

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet – 24 February 2026

Cheltenham Tree Strategy

Accountable member:

Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

Accountable officer:

Tracey Birkinshaw, Director Planning and Building Control

Ward(s) affected:

All

Key Decision: No

Executive summary:

This report presents to Cabinet Cheltenham Borough Council's first Tree Strategy with a recommendation for approval. It sets out a clear framework for managing, protecting, and enhancing the town's tree stock. Developed in response to climate change, resource challenges, and community expectations, the strategy has used ward-level data to understand the provision of existing tree cover and guide future planting.

It includes:

- Tree Management Policies – These guide how we care for and maintain trees under Council ownership.
- Trees in Planning Action Plan – This outlines how we will engage with the planning process and improve stakeholder engagement to protect existing trees and promote new planting through development.

The strategy supports biodiversity, climate resilience, and public wellbeing, and aligns with the Council's Corporate Priority - reducing carbon, achieving council net zero, creating biodiversity. Cabinet is asked to approve the Tree Strategy for publication and delegate authority for final minor amendments to ensure it is professionally formatted and visually ready for public release. Further delegation is also requested to ensure this Strategy remains a 'living document' and can be updated in a timely manner, as required in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control.

Recommendations: That Cabinet:

- 1. approves the Cheltenham Tree Strategy and delegate to the Director of Planning and Building Control in consultation with Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control any minor amendments prior to publication.**
 - 2. delegate to the Director of Planning and Building Control in consultation with Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control any amendments arising from future reviews of the Tree Strategy to ensure it remains relevant and up to date as a management tool.**
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1. Implications

1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

There are no financial implications arising from the Tree Strategy approval. Funding for tree management and planting is funded by existing budgets. Should there be a future requirement for additional funding, then this would need to be considered by a separate growth bid at the appropriate time

Signed off by: Ela Jankowska, Finance Business Partner
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1.2 Legal implications

The Climate Change Act 2008 requires local authorities to promote measures which can help mitigate the effects of climate change which includes the maintenance of existing trees and new tree planting. The policies within the Tree Strategy support the council's legal requirements in terms of the management of its own tree stock. This includes the council's legal responsibilities in relation to health and safety requirements; occupier's liability, planning related legislation and wildlife and protected species legislation.

Tree owners of trees have a duty of care to visitors, residents and passers-by. The Authority in addition has a statutory duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work

etc. Act 1974 and the Occupiers Liability Acts 1954 and 1984 to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable trees for which it is directly responsible are safe and do not pose a danger to the public.

In addition to ensuring that its trees are safe, the Authority has several other statutory responsibilities in relation to trees. Under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 the Authority, as the Local Planning Authority has a duty to ensure, whenever it is appropriate, that in granting planning permission for any development adequate provision is made, by the imposition of conditions, for the preservation or planting of trees. Under Part VIII of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 the Authority also has the power to make Tree Preservation Orders to protect landowners from cutting down, uprooting, topping, lopping, or causing wilful damage or destruction of a tree protected by such an order. Breach of such an order can amount to a criminal offence.

The Tree Strategy is produced by the Authority to provide a guide to the public/landowners as to how the Authority discharges its various responsibilities given to it in relation to the management of trees.

The approval of the Tree Strategy is a Cabinet function.

Signed off by: Charlotte Lockwood, Senior Locum Lawyer One Legal legalservices@onelegal.org.uk . 01684 272102

1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

A Climate Change Impact Assessment has been completed. This is provided at Appendix 3 of this report.

The Climate Change Team have been closely involved in the drafting of this strategy, in particular supporting the mapping of the data across the Borough. This strategy aligns with our environmental goals, supports biodiversity, and contributes to tackling climate change by reducing carbon emissions and helping with climate change adaptation, urban cooling and broader environmental aims.

Signed off by: Maizy McCann, Climate Officer, maizy.mccann@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Reducing carbon, achieving council net zero, creating biodiversity

1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

See Appendix 4.

1.6 Performance management – monitoring and review

A monitoring and review section is included as part of the Tree Strategy.

2 Background

2.1 Trees play a vital role in improving our quality of life, from enhancing air quality to providing valuable habitats for wildlife. They offer shade in the summer; help reduce the impact of flooding and bring beauty to our urban landscape. Trees make Cheltenham a happier and healthier place to live in and to visit. They are central to the town's character and heritage and intrinsic to its appeal and unique charm.

