

REPORT TITLE: Urban Forest Strategy 2026-2036: Cabinet Decision Report

To: Cabinet Member for Nature, Open Spaces and City Services, Martin Smart.

Cabinet 24 March

Report by: Matthew Magrath, Urban Forest Manager

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Wards affected: All

Director Approval: Director James Elms confirms that the report author has sought the advice of all appropriate colleagues and given due regard to that advice; that the equalities impacts and other implications of the recommended decisions have been assessed and accurately presented in the report; and that they are content for the report to be put to the Cabinet/Cabinet Member for decision.

1. Recommendations

1.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Approve the Urban Forest Strategy 2026-2036 (v5) and the supporting Topic Papers.
- b) Note Scrutiny Committee's consideration of the Strategy's development history and consultation process (**see section 6.4**).
- c) Endorse the proposed Delivery Framework (**see Appendix 6**), Policies, Actions and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as the basis for delivery and monitoring of the Strategy.

2. Purpose and reason for the report

- 2.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval of the Urban Strategy 2026-2036 (UFS) as the Council's strategic framework for protecting, managing and growing Cambridge's urban forest over the next decade.
- 2.2 The report is decision-focused and does not repeat the detailed development history or consultation narrative, which has been considered by Scrutiny Committee¹ (see section 6.4). Cabinet is asked to note this context and focus on the final Strategy.
- 2.3 This report therefore focuses on:
- the case for adoption;
 - any changes arising from Scrutiny; and
 - the implications of approving or not approving the Strategy.

3. Alternative options considered

- 3.1 Option 1: Retain the Citywide Tree Strategy 2016-2026 (Not recommended)
The 2016 Tree Strategy is time-expired and does not reflect current climate, biodiversity, planning or evidence contexts.

Option 2: Adopt the Urban Forest Strategy 2026-2036 (Preferred option)

Provides an up-to-date, evidence-led framework for protecting, managing and growing Cambridge's urban forest over the next decade.

Option 3: Delay adoption (Not recommended)

Would create a policy gap and weaken strategic coordination, delivery and defensibility of tree-related decisions.

¹ [A Agenda for Services, Climate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday, 11th March, 2026, 5.30 pm - Cambridge Council](#)

4. Background and key issues

- 4.1 The UFS represents an evolution from the 2016 Tree Strategy², moving from a primarily asset-based approach focused on Council-managed trees to a whole-city urban forest approach that recognises the role of partners, private land and communities in delivering canopy outcomes.
- 4.2 The evidence base and strategic rationale for the UFS, including the long-term ambition of at least 20% canopy cover by 2050, has been reviewed by Scrutiny Committee and is not repeated in detail here.
- 4.3 Cabinet is asked to consider whether the final Strategy provides a sufficiently clear, proportionate and deliverable framework to guide policy, investment and operational decision-making over the next decade.

5. Corporate plan

- 5.1 The UFS supports delivery of all Corporate Plan priorities, including responding to the climate and biodiversity emergencies, tackling inequality and improving health and wellbeing, supporting sustainable neighbourhoods, and modernising council services through evidence-led, cross-service working.
- 5.2 The Strategy aligns with and complements the Climate Change Strategy and Biodiversity Strategy, providing a coherent framework for nature-based solutions and climate adaptation across the city.

6. Consultation, engagement and communication

- 6.1 The development history of the Strategy and the consultation process have been considered in detail by Scrutiny Committee and are not repeated in full in the Cabinet appendices.
- 6.2 Cabinet is asked to note that consultation across Officers, Leadership Team, independent technical and legal review (Subsidence Topic Paper), and the public demonstrated strong overall support for the direction of the Strategy, with feedback used

² [Tree strategy - Cambridge City Council](#)

to improve clarity, alignment with corporate strategies and legal robustness.

- 6.3 Any material issues raised through consultation that affect the final Strategy have been addressed prior to this Cabinet report.
- 6.4 Along with the Biodiversity mid-review, the Urban Forest Strategy was taken before Scrutiny Committee 11 March 2026³.

Following a question-and-answer session, the Committee noted the progress made in developing the Urban Forest Strategy 2026-2036, including consultation responses, and approved the Strategy for recommendation to Cabinet for adoption without amendment. Minor editorial corrections (e.g. spelling and formatting) have been made since the meeting.

7. Anticipated outcomes, benefits or impact

- 7.1 Approval of the UFS will provide a clear, evidence-led framework for protecting, managing and expanding Cambridge's urban forest, strengthening cross-Council coordination and providing transparency through monitoring and KPIs.
- 7.2 The Strategy is expected to improve canopy equity, embed trees as core urban infrastructure, and strengthen community participation and shared stewardship.

8. Implications

8.1 Relevant risks

Approving the Strategy carries low strategic risk, primarily relating to delivery capacity over time and managing public expectations. Not approving the Strategy carries higher strategic, environmental and reputational risk through loss of policy direction and weakened defensibility of decisions.

