


3 October 2022

Report of	Assistant Director of Place and Client Services	Author	Shelley Blackaby
Title	Canopy Cover Assessment Guidance		 07977 184926
Wards affected	All wards affected		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Policy CC1 (Climate Change) of the [adopted Local Plan](#) (2022) includes criteria for how a low carbon future for Colchester will be achieved. In relation to canopy cover, the policy says:

“(iv) A Canopy Cover Assessment will be required for all major applications. Development proposals should seek, where appropriate, to increase the level of canopy cover on site by a minimum of 10%. In circumstances where this is not possible or desirable, compensatory provision should be identified and secured through a legal obligation.”

- 1.2 A canopy cover assessment is an assessment of the area of ground directly covered by the leaves and branches of vegetation and is expressed as a percentage. The principal objective of a tree canopy cover assessment is to help understand the urban forest resource, specifically the amount of tree canopy that exists on an individual site at present. Canopy cover assessments provide a more accurate representation than simply counting the number of trees.
- 1.3 The Local Plan requires all major applications to prepare a canopy cover assessment and then increase the level of canopy cover onsite by a minimum of 10%. To help applicants understand how the canopy cover assessment should be carried out, a guidance note has been prepared.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee approve the canopy cover assessment guidance.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The adopted Local Plan requires major applications to carry out a canopy cover assessment and increase canopy cover by a minimum of 10%. This guidance provides advice on how the canopy cover assessment should be carried out, which will assist applicants, Development Management Officers, and Members.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The alternative option is to not approve the guidance or to amend it prior to publication. The requirement for a canopy cover assessment and increase in canopy cover by a minimum of 10% would still apply.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 Policy CC1 (Climate Change) of the [adopted Local Plan](#) (2022) includes criteria for how a low carbon future for Colchester will be achieved. In relation to canopy cover, the policy says:
- “(iv) A Canopy Cover Assessment will be required for all major applications. Development proposals should seek where appropriate to increase the level of canopy cover on site by a minimum of 10%. In circumstances, where this is not possible or desirable, compensatory provision should be identified and secured through a legal obligation.”
- 5.2 A canopy cover assessment is an assessment of the area of ground directly covered by the leaves and branches of vegetation and is expressed as a percentage. The principal objective of a tree canopy cover assessment is to help understand the urban forest resource, specifically the amount of tree canopy that exists on an individual site at present. Canopy cover assessments provide a more accurate representation than simply counting the number of trees.
- 5.3 The importance of vegetation in towns and urban areas is long recognised; it provides shade, evaporative cooling, rainwater interception. It has an influence on other items such as air quality, energy use, biodiversity, and the reduction of the urban heat island effect. It also has positive impacts on human health and mental wellbeing.
- 5.4 There is an ongoing and increasing level of evidence that has made it clear that trees are a cost effective way of providing a wide range of benefits to the environment, individuals and society and as part of the wider green infrastructure are an important component of climate change adaption strategies.
- 5.5 The tree canopy coverage for Colchester Borough is currently 18% varying between wards / locations. There are some areas with larger and better canopy cover and others with significantly less. The long-term aim should be to increase the canopy cover of the borough to 20% and then 25%. It is recognised that this is an aspirational target, but that new development should seek to contribute to increase tree canopy cover where appropriate. It is considered that 10% as a target on development sites where appropriate would help to mitigate the likely losses of trees over the plan period whilst steadily increasing the overall canopy cover of the borough.
- 5.6 The Local Plan requires all major applications to prepare a canopy cover assessment and then increase the level of canopy cover onsite by a minimum of 10%. To help applicants understand how the canopy cover assessment should be carried out, a guidance note has been prepared.
- 5.7 This guidance is aimed at applicants, Development Management Officers, and Members. The purpose of this guidance is to set out the Council’s expectations in relation to the policy requirement for canopy cover assessments. It is intended to be a concise guide.
- 5.8 The guidance sets out some background and explains how to measure existing canopy cover onsite and that once the current level of canopy cover on the site has been measured, it is necessary for applicants to work out how new tree planting can achieve a minimum of 10% increase in canopy cover. A Tree Planting Plan should be prepared to show the location, species, and radius of the canopy of new trees. This can be used to

calculate canopy cover, in m², post development, and calculate the percentage increase in canopy cover.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared for the Local Plan, and is available to view by clicking on this link:

<https://cbccrmdata.blob.core.windows.net/noteattachment/Equality%20Impact%20Assessment%20June%202017.pdf>

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 The requirement for a canopy cover assessment and increase in canopy cover by a minimum of 10% is included in Policy CC1: Climate Change as one of the measures to achieve a low carbon future for Colchester. It thus relates to the Strategic Plan theme 'Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability' and specifically the priority 'conserve and enhance biodiversity'.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 The policy requirement for canopy cover assessments was consulted upon as part of the Local Plan main modifications consultation.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 The guidance, if approved, will be added to the Council's website and shared with applicants.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 There are no financial implications.

11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 An increase in tree canopy cover is expected to support the health and wellbeing of Borough residents.

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 No direct implications.

13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 No direct implications.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 14.1 The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has committed to being carbon neutral by 2030. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework. Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. These are economic, social and environmental objectives.

14.2 Increasing canopy cover will contribute towards the theme of 'enhance biodiversity and protect our environment' in the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan.

Appendices

Canopy cover assessment guidance