUBJECT:	ENGLAND TREE STRATEGY CONSULTATION	
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: EDS01/HCS14

1. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1.1 Notes the content of the consultation on the England Tree Strategy

1.2 Approves the response outlined in this report and authorises its submission to DEFRA.

2. Purpose of the Report

2.1. To inform the Committee of the proposals outlined in the England Tree Strategy Consultation and to approve the Council's response to the Consultation questionnaire.

3. Detail

3.1 The Government is currently consulting on the England Tree Strategy. The Strategy will be fundamental in ensuring the planned expansion for trees and woods for the benefit of wildlife and the global climate crisis by protecting, restoring and expanding England's woodland and tree cover. The Consultation runs until September the 11th 2020 and is accompanied by a number of targeted questions concerning aspects of the strategy and proposed approach to delivering an increase in woodland and tree cover in England.

3.2 Responses to the specific questions are proposed later in this document. Initially, however it is useful to outline some background information including the tree cover and planting in South Derbyshire and England generally and

provide a general overview of what the Strategy is trying to achieve and how it will do this. **The National Context**

3.3 Woodland which includes plantation forests, more natural forested areas and lower density or smaller stands of trees accounts for 13.1[1]% of the total UK land area. Land covered by forestry has increased steadily by 4.4% from 3.05 million hectares (ha) in 2009 to 3.19 million ha in 2019. Scotland has 46% of the UK's woodlands, England has 41%, Wales has 10% and Northern Ireland has 4%. As a percentage of the total land area, woodlands account for:

- 10% of England
- 15% of Wales
- 18% of Scotland
- 8% of Northern Ireland

3.4 In addition to the woodland areas above, the Forestry Commission estimates there are 390,000ha of small woods in Great Britain (non-national forest inventory wooded areas of over 0.1 ha in extent). There are also 255,000 ha of groups of trees (that is, clusters and linear tree features of less than 0.1ha in extent) and an estimated total canopy cover of 97,000ha from lone trees in Great Britain accounting for 2.6% of the 'wooded area'. For Great Britain, that is a total woodland area of 3,719,000 ha.

3.5 Forestry is a devolved matter and so the government is working with the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to determine how best to achieve the UK manifesto commitment to plant 30,000ha of woodland per annum.

3.6 The requirement to plant 30,000ha (116 square miles) of woodland per year in the UK up to 2050 is a recommendation made by the Committee on Climate Change to assist in the Government's commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to Net Zero Carbon by 2050. The recent budget held in March 2020 included a commitment to plant around 30,000ha of trees over the next five years in England[2]. The technical paper released alongside the England Tree Strategy indicates that the Government estimates '*that planting 10,000ha per year by 2025 is the highest possible planting rate for conventional forestry (i.e. excluding planting energy crops) in England'*.[3] Whilst the draft of the Strategy does not include any tree planting targets for England, it seems likely that England's future apportionment for the targeted 30,000ha of new planting per year will be somewhere between one fifth and one third of the total UK requirement (i.e. 6,000-10,000ha per annum). The remaining four fifths to two thirds of the committed planting will therefore be delivered in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

3.7 Recent tree planting across the UK has averaged less than 15,000ha per year since 2002 and for eight of the past 18 years been less than 10,000 ha[4]. In recent years 10-15% of total UK planting has taken place in England, with the vast majority happening in Scotland[5].

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[1] https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics/ Table 1.2 Woodland area in the United Kingdom
[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/budget-speech-2020
[3] https://consult.defra.gov.uk/forestry/england-tree-strategy/supporting_documents/englandtreestrategyconsultationtechnicalannex.pdf
[4] https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics/ Figure 1.6 New planting in the UK, 1976-2019
[5] https://consult.defra.gov.uk/forestry/england-tree-strategy/supporting_documents/englandtreestrategyconsultationtechnicalannex.pdf

The Local Context

3.8   South Derbyshire has slightly less woodland and wooded areas than the UK and England average[6]. This figure is based solely on woodland within the national forest inventory (NFI) which is a national inventory of woodlands over 0.5ha and so could exclude some smaller areas of tree cover. However, based on the NFI, 9.3% of the District is covered in woodland. Woodland cover is also comparatively low in many of the surrounding districts and boroughs and reflects the lowland character of the broader area, the urban nature of many of the districts and the competing land uses facing local areas.

