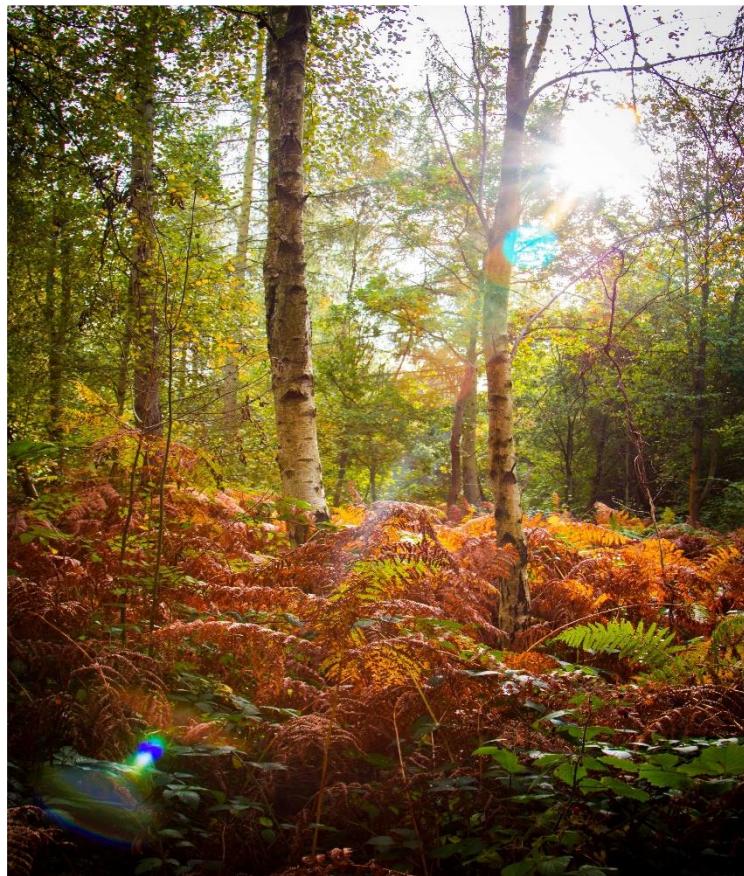




SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Trees and Woodland Strategy Report Consultation Results March 2024



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March 2024

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BACKGROUND

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to outline the results of a consultation undertaken with a variety of stakeholders on the founding principles of South Kesteven District Council's draft Trees and Woodland Strategy. The consultation was undertaken to:
 - Assess public attitudes around trees and woodlands
 - Assess public attitudes for increasing tree canopy cover within the district
 - Establish what people think the Council should be doing and the role it should play – particularly in relation to schemes which support wider tree planting across the district

Scope

2. The scope of this consultation was focused on three main areas. These were to:
 - Inform the approach SKDC should take regarding trees and woodland in South Kesteven
 - Gauge the degree of support for the emerging Tree and Woodland Strategy
 - Enable stakeholders to state opportunities for how the Council can support wider tree planting, and the extent to which both they and SKDC should get involved

Objectives

3. The objectives of the consultation were identified as follows. To:
 - Measure the level of public support for existing trees and woodlands in the district
 - Measure the level of public support for the provision of additional trees and woodlands in the district over the next ten years
 - Understand which areas of activity supporting trees and woodlands are those where the Council can or should contribute, and how this should be achieved

Timescales

4. The timescales of this consultation were as follows:

Two workshops were held on the morning and afternoon of 18 January 2024, to which district councillors and various external stakeholders were invited. Cabinet members Cllrs Patsy Ellis and Rhys Baker were updated on the approach, the proposed questions for the public consultation etc prior to the consultation going live. The survey was launched on 31 January 2024. Open for 3 weeks, it closed on 21 February 2024. Results were then analysed, and a report prepared for presentation to Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee alongside the final draft version of the Tree and Woodland Strategy on 19 March.

