

Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 21st March 2024

Wards: All

Subject: LBM Phase 1 Tree Strategy Update 2023-24

Lead Director: Dan Jones Executive Director Environment, Civic Pride and Environment and Regeneration.

Lead member: Cllr Natasha Irons Lead Member Environment, Civic Pride and Environment and Regeneration.

Contact officer: Andrew Kauffman Head of Parks Services Merton.

Recommendations:

1. Members are asked to note the content of the 2^{no} 3 Monthly Review's of the Phase 1 Tree Strategy [Tree strategy | Merton Council](#) formally adopted by Merton Council on 19th June 2023.

Appendix 1: 1st 3 Monthly Review (July-September 2023)

Appendix 2: 2nd 3 Monthly Review (October – December 2023)

2. Members are asked to note that Phase 2 Tree Strategy for the Management of Trees on Private Land which is currently in the scoping phase with the Council's Planning Department.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The report is intended to provide members with an update on the Tree Strategy Action Plan delivery now that we are coming up to the end of the 3rd 3 monthly review and highlight progress to date and a look ahead to funded projects in 2024-25
- 1.2. The report will also provide an update on the Phase 2 Tree Strategy for Merton which covers trees on private land which is currently in the scoping phase and siting with LBM Planning Team.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. Please note **Appendix 1** attached below which outlines the **Phase 1 Tree Strategy** progress made by the council between **July-September 2023** across the 4 main policy areas of the Tree Strategy
- 2.2. **Tree Research (TR)**

The initial 3 month period between July-September 2023 on the Tree Research elements of the Tree Strategy saw the final phase of a year long pro-active tree inspections program of the boroughs Highway and School tree assets. Which gives the council a greater understanding of the composition and characteristics of the

boroughs Highway and School tree assets and allowed the council arboriculture team to plan its program of Planned Tree Works

2.3. Tree Management and Maintenance (TMM)

The initial 3 month period between July-September 2023 on the Tree Management and Maintenance Policy and its key aspects **Managing Risk** and **Tree Works Packaging** saw the boroughs highways tree officers build a structured planned tree works program for Winter 23 – Spring 24 working with Barkland Tree Specialists the councils term tree contractors who commenced a 3 year term contract in November 2022.

In line with **TMM10 Communication and Advice on Tree Works**. Under the terms of **The Environment Act (2021)** imposes a duty on local authorities to consult on the felling of street trees. This duty to consult is intended to ensure that members of the public are appropriately consulted on the felling of street trees. During this period the council established a Planned Tree Works page on its website see link below. As well as developing Planned Tree Works calling cards and Planned Tree Works Signage infrastructure with its term contractor Barkland Tree Specialists

Establish Planned Tree Works Page

[Planned tree works : Overview | Merton Council](#)

Increase communication on Planned Tree Works

Signing out roads / Planned Tree Works Leaflets / Improved KPI Performance

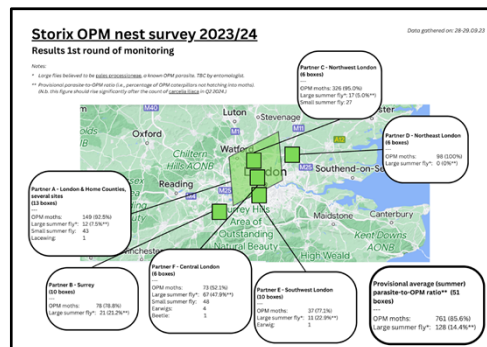


IMAGES: Signed Up Street / Calling Cards / Improved KPI Performance

2.4. Tree Protection (TP)

The initial 3 month period between July-September 2023 on the Tree Protection policy saw the councils arboriculture team working with colleagues in Highways and service providers from IdverdeUK and FMConways to review standard operating procedures for contractors working on or around trees to ensure the operational risks to the tree in line with TPR7

In line with **TPR6 Protecting our Trees from Pest and Pathogens** the boroughs arboriculture team worked with the LTOA London Tree Officers Association and actively took part in Field Trails of Oak Processionary Moth Biological Control with OPM nests taken from Mitcham Common and Morley Park and taken to trial locations in Hampstead Heath.