Tree Cover - South Derbyshire and Surrounding Districts
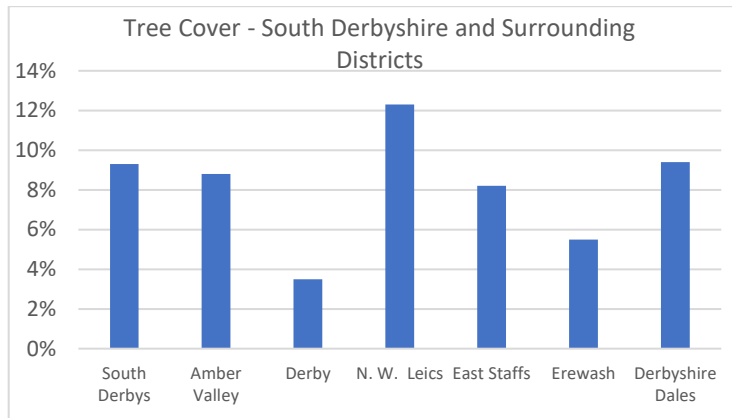
3.9   The headline figure of 9.3% tree cover in South Derbyshire hides a clear difference in tree and woodland cover within the District. This is best shown visually in the map below, but the differences shown on the map are attributable to the southern half of the District falling within the National Forest, which over the past 30 years or so has tripled tree cover within its operational area[7].

Distribution of Woodland in South Derbyshire

South Derbyshire Outside of National Forest

National Forest Area

District within National Forest

NFI Woodland

National Forest Boundary
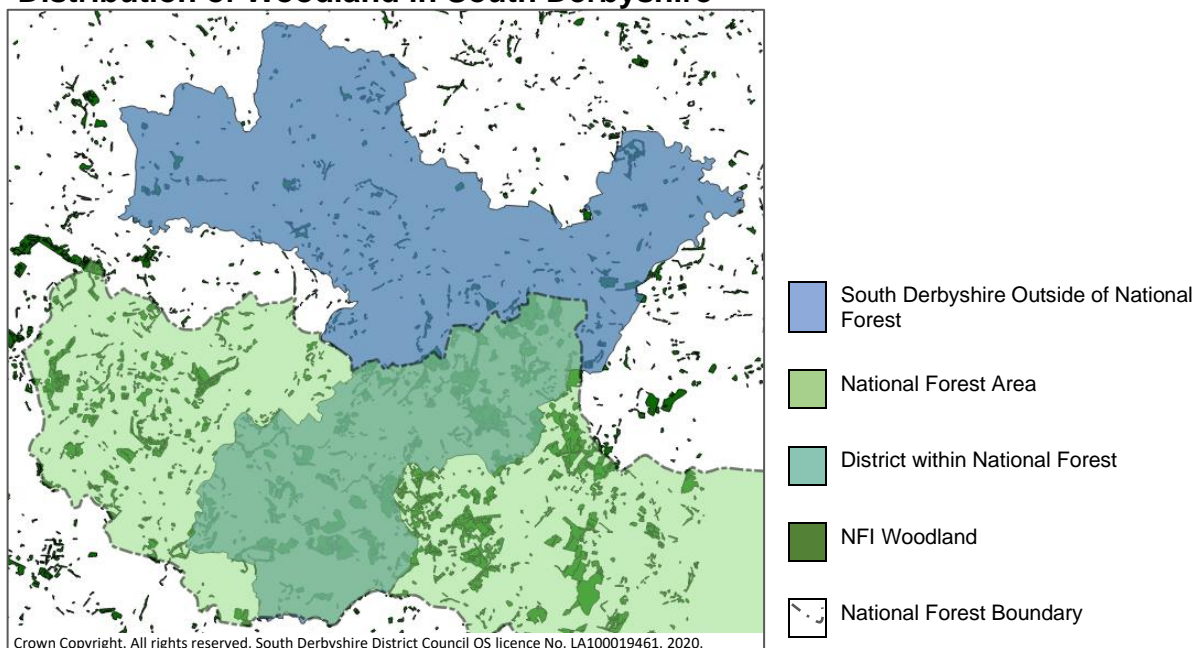
[6] https://takeclimateaction.uk/download/woodland-cover-local-authorityo
[7] https://www.nationalforest.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/1693%20NFC%20Brand%20Vision%20Report%20AW_SCREEN%20%281%29.pdf

General comments on the Strategy

3.10 Whilst it should be recognised that the delivery of 30,000ha of new woodland and tree cover would represent a significant increase in woodland creation compared to recent delivery levels, signifiantly more planting should be directed towards England and clear targets should be set within the strategy concerning how the 30,000ha will be apportioned across the UK.