Stakeholders

5. The stakeholders were identified as:

- Cabinet members for Environment and waste – Cllrs Patsy Ellis and Rhys Baker
- Chair and Vice Chair of SKDC'S Environment OSC – Cllrs Ian Selby and Emma Baker
- Residents of South Kesteven
- District Councillors for South Kesteven
- Town and Parish Councils in South Kesteven
- Lincolnshire County Council
- Large landowners within the district
- Other organisations with a focus on the natural environment
- Voluntary and Community Groups with a focus on the natural environment
- The Woodland Trust
- The Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership
- Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust
- Grantham Rivercare
- The Environment Agency
- East Mercia Rivers Trust
- Park Groups
- Forestry Commission (as they own and manage Bourne Wood)
- Planning section in SKDC

Methodology

6. The table below identifies the method(s) that were used to contact the stakeholders:

Stakeholders	Method(s)	Details
Cabinet members for Environment and Waste	Discussion took place with portfolio holders Approval sought for approach and content of consultation.	Cllr Rhys Baker Cllr Patsy Ellis
Chair and Vice Chair of Environment OSC	Invited and attended the stakeholder workshops on 18 March.	Cllr Ian Selby Cllr Emma Baker
Residents of South Kesteven	Members of the public were made aware of the consultation through the following channels: Press release to the local press SKDC Social Media Channels	Potential respondents referred to survey monkey to participate in the consultation. Alternatively, if necessary, they were able to email the Climate Change officer who would have sent them a printed copy of the survey. No requests were received. Press release prepared promoting the consultation to district. Release included the link to survey. Consultation promoted on social media channels - Facebook and Twitter. Posts included a link to the survey.

	SKDC website	Webpage of consultations updated to include information about the consultation.
District Councillors	District Councillors informed of the consultation via members email. Also invited to stakeholder workshop.	
Town/Parish Councils in South Kesteven	Town/parish clerks contacted and asked to participate. Also invited to stakeholder workshop.	Climate Change Officer / Projects Officer contacted town and parish councils with link to consultation.
Landowners within district	Landowners which own significant areas of land contacted by SKDC's Climate Change/ Project Officer. They included:	National Trust Buckminster Estates
Voluntary and Community Groups (with an environmental focus)	Contacted by email and asked to comment	CD and VH contacted voluntary and community groups
Organisations with an environmental focus	Organisations contacted by SKDC's Climate Change / Projects Officers included: The Woodland Trust The Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership Lincolnshire Rivers Trust Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust Grantham Rivercare Lincolnshire County Council The Environment Agency	<p>enquiries@woodlandtrust.org.uk</p> <p>https://glnp.org.uk/contact-us</p> <p>lincsrivers@gmail.com</p> <p>info@lincstrust.co.uk</p> <p>Rivercare Grantham David Martin sustransranger@hotmail.com Ian Simmons iansimmons@icloud.com</p> <p>https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/comments-feedback/contact-us and then chose environment and planning</p> <p>enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk</p>

