FOREWORD

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Deputy Leader - Strategic Services

I am pleased to introduce this 'Consultation Draft Tree and Woodland Strategy' for South Staffordshire.

Trees and woodlands are important elements that contribute to South Staffordshire's distinctive character. They are also vital in maintaining and improving the quality of life for all who live, work in and visit the District.

They help clean the air we breathe, improve a community’s health and well being, create a calming setting in which to live and work and provide a habitat for a wide range of plants and animals. They also create attractive settings that help to encourage economic investment.

The Council recognises the importance of the District's trees and woodlands and, through its own actions will conserve, manage and enhance them wherever possible in order to maintain their significance and status within the landscape. We will also seek to encourage others to do the same. As public awareness of environmental issues becomes more prominent, there is an increasing need to focus attention on trees and their role in providing a more pleasant environment.

The finalised Tree and Woodland Strategy will set out the ways in which South Staffordshire Council will manage its tree resource, detail our policies to guide and improve tree and woodland management and specify what needs to be done to achieve these objectives.

We are determined to make sure that our Tree and Woodland Strategy reflects the needs of South Staffordshire's communities and that's why we are producing this first stage consultation document. We want to hear the views of local people and all relevant organisations and businesses so that we can develop our vision and ensure the longevity of South Staffordshire's tree and woodland resources for the benefit of residents, visitors and the environment.
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INTRODUCTION

Trees and woodlands are a valuable part of South Staffordshire's environment. They have a significant impact on our quality of life, enhancing both urban and rural environments and providing the people of South Staffordshire with a distinctive, valuable and attractive resource.

The benefits that can be gained from having a healthy tree stock are numerous, so it is therefore extremely important to ensure it remains an integral part of the District's distinctive landscape for many years to come.

Once this document has been finalised following consultation, its purpose is to provide a long-term strategy that will ensure well managed, healthy trees and woodlands by setting out the actions necessary in order to achieve this. Further, this strategy will ultimately be a statement of the Council’s priorities in relation to trees and woodlands.

Over the next ten years, delivery against the Action Plan will ensure that the district's trees and woodlands are managed and maintained for the long term benefit of South Staffordshire's residents, visitors and its distinctive environment.
1 A VISION FOR TREES AND WOODLANDS IN SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE

Background

Prior to 3000BC, 85% of the UK was covered with woodland before large areas were cleared for farming. By the end of the 11th Century tree cover had fallen to 15%. It fell as low as 5% by the end of the 19th Century before increasing again to the current national figure. The woodland coverage of South Staffordshire currently amounts to 8.5% of its total land area compared with 7.8% for Staffordshire and 8.4% for England.

Whilst many trees and woodlands are located on private land, there are individual and groups of trees found on the many open spaces within the district's villages that also contribute to the general tree cover in South Staffordshire. These may not always be described as woodland but do nonetheless make a very significant visual contribution to the urban forest and landscape character of the District whilst at the same time providing a number of other community, wildlife and climate benefits.

Over the last twenty years, the values we attach to trees and woodlands have changed. It has become widely recognised that there are significant benefits to maintaining tree cover in both urban and rural areas. Following extensive research, in 2005, The National Urban Forestry Unit published Trees Matter! which details the benefits of trees in urban areas. Although South Staffordshire is a predominantly rural district there are a number of large settlements within which are significant areas of open space that contain woodlands, small groups and individual trees. The benefits of trees are therefore applicable to rural villages as much as they are to major urban areas. Equally, it could be argued that there is a strong case for maintaining and, where appropriate, increasing tree cover across the District as a whole. This strategy also, therefore strongly relates to the South Staffordshire Village Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and, in particular, the references to landscape character.
Why develop a tree and woodland strategy?

It is important that tree cover across South Staffordshire is maintained and increased (where appropriate) over the long-term in order that the benefits trees and woodlands bring can be enjoyed by those that live and work in the District and by those who visit. This Strategy is intended to provide for closer collaboration between the District Council, landowners, other public and private organisations and businesses that have influence on trees and woodlands in South Staffordshire. Only by working in this way will the trees and woodlands in the district be safeguarded and well managed for the benefit of the environment and people alike. Through an action plan that will be developed following consultation on this document, it is envisaged that interests will be brought together to create a more cohesive approach to the management of South Staffordshire's trees and woodlands. As already mentioned, there are clear benefits to increasing tree cover generally and in built-up areas specifically. These are considered in more detail below.

**A more moderate climate**

As well as absorbing carbon dioxide (the main greenhouse gas) and producing oxygen, trees filter, absorb and reduce pollutant gases including ozone, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide. Trees work all year round for us by reducing localised extremes in temperatures – cooling in the summer and warming in the winter. Large leaf canopies catch rainfall, slowing down the water’s progress from sky to ground, thus helping to reduce flash flooding. The shelter and shade from trees can save up to 10% of the energy required to heat and cool nearby buildings. Whatever the causes of climate change, latest scientific evidence has powerfully reinforced the fact that it is by far the greatest threat to our natural environment and social well-being. It has unprecedented implications for biodiversity and landscape character through effect on trees by:

- Greater extremes in temperature fluctuations
- Drought
- Flooding
- Consequent flourishing of tree pests and diseases
The Council will monitor the position and guidance on climate change and take any necessary actions to preserve its existing tree stock and, if appropriate in order to preserve long term tree cover, will consider the planting of non indigenous tree species. This latter course would only be taken if indigenous tree species could not be found to cope with any expected changes in temperature and conditions.