IMAGES: Storix Sustainable OPM Management System LTOA Project

2.5. Enhancement and Optimisation (EO)

The initial 3 month period between July-September 2023 on the Enhancement and Optimisation of our Tree Stock saw the commencement of some enhanced maintenance operations for Veteran Park Trees in a number of Merton Parks including the commencement of Air Spading operations around the root zones of Veteran trees within Cannizaro Park linked to NEW Green Funding for Cannizaro Park working with the Friends of Cannizaro Park to achieve Green Flag Status for the park in 2023-24.

During this period the council commenced a partnership contract with Trees for Streets to encourage local residents, organisations and businesses to sponsor trees in Merton. In year 1 the council received over 80 sponsorship requests with planned planting set to commence in Spring 2024.

[Let's fill Merton with trees - Trees for Streets](#)

The council also developed a further Community Tree Planting partnership project with **Trees for Cities** at Morden Park Lower Field to build upon the expansion of the tree belt around Morden Park that started in 2021-22 with the Urban Tree Challenge Community Planting even.

- Merton Council Instagram Page [Insta](#)
- Merton Council Website [Press release](#)

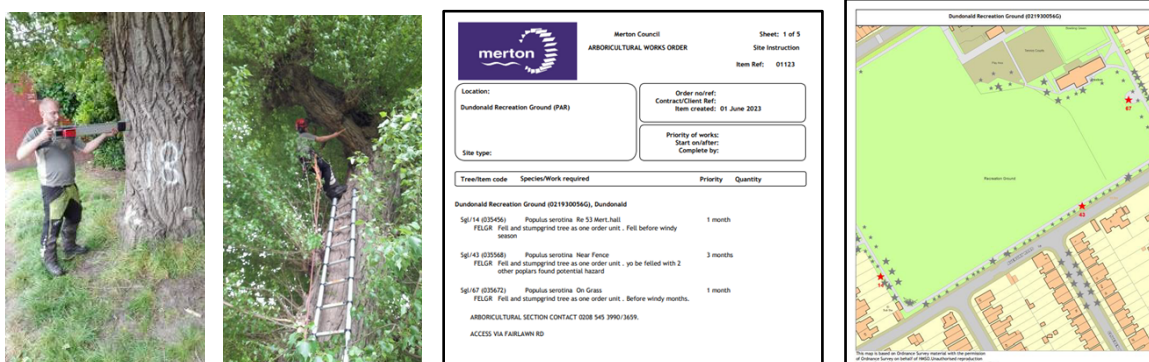


IMAGES: ATS Specialist Contractors Air Spading Tree Root Zones and Topping up with Perlite and Green Flag flying in Cannizaro

2.6. Please note **Appendix 2** attached below which outlines the **Phase 1 Tree Strategy** progress made by the council between **October- December 2023**

- **Tree Research (TR)**

During the 2nd 3 month period between October and December 2023 on the Tree Research element of the Tree Strategy the council's existing 3 arboriculture inspectors continue cyclical inspections and recording data on the councils Tree Management Software generating 1500 NEW Inspections per month across both Highways and Parks assets, managing risk and generating future tree works packages.



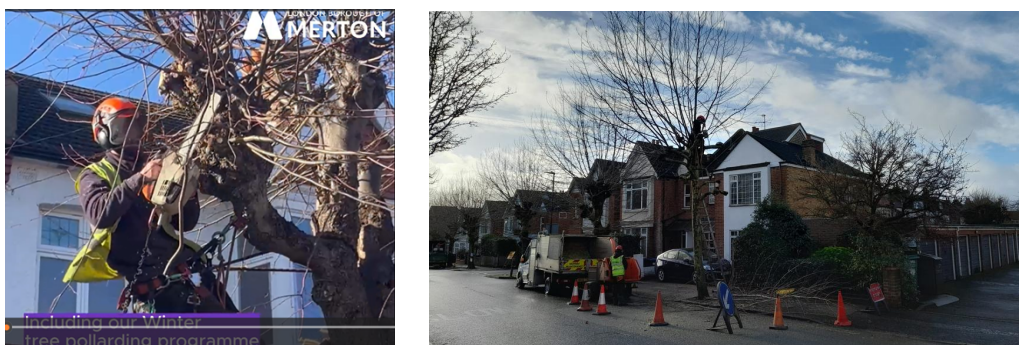
IMAGES: Resistograph surveys in Highways and Parks locations

- **Tree Management and Maintenance**

During the 2nd 3 month period between October and December 2023 on the Tree Management and Maintenance element of the Tree Strategy the council commenced its Winter 23 Spring 24 Pollarding Cycle.

