



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 3 March 2026

Report of Councillor Rhys Baker,
Cabinet Member for Environment and
Waste

Strategy for Allocation of Tree Planting Resources

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

To set out, in line with the objectives of the South Kesteven Tree and Woodland Strategy, the Council's current approach to allocating resources for tree planting, explaining the principles that will guide delivery, the financial constraints that shape annual planting programmes, and the method used to assess whether the distribution of planting activity aligns with areas of greatest need.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

1. Note the considerations determining how resources are managed for the Council's internal tree planting schemes.
2. Endorse the strategic approach to tree planting outlined in this paper.

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	Sustainable South Kesteven
Which wards are impacted?	(All Wards);

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

- 1.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report, but it does contain the methodology for how the existing budget provision will be spent. Included within the 2026/27 budget proposal, recurring growth items for both tree planting and tree maintenance are being considered for approval to ensure sufficient budget provision is in place to support the ongoing activities of the Tree and Woodland Strategy.

Completed by: David Scott – Assistant Director of Resources and Deputy s151 Officer

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 There are no significant legal and governance implications. If specific planting projects met certain financial thresholds, they would need to be approved in line with the Scheme of Delegation, Contract Procedure Rules or Financial Regulations at Part 3 of the Constitution.

Completed by: James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager

Climate Change

- 1.3 By prioritising areas with low baseline tree canopy cover, this strategy supports climate resilience. The emphasis on tree establishment and post-planting maintenance is particularly welcomed, as this maximises long-term carbon sequestration, urban cooling and biodiversity benefits, rather than focusing solely on planting numbers.

Completed by: Serena Brown, Sustainability and Climate Change Manager

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1. The South Kesteven Tree and Woodland Strategy (The 'T&W') sets the overarching framework for how trees and woodlands should be protected, enhanced and expanded across the district. A core objective of the T&W is to increase overall tree canopy cover, of which tree planting is a key delivery mechanism. The T&W also emphasises the importance of environmental justice and equity, recognising that access to the benefits of trees should be improved in areas where canopy cover is lowest and community need is greatest. In addition, the T&W makes clear that successful tree establishment, rather than planting numbers alone, is essential if long-term canopy gains are to be achieved. While the T&W provides strategic direction, it does not set out in detail how annual planting budgets should be allocated or prioritised between locations. A planting strategy, sitting beneath the T&W, is therefore required to provide a practical, transparent framework for deciding how limited planting resources are deployed in a way that supports its objectives.
- 2.2. This paper has been submitted for consideration by the Committee prior to the confirmation of the planting budget by Full Council on 26th February 2026. However, the Strategy does not seek to commit the Council to a specific level of expenditure; rather, it establishes a clear, evidence-based framework for prioritising locations, communities and types of intervention once resources are allocated. Regardless of the eventual scale of funding approved, the same prioritisation principles would apply. Agreeing the Strategy at this stage ensures that, following budget approval, any investment can be deployed efficiently, transparently and in alignment with the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy, without delay.

Scope and Term of the Planting Strategy

- 2.3. The strategy applies to amenity tree planting delivered or funded directly by the Council using its own budgets, including the costs of planting, establishment and early maintenance. It does not prescribe how external funding sources are to be allocated.
- 2.4. Opportunities to deliver additional tree planting through grant funding, public-private partnerships, third-sector collaboration or in-kind contributions will be considered on a case-by-case basis and are not governed by this allocation framework. Such opportunities are often site-specific or funding-led and may not align precisely with the prioritisation method set out in this strategy.
- 2.5. This strategy will be reviewed every three years, or sooner if circumstances change significantly. The review will consider planting site availability, costs of planting and maintenance, and the effectiveness of delivery against the Tree Planting Priority Index (TPPI), rather than relying on new canopy cover data, which is not expected to be available frequently.

General principles

2.6. Priority use of council-owned land

SKDC currently has significant capacity to deliver tree planting on land that it owns and manages. As a general rule, internal resources will be used to plant trees on Council-owned land first, as this offers the greatest level of control over site selection, planting standards and long-term management.

Alternative delivery models, such as direct funding of planting on parish council land or partnership working with third parties, will only be considered once opportunities on Council-owned land become limited or overly restrictive.

2.7. Focus on tree establishment rather than tree planting

The Tree and Woodland Strategy emphasises that planting a tree is only the first step; the long-term benefits of trees depend on successful establishment.

It is considered good practice for newly planted trees to be placed on a young tree maintenance programme for at least two to three years, including watering, weeding and corrective maintenance. For this reason, SKDC planting schemes should also cover the projected full cost of post-planting maintenance for a minimum of three years. This ensures that planting activity leads to lasting canopy cover rather than short-term planting numbers.

2.8. Replacement planting as a first priority

In each financial year, the highest priority for planting will be the replacement of high-value trees that have been felled for safety reasons. These trees often provide significant amenity, landscape or community value, and their loss represents a direct reduction in local canopy cover.

Replacement planting will therefore be prioritised ahead of new discretionary planting. The primary aim of replacement planting is to restore amenity value to the area(s) affected by tree removal. The precise location and species used for replacement planting will be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking account of site constraints and operational considerations, and will be guided by the priorities of the Tree and Woodland Strategy, including species diversity, species suitability, climate resilience, biosecurity and biodiversity.

