St Albans City & District

Tree Policy and Action Plan

Review 2015/16 - 2020

St Albans
City & District Council

INTRODUCTION

The first Tree Strategy for St Albans City and District was published in 2004 and reviewed in 2010. Since that time there have been a number of changes in legislation and national planning policy that impact on the management and protection of trees. Locally the management responsibility for Highway Trees has been passed over to Hertfordshire County Council.

A key element of the strategy is the Action Plan, which sets out clearly the Council's priorities over the next five years. This 2015/16 Review primarily focuses on updating the Action Plan to ensure current and future challenges are met.

The challenges include environmental factors such as Climate Change, Ash Die Back and sustainability targets. The role of trees in addressing these is becoming more widely understood. In addition, pressure for development and financial constraints influence the management of the tree stock and replacement planting. All these factors have implications for the tree population of the District and the wider landscape.

UPDATED POLICIES

Policies for the Management of all Trees on District Council property

Policy 1:
The Council will seek to create a varied and sustainable tree population. Its development and expansion will be encouraged by new planting of amenity trees and native bee friendly species resilient to climate change where appropriate.
Any trees removed shall be replaced unless there are special circumstances preventing this. Species suitable for the planting location will be selected, with native species and species resilient to climate change used where appropriate to maximise wildlife benefit. Natural regeneration of trees will be encouraged where possible.

Policy 2:
The Council will encourage and enable better understanding of the management of trees in order to promote greater community ownership and awareness through the Tree Warden Scheme.

Policy 3:
The Council will maintain the highest possible standards of tree care and management by:
a)   surveying its tree stock on an up to 3 year cycle & maintaining survey records,
b)   working to standards set within BS 3998 (2010) and subsequent revisions,
c)   adopting best practice according to all relevant legislation and research,
d)   avoiding work that results in the unnecessary loss of wildlife habitat,
e)   endeavouring to keep people and property safe, and,

f)   discouraging practices by other agencies that threaten the establishment of new trees as well as existing trees.

Policy 4:

Work on trees will normally be carried out according to the following criteria:

a)   Dead / dying trees shall be removed where they may be a safety hazard to the public or adjoining property.*

b)   Trees shall be made safe or replaced as appropriate, if they are a health and safety risk due to:
  i.   disease,
  ii.   storm damage,
  iii.   growth defects,
  iv.   loss of root anchorage,
  v.   loss of structural integrity,
  vi.   persistent branch fall, and,
  vii.   major deadwood.

*Dead and fallen wood will be left on site and, where safe to do so, dead trees left standing for the benefit of biodiversity and to provide valuable habitat.

Policy 5:

The removal of trees or heavy lopping will be resisted unless there are sound arboriculture or other reasons, (e.g. disease, structural damage, or a clearly identified threat to an ancient monument).

The Council will not normally carry out felling or potentially disfiguring forms of tree work in order to improve the reception of television signals or for CCTV operation.

Policy 6:

When dealing with complaints about daylight obstruction by trees, the Council will limit its agreement to requests for tree works to cases where the tree canopy is coming into physical contact with buildings. Overhanging growth will only be removed if it is obstructing access.

Policy 7:

The Council will encourage sustainable practices in tree contracts and aim to maximise the recycling of tree related 'waste' created by its tree management.

Maintenance works will make best use of resources by efficient work planning and the recycling of by-product material wherever possible by the following means:

a)   Brushwood will be chipped and spread in the work area when conditions allow, or taken for use elsewhere.

b)   Cordwood will be left stacked in the work area where conditions allow, or taken for sale or disposal elsewhere.   Where access permits, felled wood will be cut into manageable sized logs and left for residents to take.

c)   Materials removed from works will be utilised for mulch, biomass or other appropriate form of recycling.

d)   The use of peat or any other products that are harmful to the environment will

be avoided.

Policy 8:

The Council will endeavour to protect trees and their growing environment from threats, such as: loss of and damage to verges; the activities of statutory undertakers and others excavating near trees; and, damage from the over-use of road de-icing salt.

Policy 9:

As far as possible the Council will ensure that any ancient and veteran trees, for which it is responsible, are retained and protected as special historical, wildlife and landscape features.

Policy 10:

Trees will be maintained and reinforced by new planting in areas where shade is needed in public areas in the Council's control.

Policy 11:

Wherever possible, local residents, Councillors and other interested parties will receive prior notice of works that will have a significant impact upon trees in their vicinity. This includes heavy crown reduction work, or the felling and replacement of a large proportion of trees.

There may be exceptions to this where work is of an urgent nature, for example to abate a hazard or to control a tree pest or disease.

Policy 12:

Issues of subsidence will be addressed by the following measures:

a)   Trees with a known claim history will be managed proactively.

b)   Trees that grow from seed or root suckers and are likely to cause future conflict with nearby structures will be removed.

c)   The most appropriate forms of pruning for trees in high risk areas will be used. This may involve the use of:

    i.   crown reduction works, or

    ii.   pollarding or re-pollarding works.

d)   Removal of trees will be carried out if no other measure is effective in light of evidence received from investigations.

Policies for Street Trees on Hertfordshire County Council property

Policy 13:

The Council will continue to work in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council on the replacement of ageing highway tree populations and to ensure, where feasible, replacement trees are planted when existing trees are felled.

Policy 14:
HCC will be encouraged to plant new and/or replacement trees in roads. Species selection should reflect the type in use locally if resilient to climate change. This includes maintaining single species avenues and using large growing species where appropriate.