3.11 A review of Office of National Statistics (ONS) data on the value of woodland arguably suggests that perhaps greater priority ought to be given to planting in England.

Table 1 Woodland ecosystem asset values, £ million (2018 prices), UK, 2017

Service	2017
Timber	7,306
Wood fuel	1,656
Carbon Sequestration	54,620
Pollution removal	31,673
Urban woodland cooling	4,608
Flood prevention GB	6,513
Noise reduction	833
Recreation	22,534
Total	129,743

3.12 The ONS[8] places the value on the ecosystem's services, provided by woodland at £130 billion in 2017. The asset value of the regulating services makes up 77% of the overall value of woodlands, the recreation (cultural) asset value is 18% of the overall, and only 6% of the value is from the provisioning of timber and fuel. However, placing most new woodland in less populated areas of the UK, largely because land values are lower and there is less competition for land will significantly undermine the potential for new woodland to generate the added value that could be derived from focusing on more populated areas. For example, whilst it is likely that the value derived from timber and wood fuel production, as well as the carbon sequestration benefits of woodland creation would accrue irrespective of location, many of the benefits associated with pollution removal, flood prevention, urban woodland cooling and recreation will be lost if woodland creation is pushed to sparsely populated areas which already have very high levels of woodland cover. Greater priority should be given to delivering the bulk of new woodland close to where people live in order to realise the full value of its creation. If the costs of providing this woodland increase, this may not matter so long as additional value is derived from the ecosystem services gain as a result of it being close to existing communities. The consultation is very light in its reference to biodiversity and the importance of hedgerows and hedgerow trees in providing wildlife corridors and connected habitat. There is a potential for other threatened habitats, such as meadow, acid heathland etc. to be further compromised unless integrated into the plans to plant more trees.

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[8] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/woodlandnaturalcapitalaccountsuk/2020 Table 17: Woodland ecosystem asset values, £ million (2018 prices), UK, 2017

3.13 The remainder of this report will set out questions which are considered to be of most relevance to this Authority and will outline the proposed response given the word limits imposed by DEFRA in respect of this consultation.

6. Which actions would address the financial barriers that prevent the creation of new woodland?
7. Which actions would be most effective in addressing the financial barriers that prevent the creation of new woodland?
8. Woodlands provide a range of ecosystem services that provide benefits to businesses and society. How could government better encourage private investment in establishing trees and woodland creation?

3.14 Consolidating the number of grants would help individuals and organisations understand the incentives they could access. In addition and critical to delivering the step change in planting required is increasing the value of grants and aligning these to the benefits that will actually be delivered by proposals For example, it is suggested that additional grant should be paid where landowners open up sites for public access, or where sites can be demonstrated to deliver natural flood management for the benefit of downstream communities. It is crucial that government makes tree planting attractive to landowners. Most planting in England is on private land but currently many policies disincentivise planting on private land holdings. In particular classing woodland creation as a permanent land use change under the UK Forestry Act and therefore effectively devaluing land is a major deterrent which prevents many private landowners from embracing woodland creation.

13. How can we most effectively support the natural establishment of trees and woodland in the landscape? (Maximum 100 words)

3.15 Local Nature Recovery Strategies should be required to consider the most appropriate areas to support natural regeneration and habitat management at a landscape scale, these areas should be mapped and made publicly available. These opportunity maps should feed into local plans and land management strategies of governance organisations and environmental charities, and inform where natural regeneration or habitat restoration/ creation could be pursued, either in isolation, or in conjunction with new planned planting to create new wildlife networks accessible to local communities.

