



Title of report: Herefordshire Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy (H-THAWS).

Decision maker: Cabinet member environment

Decision date:

Report by: Principal Natural Environment Officer

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To consider, endorse and promote the new countywide Herefordshire Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy (H-THAWS). This strategy will support the council's Biodiversity Duty under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 and the Environment Act 2021.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **The Cabinet Member approves the Herefordshire Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy; and**
- b) **the council promotes the strategy and works on the action plan with partner organisations towards the vision to create and sustainably manage a thriving network of trees, woodland, traditional orchards, riparian vegetation, wood pasture and parkland, species-rich hedges and hedgerow trees across the county.**

Alternative options

1. Not to approve this strategy. This is not recommended as this strategy supports the council's commitment to protect and enhance biodiversity. Whilst the council already has its own adopted Tree and Hedgerow Code of Practice which applies to the council's existing estate. This joint strategy is to work in partnership across the county to enhance the whole treescape.

Key considerations

2. In response to increasing awareness of the impacts of climate change, Herefordshire Council declared a climate emergency on 8 March 2019 and, on 11 December 2020, this was strengthened to a Climate and Ecological Emergency. The Climate and Ecological Emergency was reaffirmed by Full Council on Friday 28 July 2023.
3. In January 2022, a citizens' assembly brought together a strategically, randomly selected group of people who broadly represent the county. The people who attended learned about environmental issues, discussed them with one another, and then made recommendations about how the council should tackle the Climate and Ecological Emergency. Protection of trees was one of the key issues raised.
4. The Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee reviewed tree and hedgerow management at their meeting on 18 November 2024. Recommendations from that meeting are addressed in this Strategy, particularly recommendation 1 which sought to set out a percentage target for an increase in tree coverage and recommendation 6 to provide advice and guidance on planting trees and promote hedgerow management best practice. The proposed action plan from that meeting also identified funding for a strategy to be produced, recognising that trees contribute highly to indirect carbon savings, nature saving and medium social benefits.
5. Consultation and engagement was undertaken as part of the production of the strategy. This included targeted and technical stakeholders and plus an online consultation hub and public survey. Herefordshire Tree Hedgerow and Woodlands Strategy (H-THAWS) encourages all partners, including local residents, to develop their own actions to contribute to the shared vision for the connected treescape of the county.
6. The H-THAWS is based on The Tree Council's toolkit for step-by-step guidance for local action, which followed on from the Government's publication of England Trees Action Plan in May 2021. The aim of the Strategy is to set out an aspirational, yet achievable, shared future vision for Herefordshire's treescape. The document will support the conservation, improved management and expansion of the county's treescape and hedgerow network. It will act as a key reference for interested stakeholders, landowners, managers, planners, developers and the public.

7. The strategy recommends the establishment of a Herefordshire Treescape Task Group to drive forward and promote the strategy. This will be taken forward as part of the ongoing strategic review of environmental partnerships. This group will steer the delivery of the strategy, in conjunction with key local stakeholders and external advisory organisations (e.g. National Landscape Partnerships, Natural England and the Forestry Commission).

Community impact

9. People have a deep emotional connection to trees and by providing opportunities for recreation, social interaction, and volunteering; trees and hedgerows can help build stronger communities and foster a sense of ownership and stewardship of the local environment.
10. Trees can provide enhancements to air quality and a reduction in noise pollution, which also contribute to public health and well-being improvements.
11. The identification of social and cultural elements of the treescape which are particularly important to communities can help shape local aspirations and future priorities. Public priorities for the council in relation to the treescape have been used to inform the development of the shared vision that is set out in this strategy.
12. The strategy includes an objective to establish strong working partnerships and support community involvement. This includes continuing to work closely with partners, landowners, volunteer groups and the general public in dealing with tree-related issues and planting opportunities. This should include encouraging, providing and recording opportunities for community engagement and activity. The results of the public consultation demonstrate the variety of existing volunteering opportunities available to Herefordshire's residents. One of the aims is to further encourage the involvement of individuals and communities in the delivery of the strategy. It supports the Council Plan 2024-28, which includes a commitment to 'protect and enhance the county's biodiversity, value nature and uphold environmental standards'.

Environmental Impact

13. Endorsing the H-THaWS supports the delivery of the Herefordshire Council Plan 2024-2028, specifically the 'Place' priority:
 - a) We will protect and enhance our environment and ensure that Herefordshire remains a great place to live. We will support the right housing in the right place and do everything we can to improve the health of our rivers.
14. The specific priorities are:
 - a) Develop Herefordshire as a place for growth, prosperity and communities to thrive.
 - b) Value nature and uphold environmental standards to minimise pollution and maximise biodiversity.
 - c) Work towards reducing county and council carbon emissions, aiming for net zero by 2030/31 and work with partners and communities to make the county more resilient to the effects of climate change.
 - d) Support our local culture and heritage and make Herefordshire a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and visit.
15. The strategy links to countywide strategies such as the Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, the Local Plan Core Strategy and supporting evidence bases include the Green Blue Infrastructure Strategy.

16. Tree planting and habitat creation will see increased canopy cover, improved habitat connectivity, and reversal of biodiversity decline.

