

Towards a Moorside Tree Strategy: Discussion Document June 2011

1. Introduction

Moorside has historically tolerated and sometimes encouraged trees on site, and in this respect is unusual amongst Newcastle's 63 allotment sites. Thus trees are an important part of the Moorside heritage. They are also aesthetically pleasing and they support wildlife. For all these three reasons it seems probable that most Moorside members would support the conservation of our Moorside trees. In drawing up a policy to formalise this conservation, account needs to be taken of the views of our lease-holder, Newcastle Council, and its relevant policies.

2. The Newcastle Tree Strategy and the Allotment Strategy

The Newcastle City Council Tree Strategy was formulated in 2002. The revised action plan 2008-2012 delineates the primary aim of the strategy as "to protect the trees we have; care for them; plant more trees". Trees are used here in a generic sense to include trees, hedges and woodlands. The Tree Policy 2002 notes that trees and hedges improve environmental amenity and quality; they help fight climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide; they stabilise soils and they provide habitats and green corridors for wildlife, both birds and mammals. There is no specific reference to allotments in the Tree Strategy.

The Newcastle Allotments Strategy 2010-2015 has as its primary aim an attempt to meet the recent huge increase in demand for allotments by increasing the stock of allotments and by ensuring that current allotments are fully cultivated. The Allotment Strategy discusses the Newcastle Tree Strategy as follows:

"Although there is no direct reference to allotments in the document, it is clear there is great scope for allotments to contribute to the Tree Strategy goals. In particular the considerable perimeter length of the 78 hectares of allotment land could be planted with native hedges. Some progress has been made in planting hedges but this has not been systematically recorded and we recommend that a survey of the potential for perimeter hedging should be a joint priority between the Allotment Strategy and Tree Strategy" (p49).

The Newcastle Allotments Strategy then follows this up in Target 16 (p62):
"We believe that what is now required is a systematic survey of all Newcastle's allotment sites to find out what percentage of perimeters have hedging and to gauge the potential for a massive hedge planting scheme".

In summary the Allotment Strategy prioritises perimeter hedging and does not specifically mention trees. There is a potential conflict between the need to conserve trees and the need to ensure full cultivation of allotments which is not specifically addressed in the Allotment Strategy.

Newcastle Council's integration of the two strategies, and the solution of the potential conflict between trees and full cultivation, is to encourage planting of trees along the perimeter of allotment sites and to encourage only the planting of fruit trees within allotment sites. In general, damaged or diseased trees and immature trees within allotment sites would be candidates for surgery or removal. Mature trees would be conserved unless there were specific circumstances seriously impairing cultivation.

3. Newcastle Allotment Working Group

The Newcastle Allotment Working Group acts as an advisory body mediating between the City Council and individual Allotment Associations.

Many Newcastle Allotment sites do not have trees on site, though some do have perimeter trees. In the past trees on allotments have not proved to be a matter of specific

concern of NAWG, and their current focus is upon increasing perimeter hedging in line with the Allotment Strategy. However, management of trees on allotment sites is handled via the allotment budget which is overseen by NAWG. Thus, if tree consultation and work is needed, Mark Todd, The Allotment Officer, on behalf of NAWG will call in Mick Robinson the Tree Officer. Together they make a plan; the work is carried out by the Tree Dept and funded by the NAWG budget.

NAWG are happy to devolve most site decisions to the individual allotment associations, whilst assuming overall responsibility for those decisions and keeping a watching brief. NAWG are aware that different sites have different characteristics and culture. Although this has never been specifically discussed at NAWG, it seems likely that that NAWG would accept that Moorside has a specific heritage of mature woodland trees that should be preserved. Thus in the final instance, all decisions about Moorside trees are the responsibility of the Moorside Committee, which will, however take into account the recommendations of the Council Officers and the views of Moorside members in making decisions about trees.

4. The Moorside Committee

The Moorside Committee wish to support both the Newcastle Tree Strategy and the Newcastle Allotment Strategy and agree in general with the Council's current views upon integration of the two strategies as described in Section One above.

During 2011 the Committee has been following the following principles:

1. To conserve where possible, and appropriate, mature trees
2. To sanction work upon, or removal of, damaged trees
3. To sanction the removal of self-seeded, immature trees.
4. To appraise trees against current or future restrictions upon cultivation they might impose. This would entail, for instance, considerations of the type of tree and its position on the site.

As Moorside's Rules state, no trees shall be removed by Moorside members. Requests for work upon, or removal of, trees on site must go through the Committee. If the Committee decides work or removal to be appropriate, then it will inform the Allotment Officer who in turn will seek the advice of the Tree Officer, who will then authorize and carry out the work as appropriate

5. Individual plot-holders

In making specific decisions about trees, the Committee will consult with, and take into account, the views of the plot-holders upon whose plots the trees stand, and neighboring plot-holders whose cultivation is handicapped by the tree or may be so in the future. However the Moorside Committee should make the final decision based upon its judgment of each individual case.

Peter Whewell 22nd June