Policy 15:
The Council will not normally support the removal of trees for vehicle crossovers, unless the tree is of limited life expectancy or is small enough to be relocated elsewhere.

Policy 16:
The Council will support measures that discourage verge parking by road vehicles, and damage to verges caused by adjoining building works.

Policies for Woodlands and Wooded Commons

Policy 17:
The Council will ensure its woodlands have up to date management plans in place and encourage the production of plans for woods in the private sector, in particular those which are County Wildlife Sites.

Policy 18:
The Council will ensure that its woodlands are managed as a long term sustainable resource for the public, for recreation, education and nature conservation. This management will be in-line with national and local Biodiversity Action Plans, and consistent with guidelines for safeguarding European Protected species as produced by the Forestry Commission.

Policy 19:
The Council will offset where possible some of its costs incurred through woodland management by the marketing of timber and other woodland products, grant aid and/or their contracts requiring such offsets.

Policy 20:
The Council will encourage expansion of urban woodland in appropriate locations, ensuring selection of native species of local provenance and a layout to reflect the local woodland character. Natural regeneration will be supported on appropriate sites.

Policy 21:
The Council will manage woodland to fulfil its obligation as owners to ensure the safety of people and property. Input into Community Service plans will bear in mind woodlands are natural places and the level of acceptable risk must reflect this.

Policies for Parks, Open Spaces and Railway Trail Trees for which the Council are responsible.

Policy 22:
The Council will seek to develop long term management plans for trees in parks and open spaces. Input into Community Service plans will identify areas of risk to maximise safety and prevent decline by guiding new tree planting for the future.

Policies for Closed Churchyard and Cemetery Trees for which the Council are responsible

Policy 23:
The Council will seek to develop long term management plans for trees in closed churchyards and cemeteries to: identify areas of risk; prevent decline; and, guide the planting of new trees in the future.

Policies for Council Housing owned Trees

Policy 24:
Housing trees in residential gardens are to be maintained by tenants as part of their tenancy agreement, except in cases subject to the Housing Department's discretion.

Policy 25:
Trees in communal gardens maintained by the District Council will be managed to ensure they fulfil health and safety requirements, do not pose a risk to structures and enhance the quality of the environment.

Policies for the Protection of Trees and Hedgerows on land outside the District Council's control

Policy 26:
The Council will:
a)   Seek to protect trees of public amenity and environmental value.
b)   Promote good standards of tree care and woodland management.
c)   Promote good practice for the protection of trees in development sites.

Policy 27:
The Council will give consent for works to a tree or woodland protected by a Tree Preservation Order provided it is satisfied that:
a)   The long term health and appearance of the tree or woodland will not be impaired;
b)   The works will not unjustifiably inhibit or prevent the full and natural development of the tree;
c)   The work is necessary to its continued retention and consistent with good arboricultural practice;
d)   In the case of woodland, the proposed work is consistent with the principles of sound woodland management;
e)   There are sound arboricultural and/or safety reasons for the work.

Policy 28:
The Council will impose planning conditions to protect trees according to BS 5837 (2012) and subsequent revisions where appropriate.

Policy 29:
Any unauthorised works to protected trees, both above and below ground, will be investigated and enforcement action taken where expedient.

Policy 30:
The Council will resist development which it considers makes inadequate provision for the retention of, or compensation for:
a)   Trees and other woody plants.
b)   Natural features, particularly wildlife habitats such as woodlands, hedgerows, ponds or watercourses.

Policy 31:
The Council will continue to protect significant trees by the use of Tree Preservation Orders, and will review Orders periodically to ensure they contain accurate information.

Policy 32:
There will be a presumption against the removal or destruction of any hedgerow that is considered important according to the Hedgerow Regulations 1997.
Any unauthorised works to important hedgerows will be investigated and enforcement action taken where appropriate.

Policy 33:
The Council will normally require new development to contribute to the overall tree population through on-site structural planting and on-going management. Or through planning conditions and 'Section 106 Agreements' dedicated to the planting of trees in the locality.
New woodland planting may be required if the Strategic Detailed Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans proposes urban extensions into the green belt.

Policy 34:
The Council will encourage all major tree owning organisations to adopt best practice in the care of their trees, especially where those trees contribute to the character of the District.

ACTION PLAN 2015/16 – 2020

No.	Action	Who	Cost	Target date
1	Revise the list of local tree work contractors for distribution to the public.	Trees & Woodlands section	Existing staff resource	Mar 2016
2	a). Review existing pre-2006 Tree Preservation Orders (TPO)	Trees & Woodlands section	Existing staff resource	Feb 2016
	b). Prioritise and serve updated post-2006 TPOs	Trees & Woodlands section	New resource being recruited	Mar 2017/18
3	Update and publicise the tree sponsorship scheme	Trees & Woodlands section	Existing staff resource	Dec 2016
4	Formalise and publish District tree safety strategy	Trees & Woodlands section, with input from legal / finance	Existing staff resource	Mar 2017
5	Update existing guidance on management processes and procedures for SADC owned trees	Trees & Woodlands section	Existing staff resource	Mar 2017
6	Formalise set procedures for dealing with subsidence claims in line with good practice	Trees & Woodlands section, with input from legal / finance	Existing staff resource	Mar 2017
7	Continue to develop the Tree Warden Scheme, encouraging and enabling community involvement in tree planting and management.	Trees & Woodlands section	Existing staff resource	Annual
8	Support the continued development of individual management plans to improve the quality of parks, commons, woodlands and other green spaces	SADC Community Services with input from Trees and Woodlands	Existing staff resource	Annual (provide input within consultation deadline)