

**“That Cork County Council would create a new post for a Tree Protection Officer whose function it would be to be available to advise both local authority staff and the public on tree planting, preservation, maintenance and cutting as appropriate.”**

There is no debate over the benefits of trees. Woodlands are places where people can get out in the fresh air and feel connected with nature, with their heritage and with each other. They provide vital space for insects, plants and wildlife. They form a critical part of biodiversity corridors. Trees keep us humans healthy. They absorb six of the most common urban air pollutants. In an urban landscape, they help to lower the crime rate. Studies have shown that urban vegetation lowers heart rate, lowers blood pressure, and relaxes brain wave patterns. Children exposed to more greenery demonstrate better attention skills and memory development. Homes landscaped with trees sell more quickly; in a treelined street, homes may be worth 25% more. Trees enhance economic stability by attracting businesses, people linger and shop longer when trees are present. Where offices have a canopy of trees, workers report more productivity and less absenteeism. Tree breaks help to reduce the effect of urban and traffic noise and reduce residential heating costs by 10 – 15%. Shading and evaporative cooling from trees can cut residential air conditioning costs by 20 – 50%. They play a very effective role in stormwater management. By locking up carbon, trees help to slow the rate at which our climate is warming. And in both urban and rural settings, trees are a hugely important element of our visual landscape.

Most trees are longer lived than most humans. Many are longer lived than most buildings. If some of our most beautiful trees could talk, they could regale us with first-hand accounts of the Great Famine and both World Wars. Many have been passed through the generations. The saplings of today will create the landscape of our grandchildren and their children.

In short, trees are an intergenerational asset, a key part of our heritage and one of the most cost-effective tools in a local authority’s armoury.

Yet although there are some 2000 staff in this organisation, Cork County Council has no specialist Tree Officer. We have no tree policy. We have an Environmental Strategy covering the period 2016 – 2020 which does not mention trees at all. Although high value landscapes are identified in the County Development Plan and some land is zoned for scenic amenity in the Local Area Plans, we do not use the Tree Preservation Order mechanism to protect individual high-value trees. Tree protection measures are often attached to planning permissions, yet those same trees often suffer – sometimes fatally – from compaction and root damage during development. In terms of climate benefits there are question marks over what trees to plant in what places and how best to manage them. Frequently the public could seriously benefit from informed advice on dangerous trees, unauthorised works to trees, trees blocking light into homes and trees on property boundaries. An arborist, possibly interfacing between the planning department and the environmental awareness unit, dedicated to the management and enhancement of our county’s tree stock would be a huge asset. Local authorities have a pivotal responsibility in maintaining the quality of our landscape and given the free and multifaceted benefits of trees generally, the appointment of a specialist Tree Protection Officer would be a very easy win.