Linked to experience of Pollarding operation from 22-23 season and the problem of residential parking the team adopted doing these tasks under traffic works orders working with colleagues in councils Highways, Parking Enforcement and Communications Team under **TMM10 Communication and Advice on Tree Works** producing a information video for the general public about the pollarding operation, as well as providing monthly updates on the councils Facebook social media channels as well as ward-specific geo-targeted communications using Nextdoor posts linked to targeted Traffic Works Orders

- [Tree works \(Aragon Road\) Targeted Nextdoor post](#)
- [Tree works \(Dudley Drive\) Targeted Nextdoor post](#)
- [Tree works \(Lower Downs\) Targeted Nextdoor post](#)



IMAGES: Pollarding Video and Imagery of Pollarded Streets

- **Tree Protection**

During the 2nd 3 month period between October and December 2023 the council arboriculture team worked with colleagues in Highways on a range of footway and carriageway improvement schemes which incorporated NEW tree planting opportunities including schemes at Milner Road, Cambridge Road and Martin Way with greater focus on the creation of robust and sustainable tree pits to give all NEW trees the greatest start and support the initial 3 years to establishment.

- **Enhancement and Optimisation**

During the 2nd 3 month period between October and December 2023 on the Enhancement and Optimisation of Merton's tree stock element of the Tree Strategy the council secured funding from DEFRA linked to national Biodiversity Net Gain mandatory from 12th February 2024 across England under [Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 \(as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021\)](#). During this period surveys were conducted at the below Merton Nature Reserves which are currently under review with council Biodiversity Net Gain working group before being published on the council website

- Merton Green Walk
- Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Fields
- Cherry Wood Nature Reserve

The councils arboriculture team also commenced Phase 2 Tree Safety, Planting and Habitat Creation project on the Wandle Trail between Plough Lane and Weir Road, under this scheme a further 41 standard trees were planted as well as bird and bat boxes placed in existing tree canopy along the trail and various habitat creation projects including logaries, brash piles and Hibernaculum's were created along the Wandle Trail



IMAGES: RSPB Site Surveys with Park Friends

2.7. Please note below the progress made so far between **January-March 2024** as we approach the end of the 3rd 3 Monthly Review of the Phase 1 Tree Strategy for the management of trees on council land.

- **Tree Research (TR)**

Council Arboriculture Officer continue to inspect 1500 Highways and Park Tree assets in line with cyclical re-inspection cycle using data to update Tree Risk Management data and prepare planned and ad hoc works packages

Linked to the councils SLA with Merton Schools the councils arboriculture team are on the final phase of a year long project Inspecting, Preparing works package and delivery of all school arboriculture works borough wide at all SLA Schools

Tree Management System data indicates that the borough has 2750 vacant tree pits and this data has been used to prepare a Capital Growth Bid for Street Tree Replacements to increase the annual number for 250 to 500 replacement trees as well as seek alternative funding through DEFRA, Mayor of London as well as promote the Street Tree Sponsorship Program [Sponsor a street tree | Merton Council](#)

Councils Arboriculture Officer prepare hand over report for colleagues in LBM Planning Directorate to pursue the Phase 2 Tree Strategy as outlined in Section 2.2 of the Phase 1 Tree Strategy [1110.64_TreeStrategy_low_res_FINAL.pdf \(merton.gov.uk\)](#)

Phase 2 Tree Strategy Shall deal with more wide-reaching issues relating to Merton's Treescape or 'Urban Forest' – in other words, all the trees in Merton, whether publicly or privately owned – and shall aim to optimise tree benefits throughout the borough.