**Healthy living**

Trees release oxygen for us to breathe, filter polluted air, reduce chemical smog formation, shade out harmful solar radiation and provide an attractive, calming setting for recreation. In so doing, trees have a positive effect in reducing the incidences of skin cancer and many stress related illnesses along with providing a sense of well being through softening the urban environment.

**A thriving local economy**

Trees help to create jobs and increase productivity and innovation. A well-treed area encourages inward investment and can increase property values by up to 18%. When planted strategically trees can reduce fossil fuel emissions by reducing fuel costs in the heating and cooling of buildings.

**Stability and reclamation of land**

Tree roots help bind soil particles together and to prevent erosion. Some species can also be used to clean up contaminated land.

**Useful products**

Trees provide a sustainable source of timber for traditional products such as charcoal and garden furniture as well as compost from leaves and woodchip biofuel and the many varieties of fruit.

**Richer and more accessible wildlife**

Trees are vital components of the ecosystems in our villages supporting a diversity of wildlife that people can enjoy close to home.
They are also important habitats for invertibrates, birds and mammals in rural areas located away from the main settlements.

**Enhanced landscape quality**

Trees and woodlands contribute very significantly to the character of the local area by providing a sense of place, long-term stability and a living link with the past, the present and the future.

Trees soften the often hard urban landscape, making it greener and more attractive whilst giving variety of scale, form, colour and shape.

**Sustainable communities**

Communities have the opportunity to play an active part in caring for their local trees and woodlands, which helps build more confidence and shared enjoyment.

The main reasons for developing a Tree and Woodland Strategy are therefore:

- To improve management and maximise the benefits of trees and woodlands;
- To protect and enhance levels of biodiversity and ecological habitats;
- To help create sustainable communities;
- To co-ordinate action and develop partnership working;
- To support national, regional and local policy objectives;
- To contribute to wider Council objectives including health and biodiversity;
- To access more funding opportunities;
- To promote investment in trees and woodlands.

By considering all of these benefits together within one key document that makes the links to other Council and non-council agendas, strategies and plans it will enable a coordinated approach to planning for the future in relation to trees and woodlands.
Scope of the Strategy

The main aim of this strategy is to set out ways to maintain, safeguard and increase the numbers of South Staffordshire’s trees and woodlands where appropriate, based on landscape character considerations and with a primary focus on native species in order to link to the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan (SBAP). It is, however, recognised that in certain circumstances, the planting of non-native trees is appropriate. This will be achieved through an action plan based around four broad key themes, namely:

- Tree and woodland management
- Trees and development
- Tree protection
- Partnerships

It is appropriate that this document links closely to the six themes within the Sustainable Community Strategy. This, along with the above, is explored more fully in Chapter Three. Actions will be developed around these themes that will also make the connections to other relevant Council and non-Council strategies and plans where appropriate.

This Strategy sets out the ways in which its objectives will be achieved over a ten year period

Strategy, Purpose and Vision

The strategy aims to promote the important contribution of both public and privately owned trees in South Staffordshire, and ensure as far as possible that they are safeguarded and sustainably managed for the benefit of the community and the environment. The strategy sets out a vision for trees and woodlands across the District for the next ten years and will be used to:

- Provide a framework in which to manage the Council’s tree stock sustainably
• encourage and influence tree and woodland owners to follow sustainable management practices
• provide policies in relation to trees and woodlands and in particular, to support the Council's Local Development Framework (LDF)
• Set out the basis for decision making in relation to new development where existing trees could potentially be affected
• provide clarity in the form of supplementary planning guidance for anyone who is preparing to submit a planning application where trees may be affected
• safeguard the District's important and veteran trees
• build constructive and appropriate new and maintain existing partnerships for the benefit of the District's trees and woodlands
• promote the important and environmental benefits that trees provide
• promote the planting of native trees
• protect, where appropriate, both public and privately owned trees and woodlands
• encourage the planting and establishment of new trees and woodlands that will enhance biodiversity, local character and landscape quality
• ensure a co-ordinated, co-operative and sustainable approach to the management of all trees and woodlands within the District, encouraging the use of best practice across both the public and private sectors
• develop community participation using tree warden and Friends Group schemes and activities.
2 THE CURRENT PICTURE

Policy context

There are numerous existing national, regional and local policies and strategies that relate to trees and woodlands; all of which are relevant to the preparation of this Tree and Woodland Strategy. In meeting the aims and objectives of the policies and strategies detailed below - through the action plan in this strategy - the vision for trees and woodlands in South Staffordshire can be achieved.

Legislation, National Policies and Strategies

The Town and Country Planning Act 1990
Section 219 of The Act sets out the legislative framework within which the Council makes decisions in relation to trees covered by Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and the making of new TPOs along with the procedure for dealing with trees in conservation areas. The Council determines applications for works to trees protected by TPOs and notifications for trees in conservation areas as laid down in the Act. This also forms the basis for any enforcement action that the Council may take in relation to offences involving protected trees.

A Strategy for England’s Trees, Woods and Forests
In 2007, the Department of Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) published ‘A Strategy for England’s Trees, Woods and Forests’, which highlighted the essential role trees and woodlands play in enhancing people’s quality of life. The Strategy details the following aims:

- Provide, in England, a resource of trees, woods and forests in places where they can contribute most in terms of environmental, economic and social benefits now and for future generations;
- Ensure that existing and newly planted trees, woods and forests are resilient to the impacts of climatic temperature change and also
contribute to the way in which biodiversity and natural resources adjust to a changing climate;

- Protect and enhance the environmental resources of water, soil, air, biodiversity and landscapes (both woodland and non-woodland) and the cultural and amenity values of trees and woodland;
- Increase the contribution that trees, woods and forests make to the quality of life for those living in, working in or visiting England;
- Improve the competitiveness of woodland businesses and promote the development of new or improved markets for sustainable woodland products and ecosystem services where this will deliver identifiable public benefits.

