

Report of: Environment Scrutiny Committee

To: Executive Board

Date: 18th December 2006

Item No:

Title of Report : Environment Scrutiny Committee Recommendations on Osney Trees



Summary and Recommendations



Purpose of report: To report the recommendations of Environment Scrutiny Committee following their discussions on the trees in East Street, Osney Island.



Key decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Alan Armitage

Scrutiny Responsibility: Environment Scrutiny Committee



Ward(s) affected: All

Report Approved by: Councillor Sid Phelps, Chair Environment Scrutiny Committee, Sarah Fogden, Finance and Asset Management, Emma Griffiths, Legal Services.



Policy Framework:



Recommendation(s): The Executive Board is asked to respond to the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations:

1. If it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations outlined
2. If it agrees when will the recommendations be implemented and who will take the lead
3. If it disagrees why
4. If more information is required from other officers when that will be considered



1. Environment Scrutiny Committee Minutes

66. OSNEY TREES

John Wade and Sharon Cosgrove updated the Committee in relation to the recent felling of a number of trees on Osney Island. John explained the timescales involved. An inspection was carried out on 5 October and the work prioritised to be carried out within 1 month. Ward Councillors were informed on 26th October that the trees were to be removed. John also explained the way the work had been properly prioritised by the Councils tree officer so that there was no immediate danger to the public but it would not left throughout the winter with the deadline of a month being agreed

Sharon Cosgrove explained that an independent investigation would be carried out by the Corporate Secretariat and reported to the Environment Scrutiny Committee on 15th January 2007.

*The Committee recommended to **Executive Board** that:*

A tree policy be developed as soon as possible, setting out the procedures to be followed in cases such as the Osney Trees, so members of the public and councillors are aware of the process from declaring a tree unsafe, to removing that tree.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Environment Scrutiny Committee is concerned about the decision to cut down the trees at East Street, Osney Island. The Committee wants to ensure that if a similar scenario arises again, communication with ward councillors and local communities is improved.
- 2.2 The Committee was informed that given the public outcry regarding the decision to cut down the trees, an investigation is to be carried out by Mike Newman into the events leading up to the cutting down of the trees. The Scrutiny Committee is pleased that this report will be available for its next meeting in January 2007.
- 2.3 In the meantime, the Committee has felt it is appropriate to recommend to Executive Board that the Council develops a tree policy setting out the procedures to be followed in cases such as the Osney Trees, so members of the public and councillors are aware of the process from declaring a tree unsafe, to removing the tree. Members are concerned that there was a long delay in identifying the trees as unsafe (5th October) to informing local councillors of the intention to cut them down (26th October). The Environment Scrutiny Committee wants to ensure that such delays don't happen again.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1 The Environment Scrutiny Committee recommends that a tree policy be developed as soon as possible, setting out the procedures to be followed in cases such as the Osney Trees, so members of the public

and councillors are aware of the process from declaring a tree unsafe, to removing that tree.

4. Comments from the Strategic Director (Sharon Cosgrove)

- 4.1 Tree risk assessment depends on many factors including the state of the tree, its location and the time of year. The Council's Tree Officer inspected the Willows at Osney and after considering all the factors recommended that the trees should be felled within a month. If he had considered the trees an immediate danger, he would have recommended that they were felled sooner.
- 4.2 The independent report commissioned by the Strategic Director into this case will consider all the issues following a thorough and independent investigation.
- 4.3 It is advised that the Scrutiny Committee and the Executive Board consider the report in full, including the recommendations that will arise from the report, before taking a decision on future actions.

5. Comments from the Portfolio Holder (Councillor Alan Armitage)

- 5.1 I agree that we should have a tree policy regarding the 102,000 trees for which the council is responsible, but I feel it needs to cover much more than the procedures to be followed when they are to be cut down.
- 5.2 The Parks Business Manager presented a proposed Tree Strategy to Executive Board at its meeting on 16 January 2006, recommending a comprehensive tree survey to be undertaken by the private sector over three years, with consequent work to the trees and maintenance of an up-to-date database. The total cost of the works over three years was estimated at £521,000.
- 5.3 This paper was NOT accepted by the Executive Board, but the Parks Business Manager was invited to prepare a briefing for party groups in preparation for the budget planning.

Name and Contact Details of Report Author:

Andrew Davies, Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of the Environment Scrutiny Committee