DETAILS

7. To assess attitudes in relation to the founding principles of SKDC's Trees and Woodland Strategy, the consultation officer was asked to support the consultation undertaken during February 2024. Actions undertaken by the consultation officer, the Sustainability and Climate Change Officer and the Projects Officer included:
 - Preparation of a press release to promote the consultation in the local press
 - Drafting of Facebook posts and Tweets to promote the consultation on the Council's social media channels Facebook and X (Twitter)
 - Setting up a webpage to host the document
 - Emailing all parish councils, voluntary and community groups and organisations with an environmental focus
 - Preparing, designing and setting up the on-line survey
 - Analysing feedback from 919 respondents
 - Preparing a report
8. The survey¹ included the following sections:
 - An introduction to the consultation. This included information on SKDC's Tree and Woodland Strategy, setting out the Council's position regarding existing trees and woodlands in the district as well as proposals for SKDC to action, including proactively managing trees and woodlands; and working in partnership with other stakeholders to support wider tree planting. It emphasized how those participating in the consultation can help the Council to turn their ambitions into actions.
 - Section 1 contained questions designed to measure the degree of support for the principles of the Trees and Woodlands strategy including how best to protect and manage existing trees within the district
 - Section 2 contained questions designed to determine the extent of support for SKDC's proposed actions. These included supporting tree planting across a wide remit and improving tree management within the district
 - Section 3 asked respondents to supply some demographic information
9. The opportunity to participate in the consultation was promoted both in the local media and on the Council's social media channels and website during the consultation period. The consultation was promoted three times on the Council's Facebook account, and three times on its Twitter (X) account. The first Facebook post on 1 February had a reach of 6,500. 94 people clicked on the link and there were 455 engagements. The second post on 8 February had a reach of 5,765. 35 people clicked on the link and there were 279 engagements. The final Facebook post on 17 February had a reach of 2,738. 19 people clicked on the link, and it had 64 engagements.
The first post on X (formerly Twitter) had 218 impressions. 2 people clicked on the link and there were 5 engagements. The second post had 253 impressions, 2 people clicked on the link and there were 4 engagements. The final post had 374 impressions, 12 engagements and 8 link clicks.

¹ Copy of survey attached at appendix one

10. 2,800 residents who have signed up to receive an online edition of SKToday (and had given their permission to be contacted by the Council about other issues) were also contacted directly and asked to participate.
11. Various stakeholders including parish councils and organisations with an environmental focus, were contacted at the start of the consultation. Other statutory bodies including Lincolnshire County Council and the Environment Agency were also asked for their feedback.
12. The consultation opened on 31 January 2024. It closed three weeks later, on 21 February 2024. 919 responses were received. The margin of error for this number of responses is 3.22%. This means it is possible to be 95% sure that the results of this consultation are statistically representative of the district's population +/- 3.22%. (Based on a district population estimate of 146,359², at a 95% confidence level).

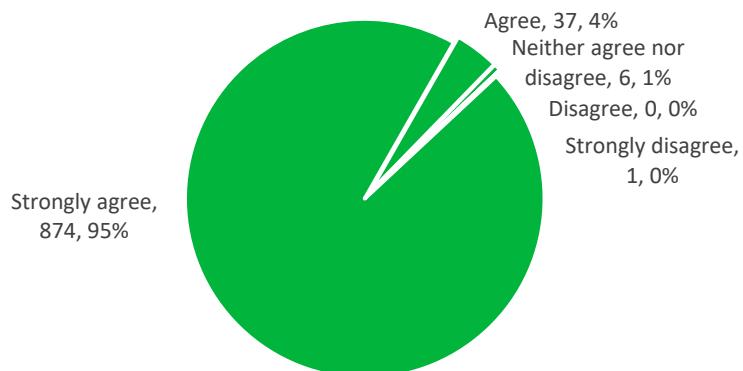
RESULTS

13. The purpose of the first section of the survey was to find out how much support there is for trees and woodlands within South Kesteven, as this forms the basis of the Council's Trees and Woodland Strategy. Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:
 - Trees and Woodlands are a valuable natural asset
 - Trees and Woodlands make an important contribution towards biodiversity
 - Trees and Woodlands are really important to me
14. An overwhelming majority of respondents agreed with each of these statements. 99% of respondents (911) thought that trees and woodlands are a valuable natural asset as illustrated in the graph below:

² Population estimate for South Kesteven for 2024 from ONS 2018

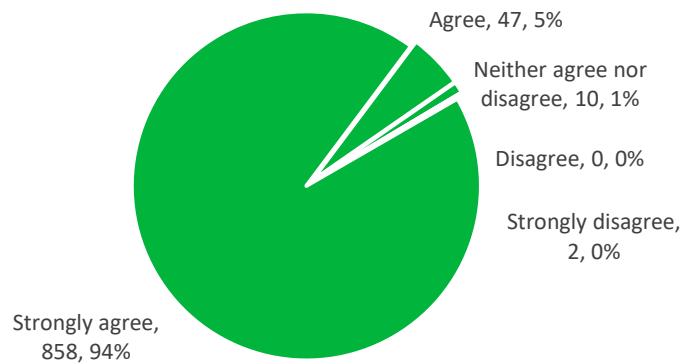
[Population projections for local authorities: Table 2 - Office for National Statistics](https://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/epc/population-projections-for-local-authorities-table-2-office-for-national-statistics)