Equality duty

17. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
18. The mandatory equality impact screening checklist has been completed for this decision and it has been found to have low impact for equality.
19. Due to the potential impact of this activity being low, a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required. However, the following equality considerations should be taken into account when making a decision about this strategy:
- a. Implementing the strategy will indirectly affect the public, through improvements to the treescape which has a wide range of benefits and through partnership working which will offer chances for community and public engagement and participation.
 - b. Implementing the strategy has the potential to promote good relation between different groups who can come together in working on neutral tree projects.
20. Cleaner air from reduced emissions and pollutants lowers asthma and respiratory illness rates¹.
21. Environmental inequalities tend to disproportionately adversely impact areas of deprivation and those with lower household income². These places are often those with populations that suffer from multiple deprivation. Factors associated with deprivation, such as language barriers, ability to earn, old age and health status, often affect people's vulnerability to other pressures, including those caused by environmental inequalities. The Chief Medical Officer for England recently highlighted the 'triple jeopardy' experienced by deprived communities, who face higher risks from social determinants of health, air pollution exposure and greater susceptibility to the impacts of pollution³. By reducing working with partners to help improve air quality countywide we seek to improve the quality of the environment in Herefordshire for all.

Resource implications

22. Approval of the Herefordshire Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy does not directly create any requirement for new or additional resources on the council. The partnership working group and secretariat will form a part of existing environmental partnerships supported by the council.
21. Any additional resources to assist in the delivery of the strategy will be managed on a case by case basis as part of the normal financial and governance processes within the council. Possible funding opportunities are identified within the strategy and will be explored with partners, subject to usual 'permission to apply' council process (if we are acting as lead or a partner).

¹ [Air Pollution and Asthma: Critical Targets for Effective Action - PMC](#)

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-environment/the-state-of-the-environment-the-urban-environment>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-environment/the-state-of-the-environment-the-urban-environment>

Legal implications

22. There are no specific legal implications within this report.

Risk management

23. Delays in implementation could exacerbate biodiversity loss whilst jeopardising the council's progress against its public commitments. Delivery risk is mitigated through partnership working and alignment with existing council strategies
24. Financial risk will be offset by leveraging external funding where possible to implement tree, hedgerow and woodland planting or management projects.
25. Failure to act could undermine public trust and Herefordshire's leadership on biodiversity issues. Through endorsement of the strategy, Herefordshire Council will maintain momentum delivering environmental projects.

Risk / opportunity

Reputation (both risk and opportunity) – There is a reputational risk of not delivering priorities within the Herefordshire Council Plan 2024-2028.

Project delivery capacity and capability – the wider Environment Team will assist partners with projects and secretariat duties where capacity and capability allows.

Project delivery – timescales – the programme has been worked up relevant timescale allocated as ongoing, short, medium and long term (over 5 years) suggestions.

Mitigation

This proposal seeks to support priorities within the Herefordshire Council Plan 2024-2028.

Where there is not capacity, or capability then partners will be encouraged to continue the work of the strategy.

There are no statutory deadlines.

26. The relevant risks will be managed at a service level, escalated to Directorate Leadership Team (DLT) and Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) as required. The risks associated within this report have been reviewed and managed in accordance with HC's risk management strategy. Ongoing oversight through established structure will ensure that risks are monitored, escalated and addressed as necessary to support.
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Consultees

28. Consultation was embedded into the strategy production. It was used to help identify key stakeholder and resident attitudes, expectations and aspirations for the strategy. A holistic approach was adopted and a three-stage consultation process was used, as outlined below:
 - a) Phase 1: Targeted (1-to-1) stakeholder consultation;
 - b) Phase 2: Technical stakeholder workshop; and

- c) Phase 3: Consultation hub and online public survey, which remained live for four weeks.
- 29. Key stakeholders included statutory consultees, relevant council officers, key interest groups / landowners and neighbouring authorities. The workshop was used as an opportunity to gather technical stakeholder input as part of the collaborative approach to the development of the strategy. The workshop was semi-structured using key questions and prompts.
- 30. A dedicated interactive website was developed to function as a 'consultation hub' for the strategy. A total of 551 responses were received to the public survey (including 73 who did not consent to the privacy statement). 401 of these were members of the public, 19 were agents / landowners and 25 were town / parish councils and councillors. The remaining responses were from community interest groups, businesses, statutory bodies, planning authorities and 'others'.
- 31. Full details of the consultation methods and findings are found in the strategy at section 1.10 – 1.17, and are highlighted throughout the document where key points informed the decision making process. The results and comments from all three consultations were useful and tangible and have been used to shape the priorities for the strategy, supplemented with national data where necessary.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Herefordshire Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy (H-THAWS), March 2025
- Appendix 2: Herefordshire Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy (H-THAWS) Summary document.

Background papers

None

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published		
Governance	John Coleman	Date 28/10/2025
Finance	Karen Morris	Date 30/10/2025
Legal	Sean O'Connor	Date 17/10/2025
Communications	Michala Lee	Date 06/11/2025
Equality Duty	Harriet Yellin	Date 17/10/2025
Procurement	Nena Beric	Date 17/10/2025
Risk	Paige McInerney	Date 06/11/2025

Approved by	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date	Click or tap to enter a date.
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[Note: Please remember to overwrite or delete the guidance highlighted in grey]

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Corporate Leadership Team (CLT)

Directorate Leadership Team (DLT)

Herefordshire Tree Hedgerow and Woodlands Strategy (H-THaWS)