

Report to: Scrutiny Committee for Economy, Transport and Environment

Date of meeting: 18 March 2015

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Review of East Sussex County Council's Dutch Elm Disease Strategy

Purpose: To review the Dutch Elm Disease Strategy adopted in 2013

RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended that Scrutiny Committee:

- (1) Continues to support the prioritised approach to sanitation felling;**
 - (2) Notes that the County Council will increase the contribution requested from private landowners to 75%; and**
 - (3) Requests another progress report in March 2017 to further consider whether the sanitation programme is continuing to deliver the outcomes as currently predicted**
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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 prioritised strategy to managing Dutch Elm Disease (DED) because the evidence indicated that this would provide the most effective means of maintaining a significant population of English Elm at least cost to the Council. The scientific evidence for this conclusion is included at Appendix 1. The strategy, which has been updated to reflect the delivery of the DED programme since 2013, is included at Appendix 2.

1.2 This report reviews whether:

- the strategy for managing DED is working as was predicted in the evidence presented in 2013; and;
- maintaining the DED sanitation programme remains a better option than stopping the programme.

2 Supporting information

2.1 The strategy in Appendix 2 explains that the objectives of the DED sanitation programme are to:

- Ensure the long-term survival of a significant population of mature English Elm, which is the largest remaining population of English Elm in the world and makes an important contribution to the local landscape and, therefore, to making East Sussex an attractive place to live and work;
- Assist in managing DED on the highway, which the Council is required to do under the Highways Act 1980 (section 154), and on County Council land (e.g. schools), when it poses a health and safety risk.
- Ensure the most cost effective approach.

2.2 The 2013 strategy was largely based on modelling work carried out for the Council by the University of Cambridge, set out in Appendix 1. This work concluded that the prioritised approach to controlling DED would be expected to 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, as this would increase the number of trees that would need to be felled for health and safety reasons on the highway and on corporate land.

2.3 The table below updates the figures provided to Scrutiny Committee in March 2013 and shows how the prioritised approach is working in practice (ie. row 3), compared with how it was predicted to work by the modelling work carried out by the University of Cambridge (ie. row 2). These figures are explained in more detail on pages 3-6 of Appendix 2.

Approach	Total number of healthy elm after 10 years	Total number of healthy elm after 25 years	Number of elms felled over 10 years	Number of elms felled over 25 years	Cost over 10 years	Cost over 25 years
1. No control	7,000	6,000	5,210	5,210	£1,228,050	£1,228,050
2. Prioritised (modelled)	14,000	14,500	6,500	16,250	£591,100	£1,477,750
3. Prioritised (actual)	14,000	14,500	7,410	10,560	£659,410	£1,235,140

2.4 As reported in 2013, the complex epidemiology of DED means that the figures in the table above are based on a number of assumptions, therefore should only be taken as an indication of the direction of travel. Furthermore, on the basis of 3 years of practical data it is too early to draw any detailed or final conclusions. Nevertheless, some key indications can be reported:

- i) The prioritised approach remains a less costly option to the Council than stopping the sanitation programme over 10 years, but after approximately 24 years the prioritised approach begins to exceed the cost of stopping the programme;
- ii) The number of trees that would be expected to be felled over the first 10 years of a prioritised approach is only slightly above the numbers predicted in the model, which suggests both that the model captured the key features of DED spread in East Sussex, and that the prioritised approach is working as expected; and
- iii) Costs are likely to be higher in the short term and lower in the longer term than predicted.

2.5 In 2014 the Council, working in partnership with the Conservation Foundation charity, secured £27,500 towards the cost of sanitation felling up to December 2015. To secure a more stable contribution to future costs it is proposed that private landowners are asked to increase their contribution towards the cost of sanitation felling on their land from 50% to 75%, from April 2015. This carries a risk that fewer landowners may be able or willing to contribute to the cost of felling, but reduces increased costs in the short term.

3 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that Scrutiny Committee continues to support the prioritised approach to sanitation felling, as the evidence continues to indicate that this provides the most effective means of maintaining a significant population of English Elm. The Committee should note that the Council will increase the contribution requested from private landowners to 75%, to reduce the cost to the Council of running the programme in the short term. It would be appropriate for the Committee to consider the DED Strategy again in March 2017 when there has been further experience gained with the approach to sanitation felling.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

Councillors Butler, Buchanan, Howson, Charlton, Lambert, Carstairs, Shing, Shing, Bennett, St Pierre, Pursglove

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Scrutiny Committee review of trees and woodland policy, March 2012:

<http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/yourcouncil/about/committees/meetingpapers/scrutinytransport/2012/14march.htm>