Underlying these aims, the Strategy's guiding principles are:

- The long term sustainable management of trees and woodlands
- Planting the right tree in the right place
- Effective use of public investment
- Synergy with other Government policies

**Trees in Towns 2**

Trees in Towns 2, a study by the Department of Communities and Local Government of Local Authorities’ tree services was published in 2008. It highlights the importance of having a ‘working’ tree strategy and offers guidance on preparation and ensuring its implementation. The key recommendations are:

- The tree strategy should be based on a good knowledge of the existing tree population and the conditions in which it grows
- The process of strategy preparation should have political and community support
- It should be linked to other aspects of the urban environment and other relevant strategies
- It should cover all aspects of the LA’s tree programme and the urban forest, including both public and privately owned trees and woodlands
• Ensure widespread and effective consultation on the draft strategy document
• It should not just include policies towards trees but also an action plan to ensure implementation
• It should be adopted as LA policy
• Ensure regular monitoring and review of the strategy

Regional Policies and Strategies

**West Midlands Forestry Framework**

'Growing Our Future', the West Midlands Forestry Framework (RFF), was published in 2004 and aims to inspire and guide those involved in the management of trees, woodlands and forests in the region to secure the sustainable development of this resource. Supported by evidence in the baseline study *A Growing Resource*, the RFF directly connects to the wider regional agenda, where there are opportunities to improve the quality of life for everyone. The aims and objectives of the RFF are intended to:

• Illustrate how regional woodland cover may evolve over several decades, helping to deliver new woodlands, manage existing ones and to enhancing quality of life in the region;
• Provide a spatial context for the development of woodland and forestry in the region and contribute to urban and rural renaissance through the regional planning process;
• Chart and facilitate an economically viable woodland and forestry sector that is able to deliver the Framework vision and help improve household incomes in rural areas;
• Make clear the relevance of woodland and forestry to people’s everyday needs involving local communities wherever possible;
• See a significant increase in the activity of the woodland and forestry sector and its contribution in urban and rural areas and help achieve relevant Public Service Agreement targets;
• Strengthen urban-rural links and see woodland and forestry more successfully embedded in wider urban and rural agendas, particularly in urban fringe areas;
• Improve understanding of regional woodland and forestry at strategic levels and within regional structures so that the woodland and forestry sector can make an effective contribution to other regional policies, delivery plans, joined-up agendas and actions;
• Illustrate good practice in sustainable development processes by minimising the ecological footprint and by demonstrating: how the woodland and forestry sector can make significant contributions and maximise benefits to health, recreation, recycling, renewable energy, urban and rural regeneration and biodiversity conservation; why health and leisure sectors should engage with and invest in woodland and forestry.

Local Policies and Strategies

South Staffordshire Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) 2008–2020
The SCS sets out the long-term vision for South Staffordshire, based on the aspirations of those who live and work in the district. The SCS is prepared by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), which is made up of a number of agencies working within South Staffordshire. The LSP strives to improve the quality of life for all the district’s residents. There are six key themes within the SCS and all of these can be linked to trees and woodlands:

• Children and Young People
• Community Safety
• Economic Vibrancy
• Environmental Quality
• Health and Wellbeing
• Housing

The links between trees and these themes are explored in Chapter 3.

South Staffordshire Local Development Framework
The Council has taken the decision to include detailed development policies within the LDF Core Strategy. The Core Strategy is a key component of the
LDF and will set out the long-term vision, spatial objectives and core policies to guide the future development of the District. Once adopted, the Core Strategy will replace the saved policies in the Local Plan and Structure Plan. Links between the Tree and Woodland Strategy and the LDF are explored further in Chapter Three.

**Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Structure Plan**

The plan covers the period 1996-2011 and contains a number of saved policies within the Natural and Cultural Assets chapter that relate to trees and woodlands:

- Landscape Protection
- Protected Landscapes
- Important Semi-natural Habitats
- Community Forests
- Tree and Hedgerow Protection
- Protection of Historic Parks and Gardens

These policies will be superseded by policies at the local level where necessary within the LDF.

**South Staffordshire Local Plan**

The Local Plan was adopted in 1996 and there are a number of saved policies in place until the LDF Core Strategy is finalised and adopted. There are three chapters in the Local Plan that contain policies relating to trees and woodlands:

- Conservation and the Built Environment
- Recreation, Open Space and Tourism
- Landscape and Nature Conservation

**South Staffordshire Village Design Guide**

The Village Design Guide is intended to provide a basis to assist in the complementary development of the District by focusing on the built characteristics which help to create the visual unity of the place. It also
recognises the importance of landscape character and the network of green spaces in and around the villages and the contribution these make to local distinctiveness. The document is a supplement to local policies on design to provide detailed, practical advice for all those involved in the development process. There are sections within the Guide that make specific reference to landscape characteristics including trees and woodlands. The Guide therefore assists in underpinning the development control-based objectives of this Tree and Woodland Strategy.

