



Towards a **Leeds Forest Strategy**

a consultation document



**Towards a
Forest Strategy For Leeds
Consultation Document**

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What is this document?

This consultation document is about the development of a strategy for the future of all the trees, both public and private, in Leeds. The Leeds Forest.

This initial draft has been produced by Leeds City Council's Parks & Countryside Service (the lead agency for the management of trees in the city) in conjunction with colleagues throughout the council. We want to capture a wide range of views and involve a wide variety of interested people in the process of developing the strategy - this document will help us to do that.

What is a Forest?

The term "forest" refers to the total tree population within the area influenced and used by our urban, suburban and rural populations within the municipal boundary of Leeds. This includes woodlands, street trees, landscape trees or individual trees and groups of trees in parks and gardens. All of these have an impact on the human population and vice-versa. Forestry and ¹arboriculture are about the sustainable management of these trees. However, it could be argued that the concept of forestry is much bigger than just management of the trees and woodlands.

Together we all help to shape this forest and there is a huge role for everyone to play in the process.

What is Forestry?

Forestry is a multi-disciplinary approach that seeks to provide and maintain quality green spaces so that they meet the needs of our expanding population by providing a full range of benefits, including opportunities for everyone to adopt a healthier lifestyle within a more pleasant landscape. A landscape that is more sustainable offers an attractive framework for our growing economy and opportunities for wildlife to extend their ranges into the very heart of the City.

Why does the Leeds Forest need a strategy?

Trees and woodlands are a key functional component of the sustainable city. They support ²biodiversity, off-set the effects of global warming, lift our spirits and make the city attractive to investors and visitors. However, reaping these benefits requires a framework of ideas and alliances that can direct development and management towards fulfilling agreed aims and objectives. The City Council does not currently have a strategic approach to how it manages its own trees nor has it agreed a way forward with other major land and tree owners.

¹ **Arboriculture** is the cultivation of trees and shrubs.

² **Biodiversity** is the number of varied types of organisms, habitats and ecosystems in a particular place.

Trees Benefit Us!

Our forest provides us with many long term physical, emotional, environmental, social, recreational, educational and economic benefits.

Many of the quotes below are taken from the publication *The Value of Trees and our Changing Region – The Strategic Framework for Trees, Woods and Forests in the Yorkshire and The Humber Region* and these are marked with an asterisk. Otherwise the reference source is quoted.

Health Benefits

References to Dr. Karen Henwood – “Health Benefits of Woods, Trees and Green Spaces”

- Hospital convalescent time reduced by even brief exposure to views of nature from a hospital bed – Robert Ulrich (1984).
- Evidence of relief from mental fatigue when exposed to encounters with nature, water, vegetation and green space – Kaplan and Kaplan (1989).
- “...the benefits of visual encounters with nature vegetation may be greatest for individuals experiencing stress and anxiety” Tabbush and O’Brian (2003).

Ruth Hall in “Health and Wellbeing: Trees, Woodlands and Natural Spaces” (Tabbush and O’Brian 2003).

- “... there has been increasing recognition in recent years of the importance of physical activity in promoting health and reducing the risk of illness such as coronary heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis

“While people may accept the need to take more regular exercise, for many that only becomes a reality when it can be taken in a stimulating and interesting environment. Research suggests that for many people woodlands are a desirable setting in which to take exercise because they offer aesthetic enjoyment in a sheltered, natural setting.”*

...contribute to an overall reduction in ill-health statistics within the region through the creation of well-treed and wooded environments near to where people live, work and play.*

- Atmospheric pollution in and around cities is reduced through increased tree and woodland cover.*
- Increased shade and humidity levels in built up areas through increased tree and woodland cover.*
- Trees and woodlands planted along transport corridors reduce noise and atmospheric pollution.*

