Communities Scrutiny Commission
14 September 2023
Supplementary Information

Public questions – responses to supplementary questions

Enclosed are the responses to supplementary public questions in relation to agenda item 10 – Draft Tree and Woodland Strategy.

Communities Scrutiny Commission
14 September 2023
Public Forum – Questions and Statements

Public forum items have been received as listed below (full details are set out on the subsequent pages):

1. Questions from Mark Ashdown on behalf of Bristol Tree Forum: Agenda item 10 – Draft Tree and Woodland Strategy

2. Questions from Len Wyatt on behalf of Bristol Parks Forum Committee: Agenda item 8 – Parks and Green Space – Funding; Agenda item 9 – Parks and Green Space Strategy; Agenda item 10 – Draft Tree and Woodland Strategy

1. QUESTIONS FROM MARK ASHDOWN, BRISTOL TREE FORUM
Agenda item 10 – Draft Tree and Woodland Strategy

Question 1
The proposed strategy has set a target to increase city tree canopy cover (TCC) by 795 hectares by 2046, giving a total canopy of 24%.
The One City Plan includes a target to increase Bristol's tree canopy cover by 25% by 2035 and to double it by 2046.[1]

1 BRISTOL AND THE SDGs: 2022 REVIEW OF PROGRESS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES - https://bristol.ac.uk/cabot/media/documents/bristol-vlr-2022.pdf
- page 40

On the basis that the current TCC is 16.9%, this is an increase of just over 70% in 22 years (from 1 January 2024).

Question 1a
Has the One City Plan to double TCC by 2046 now been abandoned?

Officer response:
The draft strategy sets an absolute target to increase city tree canopy by 795 ha to achieve 24% overall – if achieved, this would double what was understood to be the city's tree cover at the time the One City Plan target was set.

Supplementary Question

This is comparing apples with pears. When the 2018 TCC baseline was set at 11.9%, this was based on an i-Tree ECo Survey. The current figure of 16.9% is based on an entirely different methodology devised by Bluesky International Limited. The two results cannot be compared, nor indeed should they be, because to accept this would be to conclude that tree canopy has increased by 5% in the last four/five years and that the original 2036 goal of 16% has already been achieved! It is abundantly clear that it has not.

We discuss the problems inherent in measuring tree canopy in this blog - *Measuring and Modelling the Tree Canopy of Bristol.*

1. How are these inconsistencies reconciled?

The draft strategy includes an absolute target to increase tree canopy that would result in 24% city tree cover. This is being presented to One City Partners as a way forward, noting that more work is required to understand the potential to increase tree canopy including adopted highway and private land, and as such the target is recommended as interim.

Question 1b
What are the Bluesky tree-map ward-level TCC values which yield the 16.9% overall TCC value? Please provide these.

Officer response:
The per ward tree cover data is to be released following calculation.

Question 1c
Does the 16.9% TCC estimate have error bounds? If so, what are these?

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Officer response:
Accuracy of data has been advised by Bluesky International Ltd., the company providing the National Tree Mapping (NTM) data.

Bluesky International Ltd state:

'The National Tree Map (NTM) is a unique, comprehensive database of location, height and canopy/crown extent for every single tree taller than 3m, covering the whole of England, Scotland, Wales, and the Republic of Ireland. NTM is updated on a 3-year rolling cycle as new aerial photography becomes available, ensuring that it remains the most detailed and up-to-date tree map ever.

The production of NTM is a semi-automated process, using Bluesky's geographic data, including aerial photography, colour infrared, and digital height models. The data is then processed through complex algorithms produced by the Bluesky team of GIS and Remote Sensing specialists before being quality checked to ensure no area is missing or misidentified'.

Accuracy of the data provided has been assessed:

Percent accuracy = 100 – [(VA - VO)/VA X 100]

Where VA is the most accurate dataset (manually digitised), and VO is the original dataset (NTM).

This based on a sample of sites measured nationally.

The NTM in urban areas has an average accuracy of 98.94%.

The analysis shows that the NTM data over-estimates tree canopy. This is likely to be caused by the input data resolution compared to manual digitising (in the accuracy assessment. Bluesky International Ltd., advise that this is subject to review.

Supplementary Question
This response is impenetrable.
1.   What are the dates of the VA & VO datasets?

Officer response to supplementary question

Below is the table provided by Bluesky which details the sample locations subject to manual measurement (the VA datasets). Bluesky have confirmed that the VO data sets matched the VA year where sampled.

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Table 1 – *Year and resolution of input data for the manually digitised canopy cover.*
Those in bold have been used within this study.