South Staffordshire Open Space Strategy

The Open Space Strategy was adopted by the Council in April 2009. It sets out a vision for the provision, enhancement and management of publicly accessible open spaces within South Staffordshire, regardless of land ownership and will be used to:

• Provide for striking an appropriate balance between new open space provision and the enhancement of existing provision in meeting the needs of local people, now and in the future.
• Guide and inform policy development through the LDF process in relation to the protection, enhancement and accessibility of open spaces
• Provide for the identification of new sites and assessment of the suitability of previously designated sites
• Define the value and role of open space in meeting corporate aims and objectives and in supporting the Sustainable Community Strategy
• Provide clarity and reasonable certainty for developers and landowners in respect of the requirements and expectations in relation to open space provision and contributions associated with the development of land
• Provide for resource allocation that maximises funding to support improvements from internal revenue and capital budgets and external funding sources
• Set in place the right circumstances for voluntary and community groups to participate in open space provision and management e.g. friends groups
• Ensure greater coordination and partnership working between the District Council, Parish Councils, Staffordshire County Council, South Staffordshire Housing Association and other land management agencies in the management of land, based on locally appropriate standards.

Trees and woodlands are an integral part of many of South Staffordshire's open spaces, the Open Space Strategy therefore has close links with the Tree and Woodland Strategy. The Open Space Strategy includes an action plan which makes links to all other relevant strategies, policies and plans. This Tree and Woodland Strategy is therefore an integral part of the overall Open Space Strategy.

**Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan (SBAP)**

Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) are the UK’s response to the 1992 convention on Biodiversity, signed at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit. BAPs focus on habitats and species that are declining and/or require protection. There are many other habitats that may not be subject to any statutory protection or concerted focus of action, that are nonetheless important and valuable in nature conservation terms.

The SBAP has been in place since 1998. It consists of an action plan but is primarily a partnership that works together towards achieving biodiversity targets. The SBAP includes the following habitats and concomitant objectives in relation to trees and woodlands:

• Lowland wood pasture and parkland
  - maintain existing important areas of lowland wood pasture and parkland
  - restore degraded areas of lowland wood pasture and parkland by promoting appropriate management
  - increase the amount of lowland wood pasture and parkland in appropriate areas by expansion

• Native woodland
  - maintain existing areas of native woodland
- contribute to all the UK Woodland Habitat Action Plans that are relevant to Staffordshire
- restore degraded areas of native woodland by promoting appropriate management
- re-create or promote the natural regeneration of native woodland in areas traditionally occupied by this habitat and not currently supporting vegetation of greater importance, in order to expand and link the existing resource

• Wet woodland
  - maintain existing areas of wet woodland where other key habitats would not be compromised
  - restore degraded areas of wet woodland by promoting appropriate management
  - re-create or promote the natural regeneration of wet woodland in areas traditionally occupied by this habitat and not currently supporting vegetation of greater importance, in order to expand and link the existing resource

The Forest of Mercia and the Forest of Mercia Forest Plan

The Forest of Mercia (FOM) is one of ten Community Forests across England set up around 1990. The FOM covers approximately 92 square miles of South Staffordshire and adjoining parts of the West Midlands. It is made up of a partnership between a number of local authorities, Natural England and the Forestry Commission and works to promote tree and woodland based projects across three key themes:

• Education
• Community
• Forestry

The Forest Plan is the means by which the vision for the forest can be converted into a plan of action, interpreting policy and guiding implementation. The Plan is integral to the planning system and links the work undertaken through the Black Country Urban Forest initiative within the
Black Country boroughs to the National Forest set in the rural heartlands of Staffordshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire.

**Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan 2009-2014**

The Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a legal designation and, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW), public bodies have a responsibility to “have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty”.

The Cannock Chase AONB Partnership is responsible for fulfilling the statutory duties under the CROW Act. The Partnership has a duty to prepare and review a Management Plan at least every five years. Members of the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership, local communities, local and regional government organisations and other stakeholders have been involved in reviewing the progress of the previous Management Plan (2004-09) and the publication of the latest Management Plan (2009-14). The Management Plan is the basis for the strategic direction of the conservation and enhancement of the AONB. It does not stand alone but relates to a range of national, regional and local strategic documents such as the Natural England Strategic Direction, the Regional Spatial Strategy and Local Development Frameworks. Annual Action Plans are drawn from the AONB Management Plan for the implementation of projects.

**Current practice**

**Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)/tree in Conservation areas**

The Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (TCPA) places a duty on Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to protect trees and woodlands of significance where they may be under threat of removal. The use of TPOs, conservation areas and planning conditions enables the Council to control the felling and pruning of significant trees by ensuring that the works are necessary and appropriate and that the amenity value of the tree(s) is maintained. Additionally, if appropriate, the replacement of any felled trees can be enforced.
To exercise its powers under the TCPA, and in accordance with Government guidance, the authority uses TPO and conservation area legislation to protect trees.

**Development Control including Section 106 Agreements**

Through the development control process, the Council imposes conditions on planning permissions to ensure that trees considered to be of local significance are protected. Subsequently, these are usually backed up by a TPO. Again, if appropriate, the replacement of any felled trees can be enforced. The planting of new trees can be secured by the imposition of planning conditions. Trees planted as part of new development, even small schemes with perhaps only one or two trees, make an important cumulative contribution to tree cover in the District.

Section 106 Agreements provide a mechanism for securing the planting of new trees and woodlands as part of a developer's planning obligations. The Council has used Section 106 Agreements to good effect to provide new areas of open space that include individual and groups of trees.