2.2 Cheltenham Borough Council actively manages its tree stock through the dedicated work of the Council's Tree Team. However, until now, there has been no published document that clearly outlines our priorities or our approach to tree management. The need for such a strategy has become increasingly relevant considering the ever-growing challenges, including:

- Climate change which brings more extreme weather and increased pressure on urban ecosystems.
- Resource constraints, including funding and officer capacity.
- Community pressures, such as rising public expectations for tree planting and protection, concerns over tree-related risks, and the need to balance development with environmental stewardship.

This strategy responds to these challenges by providing a clear framework for how the Council will manage, protect, and enhance Cheltenham's tree stock in a sustainable and equitable way.

3 Understanding our Data

3.1 The starting point for this strategy was a detailed analysis of Cheltenham's existing tree stock, using data held by the Council on a ward-by-ward basis together with data held by organisations, such as the Woodland Trust. This analysis looked at a range of factors such as

Extent of canopy cover – measuring the proportion of land covered by tree canopy in each ward.

Age – identifying the age distribution of trees to understand long-term sustainability and future replacement needs.

Health – evaluating the condition of trees to inform maintenance priorities and

risk management.

3.2 This data-driven approach has enabled the Council to look strategically at the stock of trees and extent of canopy cover. Our assessment highlighted two important reflections:

1. Cheltenham, despite its excellent parks and well-treed streets, sits below the national average for canopy cover, while this may be understandable for a predominantly urban area, it highlights the need for strategic improvement.
2. There is a clear disparity between better provisioned wards and those with fewer trees. This is likely due to historic spatial planning decisions, which have favoured tree planting in areas with higher equity scores, and under-provisioned those with lower scores.

3.3 The analysis is further supported by the Woodland Trust's [Tree Equity Score](#), which considers canopy cover in the context of various other factors. Its metric is a tree canopy cover goal which takes account of population density, existing canopy, local income, employment, health, age, heat severity, air pollution. Cheltenham's overall score is 87, but at local level we see disparity - neighbourhoods range from 60 in St Peter's in the northwest of Cheltenham (with a canopy cover of just 9%) and 100 in Moorend in the southeast of Cheltenham (with a canopy cover of 30%).

3.4 Further analysis shows that open spaces are unevenly distributed across wards and that new planting has not followed a systematic approach. This conclusion is based on data gathered during routine tree safety inspections and subsequent analysis of tree condition, age, size potential, age potential, and pollination strategy.

4 Vision and Principles

4.1 Through our engagement with communities and stakeholders alongside the deep dive into the data available a vision and set of principles were developed, the vision being:

For the benefit of our town's environment now and into the future we will work to achieve a well-managed and sustainable urban forest in Cheltenham, to benefit the town's arboricultural amenity value, ecological balance, economic prospects, and social well-being.

4.2 To deliver the vision a suite of tree management principles has been developed.

- Enhance Cheltenham's tree population through careful species selection, planning, and community engagement — always aiming to maximise canopy cover while respecting local conditions and the Borough's rich

- heritage.
- Manage our own tree stock in a consistent, organised, and proactive way, using evidence-based approaches.
- Promote the right tree in the right place, planting appropriate species and numbers to reflect the site's conditions and future growth potential.
- Ensure replacement planting is meaningful, with a focus on long-term canopy contribution rather than just numbers.
- Protect trees through the planning system, guided by analysis of local tree population.

5 Policies and Action

5.1 The Tree Strategy is divided into two key components:

Tree Management Policies: These outline the principles and standards we will follow in the management of trees owned or maintained by the Council. They guide our day-to-day operations, risk management, and long-term stewardship of the Borough's tree stock.

Trees in Planning Action Plan: This sets out how we will proactively engage with the planning process to protect existing trees, promote new planting, and ensure that trees are fully considered in the design and delivery of development across the Borough.

5.2 Together, these components provide a comprehensive framework for safeguarding and enhancing the contribution the Council can make to planting, managing and safeguarding trees across the Borough.

