

NEWCASTLE GREEN PARTY RESPONSE TO THE REVISED TREE STRATEGY 2018 – 2023.

The current Strategy has been revised with the aim of increasing tree canopy cover from 18.1% to 20% of 11400 ha² (total area covered by Newcastle) by 2050. **This is of course welcome, but we ask for real ambition in the strategy, which puts trees (and all bio-diversity) at the heart of improving the quality of life and well-being of all Newcastle residents.**

In particular the Tree Strategy should be an integral part of an overall vision to make Newcastle, in the broadest sense, a much greener and therefore more liveable city in the face of the climate crisis. The recent IPCC report emphatically states that we have twelve years left to limit global warming to 1.5c. or otherwise face a future of major and irreversible climate breakdown. This means that every level of government has a responsibility and a duty to enact policies that will help keep the temperature rise within this limit. We truly have to act now locally in order to effectively respond to a global crisis. We urge the Council to ensure actions from the Tree Strategy contribute directly to this.

The Tree Strategy has ten discrete policies as summarised at pg. 27.

The comments and suggestions below (in bold), respond to eight of these policies.

T1 - Healthy trees and woodlands will be protected, retained and managed to ensure healthy growth, development and species diversity. No tree will be felled or pruned without good reason as set out in our Tree and Hedge Management Guidelines.

We are very concerned that the removal of a tree or trees “to allow authorised development or redevelopment” constitutes “good reason” as laid out in the Guidelines (pg.31). This weakens and contradicts the Council’s policy and duty regarding nature conservation and bio-diversity as reiterated at para. 6.1 (pages 21-22) of the Tree Policy section. The presumption that trees are retained should be explicit and felling should only occur in very exceptional circumstances and all other options to retain have been fully explored. A full explanation in these cases should be recorded and made publicly available.

T2 - Newcastle's tree stock and canopy cover will be increased to give greater species and age diversity to ensure a healthy, balanced, tree population.

The document states that results from a full iTree Eco- survey will inform an action plan “to determine where tree- planting is not only possible but will have the most benefit” (para. 4.2).

It is important that the results of the survey are made available to the public in a timely and accessible mode and the subsequent action plan is also available for scrutiny, comment and feedback before it is put into action.

We would also like to stress the following is necessary to ensure a healthy, balanced tree population:

- **Good provenance and local source are essential. Tree stock should not be imported, particularly to ensure disease free stock and absence of introduced pathogens (c.f. strategy 3.3). Additionally, we support local tree nurseries.**
- **Location for planting. In particular we are very concerned about the dearth of street trees. It is vital that we see an increase in large canopy cover within the city centre and built-up areas, especially in connection with replacement of street trees or other trees lost in**

developments. We also think there is scope for tree-planting on various parts of the Town Moor.

- The presumption should be to plant primarily native species.
- There may need to be an increase of species such as willow and alder that tolerate wet roots in lower-lying areas of the city
- In the past the planting of fruit trees has been discouraged. In view of food security and community involvement, we ask that these species be included where possible, both for the food chain, and for community activity such as the making of jams and chutneys

T4 - Using powers available under the Town and Country Planning Act, related legislation and/or lease clauses, Newcastle City Council will, in the interests of amenity, protect trees and woodlands that are of acknowledged value where they are visible to the public, are in reasonable health and condition and where there is a threat.

We urge the council to use their powers where possible, to also protect trees and woodland that are not visible to the public, and to widen the remit where possible, to oblige landowners to maintain trees and woodland in reasonable health.

T5 - Where Council land containing trees is to be sold, the trees will be assessed to determine whether protection via a TPO or restrictive clause in a lease is appropriate to ensure retention for the benefit of the wider population.

This is welcome but it begs the question that in order to protect trees on the land, should the land be sold in the first place? It could be more strongly worded that where there are trees of amenity and conservation value the presumption is that the land is sold/leased on condition that the Council has high confidence that the trees will be retained and restrictive clauses are strong enough to act as a deterrent to removal. A register of those violating such clauses available to the public could also act as a deterrent.

T6 - The Council will engage with partners, the public and other landowners to raise awareness of tree protection, maintenance, planting and establishment best practice.

This policy can be much more ambitious in its reach and go well beyond just raising awareness. There are many different ways to engage people and we make the following suggestions:

- Facilitate a campaign to help residents to plant appropriate trees and hedges in their gardens.
- Facilitate an education campaign about the vital importance of trees for improving air quality, well-being and in the context of the need to mitigate the consequences of climate breakdown. Schools in particular should be focussed on, but imaginative ways to also engage residents, businesses, workers etc. should be explored.
- Facilitate a scheme for businesses and residents to sponsor existing and new trees.
- Explore the idea of residents in each ward forming “Friends of Trees” groups.
- Develop a policy that there is a presumption of new (not just replacement) tree planting in large scale planning applications unless exceptional circumstances dictate otherwise.
- Implement a “one – stop shop” for all tree-related information. Residents and businesses should have access to clear and precise information about the City’s tree stock and the role it plays to the health and well-being of all and the eco -services trees provide.

- Produce an interactive map available to the public that shows location, species, height, condition, of trees and hedges throughout the city.
- Map and explore the viability of retrospective tree-planting in spaces such as car parks, large supermarkets/ office blocks/ industrial units.
- Explore incentives, financial and other -wise to encourage land- owners to plant and maintain trees on their land.

T8 - Hedges that are of visual amenity, archaeological or nature conservation value and are in reasonable health and condition will be retained, protected and managed to ensure healthy growth as set out in and Tree and Hedge Management Guidance.

Please see comments under T1 and T4 as they apply also to hedges.

T9 - Newcastle City Council will seek to regenerate and increase traditional, locally native hedgerows with inclusion of hedgerow trees

Please see comments under T2.

If the eco – survey does not include hedges, we ask that the latter is included if possible. The disappearance of hedges has increased and new building developments very rarely plant them. To address this issue up to date information is important. Hedgerows are often vital to many wildlife corridors

- We would like to see the Council set obligations for hedge planting as a condition of planning permission in appropriate cases.
- Set targets for more hedge planting in Council owned land where appropriate.

T10 - In conjunction with the Tree Team, land holding departments and teams will ensure appropriate management of their hedges. Requests for work to hedges on Council land will be assessed in accordance with legislation and the Tree and Hedge Management Guidelines.

Please see comments under T1.

Other comments

- We are concerned that the strategy makes no mention of the Newcastle Parks Trust and how the Council will be working with them. The Trust will be responsible for much of the City's tree cover, so we would expect that an ambitious and coordinated plan for increased tree planting and maintenance will include the Parks Trust.
- We are concerned that the i-Tree eco-survey will not be completed by the end of 2019 and in the meantime on-going and any future developments threaten existing trees and bio-diversity in general. We would expect the survey will capture all changes to produce a base-line that is accurate. We would welcome public access to the i-Tree eco- Survey at the earliest opportunity, even on a ward-by-ward basis.

Finally, the massive amount of volume housing and other developments in the last ten years is having an adverse impact on Newcastle's trees, green spaces, and wildlife habitat. To put it simply, they are being built on and tarmacked over. We have lost trees (and consequently wildlife habitat)

at such sites as Pendower Hall and Woolsington Hall, and nature reserves such as Havannah adjacent to Hazlerigg are under severe pressure from encroaching development.

The Council should now prioritise as a matter of urgency, policies and ideas which will protect and increase the City's tree population and bio-diversity and will also make Newcastle a more enjoyable, attractive, healthier and climate resilient City to live in now, and in the future.

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