

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Committee 18th January 2007

Report Title Update on Maintenance of Highway Trees in Warwickshire, Verge Parking and Verge Maintenance

Summary The report updates Members on progress following the report to Environment Overview and Scrutiny on 17th January 2006 on highway trees, and provides additional information on verge parking and maintenance.

For further information please contact Ken Simons
Forestry Officer
Tel. 01926 476491
kensimons@warwickshire.gov.uk

Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework? Yes/No

Background Papers None

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:- *Details to be specified*

Other Committees Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
17th January 2006

Local Member(s)
(With brief comments, if appropriate)

Other Elected Members Councillor K Browne } for information
Councillor Mrs J Lea }
Councillor Mrs E Goode }

Cabinet Member Councillor M Heatley – for information
(Reports to The Cabinet, to be cleared with appropriate Cabinet Member)

Chief Executive

Legal I Marriott – comments incorporated

- Finance
- Other Chief Officers
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals

FINAL DECISION **YES/NO** (*If 'No' complete Suggested Next Steps*)

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS :

Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet For consideration of an addendum to the LTP regarding verge parking requests, as per paragraph 5.3
- To an O & S Committee
- To an Area Committee
- Further Consultation

**Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee –
18th January 2007**

**Update on Maintenance of Highway Trees in Warwickshire,
Verge Parking and Verge Maintenance**

**Report of the Strategic Director for
Environment and Economy**

Recommendation

That Members

1. Note progress on inspecting and maintaining highway trees and support the current review of arrangements in the former Agency areas, and that Members consider appropriate funding for sustaining highway tree stock through replacement planting.
2. Recommend that Cabinet formally adopts the approach for dealing with requests to facilitate verge parking, as detailed in paragraph 5.1 of this report.

1. Background

- 1.1 The report to January 2006 Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee outlined the approach to inspecting and maintaining highway trees and ensuring that the County Council's liabilities and duty of care are effectively managed. The approach has been endorsed by Insurance and Risk Management, County Highways and Forestry Services. Note: for the purposes of this report 'highway tree' is taken to mean any tree growing in the highway, or in such proximity to the highway that it gives rise to safety concerns.
- 1.2 In essence, our approach has been to prioritise the highway trees in urban areas, and larger settlements, for a full inspection and remediation programme, and to plan for the future inspection of trees in rural areas.

2. Progress Since January 2006

- 2.1 A further 4,000 highway trees have been inspected with the data now extending to some 12,000 trees. This represents approximately 80% of the urban areas. Necessary re-inspections have also been carried out. As suggested, letters have been sent to both National Farmers Union (NFU) and Country Land and Business Association (CLA) seeking cooperation from landowners in taking

action to deal with dangerous trees on private land adjacent to highways. Where inspections have shown problems with privately owned trees we are now rolling out notices to private landowners asking them to remove the risk. This has begun in the North Warwickshire area.

- 2.2 Warwickshire County Council has established a Tree Officers Forum to discuss local issues, the implications of national policy, together with pest diseases that impact on local tree management. Tree Officers from the five Districts receive invitations. This forum meets three to four times a year and has met twice to date. Feedback received has been positive and Coventry City Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council have asked to join.

3. Present Tree Maintenance Arrangements within the County

- 3.1 The management of the highway tree population is achieved through a combination of WCC Forestry Services and Agreements with the District and Borough Councils. The following summarises the position regarding the division of responsibilities:-

Warwick District

Urban Areas (within Kenilworth, Leamington and Warwick) – Warwick District Council (WDC) responsible for inspection and maintenance.

Rural Areas - Warwickshire County Council (WCC) responsible for inspection and maintenance.

North Warwickshire

All areas - WCC responsible for inspection and maintenance.

Nuneaton and Bedworth

Urban Areas - WCC responsible for inspection and work planning. Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council (NBBC) responsible for engaging contractors.

Rural Areas - WCC responsible for inspection and maintenance.

Rugby Borough

Urban Areas – Rugby Borough Council (RBC) have carried out inspection and are responsible for maintenance.

Rural Areas - WCC responsible for inspection and maintenance.

Stratford on Avon District

All areas - WCC responsible for inspection and maintenance.