Environmental Benefits

-flood risk reduced through increased woodland creation in river catchments and floodplains.*
- Improved sustainability of drainage systems through increased tree and woodland planting in towns and cities.*
- Energy consumption in towns and cities is reduced through the positive micro-climate impacts of increased tree and woodland planting.*
- Ancient and native woodlands(and general biodiversity) are made more resilient to the impacts of climate change through increased tree and woodland planting to buffer and link vulnerable sites.*
- The City's ecosystems are enhanced through well planned tree and woodland planting and management.*

Social Benefits

- Communities are brought closer together through increased tree and woodland cover.*
- Trees and woodlands provide a sense of place for individuals and communities with increased access to and awareness of the natural, cultural and historic environment.*
- It has been shown that increased access to and awareness of the cultural and historic environment improves the quality of life for individuals and communities.*
- ...offer opportunities of contact with nature in what might otherwise be a largely barren landscape.*

Recreational Benefits

*Contribute to the region's targets for increased levels of physical activity through providing increased opportunities for woodland recreational access.**

- More opportunities are provided for physical recreation through increased woodland access close to where people live.*
- People become more physically active through increased involvement in the care and management of their local woods.*

Educational Benefits

- Trees and woodlands provide a resource and venue for education, interpretation, lifelong learning and skills training.*
- “We value the environment, both natural and shaped by humanity, as the basis of life and a source of wonder and inspiration” - National Curriculum Handbook.
- “A good woodland visit, or better still, a series of woodland visits, provides opportunities for children, their teachers and perhaps their parents to be involved in education in its broadest sense” (Teaching Trees 2003).

Economic Benefits

Improving... the setting for investment and community regeneration ...through enhancing the environments where people live and work.*

- Investment is increased by environments made more attractive through tree and woodland planting...*
- Existing employment and infrastructure development is better integrated in to the local landscape through tree and woodland planting...*
- The reclamation of derelict and underused land is made more sustainable through tree and woodland planting...*
- Housing areas are made more attractive places to live through tree and woodland planting...*
- Town centres and public spaces are made more attractive places to use through tree and woodland planting...
- The leisure, recreation and tourism experience of the city’s wider landscape is enhanced through appropriate tree and woodland planting and management.*

The developing policy context: What is the role of Leeds City Council?

The policy context within which the Leeds Forest Strategy can be located has developed over a number of years in response to social, economic and environmental pressures at international, national, regional and local levels.

International Context

Sustainable Forestry (Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe 1993), ³ameliorating Climate Change (UN Framework on Climate Change, signed at the Rio Earth Summit, 1992) and protecting and enhancing Biodiversity (International Convention on Biodiversity, Rio Earth Summit 1992) have created objectives for local delivery.

National Context

Government efforts to positively improve health, create Sustainable Communities and ensure value for money from public services have implications for how trees and woodlands are perceived and managed.

The Government has placed increasing emphasis on the regional delivery of national policy over recent years. ⁴**Advancing Together: the vision and strategic framework for Yorkshire and Humberside** has developed an overarching vision of regional development. The urban, suburban and rural dimensions of the vision are currently being developed through The ⁵**Regional Forestry Framework** which in turn will fit with a raft of other regional strategies on Sustainable Development, the Economy, Space (Planning), Housing and Culture.