**Involvement in the Community Forest**

The Council is an active partner in the Community Forest programme and works closely with the Forest of Mercia team to carry out joint projects. These range from the planting of trees to woodland management and other associated woodland related activities. The Council has, along with other partners signed a Memorandum of Agreement, which is a legal document setting out the partner's roles and responsibilities along with funding and steering arrangements.

The broad aim of the Community Forest programme is to achieve environmental improvements creating beautiful areas rich in wildlife, with associated provisions for access, leisure and education, thereby making towns and villages in those specific areas more attractive places to live and work.
The FoM initiative has an important role to play in the conservation of SBAP habitats. This is achieved by careful integration of existing and new woodlands with other habitats. Further, the FoM will be a key player in the delivery of the vision set out in this Tree and Woodland Strategy.

**Involvement in Cannock Chase AONB**

As with the Forest of Mercia, the Council has in place a Partnership Agreement covering partner's roles and responsibilities in relation to the Cannock Chase AONB. The Council is an active partner in the protection and enhancement of this statutorily designated important landscape and manages its own part of the AONB in accordance with a site management plan that closely links to the broader AONB Management Plan.

Part of the AONB is situated within South Staffordshire and there is therefore a clear link between the AONB Management Plan and the Open Space Strategy, of which, this Tree and Woodland Strategy forms part. Additionally, the AONB is well known for supporting large areas of woodland along with other habitats and it is intended that this document will fit seamlessly with the AONB Management Plan.

**Free Tree Scheme**

The Council has, for a number of years, run a scheme to provide trees free to households in the District. The numbers of trees available each year have been limited due to budgetary constraints but over the period that the initiative has been running, around 11,000 trees have been given away to people for planting in their gardens, thus making a major contribution to increasing tree cover across the district. Whilst the Council has previously funded this initiative it is proposed that in order to continue the free tree scheme should aim to be funded from external sources.

**Tree Wardens**

The Tree Warden Scheme is a national initiative, set up in 1990 by the Tree Council that enables people to play an active role in conserving and enhancing their local trees and woods. South Staffordshire Council has been a member of the Tree Warden scheme since 1996 and co-ordinates the
scheme within the district from the Council offices on behalf of the Tree Council.

Tree Wardens are volunteers, appointed by parish councils or other community organisations, who gather information about their local trees, get involved in local tree matters and encourage local practical projects connected with trees and woods.

The Tree Warden Scheme provides:

• a proven method of working with the community
• a cost effective way of consulting the community about trees
• a volunteer force who can become the eyes, ears and hands for trees
• the ability to empower the community to manage their environment
• a method of establishing links with parish councils and other groups

**Management of open spaces**

The Council proactively seeks opportunities to plant new trees on areas of public open space in order to increase tree cover within the District's settlements and to replenish the tree stock. The latter is particularly important where there are trees of significant age that may be nearing the end of their natural lives. Without this approach, there would be a gradual decline in the number of mature trees within South Staffordshire's villages.

The Council manages its open spaces for biodiversity and encourages a range of habitats that includes trees of all ages from newly planted to veteran. These open spaces are freely accessible to the public.
3  THE WAY FORWARD - ACHIEVING THE VISION

Partnerships

A large number of South Staffordshire’s trees are growing on areas of public open space, which are often in close proximity to where people live or work. However, a very significant contribution to the District's tree cover is made by other trees that are privately owned or are in the ownership of other public bodies.

Improvements to the management of both public and privately owned trees will require the involvement and co-operation of different departments within the Council as well as parish councils, housing associations, agencies such as the Forestry Commission and British Waterways and other public and private landowners.

The main owners of trees and woodlands in South Staffordshire are listed (in no particular order) below:

- South Staffordshire Council (responsibility within 3 main service areas)
  - Architectural and Landscape Services
  - Leisure and Community Services
  - Commercial Development Services
- Staffordshire County Council
  - Highways
  - Education (Children and Lifelong Learning Directorate)
- Parish Councils
- South Staffordshire Housing Association and other Housing Associations
- The Forestry Commission
- The Woodland Trust
- The National Trust
- Staffordshire Wildlife Trust
- Private Landowners
Landowners have an impact on the way trees are managed within their own policies and through the requirements of the Forestry Acts and the policies of the Forestry Commission. A joint approach to management agreed between the different owners would achieve the best results for the benefit of all who live and work in, and for those who pass through, South Staffordshire. Through this Strategy, major landowners will be encouraged to work together to share knowledge and examples of good practice in respect of the management of trees and woodlands.

**Draft Priorities**

**P1** The Council will seek to expand existing woodland areas, encourage the planting of trees and examine the potential for creating new woodlands through planting on its own land and/or by working in partnership with other landowners and the Forestry Commission.

**P2** The Council will maintain its partnerships with The Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Forest of Mercia Community Forest.

**P3** New partnerships will be sought that contribute to the aims of this Strategy.

**P4** The Council will promote tree and woodland initiatives through the Local Strategic Partnership where appropriate.

**The Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS)**

The Tree and Woodland Strategy provides the opportunity to propose measures and develop actions around the six themes of the Sustainable Community Strategy and these are set out below.

**Trees, woodlands and Children/Young People**

Children and young people can gain enormous benefit from interaction with trees and woodland. There are both formal and non-formal educational benefits to be gained from encouraging children and young people to explore their local woodlands and open spaces. Trees and woodlands can be
considered as natural play areas and provide children and young people with opportunities to develop their physical skills and a degree of independence in their informal learning, whilst at the same time interacting with the natural environment. Additionally, trees and woodlands can be used as an 'outdoor classroom', supporting most aspects of the formal curriculum at all key stages. Involving children and young people from an early age with trees and woodlands helps instil a sense of care for the natural environment.