³ [Agenda for Services, Climate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday, 11th March, 2026, 5.30 pm - Cambridge Council](#)

Financial Implications

- 8.2 There are no direct financial implications arising from adoption of the Strategy. Adoption does not commit the Council to additional expenditure. Delivery will be prioritised within existing approved budgets, with any future initiatives or aspirational elements subject to separate business case development and approval through the Council's normal budget-setting and governance processes.

Legal Implications

- 8.3 No new legal duties arise. The Strategy provides a clearer framework to support lawful and defensible decision-making.

Equalities and socio-economic Implications

- 8.4 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been prepared for v2 of the UFS and attached as an appendix to this report (**Appendix 1**).

The EqIA prepared for v2 has been reviewed for ongoing relevance and remains applicable to v5, as the strategic aims and equity principles have not changed.

The UFS explicitly addresses issues of equitable access to tree canopy cover across the city. Analysis has highlighted inequalities in canopy distribution that correlate with social and economic deprivation. The UFS responds to this evidence by embedding equity considerations into future planting and management priorities.

Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental implications

- 8.5 Trees and woodlands are a vital part of climate mitigation and adaptation. The UFS sets out a proactive approach to maintaining and expanding canopy cover, contributing to:
- Carbon storage and sequestration, supporting the Council's net zero targets.
 - Urban cooling and shade, reducing the impacts of extreme heat.
 - Stormwater management, helping reduce local flood risk.

- Biodiversity enhancement and habitat connectivity.

The UFS complements and aligns with the Council's Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategies.

A climate change rating has been completed for v2 of the UFS and it attached at **Appendix 5**. The Climate Change Rating completed for v2 remains applicable to v5, as the Strategy's direction and climate outcomes are unchanged.

Procurement Implications

- 8.6 There are no direct procurement implications arising from this decision. Any future procurement for planting, maintenance or surveys arising from delivery of the UFS will follow existing Council frameworks and procurement processes.

Community Safety Implications

- 8.7 There are no direct community safety implications arising from this decision. The UFS supports public safety in relation to the Council's tree asset through continued proactive inspection, risk-based management and maintenance, and provides a consistent framework to guide tree-related decision-making across multiple Council services.

8.8 Checklist - Impact of the decision:

Financial: Adoption of the UFS does not commit the Council to additional expenditure. Delivery will be prioritised within existing approved budgets. Future elements may be accelerated through collaboration and external funding opportunities, building on the Council's track record of securing over £1 million since 2019. Actions without identified funding are included as aspirational and will only be progressed where resources become available and subject to the Council's normal budget approval processes.

Legal: No new legal duties are created. The UFS supports compliance with existing duties such as tree preservation and planning requirements.

Corporate Priorities: The UFS contributes to all four Corporate Plan priorities: responding to the climate and biodiversity emergencies, tackling poverty and inequality, supporting sustainable housing and neighbourhoods, and modernising council services.

Climate Change, Biodiversity & Sustainability: The UFS has a positive impact. It will help increase canopy cover, capture carbon, provide shade and cooling, deliver biodiversity net gain, and reduce stormwater flooding.

Crime and Disorder / Community Safety: The UFS indirectly supports safety through proactive tree inspection and maintenance.

Discrimination and Equality: The UFS explicitly addresses equity and will identify areas with low canopy cover and higher social need, ensuring fairer distribution of the benefits of trees.

Human Resources: The UFS does not create new posts, though it reinforces the Urban Forest Manager role and may guide future staff and team development.

ICT: Existing systems such as GIS and online mapping will support delivery and monitoring.

Property: Trees on council land are an asset class but there are no new property implications.

Procurement: Future procurement for services, planting or maintenance will follow standard council processes or our Framework Agreement⁴.

Customer Services: The UFS will provide a clearer framework for responding to public enquiries, complaints and FOIs.

Communications, Consultation & Engagement: A two-stage consultation process has been undertaken, comprising internal consultation followed by public consultation

⁴ [Our tree-work partners - Cambridge City Council](#) (last accessed 26/08/25)

alongside the Biodiversity Strategy review. Both stages indicated overall support for the direction and aims of the UFS, with feedback used to refine clarity and presentation.

Council's values and Target Operating Model: The UFS supports cross-service working, measurable performance through KPIs, fairness through tree equity, sustainability through canopy expansion, protection and resilience, and improved customer focus.

9. **Background documents**

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

N/A

10. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for Urban Forest Strategy (v2)

Appendix 2 UFS Version control details

Appendix 3 UFS v5

Appendix 4 [Topic Papers 1-12 v5](#)

Appendix 5 Climate Change Rating Tool for UFS (v2)

Appendix 6 Summary of UFS Delivery Framework

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact Matthew Magrath, Urban Forest Manager, 01223458526, matthew.magrath@cambridge.gov.uk