Local Context

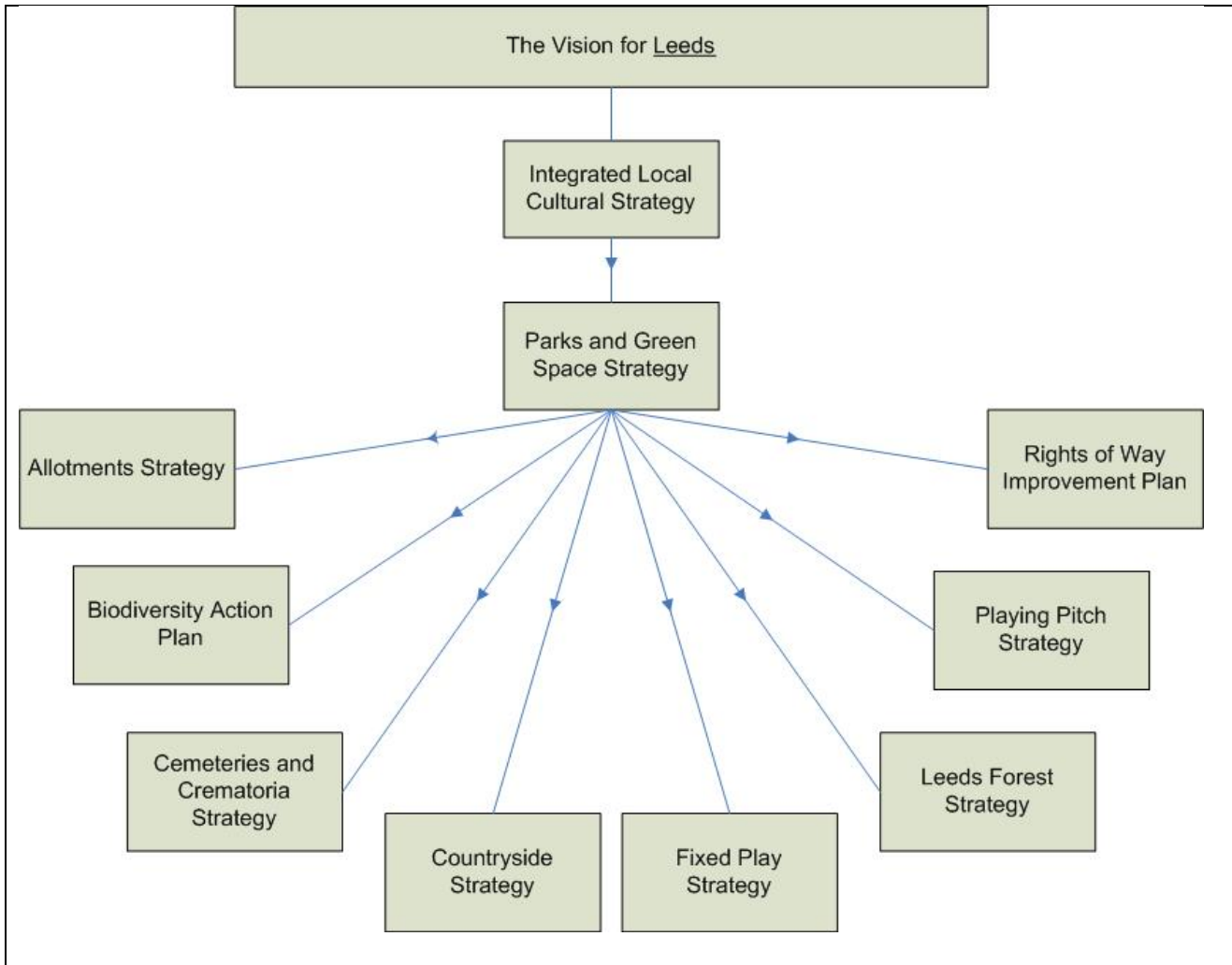
Local authorities are in turn in a unique position to stimulate and influence the process of delivering a *quality* forest. As the largest single landowner and tree owner in its area, Leeds City Council already has a history of leading by example, through the Forest of Leeds initiative, setting standards for woodland and tree management and engaging with community groups, land owners and other stakeholders. This strategy will need to demonstrate links towards the Regional Forestry Framework and also towards the desires and needs of the communities of the district.

Trees and woodlands are an important facet of most green spaces and as such this strategy will have to link to the Parks & Green Space Strategy.

³ **Ameliorating** - making something better or more tolerable.

⁴ Yorkshire and Humberside Assembly (2003) Advancing Together – The Vision and Strategic Framework for Yorkshire and Humberside, YHA Wakefield

⁵ Draft document from Forestry Commission – Trees and Our Changing Region to become our regional Forestry Framework published July 2004 in draft.