**Draft Priorities**

**SCS1** Opportunities will be sought for engaging children and young people in the management and improvement of woodlands and in the planting of new trees.

**SCS2** The Council, through its appropriate partner organisations, will seek to reduce vandalism to trees and woodlands by increasing environmental awareness in schools.

**Trees, woodlands and Community Safety**

The ways in which trees on open spaces and publicly accessible woodlands are managed has an impact on perceptions of those who use these sites in respect of safety. Badly managed woodlands, in particular, can feel oppressive through being dark and densely vegetated. It is therefore important that publicly accessible woodlands are managed in a way that creates safe feeling environments to encourage their use. Increased use leads to less anti-social behaviour.

Management of woodlands should aim to deal with anti-social behaviour, this would require a coordinated approach from a number of service areas within the Council and partnership working with other landowners who allow public access to their sites.
Draft Priorities

**SCS3** The Council will ensure it meets its legal obligations to maintain the safety of people and property in relation to its trees and woodlands whilst, as far as possible, maintaining and improving diverse wildlife habitats.

Trees, woodlands and Environmental Quality
Trees and woodlands create healthier places to live and support a variety of wildlife habitats, making a very significant contribution to biodiversity and, in particular, targets in the SBAP. Linked to health, trees clean the air by filtering fine particulates associated with vehicle and factory emissions. In certain circumstances, trees can also be used as a method for cleaning up contaminated land where sites are proposed for improvement and or development over the longer term. Additionally, increasing tree cover in built-up areas significantly helps to reduce flash flooding by slowing storm water run off.

Draft Priorities

**SCS4** The Council will ensure that every opportunity is taken to establish new trees and expand and develop new woodlands on appropriate sites in the district with a primary focus on native tree planting.

**SCS5** The Council will aim to provide a sustainable, high quality tree population and will engage with other landowners as appropriate.

**SCS6** As far as possible, the Council will plant trees grown from locally collected seed provenance.

**SCS7** The Council will seek to create a diverse and appropriate tree population by:

(a) giving careful consideration to the selection of tree species; and

(b) increasing the diversity of tree species in planting schemes to prevent the development of monocultures.
Trees, woodlands and Economic Vibrancy

Trees and, in particular, woodlands help support the local economy by the production of wood products, providing the basis for new business ventures and supporting existing businesses to diversify through sustainable wood product development such as wood chip pellets for wood fired heating systems.

The major woodland sites in the District are also a focus for tourism, which in conjunction with other destinations in South Staffordshire assist in supporting the local economy.

Draft Priorities

SCS8 The Council will work to promote its major woodland sites and work with other landowners and businesses to encourage tourism and to support the woodland economy.

SCS9 The Council will encourage landowners to diversify towards a woodland economy where viable and where site locations are considered to be appropriate.

Trees, woodlands and Health/Wellbeing

As already mentioned, more urban trees mean cleaner air. By providing shade in our open spaces, and woodlands, trees play a part in helping to reduce incidences of skin cancer. Additionally trees have an important role to play in reducing stress. Research has shown that those who arrive at work having travelled through a well-treed environment arrive feeling less stressed than those who have not. Perhaps most significantly, research has clearly demonstrated a link between trees and recovery from illness, it has been demonstrated that hospital patients with a view of trees recover from surgery more quickly (Ulrich, R. 1984), which helps to reduce pressure on the National Health Service.
**Draft Priorities**

**SCS10** The Council will seek to work in partnership with healthcare professionals in order to exploit the health benefits of trees and woodlands.

**SCS11** The Council will promote tree and woodland-based activities as part of people's health and wellbeing.

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**Trees, woodlands and Housing**

Tree belts and woodlands help to create shelter from the elements and in doing so lessen energy consumption by reducing heating bills in winter and helping to keep properties cooler in summer. It has been shown that property values can be up to 18% higher in well-treed areas.

Trees are an important factor in the places where people live and provide a sense of scale, visual interest, and help to 'soften' the hard urban landscape. Used appropriately, trees are a vital component within new developments and are valuable additions to existing settlements.

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**Draft Priorities**

**SCS12** The Council will seek to ensure that trees are included in landscape scheme submissions on any new developments and for schemes associated with the provision of new open space.

**SCS13** Where appropriate, planning obligations will be used to provide for tree planting on existing open spaces, particularly where it is impractical to provide for significant numbers of trees within smaller developments.

**SCS14** The Council will expect landscape schemes as part of any new development to have regard to any statutorily designated landscapes through appropriate tree and woodland planting that reflect the special qualities of those places.
**Forest of Mercia**

The Forest of Mercia Community Forest has a key role to play in the planting and management of trees and woodlands along with providing opportunities for the local community to get involved in woodland-based activities. The FoM is also a strong link between trees, woodlands and lifelong learning and other organisations.

The FoM is also well-placed to be a co-ordinator and project funding lead in relation to The Big Tree Plant initiative that was launched recently by the government. This initiative is detailed further in the *Community involvement* section.

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**Cannock Chase AONB**

Shoal Hill Common, between Penkridge and Huntington is located within the AONB. The site is part woodland and part lowland heath, both of which support important and different habitats. Within the AONB, policies have been developed through a management plan required by national legislation. The plan has been prepared by a Partnership of the relevant local authorities, the Forestry Commission and Natural England. It is therefore important that any proposed policies in this Tree and Woodland Strategy align with the Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan 2009-2014 and subsequent plan reviews.