14. Are there any other actions - beyond the options you have already selected or submitted - that would help landowners and managers to transform the level of woodland creation and increase the number of non-woodland trees in England? (Maximum 150 words)

3.16 For 30 years in South Derbyshire within the National Forest new developments have been required to deliver 20-30% tree planting within the development site area. This has contributed towards tripling tree cover in the Forest. This requirement is not a break on development, as evidenced by South Derbyshire's recent growth, and can be easily accommodated provided developers are aware of this requirement when valuing and purchasing land. A further requirement outside of the National Forest for 10% tree planting is to be pursued in the emerging South Derbyshire Local Plan where this is acceptable in landscape character terms. Over time this will increase forest cover in locations accessible to new communities.

15. Which of the following actions would be most effective in helping expand woodland creation in locations which deliver water, flood risk benefits and nature recovery? (select up to three options).

3.17 Widening the eligibility criteria for woodland creation grants so more applicants can apply, and more forms of woodland can qualify would be most effective. There is also a need to pay landowners and managers more for sites that deliver more public benefits. On this basis grant payments for riparian planting along watercourses should be higher than sites where planting would not provide benefits in respect of Natural Flood Management (NFM) and/or water quality improvements etc.

3.18 The final option proposed is to highlight the need for resources to be set aside and made available to the Environment Agency or Lead Local Flood Authorities to allow modelling to be undertaken to understand the beneficial effects of natural flood risk management measures in high risk areas as well as provide support to target those measures to the most effective parts of the catchment. This would allow agencies to identify where NFM interventions may be appropriate and could provide opportunity to identify low cost natural flood management measures upstream of areas prone to flooding whilst providing amenity, water quality and ecological benefits to local communities. However given the 25 word limit to make this point it is proposed the following be submitted: Resources should be available to the EA/LLFAs to allow modelling of catchments to understand the beneficial effects of NFM in high flood risk areas.

18. Which actions would best help the planning system support better protection and enhancement of the ancient and wider woodland environment and trees? (select up to two options)

3.19 Encouraging more woodland to be brought into management where it is impacted by development. Positively managing existing woodland potentially affected by development could offer opportunities to provide long-term improvements to amenity and ecology.

3.20 The second factor most likely to support the planning system better protect woodlands and trees is the timely delivery of the Environment Act and the protections proposed in this emerging legislation. The England Tree Strategy consultation outlines the threat to some woodland from the unlicensed pre-emptive clearance of trees ahead of planning applications being submitted. The report indicates that at least 43% of illegal felling in 2019-20 was as a result of development. Part of the problem is the fines from illegal felling are based on the value of the timber, rather than the potential increased value of sites that can accrue from development, the limited value of fines is, therefore, a poor deterrent to the clearing of sites with development potential ahead of an application being made.

3.21 The Environment Bill will address this issue. Fines for illegal felling will be unlimited, giving the courts discretion to punish offenders appropriately. The Forestry Commission will be given new powers to make Restocking and Enforcement Notices more effective. For example, a Restocking Notice would become a charge on the land where the felling had taken place, so it would appear on the local land charge register – visible to any prospective buyer and

binding on them if they bought the land[9]. In addition, the Environment Act will introduce a requirement for development to achieve biodiversity net gain. This requirement should help to discourage the loss of woodland to development by firstly valuing woodland as a habitat making its loss relatively expensive or difficult to offset, but will also reduce the risk of pre-emptive habitat and tree clearance, and help to ensure that any losses are properly compensated for as any gain will be based on the pre cleared value, not on the sites value after its loss. Ensuring that environmental protections are not sidestepped in advance of development is key to safeguarding habitats and spatial planning. However, given the 25-word limit to make this point it is proposed the following be submitted: The prioritisation of the Environment Bill through parliament in order that the currently stated provisions within it can be bought into effect expeditiously.

28. Which of the following actions are or would be most appropriate for England's trees and woodlands to contribute to climate change mitigation and helping to achieve net zero? (pick up to three options)

3.22 Of the options highlighted in the paper it is likely that a combination of the options highlighted will be needed to meet the Climate Challenge. However, within South Derbyshire, given its low lying area and relatively high agricultural land values, it is likely the most appropriate approach to addressing climate change will be the planting predominantly native woodland to act as a long-term store of carbon, encouraging agroforestry to increase the amount of carbon stored on productive farmland and strengthening the protection of all woodland to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation. Although some biomass can be derived from future management such as thinning sites as they mature it is unlikely that growing woodland solely for biomass will support a significant increase in woodland cover.