BNG grid	Input data year	Input data resolution
NZ – Newcastle	**2016**	**25cm DHM, 12.5cm AP**
TL	2019	25cm DHM, 12.5cm AP
ST – Cardiff	2020	25cm DHM, 12.5cm AP
SJ – Wrexham	**2020**	**25cm DHM, 12.5cm AP**
SE	**2020**	**25cm DHM, 12.5cm AP**
SH	**2020**	**25cm DHM, 25cm AP**
ST	2021	25cm DHM, 25cm AP
SX	2021	25cm DHM, 12.5cm AP
SO – Birmingham	**2022**	**25cm DHM, 12.5cm AP**
TQ – London	2022	25cm DHM, 12.5cm AP

2. What is the error range of the 16.9% figure?

Bluesky have not provided an error range.   From their review of accuracy, they have concluded that for urban areas [which we can assume to include Bristol], the modelled data is, on average, 98.94% accurate, and that it an over-estimation (as reply above). The NTM data for Bristol measures canopy at 16.9%, so applying this accuracy assumption, then the actual canopy likely will be 0.18% lower at 16.7%. Bluesky have said that they will publish their accuracy report in due course, but immediately it is not in public realm. In Bristol, we have the opportunity to undertake an accuracy check, potentially by sampling and manual assessment v NTM generated data; this would apply to the year measured.

16.7 – 16.9
Question 2
Target B is that Protected woodland will be in good management by 2046.

Question 2a
What is meant by 'Protected woodland'?

Officer response:
Protected means woodland designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) - this includes international and national nature conservation designations.

Supplementary Question
There are nine Ancient Woodlands within the city boundaries. Not all are wholly within SNCIs.
1. Why have these Ancient Woodlands been excluded?

Officer response to supplementary question

We have checked the sites on the government website (magic.gov.uk) that have been recorded as ancient woodland, and they all appear to be sites that are within an SNCI, which is our expectation. Please provide details of the areas of ASNW that fall outside SNCI boundaries.

Question 2b
How will it be protected?

Officer response:

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As above – sites designated are set out as prescribed, see Local plan (bristol.gov.uk)

Supplementary Question
The Local Plan only offers limited protection to SNCIs from development applications. Recent Guidance from the Chief Planner suggests that, when the Environment Act comes into force requiring all developments to achieve 10%+ biodiversity net gain – on or off site – the current protection set out in DM19 will be nullified. See https://bristoltreeforum.org/2023/09/07/it-seems-that-sncis-are-nothing-special-an-open-letter-to-bristols-chief-planner/.

1. What non-development protections will be provided to these sites?

Officer response to supplementary question

The local plan will continue to provide strong protection for SNCI sites and is consistent with the advice that the Chief Planner has provided. Local Plan Policy DM19 continues to be applicable. The policy states that development which would have a harmful impact on the nature conservation value of a Site of Nature Conservation Interest will not be permitted.

Question 2c
Is this woodland mapped? If so, may we see the map?

Officer response:
SNCI's are available @ Bristol - Pinpoint local information

Supplementary Question
The SNCI maps published by the Council do not identify woodland separately.
1. Will a separate map showing all Protected Woodland be produced?

Officer response

Yes, that is the intention – this is an example of information that would be copied to the Forest of Avon tree and woodland data hub.

Question 2d
Has a Protected woodland management plan been prepared? If so, may we see it?

Officer response:
A protected woodland management plan has not been prepared for all woodland in the city – which would include a range of landowners. The strategy seeks to bring all such protected woodland into positive management which will require cooperation from landowners to develop such plans and enact positive management.

Supplementary Question
1. When and by whom will this document be prepared?

Officer response to supplementary question

Multiple landowners will need to be engaged. This requires a project approach to understand ownership, status of woodland and incentives to prepare relevant plans and enact positive

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management. The BTWS action plan identifies a project approach, identifying key contributory actions and role of lead organisations, including the Forest of Avon Trust.

Question 3

Question 3a
Can the authors provide a list of meetings with BCC Departments and other stakeholders to discuss the draft tree strategy?

Officer response:

Meetings held or attended following drafting stage:

4th September – One City Office and BCC external communication team
29th August – Exec briefing
22 August – Woodland Trust and Forest of Avon Trust
10th August – Exec briefing
7th August – GIS team – mapping
22 June – BCC staff / departments Strategy development drop in session
21st June – West of England Tree and Woodland Strategy group
22 June – Strategic Climate and Ecological Emergency Programme manager
12th June – GIS team - mapping

2. QUESTIONS FROM LEN WYATT, BRISTOL PARKS FORUM COMMITTEE

Bristol Parks Forum

Campaigning to protect and enhance all public green space in the City of Bristol.

See our Vision for Parks & Green Spaces at

www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/vision

Statement to Communities Scrutiny Commission – 14th September 2023
Questions - Agenda Items 8, 9 and 10

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The Bristol Parks Forum is the only community voice dedicated to all publicly owned parks and green spaces in Bristol. We work with Bristol City Council to ensure our spaces are well looked after and to help local groups to enhance their green space. Further information about the Forum can be found at http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/

Agenda Item – 8 - Parks and Green Space Funding

Question 1 – Page 26 Does "expanding cultural events and activities in parks" include all parks and green spaces owned by the City Council?