6 Reasons for recommendations

6.1 Cabinet is asked to approve Cheltenham Borough Council's first Tree Strategy for publication. The strategy provides a clear framework for managing, protecting, and enhancing the town's tree stock in response to climate change, resource challenges, and community expectations.

6.2 Cabinet is further asked to delegate authority to the Director of Planning & Building Control, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control.

7 Alternative options considered

7.1 The alternative is to not deliver a Tree Strategy. It is considered that the Tree Strategy as presented provides enhanced transparency in the way in which the Council both manages and invests in its own tree stock, together with setting out the positive ways in which other stakeholders whether that is the proactive work undertaken by Gloucestershire County Council, parish councils and

neighbourhood groups or developers through the delivery of planning applications can deliver, support and maintain our tree stock.

7.2 This Strategy will be the first of its kind for Cheltenham and will form an active tool in creating a forward thinking and sustainable approach to managing, preserving, and expanding tree cover across. Its outcomes will help to:

- Increase Tree Canopy Coverage
- Enhance Biodiversity
- Mitigate Climate Change
- Improve Air Quality and Mitigate Flood Risk
- Enhance Health and Well-being
- Protect and Maintain Existing Tree Stock
- Promote Education and Awareness
- Maximise Funding

8 Consultation and feedback

8.1 There has been wide ranging consultation on the emerging strategy. Early engagement began with internal officers across the climate change, green spaces and planning teams together with Gloucestershire County Council. This early engagement included the Woodland Trust and helped to build the scope of the emerging strategy. The Woodland Trust has reviewed the draft as presented and has endorsed the strategy.

8.2 A questionnaire was published to encourage participation from across our communities. This generated over 200 individual responses and was used to test against the emerging analysis of our existing knowledge, data sets and best practice together with helping to bring the story of Cheltenham Trees to life.

8.3 A wider in person stakeholder workshop took place on 10th July 2025. A wide range of individuals and stakeholders were invited to this event ranging from elected members, parish councils, Gloucestershire County Council, neighbourhood and interest groups. Over 30 groups and individuals were represented at the workshop which created the opportunity to test emerging findings from the detailed data analysis and best practice together with testing role, purpose and outcomes of the strategy. This workshop has been invaluable to establishing the form and content of the strategy as now presented.

8.4 A round table session to review the draft Tree Strategy was undertaken with relevant Cabinet members including:

- Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control
- Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling, Parks, Gardens and Public Realm Greenspace

- Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency

8.5 In presenting this report to Cabinet, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the many participants who have actively engaged in the drafting of the Tree Strategy as presented today. Particular thanks to the Cheltenham Tree Group, Climate Change Team, The Woodland Trust and lead Cabinet members who have shown a keen interest in the development of the strategy and have provided ongoing advice and detailed comments.

9 Key risks

9.1 See Appendix 2.

Report author:

Tracey Birkinshaw, Director Planning & Building Control
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Appendices:

- i. Draft Tree Strategy
- ii. Risk Assessment
- iii. Equality Impact Assessment – Screening
- iv. Climate Change Impact Assessment

Background information:

[Climate Leadership Gloucestershire – Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment](#)

Appendix 2: Risk Assessment

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
TS01	If the Tree Strategy is not approved, then this would limit the planning team's contribution to helping to deliver our Corporate Strategy (Key Priority 3).	Tree Officer	2	1	2	Reduce	Active engagement with relevant Cabinet portfolio holders	Director Communities & Economic Development	18/11/25
TS02	If the Tree Strategy is not approved, then this may have a reputational impact given the positive engagement to date across elected members, parish councils, Gloucestershire County Council, neighbourhood groups and stakeholders together with members of the public.	Tree Officer	2	1	2	Reduce	Active engagement with relevant Cabinet portfolio holders	Director Communities & Economic Development	18/11/25

Appendix 3: Equality Impact Assessment (Screening)

1. Identify the policy, project, function or service change

a. Person responsible for this Equality Impact Assessment

Officer responsible: Director Planning & Building Control	Service Area: Planning
Title: Tree Strategy	Date of assessment: 06/10/2025
Signature: Tracey Birkinshaw	

b. Is this a policy, function, strategy, service change or project?

Strategy

If other, please specify:

c. Name of the policy, function, strategy, service change or project

Tree Strategy

Is this new or existing?

