



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Officer Delegated Decision

13th March 2024

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive



Creation of a Tree (Planning) post within the Planning Service

The purpose of the report is to agree to the creation of a new Tree Officer post to sit within the existing Planning Service structure. The proposed post holder will support and compliment the work of the Planning Service.

Contact

Emma Whittaker, Assistant Director (Planning and Growth)

 Emma.whittaker@southkesteven.gov.uk

Decision made by:	Karen Bradford, Chief Executive
Decision:	That the Chief Executive approves the creation of a new Tree Officer (Planning) post
Public or Exempt:	Public
Reasons for exemption:	N/A
Conflicts of interest:	No
Policy compliant:	Yes
Details of delegation:	In line with delegation of Head of Paid Service as set out in part 3 (responsibility of functions) of the constitution

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

- 1.1 This post will be funded through savings identified in the Development Management budget which was approved by Council on 29 February 2024 as part of the 2024/25 General Fund budget.

Completed by: Alison Hall-Wright, Deputy Director (Finance & ICT) and Deputy S151 Officer

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 The Chief Executive has delegated authority as Head of Paid Service to structure and restructure the Officer core including the creation of new posts. This report is in line with that delegation. Employment law must be adhered to, including consultation where necessary.

Completed by: Graham Watts, Assistant Director (Governance and Public Protection) and Monitoring Officer

Human Resources

- 1.3 From an HR perspective, the creation of the new Tree Officer (Planning) post within the Planning Service is being considered to allow the Council to recruit a skilled and experienced individual who can support and complement the work of the Planning Service.

The recruitment process will be fair and transparent in line with the Council's policies, and the job description and person specification accurately reflect the requirements of the role. A job evaluation has been completed for fairness of grading. Consultation with relevant stakeholders, including unions, is being undertaken.

Completed by: Fran Beckitt (Head of Service, Human Resources and Organisational Development)

2. The Purpose of the Report

- 2.1 The planning department of South Kesteven District Council is the Local Planning Authority. The service provides a number of statutory council functions under the

town planning system to regulate development and the use of land in the public interest.

- 2.2 The Corporate Plan (2024-2027) has a vision which sets out what the Council wants the district to be like: 'A thriving district in which to live, work and visit. The Planning Service helps deliver many of the Council's aims as set out in the Corporate Plan. A key ambition is to significantly increase tree planting across the district and manage, care and protect existing tree cover.
- 2.3 The Planning Service deals with several tree-related matters including the following:
 - Managing requests for Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)
 - Dealing with applications for works to protected trees
 - Providing guidance on the tree related matters on planning applications
 - Enforcement matters
- 2.4 A TPO protects a specific tree or woodland from deliberate damage and destruction. The Council has over 400 TPOs currently in force and a vast number of other trees that are afforded protection by virtue of being in one of the district's 48 Conservation Areas. In 2023, the Council received 102 applications for works to protected trees and a further 257 notifications for works to trees in Conservation Areas.
- 2.5 Currently the Council uses a consultant to provide the expert advice to support decisions on planning related applications. The administration associated with these applications is currently managed by Planning Officers and the planning support team. The consultant currently provides approximately one day a week support for the Planning Service.
- 2.6 It is proposed to create a new Tree Officer (Planning) post to replace the reliance on the consultant and to release capacity within the Planning Officers (development management) and planning support teams. The post created would be part time (0.6 full-time equivalent (FTE) or 22.5 hours). Officers and the Planning Committee will have better access to professional technical advice and support due to the increase in working hours. Officers will also be able to be more responsive to enforcement matters when they arise.
- 2.7 The new post will be fully funded mostly through savings within the 2024/2025 budget, including using the funds which would otherwise have been used to fund the consultancy support which is currently relied upon for tree advice. Additionally, an Enforcement Officer post has been reduced from 37 to 30 hours per week. The combination of this salary saving and the reduction in the consultancy budget, will fully fund this post.
- 2.8 The Council is developing a Tree and Woodland Strategy and accompanying action plan which will, amongst other things highlight areas of opportunity to increase the number of trees and areas of woodland and protect the district's trees. Whilst this role is distinct from a tree officer post that may be required to carry out the work associated with the Tree and Woodland Strategy, there will inevitably be some implications for the planning team in terms of promoting tree planting and protection in new developments. There may also be an impact in relation to the number of

protected trees across the district. Whilst this post will be separate from any that the Council recruits to in relation to the Tree and Woodland Strategy, there would be an expectation that there will be a degree of collaboration between the teams.

3. Available Options Considered

- 3.1 Option 1 – create the Tree Officer (Planning) post.
- 3.2 Option 2 - The alternative is to “do nothing” and retain the existing arrangement. It is proposed this option is discounted as the benefits of option 1 outweigh option 2.

4. Preferred Option

- 4.1 The preferred option is to create the Tree Officer (Planning) post.

5. Reasons for the Decision

- 5.1 The creation of a new Tree Officer (Planning) post will enhance the planning decisions made by the Council both in respect of planning policy, development management and enforcement matters. The post will be an asset to the team and wider Council and reduce the reliance on contractors which is not sustainable in the long term.

6. Appendices

- 6.1 Proposed Job Description

Signed by:

Karen Bradford

Date: **13 March 2024**