Part of Cannock Chase AONB is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). SACs are areas which have been given special protection under the European Union’s Habitats Directive. They provide increased protection to a variety of wild animals, plants and habitats and are a vital part of global efforts to conserve the world’s biodiversity. New housing development over a certain size threshold will be required to provide mitigation for the effect on
the SAC arising from that development. This should include the planting of trees and the creation of new publicly accessible woodlands where appropriate.

Draft Priorities

| AONB1 | The Council will maintain its partner role in the Cannock Chase AONB through a Partnership Agreement. |
| AONB2 | In any proposals the Council may bring forward in relation to tree and woodland initiatives, regard will be had to the special qualities of the Cannock Chase AONB and the proposals will accord with the prevailing AONB Management Plan. |

Community involvement

Engaging the community is essential in ensuring the long-term aims and objectives of this strategy are achieved. Perhaps the most fundamental issue is the perception people have of treed open spaces and woodlands and how they use them. This encompasses recreational, educational and health and wellbeing uses.

It is envisaged that through the action plan that will eventually form part of this strategy, information will be gathered in relation to people's views, use and perception of woodland sites and trees in general. This will help to inform the approach the Council and other organisations take to the management of woodlands in the district.

Following this it will be important to fully engage the community in ensuring the widest possible support for any proposals in relation to trees and woodlands.

To provide a focus for community action, the government has launched a national tree planting campaign to be known as The Big Tree Plant. This will be a 'Big Society' initiative, aiming to bring together local government, the private sector and civil society to involve communities and increase the number of trees planted in, mainly, urban areas throughout England.
Draft Policies

CI1  The Council will seek to engage community support for tree and woodland related initiatives through establishing schemes that involve the public more directly with trees in their neighbourhood and by giving support to tree-related community initiatives.

CI2  The Council will endeavour to involve the community by consulting residents, parish councils, Tree Wardens and other interested parties on proposed large-scale tree works, allowing time for comments to be received and considered where they are conducive to good tree care and do not hinder the abatement of a hazard or nuisance.

CI3  The Council will engage fully in playing its part in The Big Tree Plan, working closely with the FoM and Tree Wardens to engage local communities in the initiative.

Tree and woodland management

Management of Woodlands

It is important that South Staffordshire Council manages its existing woodlands in a sustainable manner to maximise the benefits for local people. Without maintenance being carried out woodlands can deteriorate. Similarly, new plantations can become overcrowded with dense, closed canopies as trees grow and compete for light, (high forest).

The result of this high forest is dense shade below leading to a reduction of diversity and potentially to a reduced ground and shrub layer. The Council will carefully tailor management plans for each woodland site to ensure its prolonged health and biodiversity. Where necessary and appropriate the Council will seek relevant advice, grants and/or felling licences from the Forestry Commission.

The Council owns a number of mature woodlands such as Baggeridge Country Park near Wombourne and Smiths Rough near Perton. It also manages Shoal
Hill Common near Huntington on behalf of the Shoal Hill Joint Management Committee.

Each woodland is managed to achieve different objectives. Older mature areas are managed to protect and enhance vulnerable wildlife habitats, maintain biodiversity and public access/safety. Many of the recently planted areas are designed to create attractive surroundings to new development areas whilst at the same time creating wildlife corridors.

There are other mature woodlands in the District that are owned and/or managed by other Councils, The Woodland Trust (eg Bunkers Hill Wood) or private estates/individuals (eg The Million near Kinver and Horsemoor Wood near Penkridge).

The Woodland Trust has many years of experience in woodland management and ensures all their areas are open and free to access for the general public. The Council will seek to build on its past relationship with the Trust, assisting where possible in effective management of its woodlands.

**Management of Trees on Open Spaces**

The Council has in place a Tree Management System that provides for regular inspections of trees at appropriate intervals and for the identification of any work that may be required. The benefits of this are two-fold. Firstly, it assists in ensuring trees are as safe as possible whilst bearing in mind that they are living organisms and cannot, therefore, be guaranteed 100% safe. Secondly any necessary work required to trees such as pruning or pollarding will be carried out with the aim of securing the tree's long-term retention.

**Draft Priorities**

**TWM1** The Council will ensure that the highest possible standards of tree work and management are in keeping with best practice and are carried out to relevant British Standards.
Formative pruning of young trees will be carried out to establish a well framed crown with a dominant leader in order to reduce the need for future, potentially negative, ad-hoc reactive maintenance that could be detrimental to the long term health and vigour of the tree.

The Council will not carry out pruning or felling of trees to alleviate daylight or television reception problems unless it is clear that pruning would be in the best interests of the tree or in the case of felling, for reasons of safety.

Where necessary, the Council will address the problem of an ageing tree population through development and implementation of phased replacement planting programmes. This may result in the felling of trees where they have been assessed as being in the advanced stages of decline.

The Council will not fell trees on its land unless there are sound arboricultural or site management reasons.

The Council will promote the importance of the management, care and value of trees to increase public awareness.

Tree protection

Trees and development

The most common threats to trees and a common reason for making a TPO is the proposed development of land upon which trees are growing. Plans are often submitted showing trees that are in conflict with the proposals, or in poor condition, making retention out of the question. A tree may take a century to reach maturity but it can be irreparably damaged or felled in only a few minutes. Such damage is often unwittingly caused because of a failure to appreciate the vulnerability of trees, particularly the roots and how easily they can be damaged.
To avoid such problems and to ensure a harmonious relationship between trees and structures, careful planning and expert advice is needed on their position within new developments and their relationship to new buildings. It is important for trees to be considered at the earliest stages of any proposal. Ideally, pre-planning site discussions involving all parties, including the Council, should take place.