This strategy will also be developed to reflect and exploit the tremendous lifelong learning opportunities that are afforded by trees and woodlands within our district.

What do we want the Leeds Forest strategy to achieve?

- **Vision for Leeds 2004 – 2020** has set its sights on making Leeds Europe's cleanest and greenest district. The forest strategy will set out aims and objectives that will support this and other international, national, regional priorities.
- **Set out the legal obligations of The Council in relation to trees and woodlands.** There are a number of common law and statutory obligations that shape how trees and woodlands are managed. The Development Department of the council also has legal responsibilities and duties in relation to trees such as Tree Preservation Orders, Conservation Areas and planning conditions.
- **Provide a vehicle for the development and adoption of a Tree Policy for Leeds City Council.** Currently Leeds City Council does not have an adopted policy to guide individual tree and woodland management decisions.
- **Identify key performance indicators for development and management.** The expenditure of public money to create public benefits should be measured to show improvement.
- **Define, and identify the geographic distribution of all Council owned sites with trees and woodlands** in relation to their size and facilities and assess how accessible they are from surrounding areas.
- **Emphasise the importance of the Leeds Forest** in terms of the many real benefits that the forest can bring to the social, economic and environmental and physical wellbeing of the district.
- **Identify the key issues concerning the provision and management of the Leeds Forest** including strengths and weaknesses as well as an indication of over and under provision.
- **Set out the structures and processes that will deliver the aims and objectives.** Council, community and business partnerships that are capable of success must be formed.
- **Identify the financial and organisational resources available to deliver the aims and objectives.**
- **Internally, enable us to find new ways to respond to customer requirements** whilst maximising the benefits of a single lead agency for Forestry issues.
- **Assist us in establishing 'joined up' environmental co-ordination at a local area level** to put Forestry at the centre of traditional neighbourhood debates (health, community safety etc) and involve them more closely in wider community issues such as vandalism etc.

The current picture

Ownership

Leeds City Council is a key tree owner and manager within the district, however there are some other important public and private tree owners, including rail and water ways, universities, golf courses, private estates etc. A large swathe of the forest is owned and managed by private and council households who grow and manage trees in their own gardens. Responsibility for Leeds City Council trees resides with the ⁶vested department. Some trees are now the responsibility of housing ⁷ALMOs and individual Schools or ⁸PFI's.

Management arrangements

The City Council influences the forest in two important ways at the present time. Firstly, as a land and tree owner, the Council is responsible for its own tree assets. Secondly, through town and country planning and highways legislation, the Council can influence how private landowners manage trees on their property.

Day to day tree and woodland management issues have been dealt with "in house" through the Parks and Countryside service. The service manages the large tree and woodland holding of Learning and Leisure Services and provides forestry services to Highways/City Services, the Housing ALMOs, Social Services and other departments. This arrangement has enabled a reasonably consistent policy towards tree and woodland management to develop and meet the changing demands of internal clients and external customers.

Statutory obligations arising from planning and development law, Tree Preservation Orders, Conservation Area management and new development schemes involving trees are dealt with by Development Services. The obligations to enforce the provisions of the Highways Act reside with Highways/City Services.

The Tree Stock

Leeds City Council has responsibility for managing in excess of ⁹1,200 hectares of woodland across Leeds. As a percentage of total land area, Leeds at ¹⁰4.5% is only half that of the national average and less than the Yorkshire and Humberside average of 6%. Additionally, the City Council is responsible for an estimated 1 million trees across the district, in the highway, parks, public open spaces and development land.

Community Involvement

Since 1995 the Council's main vehicle for encouraging community involvement and also expanding the amount of Council owned woodland has been the Forest of Leeds initiative.

⁶ **Vested** means the part or department, within the City Council which is held responsible for each site/area.

⁷ **ALMO** means Arms Length Management Organisation – the City Council has set these up to own and manage its housing stock.

⁸ **PFI** means Private Funding Initiative – some assets of the City Council are now managed in this way.

