

Committee:	Scrutiny Committee for Communities, Economy and Transport
Date:	15 March 2017
Report By:	Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
Title of Report:	Review of East Sussex County Council's Dutch Elm Disease Strategy
Purpose of Report:	To review progress in delivering the Dutch Elm Disease Strategy, which was adopted in 2013

RECOMMENDATION: It is recommended that Scrutiny Committee continues to support the Dutch Elm Disease sanitation programme.

1. Background

1.1 A Scrutiny Committee review of trees and woodland policy took place in March 2012. In March 2013 Scrutiny Committee endorsed a new strategy for managing Dutch Elm Disease (DED), based on evidence that this would provide the most effective means of maintaining a significant population of English Elm at least cost to the County Council. In March 2015 Scrutiny Committee reviewed progress in meeting the objectives of the strategy and agreed to continue to support the approach being taken to managing DED. This report provides the second progress report as to whether the objectives of the strategy are being met and whether continuing the DED sanitation programme remains a better option than stopping the programme.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 The strategy, which is set out in Appendix 1, sets out the objectives of the DED sanitation programme. These are to:

- 1) Ensure the long-term survival of a significant population of mature English elm, as this population makes an important contribution to the local landscape, provides a habitat to a number of threatened species, and is considered by Natural England to be of regional importance.
- 2) Assist in managing the health & safety risk of DED on the highway and schools;
- 3) Ensure the most cost effective approach is taken.

2.2 The 2013 strategy was largely based on modelling work carried out for the County Council by the University of Cambridge. The modelling report is set out in Appendix 2. This work concluded that controlling DED should be less costly in the short and medium term than stopping the sanitation programme because fewer trees would need to be felled than if DED was allowed to spread unchecked.

2.3 The table below provides a comparison between:

- 1) The number of trees felled and the cost of felling to the County Council if the sanitation programme was stopped (row 2, called 'no control');
- 2) The number of trees felled and the cost of felling to the County Council predicted by the Cambridge model (row 3);
- 3) The number of trees felled between 2012-16 and forecast to be felled over the next 20 years, and the associated costs to the County Council (row 4).

Table 1.

Approach	Elm numbers after 10 years	Elm Numbers after 25 years	Number of elms felled in 10 years	Number of elms felled in 25 years	Cost of control 10 years	Cost of control 25 years
No control	7000	6000	5210	5210	£1,228,000	£1,228,000
Model predictions	14000	14500	6500	16250	£705,800	£1,764,500
Actual & forecast	14000	14500	8150	9520	£814,900	£1,318,500

The main conclusions from table 1 are similar to the conclusions presented to Scrutiny in 2015, namely that:

- 1) Stopping the sanitation programme would be more costly to the County Council over the short and medium term than continuing the programme, because stopping the programme would lead to the rapid spread of DED and, therefore, the need to fell a large number of diseased trees on the highway and on ESCC land to manage the Health & Safety risk;
- 2) Continuing the sanitation programme becomes more expensive than stopping it over the longer term, because the programme is an open-ended financial commitment, as DED currently cannot be eradicated;
- 3) Continuing the sanitation programme enables a larger population of healthy mature elm trees to survive than stopping the programme because fewer trees would become infected.

2.4 As was highlighted in the reports of 2013 and 2015, it is important to note that there is considerable uncertainty with forecasting the effectiveness of the DED sanitation programme. This is because the rate of spread of infection is not well understood, which means that the Cambridge model includes a number of simplifying, and possibly inaccurate, assumptions. In addition, there are a number of other variables that we cannot take into account, for example the effect of climate change and water stress, or the predicted effects of other tree diseases. Consequently, whilst independent experts in the field (e.g. the Forestry Commission) conclude that the sanitation programme is based on the most up-to-date knowledge of DED and is the best approach to managing DED, the figures used in this report should be taken as an indication of the direction of travel rather than firm estimates of what will happen in future.

3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

3.1 It is recommended that Scrutiny continues to support the DED sanitation programme, as the evidence continues to indicate that this provides the most effective means in the short and medium term of maintaining a significant population of English Elm at least cost to the County Council.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None