

STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMISSION	Agenda Item No. 5
14 SEPTEMBER 2011	Public Report

Report of the Chief Executive

Contact Officer(s) – Andrew Edwards, Head of Growth & Regeneration
Contact Details – 01733 452303

TREES IN BRIDGE STREET

1. PURPOSE

1.1 This report is in response to a request for an agenda item from Councillor Sandford.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Committee is recommended to note the contents of the report.

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

3.1 The report explains an element of proposed public realm improvement works to Bridge Street and Long Causeway which will contribute to Programme 1 of the Single Delivery Plan – “creating jobs through growth and improved skills and education” – and particularly by addressing the priority to “create a safe and vibrant city centre.”

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 As part of the ongoing programme of improvements to public realm in the city centre, proposals are currently being developed to refresh the key shopping streets Bridge Street and Long Causeway. An initial scheme design has been drawn up and was put out to public consultation during the summer. The main elements of the proposal are:

- Replacing street furniture such as seats, cycle racks and waste bins
- Upgrading street lighting, including installing feature lighting to trees
- Repairing and relaying paving, including sections around seating areas
- Removing two trees from each group of six where this is necessary to protect the viability of the remaining trees
- Management of existing trees

Funds have been set aside to plant 200 new trees in other parts of the city to replace those that we will have to remove.

A specific timetable of work has not been established at present but work will be phased to focus on one small area at a time to minimise disruption.

5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 The key issue for consideration by the committee today is the proposed removal of approximately one third of the existing trees. This proposal is based on a report by a tree specialist who examined the condition of the trees on Bridge Street and Long Causeway. The report concluded that the majority of the trees are currently in good condition. However it also noted that “The trees are close grown and consequently several are leaning away from their neighbours. There is a need for selective tree removal to ensure longevity of the tree stock and perpetuate an ongoing beneficial contribution to the street scene.”

The current public realm proposals take this recommendation into account by proposing to remove some of the trees now, before the condition of any of the trees starts to suffer significantly, and to allow the remaining trees more room to reach full and healthy maturity.

Officers consider that the removal of around one third of the trees will also have a secondary benefit of opening up the street scene, allowing in more natural daylight. However under the proposals the remaining trees would still provide a green environment with ample shade on warm days.

It should be noted that although the proposals include the removal of around one third of the existing trees, the proposed planting of 200 new trees elsewhere in the city is expected to more than offset any CO₂ impacts of the tree removals.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The proposal concern two key city centre shopping streets and therefore have potential city wide implications as the streets are used by many residents from across the area.

Public realm changes may also have maintenance implications; these are due to be explored with officers responsible for the Enterprise contract shortly.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Public consultation took place for four weeks beginning 21st July and ending 19th August 2011. The proposals were displayed for the first two days in a public exhibition at St. John's Church in the city centre, and were also available online for the duration of the consultation period. In both cases a questionnaire was provided. A copy of this is given at Appendix 1.

A concern has been raised that the question regarding trees could be considered leading. However officers considered that it was important to set out clearly the reasons for the proposed tree removal so that members of the public could form their opinion based on the full facts.

Responses received expressed a variety of views on all aspects of the Bridge Street and Long Causeway proposals. On the particular topic of the trees the range of views encompassed a number who wished to see all the trees removed as they felt they created a dark and gloomy environment, through to those who felt strongly that all trees should remain even if this caused future difficulties. The majority (67%) agreed with the proposal to remove a proportion of the trees if this is necessary to retain the viability of the remainder.

Internal consultation with officers in the Natural & Historic Environment team (with responsibility for Conservation Areas and Tree Preservation Orders) is currently underway. Officers with responsibility for the Enterprise contract (which covers tree maintenance and street cleansing amongst other items) will also be consulted.

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 Following the consultation described above officers will shortly consider in conjunction with the relevant Cabinet Members whether it is necessary to make any amendments to the proposed scheme. A final scheme will then be published later in the year.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 9.1 Tree Condition Survey And Management Recommendations Peterborough Public Realm – The Urban Forestry Organisation Limited, February 2008.

10. APPENDICES

- 10.1 Appendix 1 – copy of Questionnaire from public exhibition