31. Are any of the following significant barriers to securing and maintaining street trees? (select up to three option

3.23 The adoption of street trees by local highway authorities is a major barrier to the planting of street trees. Many highways authorities refuse to accommodate planting in the highways due to the costs associated with their future management. Others make provision for street trees, so long as sometimes significant planning obligations are collected for future management. Given the pressure on Council finances it is rational to resist the accommodation of street trees in new development and in some cases to remove existing street trees where these are inappropriate or could damage nearby buildings.

32. How could government overcome the barriers to securing and maintaining street trees you have identified in question 30? (Maximum 150 word response)

3.24 Authorities could be given better guidance and advice on the best tree to plant where, reflecting development characteristics, local ground conditions etc. Selecting the right tree for the right location could help reduce future management costs. However, absolutely crucial will be to provide Councils (Highways Authorities) with sufficient resources to manage trees, many of which will require crown reduction or other works on an ongoing basis. In the absence of funds to support the delivery of street trees it is likely that these will

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[9] https://forestrycommission.blog.gov.uk/2019/10/25/cracking-down-on-illegal-felling/

continue to make up only a tiny and insignificant proportion of new planting associated with new development and some existing healthy trees will continue to be removed by Council's due to the unaffordability of future management.

33. Which of these actions would be most effective in increasing the number/coverage of trees in and around urban areas? (rank the following options in order of preference)

3.25 Of the options put forward in the consultation paper it is proposed that the three most significant options to increase tree coverage in urban areas are the promotion through national policy (including England Tree Strategy and national planning policy). These include: recognition that trees and woodlands are key components of green infrastructure, with equal status to other green and built infrastructure; the development and implementation of Local Tree and Woodland Strategies and local planning policies - setting local targets for tree canopy cover and recognition that trees and woodlands are key components of green infrastructure (noting that this could potentially be done as part of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy).

38. Which of these actions would best address the funding challenge for the planting and on-going maintenance of trees in urban areas? (select up to two options)

3.26 This issue has been touched upon previously, but essentially central funding is required for establishing street trees in existing urban areas. However, the use of planning policy levers can also ensure that trees can be delivered in all appropriate developments, for example by requiring that a proportion of larger development sites is passed over to tree planting.

39. What could the England Tree Strategy do to encourage the use of timber in construction? (select up to two options)

3.27 The Strategy should require that Local Plans incorporate policies for new development to use sustainable materials. South Derbyshire has policies to encourage the use of wood in new development in both its Local Plan Part 1 (Policy BNE1 Design Excellence) and in its Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document reflecting its location in the National Forest. However, most developers have standardised house types that use a standard palette of materials. In this context it is difficult to encourage the use of materials which for many developers are non-standard. If the greater use of timber was supported or perhaps even required by national policy it would be more likely that timber would become more widely used in new development and support the growth of this market.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 Neutral Impact

5. Corporate Implications

Employment Implications

5.1 Beneficial. Any increase in woodland cover and urban tree cover as a result of increased targets for tree canopy cover will improve the attractiveness of the District as a great place to live, visit and invest.

Legal Implications

5.2 None Identified

Corporate Plan Implications

5.3 The preparation of an England Tree Strategy, and potential associated requirement to create local tree and woodland strategies will support a number of Corporate Plan objectives. These include:

- to enhance biodiversity across the District (Our Environment)
- to improve public spaces to create an environment for people to enjoy. (Our Environment)
- Promote health and wellbeing across the District. (Our People)
- To influence the improvement of infrastructure to meet the demands of growth. (Our Future)

Risk Impact

5.4 None identified at present.

6. Community Impact

Consultation

6.1 None

Equality and Diversity Impact

6.2 None.

Social Value Impact

6.3 Beneficial. Increased tree planting and woodland creation will support improved access and awareness to green space within the District.

Environmental Sustainability

6.4 Beneficial. Increase tree planting could have beneficial effects in respect of natural flood risk management, the provision of new amenity green space, and could contribute towards urban cooling, and reducing pollution locally.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The Strategy to significantly increase tree planting compared to recent historic trends should generally be welcomed but greater emphasis should be placed on woodland creation close to existing urban areas, particularly in England in order to fully realise the full range of benefits that can be accrued from woodland creation.

8. Background Papers

8.1 England Tree Strategy Consultation Document

8.2 England Tree Strategy Consultation - Technical Annex