



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of an **INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION** will be held at the Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham on
MONDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2016 AT 4.05 PM

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andy Couldrick', written in a cursive style.

Andy Couldrick
Chief Executive
Published on 5 February 2016

This meeting will be filmed for inclusion on the Council's website.

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Our Vision

A great place to live, an even better place to do business

Our Priorities

Improve educational attainment and focus on every child achieving their potential

Invest in regenerating towns and villages, support social and economic prosperity, whilst encouraging business growth

Ensure strong sustainable communities that are vibrant and supported by well designed development

Tackle traffic congestion in specific areas of the Borough

Improve the customer experience when accessing Council services

The Underpinning Principles

Offer excellent value for your Council Tax

Provide affordable homes

Look after the vulnerable

Improve health, wellbeing and quality of life

Maintain and improve the waste collection, recycling and fuel efficiency

Deliver quality in all that we do

For consideration by

Angus Ross, Executive Member for Environment

Officers Present

Peter Baveystock, Cleaner and Greener Services

Colm Ó Caomhánaigh, Democratic Services

IMD NO. 2016	WARD	SUBJECT	
IMD8	None Specific	TREE INSPECTION FRAMEWORK FOR COUNCIL TREES To implement a coherent policy for managing the trees within the Council's Estate.	5 - 12

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Agenda Item IMD8

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION REFERENCE IMD: 2016 / 8

TITLE	Tree Inspection Framework for Council Trees
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Angus Ross, Executive Member for Environment
DATE AND TIME	4.05 pm on Monday 15 February 2016
WARD	All
DIRECTOR	Heather Thwaites, Director of Environment
REPORT TO BE PUBLISHED ON	5 February 2016
VENUE	Room FF12, Civic Offices, Shute End

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Enhancing the vibrancy of Wokingham Borough by introducing a formal framework to manage trees within the Council Estate and create a single reporting system for Wokingham Borough residents.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive Member for Environment:

- 1) adopts the Tree Risk Zones;
- 2) implements the proposed inspection framework; and
- 3) works with key stakeholders on the development of a broader document detailing the wider management of trees in the Borough.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This paper sets out to establish a formal framework for tree management within the Council's own estate. This will be done by designating zones based on potential risk and developing an inspection regime based around these zones.

The scheme seeks to consolidate resources to deliver a joined up approach to tree management across Council services

Background

As with other local authorities, Wokingham Borough Council has a duty of care arising out of its ownership of trees and must be able to demonstrate that it has not been negligent in its management of those trees. Insofar as is reasonably practicable, a local authority must ensure that neither people nor properties are exposed to the risks arising from failure of trees.

According to the National Tree Safety Group Guidance, tree risk is low where there is a 1 in 10 million chance of a fatality.

Most local authorities (more than 80%) have a tree risk summary and inspection strategy. These strategies vary from routine cyclical inspections of most trees on a 3-5 year basis through to bespoke zonal inspections based on risk.

The Council's own tree estate is overseen by the Cleaner and Greener Team which was established in March 2015. Planning and other issues such as enforcement, implementation and monitoring of Tree Protection Orders are dealt with through Council's Planning and Regulation Service within Environment.

Although the exact number of trees in the Borough is currently unknown, it is estimated that there are between 50,000 and 70,000, with between 5,000 and 10,000 of these adjoining a highway.

The current method of tree inspection, recording and reporting is predominately based on reacting to internal and external reports. However, the Council does carry out proactive inspections at schools, cemeteries, play areas, and on trees within high risk sites. In addition to this, all newly adopted sites come with an accredited tree inspection report.

Analysis of Issues

- **Risk Zones**

By identifying tree risk zones, it allows the Council to set up an inspection regime which reflects the different type of areas that exist within the borough and how frequently they are used. For example a tree adjacent to the highway would be inspected more frequently than a tree in the middle of a seldom used copse. This allows us to focus our resources on priority areas where there is a higher risk to the public or property, i.e. trees surrounding play areas or high use roads.

It is proposed that all geographical areas for which the Council is responsible are categorised into different zones in relation to the risk they represent. Specifically, the risk will be determined by the use of site, the number of people visiting, traffic volumes, the size and age of the trees.

The proposed risk zones are categorised as follows:

Risk Zone 1 Areas (Constant or very frequent access) - Major roads or busy junctions where cars are static under trees. School buildings or immediate environs and school main access areas. Busy playgrounds. Urban centres and high density pedestrian areas

Risk Zone 2 Areas (Frequent access) - Busy roads or footway pavements. Road junctions or bus stops with peak time traffic where cars or pedestrians are static under trees. School grounds or less well used playgrounds. Frequently used buildings/properties.

Risk Zone 3 Areas (Some access through day. Busy at peak times) - Peak times traffic (pedestrian or vehicular) including main access to buildings, properties and within green spaces with regular use

Risk Zone 4 Areas (access is sporadic) - Occasional traffic or use including most rural roads and regularly used green space/woodland paths

Risk Zone 5 Areas (access is rare) - Infrequently used rights of way including minor woodland paths

Risk Zone 6 Areas (access is not foreseeable) - No formal public access including private land with no rights of way or permitted paths

The differing frequency of inspections can be summarised as:

Risk Zone	Area Examples	Frequency of Level 1 Inspection
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major roads – Constantly or very frequently used. • Play Areas • Cemeteries • Open spaces or parks on or next to sites with identified risks i.e. schools 	3 years
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Busy roads • Frequently used footways or cycleway's • Car Parks • Frequently used buildings e.g. Council offices, health centres 	5 years
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks and open space areas near paths or adjacent to private properties • Frequently used parks & open spaces 	7 years
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural roads with infrequent use • Regularly used woodland paths 	7 years
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrequently used right of way • Minor woodland paths 	7 years
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low risk open spaces • Woodland 	Reactive

There is the potential for this information to be shared via the Council's GIS system, once consideration has been given to the appropriate level of access the public will require in order to enhance the inspection regime.

