

Template Scoping Document

<p><u>Environment & Economy Select Committee</u></p>	
<p><u>Scrutiny Review Title:</u></p>	<p>Tree & Hedges Review</p>
<p><u>Background issues</u> to review – rationale for scrutinising this issue:</p>	<p>Members raised the issue of reviewing the Council’s tree and hedge procedures, which was agreed by the Select Committee at its meeting on 12 March 2014 as the focus of its scrutiny review. The Council agreed a Policy for Trees which is an inward facing document determining how the Council will manage trees in the town and can be considered by the review.</p> <p>Members wish to investigate this matter as it is a subject that is raised by residents at Members’ surgeries, and is complicated by land ownership tenure, HCC licences to cultivate, and SBC licences to occupy and tree preservation orders.</p>
<p>Is the issue highlighted as one of the Council’s corporate aims and objectives of the Council’s <u>Corporate Strategy</u>, – ‘Sharing the Dividends’? If so which one:</p> <p>Is the issue addressed by the Council’s <u>Community Strategy</u>?</p>	<p>There are no specific references to the Council’s Tree and Hedge Policy within the Council’s Corporate Strategy. However, within the corporate strategy there is a commitment to “Maintain our clean streets and green spaces” and the strategy’s aspiration is to provide “A Quality Environment”, “We aspire for Stevenage to be clean and green, with residents that are active in the local area and with neighbourhoods that are and feel safe. We want a Stevenage that is well designed with a quality built and natural environment and has excellent transport and communication links. <u>If a neighbourhood is well maintained it encourages a strong sense of place, promotes investment and encourages responsible behaviour.</u> We will work with local organisations, partners and residents to promote and maintain Stevenage’s environment.”</p> <p>Regarding the Council’s Community Strategy there is a commitment under promoting healthy communities to encourage residents to “respect their environment and act to protect it”.</p> <p><u>Ensure clean and green spaces</u></p> <p>The Council’ s Community Strategy has a commitment to maintaining its green spaces and</p>

	<p>engaging residents in this process. However, there are no direct references to maintaining tree and hedges, but rather there is a more general promotion of the town's natural environment which encompasses trees and hedges, and specifically "We want to increase the involvement of local residents and community groups in actively managing the environment, and will look to create opportunities for people to get involved, such as "Friends of" schemes.</p> <p>Also the strategy states that "SoStevenage is keen to ensure that Stevenage residents have a strong sense of place and are committed to maintaining these spaces as a great legacy for future generations to enjoy and we will ensure that the council's Green Spaces" Strategy and the Biodiversity Action Plan are implemented to achieve this. Well maintained environments, which include the maintenance of hedges, help foster good community relations and social behaviour in neighbourhoods. Scrutinising what undertakings the Council currently provides and where improvements can be made regarding resident involvement in the maintenance of the town's environment would therefore be beneficial.</p>
<p>Is this issue one that raises interest with the public via complaints or Members' surgeries?:</p>	<p>There have been some recorded complaints from the public in connection to the Council's current policy and practise regarding Trees and Hedges. From April 2012 to June 2013 there were 36 recorded complaints regarding trees and hedges. The issues raised in these complaints are predominantly from Council tenants regarding the pruning of trees and hedges and range in their complaint. Some are regarding a lack of consultation and others are complaining about the lack of progress regarding a request that a tree of hedge be cut and still others are complaining about the removal of trees and hedges and the lack of privacy this creates.</p>
<p>Focus of the review: (State what the review focus will be)</p>	<p><i>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting*.</i></p> <p><i>Members/Officers have suggested the following possible Options:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Are there any current problems with the SBC service from the public's perspective?</i> • <i>What problems (if any) do Tree Preservation Orders cause regarding maintaining the environment?</i> • <i>How does land ownership affect the response of the service?</i> • <i>Is there any impact of HCC licences to cultivate and SBC licences to occupy with the</i>

	<p><i>Council's pruning programmes?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What can be done to encourage residents to join 'friends of' groups to help promote and maintain the town's green spaces</i> • <i>How does the service consult with residents?</i> • <i>Is there any innovation from neighbouring authorities that SBC can learn from?</i> • <i>Explore the development of informal tenant groups maintaining local areas? How is this done in other authorities? Would this be viable in neighbourhoods in Stevenage?</i> <p>* Challenge why, how and by whom a service is provided. Compare our performance with that of others, including the best, to discover what works well and how we can improve our service delivery. Consult with all interested parties, including local residents, service users and non-users, the wider business community, partner organisations, elected members and our employees on how we can improve our services.</p>
<p><u>Timing issues:</u> Are there any timing constraints to when the review can be carried out?</p>	<p>The Head of Service would not be available during September 2014. Otherwise none apparent prior to scoping, but the review will have to fit in with the timing of the other Select Committee review work programme items. Officers will advise at the meeting if there are any timing issues to consider.</p>
<p>The Committee will meet on (provide <u>dates</u> if known):</p>	<p>Dates: Day/Month/Time/Venue Wednesday 18 June 2014 – Consider Draft Scoping Document Wednesday 9 July 2014 – Presentation of Service/Agree Scope Tuesday 7 October 2014 – Interview review witnesses Tuesday 21 October 2014 - Interview review witnesses/draw together findings and draft recommendations Identify a date for the Final Report and Recommendations</p>
<p><u>SBC Leads</u> (list the Executive Portfolio Holders and SD's Heads of Service who should appear as witnesses):</p>	<p><i>Officers have suggested the following people:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Portfolio Holder for Environment – Cllr John Gardner</i> • <i>Strategic Director (Environment) – Peter Bandy</i> • <i>Head of Environmental Services – Lee Myers</i> • <i>Green Spaces Policy & Development Manager - Julia Hill</i> • <i>Service Manager Street Scene and Amenities - Paul Seaby</i> • <i>Arboriculture and Conservation Manager - Cristian Pinta</i>

	<i>visit Parks and Open spaces (as advised by officers) to gather first hand evidence. Dates to be agreed – ideally carry out in July 2014.</i>
<u>Equalities and Diversity issues:</u> The review will consider what the relevant equalities and diversity issues are regarding the Scrutiny subject that is being scrutinised	<i>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting XXXX</i>
<u>Constraints</u> (Issues that have been highlighted at the scoping stage but are too broad/detailed to be covered by the review):	<i>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting XXXX (These issues can be captured and dealt with via other means – Briefings/email/officer action etc)</i> The review is not intended to revise or rewrite the current policy for tree and hedges but it may make recommendations that in time influence the Council's policy in this area.
<u>Background Documents/data</u> that can be provided to the review	<i>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting XXXX</i> <i>Possible options suggested by officers:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Current Environmental Policy for the town's environment including trees, hedges and its parks and open spaces</i> • <i>Complaints data</i> • <i>Current service provision, resources</i> • <i>Presentation describing the service</i>