Officer response:
This would not include all parks and green spaces owned by the City Council, we would need to assess the suitability of sites when considering this.

Question 2 – Page 26 - What are you market testing the services against?

Officer response:
The costs of delivering services which we provide are based on rates we charge; this can be on a square or linear metreage rate or another rate which is applicable to a task or activity which is delivered. One route we can use is to bench mark the cost of delivering services with other core cities who provide in house services.

Question 3 – Page 26 - What is meant by "receiving value for money" in the statement. And how is this review being carried out?

Officer response:

The parks service is supported by internal and external organisations for service delivery, equipment, and materials etc. This supports the day-to-day operation of services we provide across the parks and green spaces service area. We will test that the rates and the services provided are delivering value for money. One route we can take is through bench marking with core cities and other councils we work with to ensure value for money is be delivered.

Agenda Item – 9 - Parks and Green Space Strategy

While acknowledging the ongoing work being carried out by the officers and Cabinet members involved:

Question 1 – What is meant by Recreational Green Space, the term used on the typology plans? Pages 56 to 70.

Officer response:
The 'Recreational green space' designation are spaces that are publicly accessible green space – that includes closed burial grounds.

Question 2 – What is the relationship between the Strategy; and the forthcoming Local Plan?

Officer response:

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There is a direct policy relationship between the two plans. The draft Local Plan policy for open space for recreation expects development to ensure a sufficient quantity, quality and proximity of open space for recreation.   The Local Plan is expected to go to public consultation in November this year.

Question 3 – What is the relationship between the Strategy; and the planning process for decisions on individual sites?

Officer response:
The PGSS provides evidence and guidance to inform the development management process for decisions, as it relates to individual sites.

Question 4 – Does the Strategy enable a consideration of a large new green open space in Central Bristol?

Officer response:

The Strategy itself does not enable 'large new green open space', but instead the following planning documents relevant to the central area state what plans there are for green spaces:
- the City Centre Development plan which has plans for greening the Broadmead area and improvements to Castle Park,
- the Temple Quarter development frame work for improvements around Temple Meads - particularly plans emerging in St Philips which is looking at Sparke Evans park improvements as well as other opportunities along the river and feeder canal,
- Frome Gateway framework will be out to consultation very soon which also set out improvements to the green space in the area and restoration of the river, and
- the upcoming master plan for Western harbour which will enhance and potentially expand public space

Managing for Nature

Question 5 – What is the role of species found on individual sites in the Managing for Nature approach?

Officer response:
The managing for nature approach includes consideration of the West of England Nature Recovery Network (NRN) and Bristol Wildlife Corridors (BWC). The NRN and BWC's use key species to define a footprint of connected habitat (for woodland, grassland and wetland habitats) based on the 'dispersal distances' of such species. see Nature Recovery Network - WENP. Where new nature spaces are created, the primary approach is to provide relevant habitat to address the needs of a range of relevant species, rather than a focus on species per se. It is expected that a mosaic of habitats will be created at a local scale to provide for a range of species. Further, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy is expected to define a range of species for which targeted actions would be relevant to compliment a habitat approach. For Sites of Nature Conservation (SNCI) management plans will be informed by species recorded for those sites, with relevant actions for such species, including the potential to encourage absent species.

Agenda Item – 10 - Draft Tree and Woodland Strategy

Bristol Tree and Woodland Strategy

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Question 1 – What does the scale – "Least combined impacts/Most Combined impact" mean?
Pages 119 to 134

Officer response:
The map shows the highest combined score for the four impact criteria and conversely the lowest combined score. Each criterion is a 1-4 scale, or weighting, as explained in the report attached.

Question 2 – What is the relationship between the proposals and existing non-woodland habitats or on areas of non-ecologically valuable grassland in those sites?
Page 110

Officer response:
The Tree Impact Criteria set out benefit received from tree planting (by category and by degree). The criteria do not define whether trees should be planted or not. The PGSS tree planting opportunity report sets out where tree planting is appropriate – intending that this work sets out the scale of potential to increase tree canopy with PGSS land. On the test of impact on existing sites it is more likely that non-ecologically valuable grassland would be considered for tree planting, but other considerations would come into play e.g., whether a different habitat was prioritised by the Nature Recovery Network, or some other land use.

 Question 3 – What is the relationship between the proposals and existing uses of the sites (eg: dog walking, events, sports)?

Officer response:
The PGSS tree planting opportunity report, as stated above, aims to understand the potential to increase tree canopy across PGSS land. In making this assessment, certain primary land use has identified where tree planting would be harmful to current use including formal sport or event spaces. Otherwise, design considerations would take into account a range of site use, including dog walking. The principle of increasing tree cover (by planting or natural regeneration) on public open space is to maintain access.