

To: Cabinet
Date: 17 April 2024
Report of: Climate and Environment Panel
Title of Report: Tree Planting

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Panel of the Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Panel Chair
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice
Corporate Priority:	Pursue a Zero Carbon Oxford
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices	
Appendix A	Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee

Introduction and overview

1. The Climate and Environment Panel met on 20 March 2024 to consider a Scrutiny-commissioned item on Tree Planting. It was recommended that the Panel receive a presentation followed by an opportunity for discussion; and agree any recommendations.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Anna Railton (Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice) and Mish Tullar (Head of Corporate Strategy) for attending the meeting to present and answer questions.

Summary and recommendations

3. Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy delivered a presentation which provided an update on tree planting, specifically in relation to the planting of new trees.

4. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the availability of guidance on the process for planting new trees; how various Council strategies and policies aligned and avoided duplication or inconsistencies; the Council's 'Treemail' campaign; urban heat island effect; the costs of planting and maintaining new trees; how the Council could incentivise tree planting; the locations of existing empty tree pits; and the definition of a tree (i.e. did it include hedges).
5. In particular, the Panel highlighted that the process surrounding tree planting was complicated and difficult; the need to ensure a clear and easily understandable process for Members, community groups and individuals was emphasised, so that they could get involved in the process. The Panel agreed that it would be useful for the Council to produce guidance documents in relation to tree planting which set out the process from start to finish, including the identification of existing empty tree pits, costs and how organisations, groups and individuals could contribute towards costs and/or ongoing maintenance. The Panel agreed that having two sets of guidance would be appropriate – one in relation to public land and in relation to private land.

Recommendation 1: That the Council produces a guidance document and accompanying flow chart which clearly sets out the process for the planting of new street trees on public land, including but not limited to the mapping of existing empty tree pits within the City; responsibility for the replacement of dead or damaged trees; and a breakdown of the costs for planting and maintaining new street trees, with information as to how those costs might be met by different organisations, groups and/or individuals.

Recommendation 2: That the Council produces a guidance document for the planting of new trees, and associated costs, on private land which is aimed at a diverse audience, including community groups, schools, private landowners and landlords.

6. In addition, the Panel noted that the Council, through its policies, should look to incentivise tree planting, retention and renewal. During discussion, it was agreed that particular attention should be paid to how this could be facilitated through Planning and Licensing policies, as these were areas where the Council had more direct influence.

Recommendation 3: That the Council, when it reviews its policies, explores how it could incentivise, promote and encourage the planting, retention and renewal of trees through those policies – particularly within Planning and Licensing.

7. The Panel noted that there were a number of new community buildings and spaces in development across the City and agreed that there should be a focus on ensuring trees were incorporated into their design so as to support the City's wider environmental agenda. The Panel agreed that the Council should take an active role in encouraging tree planting in respect of these projects, including communicating with those developing the spaces to advise how they could contribute to the success of the Council's tree policies and strategies.

Recommendation 4: That the Council actively encourages tree planting within and around new community buildings and spaces to ensure alignment of these new projects and developments with the City's wider environmental policies.

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