2.9. Supporting public sector development

SKDC will plant trees within and adjacent to sites of public sector development where this supports the successful delivery of development or helps mitigate its environmental impacts. This may include improving local amenity, enhancing the quality of the public realm, or contributing to the mitigation of adverse impacts on biodiversity and landscape character arising from development.

2.10. Maximising site potential and operational efficiency

Tree planting and establishment costs are strongly influenced by the number of sites involved. It is more efficient to concentrate planting on as few sites as

possible, as this reduces travel time and labour costs associated with planting, watering and maintenance.

Where a single replacement tree is required but the site can accommodate additional trees, it is operationally sensible to maximise the site's planting potential before moving to new locations. As a result, if a large number of trees are removed in a single year—particularly across many sites—the majority of the planting budget may be allocated to replacement planting.

2.11. *Targeting areas of greatest benefit*

A key objective of the Tree and Woodland Strategy is to ensure that tree planting delivers the greatest benefit to local people, particularly by increasing canopy cover in areas where it is currently lowest.

To support this objective, the distribution of tree planting activity will be assessed against a theoretical “ideal” distribution, based on a Tree Planting Priority Index (TPPI). This does not dictate where individual trees must be planted but provides a transparent benchmark against which locations outlined for delivery can be reviewed.

2.12. *Use of Tree Equity Scores within towns*

Where planting resources are allocated to towns, priority will generally be given to locations within those towns that score most highly on the Woodland Trust's Tree Equity Score.

The Tree Equity Score is a composite measure that identifies neighbourhoods where people are least well served by trees, taking account of existing canopy cover alongside social and environmental factors such as deprivation, health vulnerability and exposure to environmental pressures. Higher scores indicate areas where increased tree cover is likely to deliver the greatest benefit to local communities.

Tree Equity Score data is currently only available for towns and urban areas. For this reason, it will be used as a secondary prioritisation tool within towns, rather than as a district-wide allocation mechanism. It will not override the wider principles set out in this strategy but will help ensure that planting within towns is targeted to the areas of greatest need.

Measurement of Tree Canopy Cover

- 2.13. Tree canopy cover for each town and village was assessed using the i-Tree Canopy tool. i-Tree Canopy is a nationally recognised, evidence-based method that estimates canopy cover by randomly sampling points across a defined area. Each sample point was classified as either ‘tree’ or ‘non-tree’. The proportion of points classified as ‘tree’ was then used to calculate the overall canopy cover percentage for each settlement.

- 2.14. Assessment boundaries were defined using a practical, common-sense approach. In most cases there is a clear and identifiable boundary where built development ends and open countryside begins. These boundaries were used to ensure canopy cover reflects the areas where people live and experience trees in their daily environment.
- 2.15. Land that is currently undeveloped but allocated for development in the Local Plan was included within the assessment boundaries, even where it presently appears as open countryside. This ensures that canopy cover figures better reflect the future urban extent of settlements and provide a more appropriate baseline for long-term planning.
- 2.16. The results of the tree canopy cover assessments are available in Appendix 1.

Tree Planting Priority Index (TPPI)

- 2.17. The TPPI is a composite indicator used to assess the relative priority for tree planting between towns and villages across the district. It combines information on existing tree canopy cover and population size to identify where additional trees are likely to deliver the greatest overall benefit to local people, while also addressing the most significant canopy deficits. Settlements with very low canopy cover receive greater weighting, ensuring that severe canopy shortfalls are prioritised, while population weighting ensures that planting effort remains broadly proportionate to the number of people who stand to benefit. TPPI does not determine where individual trees must be planted but provides a transparent, evidence-based benchmark against which the overall distribution of planting activity and expenditure can be assessed.
- 2.18. Full details of how the TPPI is calculated for each settlement are provided in Appendix 2.
- 2.19. The top 40 TPPI values are provided in Appendix 3.

Financial framework for annual planting programme

2.20. Post-planting maintenance costs

Based on historic data, the average cost of watering an amenity tree for one growing season is approximately £100 per tree. This figure will be reviewed annually based on actual expenditure.

Because budgets operate on an April–March basis, the estimated cost of summer watering must be deducted from the current year’s planting budget.

In addition:

- £2,000 is allocated annually for other maintenance tasks (weeding, restaking, minor repairs)
- £3,000 is set aside as a contingency fund

2.21. *Planting costs*

Review of the previous two years of planting indicates an average planting cost of £225 per amenity tree. This figure will also be reviewed annually using real expenditure data.

2.22. *Budget balancing and prioritisation*

Once post-planting maintenance and contingency costs have been deducted from the annual budget:

- The cost of replacement planting and planting required to support public sector development will be calculated
- If replacement and public-sector-development planting exceeds the available budget, proposals will be rationalised and prioritised based on expected amenity value
- If budget remains, additional planting will be allocated to move delivery as close as possible to the TPPI 'ideal' distribution

External funding and partnership delivery

2.23. Additional planting may take place using external resources, including grant funding, third-sector partnerships or corporate sponsorship.

2.24. The allocation of sites for externally funded planting may not always align with TPPI priorities, as funding opportunities can be highly site-specific. However, where possible, these opportunities will still seek to support the wider objectives of the Tree and Woodland Strategy.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations

3.1. This strategy provides a transparent, evidence-based and financially realistic approach to allocating tree planting resources. It balances operational efficiency, long-term tree establishment, and strategic equity, while remaining flexible enough to respond to changing budgets, planting opportunities and external funding.

4. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Tree Canopy Cover Data

Appendix 2 – TPPI methodology

Appendix 3 – TPPI data