⁹ Of a total of 2700 hectares of woodland.

¹⁰ This 4.5% represents the total of 2700 hectares of woodland.

What are the strategic issues?

The size and diversity of the Leeds Forest ensures that there are potentially a great many strategic, tactical and operational issues to address. The key strategic issues are set out below:

Putting Customers First:

Balancing individual and collective needs.

Operationally, customers have always been at the forefront of how the Council manages its tree assets, in the sense that service provision is based on responding to customer enquiries and making safety works and community security issues the priority.

However, there is a need for us to improve communication with our customers about tree and woodland issues.

The main strategic concern however, is how to balance individual customer needs with the public provision of trees to support wider social, economic and environmental aims.

Experience suggests that we need a dual strategy of maintaining trees where they do not cause great inconvenience to individuals and informing customer perceptions about the value of trees in our environment. The former requires a spatial dimension to the forestry strategy (right trees in the right place) and the latter a positive approach to customer relations management.

Social aims

*Community
Forestry,
Sustainable
Communities,
Thriving Places*

Trees alter our experience of the environment in both passive and active ways. The experience is largely positive but can also be negative when trees cause individual problems or become the venue for anti-social behaviour.

Creating the passive benefits is strategically more straight forward where it centres on landscape enhancement projects. The provision of trees can enhance a sense of wellbeing and create a landscape where people are more likely to participate in some form of exercise and recreation. Trees can simply make somewhere a more attractive place to live.

Attaining active benefits, a more positive experience for the customer, requires participation and involvement in the processes of understanding, designing, implementing and maintaining the forest - Community Forestry. High levels of community involvement are desirable but harder to stimulate and sustain, however the benefits are potentially greater as community groups develop the confidence and efficacy to tackle other more complex issues of neighbourhood safety, ¹¹equity and health issues.

The Forest of Leeds initiative has had some success in encouraging community groups and individuals to take ownership of the management process for woodlands in their neighbourhood. The White Rose Forest is also trying to secure a £250,000 grant to “connect” communities with their ancient woodland heritage through their Woodland Ways bid.

¹¹ Equity meant in the sense of addressing areas of deprivation or dislocation, from the benefits of trees.

Economic aims

Internationally competitive city

If Leeds is to realise the vision of being an “internationally competitive city” (Vision II) it must look and feel like an internationally competitive city. The creation and maintenance of a superb quality forest is a key ingredient in how the city looks and feels, in terms of creating both the important first impression and the lasting impression that Leeds is a desirable place to live and work.

Leeds has a good heritage of tree planting and over the past decade the Forest of Leeds has added to the area of woodland cover. However, in comparison with some other UK and European cities, Leeds does not score highly. Attaining European standards will require the City to tackle some major challenges, including the creation of the City Centre ¹²Arboretum, replacement of Victorian street planting schemes and finding land for the expansion of tree and woodland cover throughout the city.

Leeds, through the White Rose Forest, is currently investigating the links between investment and relocation decisions and the quality of the treescape in a joint project with the South Yorkshire Forest. The project “Creating a setting for investment” has European funding through ¹³Interreg IIIB.

¹² **Arboretum** a place where trees and shrubs are cultivated for study and display.

¹³ EU, North Eastern Europe environmental funding initiative

Environmental aims

The sustainable city: climate change and biodiversity

International and national commitments to safeguard and enhance biodiversity and combat the effects of climate change depends upon local action.

In the sustainable city the forest is seen as a functional part of the infrastructure: capturing carbon dioxide and exhaust particulates, intercepting rain and flood waters, providing shade from the sun and shelter from winds. In addition well managed woodlands can provide a local, sustainable source of useful timber and other woodland produce.

The forest is immensely valuable and important as a series of linked habitats that support a range of native flora and fauna. Safeguarding and enhancing these eco-systems requires a co-ordinated and sensitive approach e.g. making sure that woodland creation is not at the expense of other valuable habitat.

