



9th October 2014

Agenda Item: 7

REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR, HIGHWAYS

HIGHWAY TREES

Purpose of the Report

1. This report is to seek Committee approval to the provision of additional resources in order to deal with a backlog of tree work and the consequences of Ash Dieback.

Information and Advice

2. There are approximately 167,000 trees in the County which are either within the highway boundary or are in private land adjacent to the highway and could pose a threat to public safety if they were to fall over the highway. There is a statutory requirement under the Highways Act to inspect all these trees once every five years.
3. The revenue budget for tree maintenance has been unchanged at £465k per year for the last three years. With rising costs and increased rates of tree growth in the wet and warm weather this level of budget has only been sufficient to do tree safety work such as removing epicormic growth (growth at the base of the tree trunk which affects pedestrian safety) and felling trees which are a danger to road users. Other routine tree maintenance work such as pollarding (removal of branches above a certain height in order to reduce the moisture the tree takes out of the soil and thereby reduce potential subsidence) and crown lifting (removal of branches to create clearance over footways and carriageways so that branches don't reach passing vehicles) has been stopped with the consequence that many trees have now become overloaded to the point of collapse or posing a risk to passing vehicles, cyclists or pedestrians or to adjacent properties. Major tree works costing £260k are also now needed along the A611 and A38 in order to reduce the risk to vehicles, clear blockage of traffic signs and fell trees that are dead. The number of enquiries about trees has also grown significantly over the same period.
4. A report on the implications of the Ash Tree Disease was considered by Committee in March 2013. There has now been the first confirmation of Ash Dieback in the County along A612 Colwick Loop Road which will involve felling up to 80% of all the trees along this route and loss of the tree screen for adjacent properties. There are approximately 30,000 Ash trees in or adjacent to the highway in the County of which 8,000 are medium to large trees. Dutch Elm disease is also likely to be present in some of the County's trees which will be confirmed through the inspection under this proposal.

Proposals

5. There is an urgent need to carry out the following works :-

- Restart the programme for pollarding and crown lifting of trees throughout the County;
- Major tree work along the A611 through Annesley Forest and A38 Sutton in Ashfield bypass;
- Major tree work along A612 Colwick Loop Road to remove Ash Dieback;
- Condition surveys of all County Ash and Elm trees by using temporary tree inspectors.

6. A Reserve Fund of £500k per annum was set aside last year to deal with Ash Dieback and it is proposed to use this funding for the programme of work outlined above. With the benefit of the additional inspections consideration will be given to the need for additional funding in future years.

Other options considered

7. The lack of routine tree maintenance work over the last three years and the first confirmed outbreak of Ash Dieback mean that there is no alternative to the proposed programme of work without jeopardising the safety of road users.

Statutory and Policy Implications

8. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

9. It is recommended that Committee:-

- a. Note this report and
- b. Approve the programme of work outlined in the report to be funded from the £500k reserve already established.

Andrew Warrington
Service Director Highways

For any enquiries about this report please contact:
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Background Papers

10. Transport and Highways Committee March 2013

Constitutional Comments

11. Transport and Highways Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report. (SLB 30/09/2014)

Financial Comments

12. Financial implications are set out in paragraph 6 of this report. (IC 1/10/2014)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

13. All