- **Tree Management and Maintenance (TMM)**

Term contractors Barkland Tree Specialists are currently 77% through the priority 2023-24 pollarding program and completed 100% of Winter Basal and Epicormic Works during this period to date.

- **Tree Protection (TPR)**

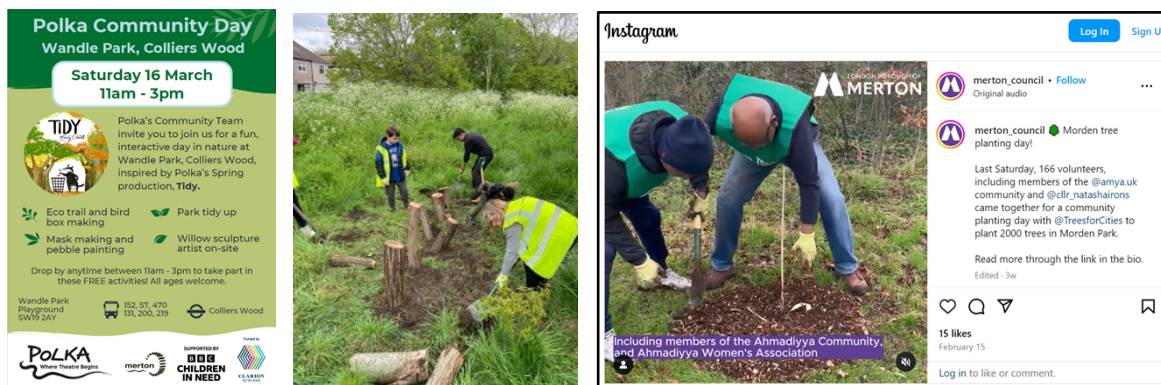
The councils arboriculture team continue to offer advise on suitable tree protection zoning around trees linked to statutory undertakers and developers working on borough land to carry out Civils Works. Working with colleagues from Greenspaces a community bursary was established with Network Rail who required to establish a compound at Figges Marsh while carrying out a Step Free Access project in Tooting Station with £35K ring fenced for improvements once the site is demobilised and reinstated.

- **Enhancement and Optimisation (EO)**

A number of Community Planting events have happened during the period including Trees for Cities community planting at Morden Park (Lower Field) 10th February 2024 with over 120 local volunteers getting involved including Friends, Tree Wardens, Faith groups from Hindu and Muslim Faiths and Sports Groups with 2000 whips planted and 50no Oak Trees grown on from Acorns harvested from local veteran Oak Trees in Morden and Wimbledon.

Additional planting events have also been held by Friends of Morley Park, Friends of the Earth Merton at Morden Park, Friends of Holland Gardens, Friends of Cottenham Park, Friends of Morden Rec.

The council have worked with Polka Theatre linked to its theatre production TIDY and will be delivering a litter pick and habitat creation project at Wandle Nature Park on the 16th March 2024.



IMAGES: Polka Theatre Tidy Event / Wandle Habitat Creation / Trees for Cities Morden Park

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. As this is a performance review of the councils Phase 1 Action Plan progress the council has made on the recently adopted strategy, alternative options have not been considered

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. None for the purposes of this report

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. None for the purposes of this report

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. Phase 1 Action Plan is being delivered within the current council Highways and Park Tree Revenue and Capital Budgets as well as 2023-27 Capital Bids.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. None for the purposes of this report

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. None for the purposes of this report

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None for the purposes of this report

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. None for the purposes of this report

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

Appendix 1: 1st 3 Monthly Review (July-September 2023)

Appendix 2: 2nd 3 Monthly Review (October – December 2023)

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1. Phase 1 Tree Strategy Adoption 19th June 2023 - [Committee report \(merton.gov.uk\)](https://merton.gov.uk)
- 12.2. Phase 1 Tree Strategy - [1110.64_TreeStrategy_low_res_FINAL.pdf \(merton.gov.uk\)](#)

Department Approval	Name of Officer	Date of Comments
Legal		
Finance		
Executive Director		
Cabinet Member		