Appendix E – Capital Asset Valuation of Amenity Trees (CAVAT)

Recommendation:-

That CAVAT is adopted by West Northamptonshire Council for dealing with the loss of trees within its ownership due to third parities damage or the need for removal. It is also recommended that any compensation is ring fenced for new tree planting initial young tree maintenance on their land or other land where the public can benefit e.g. Parish Council managed openspaces.

Capital Asset Valuation of Amenity Trees (CAVAT)

CAVAT is a method developed in the UK for managing trees as public assets rather than liabilities. It is a strategic tool and aid for decision-making in relation to assessing tree stock as a whole, and where the value of a single tree needs to be expressed in monetary terms in order to demonstrate its relative contribution to public amenity.

Capital Asset Valuation of Amenity Trees (CAVAT) was developed by Chris Neilan and the London Tree Officers Association (LTOA) in 2008 and is regarded as one of the principal methods of tree valuation in the UK. Valuing amenity trees is important for calculating loss of amenity and replacement value following wilful or negligent damage, and for several aspects of urban forest management: planning, budget setting and decision-making.

CAVAT provides a method for managing trees as public assets rather than liabilities. It is designed not only to be a strategic tool and aid to decision-making in relation to the tree stock as a whole, but also to be applicable to individual cases, where the value of a single tree needs to be expressed in monetary terms.

In the UK, section 198 of the Town and Country Planning Act (1990) covers the public amenity value of trees, and places a duty on local authorities to protect trees in the public interest. However, it does not prescribe how their value should be estimated. A number of urban street trees valuation systems have been developed. The term 'street trees' often refers to all trees within urban areas and not just those on the street.

Discussion of CAVAT

Typically, public realm assets are valued on an asset register, for example, land, highways, lamp columns. Trees have often remained as one of the few public assets that had no value or entry on the asset register. Traditionally this has meant that when a tree removal was proposed, little mitigation was offered and development could proceed or, where a subsidiary planting scheme was proposed and subsequently failed, the public asset was lost.

Since the adoption of CAVAT, many local authorities have either influenced developers to change their designs to avoid tree damage or received adequate compensation for tree loss.

CAVAT has also been successful in securing compensation following wilful or negligent damage to local authority trees (see www.ltoa.org.uk/resources/cavat). Typically, the local authorities have reinvested the compensation back into local tree planting and maintenance.

It is a little-known or rarely applied planning principle that a developer does not have an automatic right to remove a public tree just because planning has been consented on private land. They must seek permission from the local authority's department responsible for trees in order to remove the tree or work with them to secure its future.

CAVAT has also been useful in helping to alter an entrenched perception in many local authorities that trees are liabilities which must be strictly managed from the perspective of risk. Instead, CAVAT illustrates that healthy trees are assets which not only provide valuable amenity that is not easily off-set, but which also appreciate in value over time given appropriate management.

Studies on other systems:-

Studies have compared the available valuations systems a summary is detailed below (source: https://cdn.forestresearch.gov.uk/2022/01/FCRN008_lcXvkLV.pdf):

Helliwell was first developed and published in 1967 and most recently revised in 2008. It has been endorsed by the Tree Council and the Arboricultural Association. Its main stated aim is to aid practical planning and management (e.g. felling, pruning and planting) of woodlands and urban trees by evaluating their relative contribution to the visual quality of the landscape.

The CAVAT system is targeted primarily at local authorities and publicly owned trees, providing a method for managing trees as public assets rather than liabilities. It was developed and first applied in London in 2007 and is based on the depreciated replacement cost approach. CAVAT also takes into account the contribution of location, relative contribution to amenity, social value and appropriateness, as well as an assessment of functionality and life expectancy.

i-Tree peer-reviewed software suite was developed by the United States Forest Service for use by communities. i-Tree Tools are in the public domain and are freely accessible.

Both CAVAT and i-Tree, take substantial account of the social and cultural component of the value of street trees. The Helliwell system puts an emphasis on visual amenity and, being explicitly based on expert judgement, also appears to produce the most variable valuation outcomes of the three systems (Watson, 2002).

References

CAVAT (Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees): valuing amenity trees as public assets Kieron J. Doick, Christopher Neilan, Glyn Jones, Andrew Allison, Ian

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