

Questions from County Councillors

Question from Councillor Steven Lugg to the Cabinet Member for Natural and Built Environment in relation to a Joint Tree Planting Strategy

Question

2017 saw the lowest level of tree planting in England since the war. Due to the longevity of trees, this statistic is a 'lag indicator' and shows that society is potentially failing our children, grandchildren and beyond. Given the well-rehearsed research and knowledge of beneficial effects, nay of the vital role that trees play in our lives, from preventing flooding and soil erosion to improving all sorts of things from air quality to mental health, would Dorset County/East Dorset District councils consider implementing and investing in a joint long-term Strategy for tree planting? Such a Strategy should include support for the national Tree Charter, and an annual Tree Charter day.

Answer

Dorset County Council recognises the importance of trees, woods and forests, and the many benefits offered by appropriate management of trees across Dorset. To illustrate this, the County Council is already a signatory to the Dorset Trees, Woods and Forest Strategy which sets out a strategy and actions to harness these benefits (see http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/assets/downloads/Woodlink_strategy/Woodland_section1.pdf for a summary of the strategy). Development of the strategy was led by the Dorset AONB Partnership but it covers the whole of Dorset, and the County Council continues to work closely with partners to implement the strategy objectives. We are also signed up to the national Tree Charter referred to in the question via our Arboriculture Team Leader Steve Maros, who ensures that we adopt the principles of the Charter in our arboricultural work.

In practical terms, the County Council implements these policy commitments in a number of ways:

- County Council-owned trees (typically highway trees): the County Council has adopted a Tree Policy which states that when we have to remove a tree we replace it with another, wherever possible. Over the last 10 years we have been back filling trees where they had previously been felled but not replaced. We plant, on average, about 200 trees a year in this way.
- Countryside sites: the County Council planted 476 trees/whips last year but the amount of planting is often much higher than this. This new planting is partially offset by some felling, a necessary part of countryside management, including a significant volume of Scots Pine removed every year from heathland sites to protect their SSSI status. In addition to new planting, however, the increase in wood biomass from natural regeneration on County Council-owned land in a typical year is very significant and will generally exceed that of anything removed through felling.
- Major development sites: landscaping for new County Council developments (e.g. schools and waste facilities) will normally incorporate tree planting where appropriate – for example, 3,000 trees were planted as part of the Broomhills waste transfer station development in Bridport; in 2017, 141 trees and 589m of hedgerow were planted on 3 new school sites; and in 2018, at least 97 trees and 377m of hedgerow will be planted at Twynham Primary School, with a similar number at Wimborne First School.
- County Farms: a similar policy is applied to highway trees (one replaced for every one felled) and although the extent of this is limited (less than 10 a year), a bigger impact will be the work which the County Council's tenants do to maintain or plant trees and hedgerows within the estate.

There is no specific budget for tree planting so the County Council has to be creative in funding the purchase and planting of trees and we do this in several ways:

- Where local residents want a tree replaced outside their residence, we invite them to pay for it and many do
- We work with community and resident groups who want to improve the treescape in a given area and they raise money in order to sponsor the planting
- We work with parish and town councils to combine resources and promote tree planting
- We use money donated each year by WJ Linemarkings (one of our Highway contractors) as part of their 'carbon offsetting' policy

Last year the latter donations went towards developing a community orchard in Littlemoor. In previous years, the trees have gone towards increasing the tree stock on highway verges, as it has this year. Trees to plant in the highway verge have also been donated by the Dorset Tree Forum. Private landowners and voluntary organisations can also access grants to help with tree planting which the County Council cannot access, therefore working in partnership with other organisations is a good way forward. In essence, the County Council explores a wide range of opportunities which enable us to plant more trees beyond what our limited resources would otherwise allow. We hope this demonstrates the County Council's commitment to addressing this important issue across Dorset.