Q1. Trees and Woodlands are a valuable natural asset



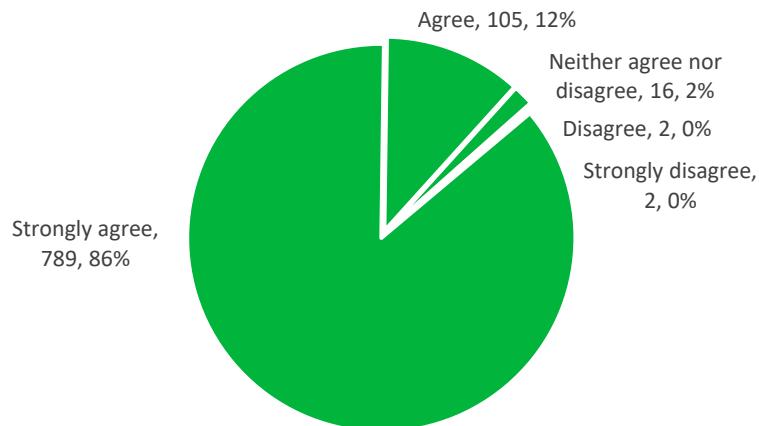
15. A similar proportion (905 or 98.7%) thought that trees make an important contribution towards biodiversity. Two respondents (0.2%) didn't agree.

Q2. Trees and woodlands make an important contribution to biodiversity



16. Trees and Woodlands are very important to people. Nearly all respondents (894 or 97.8%) agreed with this statement as illustrated in the pie chart below. Four respondents (0.4%) didn't agree.

Q3. Trees and Woodlands are really important to me



17. When asked why they had chosen to answer in this way, over 700 respondents took the time to comment. Trees are viewed as a valuable natural resource for a wide variety of reasons – their contribution towards biodiversity, their role in tackling climate change, the physical barrier they provide (to mitigate noise, help prevent flooding and provide shade) and the wildlife habitats they host. The quotes below provide a flavour of peoples' motivations:

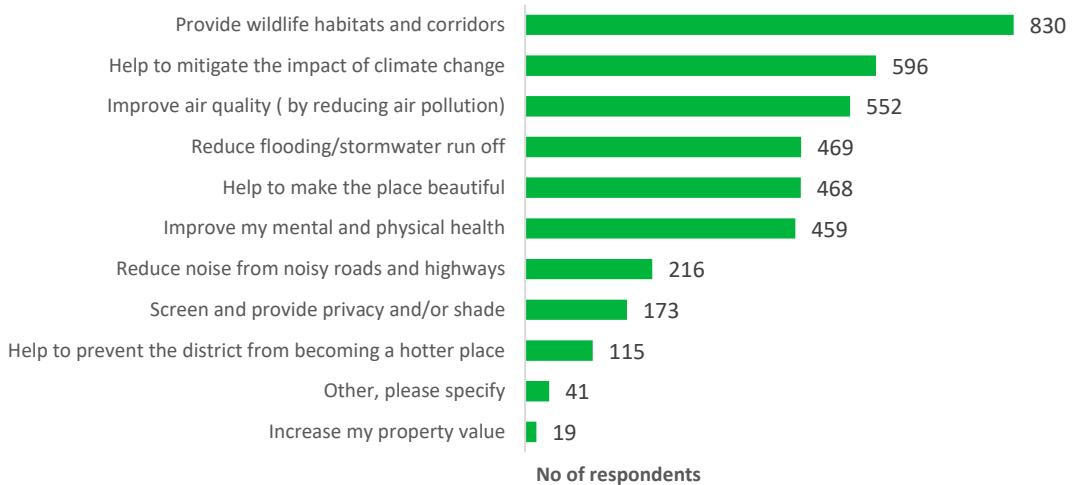
“Trees and woodland are nature's green lungs. Essential to wildlife and air quality.”