Where there are trees on or adjacent to a site detailed information as set out in chapters 4 to 9 (inclusive) of British Standard 5837, ‘Trees in relation to construction – recommendations’ will need to be submitted to the Council with any planning application (where 2 or more dwellings are concerned or for any industrial development). This includes, land and tree surveys, a tree constraints plan, arboricultural implications assessment, arboricultural method statement and tree protection plan and details.

Failure to submit the required information with a planning application may result in non-validation or delays in the consideration and decision making process.

Developers will be expected to comply with conditions and agreed working methods. If this is not the case, compliance will be enforced through the planning process as appropriate.

Protection of trees is not only achieved through the statutory process. A large number of trees have been saved from inappropriate pruning or felling due to advice given by Council Officers. This advice is given free of charge and is important in contributing to the protection of trees.

Separate specific, but informal guidance will be produced that explains the above in more detail and which will be of use to developers and owners of trees when making decisions about the retention of trees and/or any proposed tree work. Further, many of the policies within this document are related to the spatial vision for the District set out in the LDF. In order to ensure that trees and woodlands are safeguarded within the planning
process, consideration will therefore be given to the preparation of a specific supplementary planning document covering trees and woodlands.

### Draft Priorities

**TD1** All planning applications submitted to the Council must clearly identify the positions and details of trees on the development site and any trees adjacent to it. Details will include a full tree survey, arboricultural impact assessment and arboricultural method statements.

### Tree preservation Orders (TPOs)

The Council will consider protecting trees and woodlands of high amenity value, which may be under threat from development (or other) pressures, by the making of a TPO. Trees growing within conservation areas are automatically protected as 6 weeks notification is required to be given to the Council prior to any works being carried out. This enables the Council to consider if the works are appropriate and whether a TPO should be made.

To assess the 'amenity value' of trees for inclusion in Tree Preservation Orders, an Amenity Evaluation Checklist will be used. The Checklist will ensure that there is a consistent and structured approach to amenity evaluation, providing a transparent approach to tree protection.

### Draft Priorities

**TP1** The Council will exercise its powers, where appropriate, under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 for the making of Tree Preservation Orders. The Council will generally only protect trees that are in good health and structurally sound. Consideration will be given to protecting other trees, such as veterans, that may not be in the best of health or contain cavities and decay where they are not a risk to the public and are a valuable wildlife habitat.

**TP2** The Council will resist the unnecessary removal or pruning of trees unless supported by sound arboricultural reasons.
**TP3** The Council will seek to deter damage to its tree stock by, where appropriate, prosecuting anyone found damaging Council-owned trees.

**TP4** For the purposes of consistency, effectiveness, openness and transparency, the Council will base assessments of tree amenity value through use of a checklist.

Following consultation on this Draft Strategy, a series of actions will be developed around each of the above themes in order to ensure the policies are put into practice. It is envisaged the actions will developed to cover both strategic and operational levels of working. This approach will ensure that there is a cascade from broad policy decisions down to more specific site and community work. Close partnership working with relevant service areas within the Council and all other agencies will be required to ensure that the actions are delivered.
4 THE NEXT STEPS - CONSULTATION

The Council is committed to seeking the views of local communities and other stakeholders in the development of this Tree and Woodland Strategy. This document has therefore been prepared to a 'first draft for consultation' stage and it is key to the strategy’s ultimate success, that those with an interest can openly share their opinions with the Council. The Council is therefore seeking your views on this Draft Strategy.

The preparation of the Tree and Woodland Strategy includes the development of a prioritised Action Plan that will inform funding and operational management decisions. The overall aim of the Action Plan is to ensure that the Council and its partners meet the needs and aspirations of local communities, thus achieving the vision outlined in Chapter One.

The Action Plan will be worked up following consultation on this document and will identify strategic and operational work that will contribute to achieving the Vision along with clear lines of responsibility and timescales up to 2020.

Please help us make this a workable Tree and Woodland Strategy by answering the following questions.

Q1. Have we identified the main reasons for developing a Tree and Woodland strategy?

Q2. Do you agree with the vision for trees and woodlands in South Staffordshire set out in Chapter One?

Q3. Are there any other issues that you consider have impact on South Staffordshire's trees and woodlands?

Q4. Do you agree that the Tree and Woodland Strategy should develop actions at both the strategic and operational level?
Q5. Do you agree with the Council's approach in relation to the six themes of the Sustainable Community Strategy?

Q6. Are there any other issues that could be addressed through themes within the Sustainable Community Strategy?

Q7. Do you agree with the other themes set out in Chapter Three?

Q8. Do you agree with the Council's approach to implementing the Tree and Woodland Strategy?

Q9. Do you have any comments on the Draft Priorities set out in Chapter Three?

Q10. Do you consider the vision for trees and woodlands in South Staffordshire to be achievable through the mechanisms proposed in Chapter Three?

In addition to answering the specific questions, we are also keen to receive any other comments you wish to make on this Draft Strategy.

The consultation on this document is scheduled to run until the end of January 2010. Once the consultation period has ended and the Council has collated all the responses, amendments will be made to produce the final published strategy. It is intended that this will be launched at the beginning of April 2011.

**How to comment**

To comment on the Consultation Draft Open Space Strategy, please write to:

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Alternatively you can comment by e-mail at
landscapeplanning@sstaffs.gov.uk or by telephone on 01902 696538