- **Inspection**

Once the framework for understanding risk has been established within the six Risk Zones, a suitable inspection regime can be introduced to effectively monitor and manage trees across the borough. As with any other inspection regimes, the effective management and reduction in harm associated with trees (and any associated resources) should be appropriate to the expected level of risk.

It is proposed that the following Tree Policy Inspection Principles are adopted to support the appropriate management of trees within the Council's estate:

- All trees in zones 1-5 will be examined (as outlined in the table above) and any tree showing signs of distress will be subject to further detailed examination by an arboricultural officer.
- Provision for inspection of high risk trees following extreme weather.

Different types of inspection that can be utilised are summarised below:

Observational Tree Inspections

In addition to proactive level 1 "Lantra" inspections (accredited qualification for tree inspection), a wider group of Wokingham Borough Council Officers will be trained to identify potential hazards and escalate them appropriately to the relevant teams.

This type of inspection will be carried out by officers who hold an interest in the management of council owned land which contain trees (see table below). Rather than a designated inspection we aim to create a culture where council officers are aware of their surroundings so they can identify and escalate any potential hazards appropriately. For example as part of their day to day duties an estates officer may notice a tree which appears to be dead or has loose branches.

This officer would report this to the Cleaner & Greener Services team who would arrange to either arrange suitable works or inspect the tree to determine onward management.

This corporate approach to tree risk management will allow any potential hazards to be quickly assessed and dealt with promptly prior to a scheduled inspection or customer query.

Level 1 Tree Inspections

Risk zone areas 1-5 will receive a level 1 tree inspection on a proactive basis. These inspections will be carried out by an officer who has undergone Level 1 Tree Inspection Training. This will involve looking in detail at a tree from ground level to identify clear defects or hazards relating to the tree. In cases where onward

management of a tree is unclear, e.g. thinning or dieback of branch leaves, a Level 2 Inspection should take place, and details escalated to the appropriate officer.

Level 2 Tree Inspections

These inspections will be carried out by an officer who has received Level 2 Tree Inspection training. The inspection process is the same as that of a Level 1 Inspection but the officer will have the expertise to identify less obvious hazards and potential pathology (disease) from ground level. This officer will be able to determine appropriate management of the tree.

The table below shows the range of Council staff that can support this inspection regime:

Inspection Type	Officers equipped to inspect
Observational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services officers • Car Park attendants • Highways Officers • Facilities/Property and Estates Officers • Traffic Management Officers • Community Wardens • School Site Controller's
Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleaner & Greener Officers • Highways Inspections • Countryside Services Officers • Tree & Landscapes Officers • Tennant Services Surveyors
Level 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleaner & Greener Tree Inspection & Commissioning Officer • Tree & Landscape Officer

In addition, we will continue to work with our partners, such as Town and Parish Councils, to enhance this regime.

It is also envisaged that developments in current smartphone application technology and Wi-Fi transmission/recording linked to mapping will make inspection and recording easier and more robust in the near future

The following gives some approximate estimates of tree numbers within the selected categories and suggests an inspection regime focusing on zones 1, 2, 3 and 6.

Risk Zone	Zone examples	Number of trees estimate in WBC	Proactive Informal Observational Inspection by service - frequency	Pro-active Expert Level 1 Inspection - frequency
1	Highway principal	5000	Part of daily routine	3 years
1	Parks near play area	7000	Part of daily routine	3 years
1	Open space on or adjacent to sites with identified risks	3,000	Part of daily routine	3 years
2	Highway other including Car Parks	5000	Part of daily routine	5 years
3	Parks general and open spaces high risk near paths or adjacent to private properties.	10,000	Part of daily routine	7 years
6	Open spaces low risk	10,000	None	Reactive
6	Woodland	13,000	None	Reactive

This approach would necessitate the professional and expert inspection of approximately 6,000 trees per year utilising internal trained Council staff.

- **Implementation**

There will be a transitional period moving the focus from reactive inspections to proactive tree inspections which will be assisted by the introduction of the new Grounds Maintenance Contract, commencing April 2016, and compulsory tree inspection training for both internal and external stakeholders as detailed in the action plan below.

- **Action Plan**

Action	Responsibility	Milestone
Apply zones to the borough trees	C&G	February 2016
Investigate potential for smartphone/ PDA e-recording/ mapping esp. with new GM Service Provider	C&G	March 2016
Finalise training programme for identified officers	C&G	March 2016
Initiate commissioning and procurement project for above ground tree contract	C&G	June 2016
Consider wider document (Tree Management Statement) that encompasses other elements of tree management such as tree planting, memorial trees and ongoing maintenance	C&G	July 2016
Approve wider document with IEMD	C&G / Trees and Landscapes	October 2016

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The inspection scheme will be resourced by a gradual transfer away from a predominately reactive regime to a predominately proactive inspection system based on zonal risk.

Cross-Council Implications

This decision helps to build a collaborative approach to managing trees within the Council Estate led by the Council's Cleaner & Greener Team.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
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Director – Finance and Resources	No response
Monitoring Officer	No response
Leader of the Council	I fully support these proposals for a structured inspection framework. In these days of pressure on resources such a framework will maximise the use of those resources.

List of Background Papers

None

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Date 5 February 2016	Version No. 1