4. Review of Current Arrangements

- 4.1 The present arrangements are perceived by Area Surveyors to be working reasonably well. There are issues in Nuneaton and Bedworth concerning the timeliness of remedial works, probably due to the use of sub contractors.
- 4.2 For those areas WCC inspect, we are building up a comprehensive database of highway trees. For those areas not inspected by WCC there may be future legacy issues with the compatibility and accuracy of the data sets.

- 4.3 One issue highlighted by the survey data is the relatively even, and maturing, age profile of our highway trees. There are simply not enough young trees to replace the maturing stock. Historically there has been no budget allocated for replacement trees.
- 4.4 A budget of £20,000 per annum would facilitate circa 50–60 replacement trees including the costs of planting and early maintenance.

5. Verge Parking and Maintenance

- 5.1 Under the former agency agreements, whereby three of the five District/Borough Councils in Warwickshire undertook work on the highway on behalf of the County Council, a budget was made available for the creation of new verge parking. Following the cessation of the agency agreements, the County Council has not continued to make these funds available. In policy terms, such proposals are contrary to the aims and objectives of the Local Transport Plan (LTP), and do not contribute towards the delivery of any LTP targets. In many cases, they are also inappropriate on highway safety and amenity grounds.
- 5.2 Notwithstanding this, the County Council continues to receive regular demands for verge parking. In the last four years, there have been 33 applications for highway verge parking across the County. To date, officers have responded consistently to such requests so as to avoid setting an inappropriate precedent. In responding to future requests however, it would be preferable to be able to refer to Cabinet approval for dealing with such matters in this way.
- 5.3 The Committee is therefore asked to recommend to Cabinet that it formally adopts the approach for dealing with “requests to facilitate verge parking”, as set out in paragraph 5.1 of this report.
- 5.4 Section 7 (see **Appendix A**) of the Highway Maintenance Policy, dated 2002, includes details on the extent of cyclic and ad hoc verge maintenance.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The present highway tree maintenance arrangements are achieving results. The major issues arise from work planning, timing and implementation. This is a bigger problem where the lines of communication are extended as in Nuneaton and Bedworth. Where tree works are implemented in house, communication and ownership issues are dealt with in a more coherent way.
- 6.2 There is a need for a more in depth review of arrangements in the former Agency areas. However, it may be prudent to merge this review with the preparation of a tree strategy for the county (target date April 2008). There is an urgent need to identify funding for replacement trees as some areas are suffering from a prolonged period of non replacement.

- 6.3 Requests for verge parking improvements continue to be received by the County Council on a regular basis. However, these works do not generally comply with LTP policy, or contribute to its aims. As such it is proposed to recommend that Cabinet formally adopt the approach for dealing with “requests to facilitate verge parking”, as set out in paragraph 5.1 of this report.

JOHN DEEGAN
Strategic Director for Environment and Economy
Shire Hall
Warwick

5th January 2007

Appendix A of Agenda No

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee 18th January 2007

Update on Maintenance of Highway Trees in Warwickshire, Verge Parking and Verge Maintenance

Extract from Section 7 of Highways Maintenance Policy 2002

Verge Maintenance

Purpose

The verge is the grassed area from each carriageway edge to its respective hedge or fence line, excluding any footways/cycleways. The verge also serves as a safety feature by providing visibility for users of the highway. The County is aware of the careful balance between its commitment 'to maintain the road network for safe and effective movement of people and traffic generally in keeping with the environment and in a uniform manner across the County' and the environmental and ecological effects of its actions when maintaining its verges.

Verge maintenance can be divided into two categories, planned cyclic operations and ad hoc works.

Planned Cyclic Operations these being:-

- (a) Verge Mowing

Ad Hoc Works, carried out following complaints or inspections:-

- (a) One Off Operations, treatment to hedges, trees, cutting and selective weed spraying,

Verge Mowing

Verge mowing is carried out to ensure that vegetation does not restrict visibility for the highway user and to provide a refuge for pedestrians.

Verge Mowing Policy

- (a) The authority will fund the mowing of verges on a safety basis only, that is to cut a one metre swathe width plus visibility areas along verges, centre reserves and either side of footways on all County roads twice a year.

Additional cuts can be sanctioned in locations where sight lines, signs or safety are jeopardised.

- (b) Where District and Borough councils require amenity standards on highway verges then the cost, in excess of the two cuts to the above standard funded by the County, shall be funded from their own budgets.