New or proposed

Please specify reason for change or development of policy, function, strategy, service change or project

d. What are the aims, objectives and intended outcomes and who is likely to benefit from it?

Aims:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To create a forward thinking and sustainable approach to managing, preserving, and expanding tree cover across Cheltenham To optimise the efficient management of the Borough's own stock
Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance Cheltenham's tree population through careful species selection, planning, and community engagement — always aiming to maximise canopy cover while respecting local conditions and the Borough's rich heritage. Manage our own tree stock in a consistent, organised, and proactive way, using evidence-based approaches. Promote the right tree in the right place, planting appropriate species and numbers to reflect the site's conditions and future growth potential.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure replacement planting is meaningful, with a focus on long-term canopy contribution rather than just numbers. • Protect trees through the planning system, guided by analysis of local tree population.
<p>Outcomes:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase Tree Canopy Coverage: One of the primary aims is to address the disparity of canopy cover across Cheltenham. This involves looking at a broad range of data including tree equity data and inspection data etc to better inform the location and planting of trees in spaces where they make a social, environmental and economic contribution. This will help to expand canopy cover and contribute to environmental health. This aim will also inform decisions in the planning process to better protect trees on private land. This should be achieved through diversity of species and characteristics of Cheltenham’s tree stock. 2. Enhance Biodiversity: Trees support a wide range of plant, animal, fungal and bacteria species. A key aim of this strategy, feeding into our Nature Recovery Strategy Supplementary Planning Document, is to increase biodiversity by planting a broad range of tree species, which provide habitats for wildlife and contribute to ecological resilience. 3. Help Mitigate Climate Change: Trees are important for absorbing carbon dioxide (CO2). Cheltenham has a commitment to carbon net zero by 2030. By maintaining and increasing the number of trees that can sequester carbon, and reduce heat island effects in our urban area, we can help mitigate climate change and help regulate our local climate. 4. Improve Air Quality and Mitigate Flood Risk: Trees act as natural filters, improving air quality by collecting pollutants and releasing oxygen. They also help manage water runoff and reduce the risk of flooding by slowing the flow of rainwater into drains, streams and rivers. 5. Enhance Health and Well-being: Trees are important to our communities. They support both our mental and physical health. Urban trees help create attractive areas, whilst trees in our green spaces enhance these spaces, create areas for recreation, reducing stress, and encouraging outdoor activities. 6. Protect and Maintain Existing Tree Stock: A key part of any tree strategy is the preservation of existing trees. This involves robust inspection and maintenance, good biosecurity measures and ensuring we plant the right tree for the right place so that full crown potential can be achieved. 7. Promote Education and Awareness: This aim will help to engage local communities with the broader understanding and a sense of ownership of their environment. 8. Maximise Funding: This trees strategy can be used as a lever for funding for future tree management.
<p>Benefits:</p>	<p>See above.</p>

e. What are the expected impacts?

Are there any aspects, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could have an impact on the lives of people, including employees and customers.

Yes

Do you expect the impacts to be positive or negative?

Positive

Please provide an explanation for your answer:

- Having a clear approach to how trees are managed and planned for across land owned by Cheltenham will have a positive impact on communities. By publishing a Tree Strategy, it allows the council to be transparent in the way it plans for and manages trees allowing communities and other stakeholders to positively engage within clear expectations.
- The data analysis that supports this strategy has clearly identified that the distribution of trees across the borough is inequitable. The Tree Strategy provides a positive tool with which to positively address the imbalance prioritising tree planting and canopy cover, especially in under-provisioned wards.
- More trees and better maintained and planned for tree planting programmes contributes to cleaner air, cooler urban temperatures, and better mental health outcomes.
- Targeted planting in areas with low tree equity scores helps address environmental inequalities.
- Active engagement in tree planting and stewardship fosters civic pride and gives residents a voice in shaping their environment.
- Preparation of the Tree Strategy has included collaboration across various officer teams and lead Cabinet portfolio members, helping to build buy-in to the outcomes.

If your answer to question e identified potential positive or negative impacts, or you are unsure about the impact, then you should carry out a Stage Two Equality Impact Assessment.

f. Identify next steps as appropriate

Stage Two required

No

Owner of Stage Two assessment

N/A

Completion date for Stage Two assessment

N/A