“Trees help the environment and people's mental health. We need to plant more to help with pollution”

“Natural woodland is a precious habitat for so much wildlife, trees store carbon, clean and cool our air, are good for our mental health. We need to protect our trees and plant more for future generations to enjoy.”

18. To help inform the focus and direction of the strategy, respondents were then provided with some of the benefits of trees and woodlands. These included providing habitats and corridors for wildlife, reducing noise from noisy roads and helping to tackle climate change through carbon sequestration (the capturing, removal and storage of carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the earth's atmosphere). When asked to choose up to four reasons why trees are important, respondents' priorities became clear. Providing wildlife habitats and corridors was the most popular choice, chosen by 830 (92.5%) respondents. Helping to mitigate the impact of climate change and improving air quality by reducing air pollution were also popular choices – chosen by two thirds (66.4%) and three fifths (61.5%) of respondents respectively. The number of respondents choosing each of these benefits is illustrated in the graph below:

Q5. The trees and areas of woodland in South Kesteven are important because they



An analysis of the responses received under other, please specify revealed the following common threads:

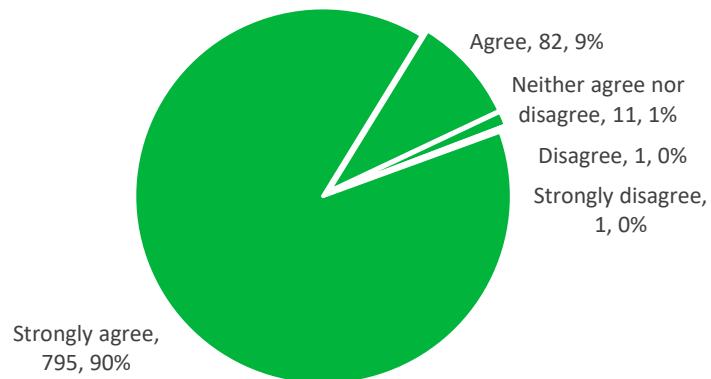
- Some respondents found it difficult to choose four. They wanted to tick them all
"I actually struggled to only select four as every statement was relevant"
- Trees and areas of woodland provide opportunities for nature-based leisure activities including walking and mountain biking
"Provide important leisure opportunities"
- They are a good source of micronutrients and provide important ecosystems
"Good source of micronutrients from leaf carpet in autumn"

19. The second section of the survey concentrated on support for tree and woodland planting, management, and protection within South Kesteven – specifically focusing on the role of the Council. To establish the extent to which there was an expectation that SKDC would be involved, and the role it should play, respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

- Planting, maintaining and protecting trees and woodlands in South Kesteven is an important function
- Planting, maintaining and protecting trees in South Kesteven is a worthwhile investment and something the Council should be involved in/contribute towards
- The Council should focus on planting, maintaining and protecting trees and woodlands in South Kesteven

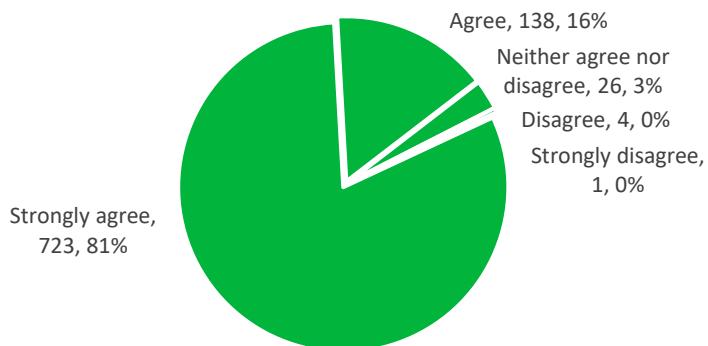
20. There was very strong support for planting, maintaining and protecting trees and woodlands in South Kesteven. Nearly all those responding (877 or 98.5%) agreed with this approach, as illustrated here:

Q6. Planting, maintaining and protecting trees and woodlands in South Kesteven is an important function



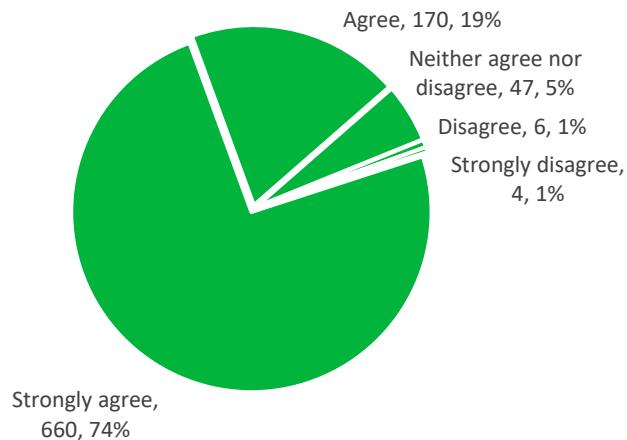
21. When asked if they thought planting, maintaining and protecting trees and woodland in South Kesteven was a worthwhile investment and something the Council should get involved with/contribute towards, the majority of respondents 861 (96.5%) were in agreement, as shown overleaf:

Q7. Planting, maintaining and protecting trees in South Kesteven is a worthwhile investment, and something the Council should be involved in/contribute towards



22. Respondents were also asked if they thought this was something the Council should be focusing on. More than nine out of ten respondents (830 or 93.6%) agreed with this statement, as illustrated here:

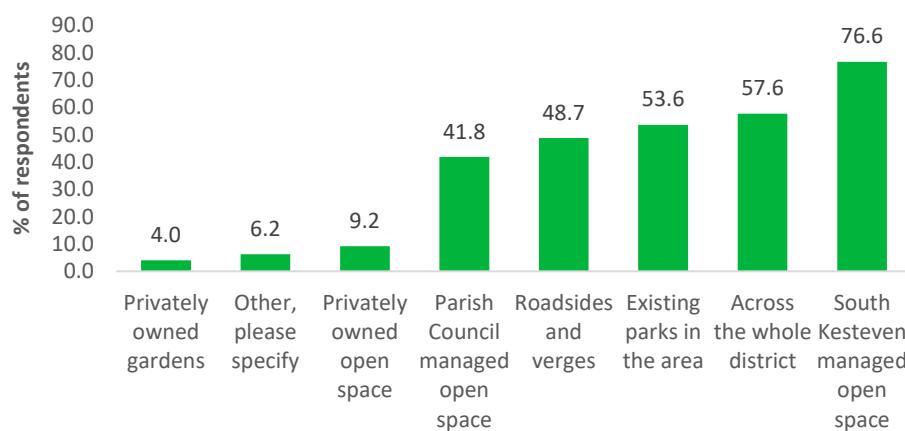
Q8. The Council should focus on planting, maintaining and protecting trees and woodlands in South Kesteven



23. These questions were asked to help define and measure peoples' expectations as to the role the Council should fulfil in this area. Their feedback will inform the content and direction of the strategy, and underpin the action plan.

24. To enable a better understanding of respondents' priorities, they were asked to identify the areas where they thought the Council should concentrate its efforts. They were asked to choose no more than three options. Their choices are illustrated in the graph overleaf:

Q9. If you think SKDC's role is to focus on planting, managing and protecting trees and woodlands, which of the following locations do you think they should concentrate on?



25. Respondents thought that the Council should concentrate its efforts in respect of tree and woodland planting, protection and management on areas it already owns. Parks and areas of open space were popular choices, identified by 53.6% and 76.6% of respondents respectively, as were roadsides and verges, which, although maintained by Lincolnshire County Council, not SKDC, were chosen by just

under half of those taking part in the consultation. Perhaps not surprisingly, “across the whole district” was the second most popular choice – chosen by just under three fifths of those responding to the survey (57.6%).