Sometimes even individual trees within the forest can be of high ecological and historical value. More often than not these trees are also very old and are referred to as Veteran Trees. These trees require special care and attention to manage their ecological value, extend as much as possible their viability and ensure they do not pose a hazard.

Apart from the physical measurable environmental aspects of trees, there are the other benefits they can bring. Examples of this are where trees are planted to screen or soften a development or simply as an aesthetically pleasing feature in their own right.

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| <p>Ownership and Management:</p> <p><i>Diversity and fragmentation</i></p> | <p>and</p> <p>and</p> | <p>Ownership and management of Leeds trees reside with several vested departments (Highways, Social Services, Learning and Leisure) and also with the ALMOs and Schools under ¹⁴LMS.</p> <p>¹⁵Area Management will place service provision closer to the end user. Large parts of the forest are under private ownership and management.</p> <p>The main strategic challenge is how to deliver the important social, environmental and economic aims of forestry from a diverse and fragmented pattern of ownership and management. Essentially, this is also the main argument for a forest strategy as a partnership document, a shared vision of how the forest can be grown and managed for the benefit of the City.</p> |
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¹⁴ **LMS** means Locally Managed Schools, schools which have chosen to manage a lot of their own assets, instead of having them managed by the city.

¹⁵ **Area Management** is the way in which the district is now separated in to 5 administrative `wedges' with the City Centre being a 6th area. The 5 wedges are further divided into inner and outer areas.

Asset and Risk Management:

Responsibilities for meeting legal obligations

Some trees are also a hazard and carry the risk of failure resulting in injury or damage to property. Leeds City Council trees also encroach upon private property and again carry a risk of causing subsidence damage to private property. A number of local authorities over the past few years have faced severe criticism, heavy fines and costs arising from their failure to meet their legal obligations in respect to trees.

The tree and woodland assets of the Council are numerous, diverse, widespread and largely unrecorded, nor are they systematically inspected or maintained. The collection and maintenance of basic asset data is a key pre-requisite of any attempt to plan and deliver strategic objectives, and to have a “defensible system” in law, in the event of major injury or fatality.

Diversity and fragmentation of ownership and management have or are potentially blurring the lines of responsibility for tree asset and risk management.

Timescales

The consultation period will close on 3rd July 2006. After that we will look at all the comments and views we have received and feed them into the process of developing the strategy itself - the key element of the strategy will be an action framework for the future. Prior to publication the draft strategy will also be consulted on widely in December 2006. We aim to publish the final strategy summer 2007.

Whilst we believe that the above analysis is broadly accurate, we know that local people and other stakeholders have a lot to add to our understanding of the issues we are facing as well as ideas on how we might address them. We would like to thank you for reading this document and ask you to take this opportunity to let us know what you think about the future of the Leeds Forest.

We are happy to receive any views and comments you may have about the contents of this document. However, set out below are a few key questions, which we are particularly keen to consult on. Please respond to the questions you feel are most relevant to you and do not worry if you feel unable to answer all of them.

Your Forest – What do you think?

The questions

1. Have we identified the right issues and are there any others we should be addressing within the strategy?
2. From your point of view which issues should be addressed as a matter of priority
 - a. within your local community?
 - b. for the city as a whole?
3. In your opinion, which Leeds Forest sites are you most proud of and why
 - a. within your local community?
 - b. for the city as a whole?
4. In your opinion which facilities are not so good and why
 - a. within your local community?
 - b. for the city as a whole?
5. What are your views on how the issues raised should be addressed?

Please let us have your postcode. It will help us build a picture of opinions around the district.

The closing date for consultation is the **3rd July 2006**. You can respond in the following ways:

- call our hotline on **0113 395 7403** (24 hours) to make your comments
- write to us at:

**Leeds Forest Strategy,
7th Floor West
Merrion House
Merrion Centre
Leeds LS2 8DT**

- e-mail us at **parks@leeds.gov.uk**