26. Other suggestions included but were not limited to:

- Closed Churchyards which the Council has responsibility for
- All areas of public land
- Ensuring new developments protect existing trees as well as include tree planting schemes
- School sites
- Unused farming land

27. When given a list of actions the Council should undertake to achieve this, and asked to pick three, the top choices were a combination of actions focused on sustainability and protection of existing areas of woodland, as well as attracting funding for additional provision and highlighting opportunities for community involvement. This is illustrated overleaf:

Q10. The Council should do this through



An analysis of the responses received under “other, please specify” included several suggestions. A few stressed the importance of working with other partners and organisations – particularly The Woodland Trust – as it’s HQ is in Grantham. Others were just keen for the work to commence. The importance of the planning process as a means of increasing the amounts of trees planted was also mentioned.

“Liaison with the Woodland Trust on your doorstep”
“Get on with planting”

“Enforce developers’ tree planting”

28. The next question on the survey asked respondents if they would be interested in volunteering - either to look after existing trees or by helping to plant new ones. A significant proportion (349 or 41%) said that they would.

28. When asked if they had any questions or would like to comment on anything else in relation to the development of SKDC's Trees and Woodland Strategy, over 150 comments were received. The importance of forging closer relationships with partner organisations that are specialists in this area including the Woodland Trust and The Forestry Commission, was mentioned by several respondents. This is illustrated in the quotes below:

“Please partner with experts like The Woodland Trust so we get the right type of trees in the right places.”

“There is a need to establish stronger relationships with woodland management organisations including Forest England/the Forestry Commission to provide a coherent strategy....”

The role the planning/development process can play in protecting existing trees and encouraging more provision was also popular, as shown here:

“Ensure that property developers are not permitted to destroy established trees and hedges!!!”

“Do not lose existing planting to urban development.”

“There should be more tree planting on new housing schemes including private gardens.”

Demographics

29. To enable the authority to assess if responses had been received from across the district, those participating in the consultation process were asked to supply their postcode. Responses were received from across the district as illustrated below:

Postcode sector	Number of responses	% of responses
NG23	26	3.0
NG31	224	26.2
NG32	87	10.2
NG33	67	7.8
NG34	32	3.7
PE6	92	10.8
PE9	162	18.9
PE10	151	17.7
Prefer not to say	3	0.4
Other	11	1.3
Total	855	100.0

An analysis of the responses received from other postcode sectors revealed most were actually from areas in the district. One response was received from someone who had an LE15 postcode, and two responses were received from people with a PE11 postcode – both of which are postcode sectors for areas adjacent to the district of South Kesteven (Rutland and Spalding)

30. The final question on the survey asked respondents to identify if they had answered the survey as a resident, a landowner, a voluntary group or organisation, a parish or district councillor or on behalf of another organisation in the public sector. Most responses were from people living in the district. 819 responses (95.7%) were from residents, with responses from parish and district councillors forming the next largest group. 17 responses were received from individuals representing a group with an environmental focus.

Conclusion

31. Respondents were really keen to protect trees and woodland and were very supportive of the founding principles of SKDC's Trees and Woodlands Strategy. Many of the responses were indicative of a strong environmental focus- with wildlife, nature, air pollution and climate change emerging as dominant themes.
32. There is a significant expectation that the Council should play an active role in protecting, maintaining and planting trees and areas of woodland – and that they should be involved/contribute towards activities and actions in this area.
33. When asked where they thought SKDC should concentrate its efforts, respondents thought it prudent to focus on areas already owned by the Council. They were also keen however to see progress and delivery of initiatives across the district.
34. A significant minority of those responding (around two fifths) stated that they would be interested in helping to plant trees or look after those already in situ. Some thought will have to be given to how best to harness and make the most of this willingness to help.
35. Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

Prepared by:

Deb Wyles

Communications and Consultation

11 March 2024