

Yateley Town Council

Tree Risk Management Policy



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6-9-2020

1 INTRODUCTION

Yateley Town council owns over 40 hectares of public open space over a number of separate locations. A prominent feature are the trees that grow there. Trees provide a wide variety of benefits to society and a balance needs to be reached between the benefits provided and the risks posed. Tree management does not seek to eliminate all risk, this would not be practicable and would remove all the benefits trees offer.

The aim of this policy is to set out how Yateley Town Council will manage risk and maintain its tree stock and provide guidance to those whose activities bring them in to contact with them and ensure that the Council is fulfilling its statutory duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Occupiers Liability Act 1999 to ensure that members of the public, and staff, are not to be put at risk because of any failure by the Council to take reasonable steps to ensure their safety.

2 HAZARD AND RISK

Like all living organisms, trees are subject to decline in old age, and to physical damage, or invasion by pathogens. As trees age, their value tends to increase. A **hazard** is something that could cause harm i.e. in trees, the failure of parts of or the whole tree. For a tree to become a hazard, there must be a target that can be affected by the hazard. The target could be an object, structure, person or anything else in the area. **Risk** is the level of likelihood that a hazardous tree will cause actual harm. Risk is related to the location of the tree, the intensity of use of the location and the proximity of possible targets.

The risk of being struck and killed by a tree or branch falling is extremely low (in the order of one in ten million for those trees in or adjacent to areas of high public use)¹ It would therefore be disproportionate to inspect and record every tree as part of a tree risk management regime.

3 INSPECTIONS

The council will take proportionate and reasonable steps to prevent or minimise the risk arising from the presence of trees on its land. It will ensure a process of inspection is conducted to assess trees for their potential to cause harm, and act on the results (see section 4). Inspections may be programmed or ad-hoc (as a result of a report from a resident, for example)

Ad-hoc inspections can be undertaken in the first instance by a member of staff or contractor who has a good general tree knowledge or has undertaken a basic tree survey and inspection course. The person must be aware of their own limitations and if in any doubt request a detailed inspection from a suitably qualified person.

Programmed inspections will form part of the routine formal inspection process commissioned by the council. The council will be satisfied that the inspector is suitably qualified (minimum Level 3 Arboriculture with modules covering tree inspection and the recognition and treatment of defects, LANTRA Professional Tree Inspection) experienced and holds professional indemnity and public liability insurance of £10,000,000.

¹ HSE Management of the risk from falling trees or branches 2013

3.1 Site Zoning

To use resources effectively it is necessary to prioritise inspections. Zoning is a practice where landowners and managers define areas of land according to levels and types of use and the potential hazard of the trees.

Yateley Town Council shall divide its land into three risk zones dependent on certain site characteristics which reflect how an area is used and how frequently it is occupied. The Town Clerk will be responsible for ensuring this is carried out and reviewed by a member of staff with good working knowledge of the council's land and its usage.

The following three zones are to be used –

- High Risk (colour coded red)
- Moderate Risk (colour coded yellow)
- Low Risk (colour coded green).

Risk zone category	Definition/ site characteristics	Inspection frequency
High	<p>Trees within high use areas (* High use is where many people are closely around the trees most days)</p> <p>Trees within falling distance of; main roads, well used paths, playgrounds, sports pitches, car parks, property of value.</p>	Every 18 Months
Moderate	<p>Trees within moderate use areas (*Moderate use is where trees are occasionally closely approached by people, but not many people most days)</p> <p>Falling distance of gardens, minor roads, moderately used paths</p> <p>Trees within Heathlands Cemetery</p>	Every 3 years
Low	<p>Trees that are rarely approached by people, including woodland blocks and inaccessible areas, self-trodden rarely used paths</p> <p>Small trees anywhere</p>	No, or only informal inspections. It may be necessary to respond to reports of any problems in these areas.

3.2 Scope of Inspections

All formal inspections will be carried out from ground level and will look at the following

Roots

- lifting of rootplate indicated by changes in soil level, or cracking of the soil around the roots
- included bark between buttress roots
- fungal fruiting bodies growing on, or from the roots
- physical damage of roots
- cavities, or decayed areas on the buttress roots
- lack of root flare
- loose dead bark on the buttress roots
- ooze, or exudate from roots

Trunk

- the presence of fungal fruiting bodies on the trunk
- wounds on the trunk
- splits within the trunk
- cankers on trunk
- areas of dead bark on the trunk
- epicormic growths on the trunk
- abnormal swellings on the trunk
- swelling of the trunk indicating possible internal decay
- cavities within the trunk
- ivy on trunk
- evidence of lightning strikes on the trunk
- sheer cracks along the plane of the stem from co-dominant stems
- signs of physical damage to the trunk from vehicular collisions or vandalism

Main branches

- signs of included bark between tight crouched unions between limbs and signs of incipient cracks
- presence of fungal fruiting bodies on limbs
- presence of longitudinal cracks on large limbs
- cracks on large limbs
- hanging limbs
- presence of dead, or broken limbs
- cavities within large limbs
- sudden changes in direction of limbs.
- presence of extensive growth of Ivy on limbs
- unbalanced asymmetrical crown shape

Canopy

- density of leaf cover
- check leaf size, colour and condition
- dieback of the outer canopy
- dead smaller branches within the canopy
- gaps within the canopy indicating weakened or broken limbs
- broken branches within the canopy.

3.3 Inspection Reports

The outcome of inspections will be recorded as a written report and will detail;

- Those trees which pose risk
- The level of risk
- The required action
- Priority level for completion.
- They must be dated and signed by the inspector.

3.3.1 Response times for completion of the work is detailed in the table in Section 4.

3.3.2 All inspection records must be retained to evidence that trees have been subject to systematic inspection, records are to be kept as per the council's retention schedule.

4 TREE MAINTENANCE

4.1 Tree maintenance and remedial work will be conducted as a result of information gathered during programmed inspections (detailed above), however reactionary maintenance will always form a key element of overall tree maintenance operations following ad-hoc inspections due to reports from residents, partner organisations and utility companies or storm damage etc.

The following categories will be used when prioritising tree work

Priority	Response
Level 1 Urgent Public Safety	From 24 hours to one week depending upon risk
Level 2 Non-urgent but essential	Between 1 to 6 months depending upon risk and time of year
Level 3 Desirable	12 months where possible if budgets allow
Non-priority	No action proposed

4.2 Trees will be made safe via pruning or felling, or other options advised by a suitably qualified person. If a delay is anticipated in securing a permanent solution, measures will be put in place to temporarily reduce the risk i.e. closing footpaths, fencing or cordoning off trees etc.

4.3 Work to trees will only be undertaken by contractors competent to carry out the work i.e. they are fully trained and experienced in the work that they are undertaking. They must hold Public liability insurance of at least £10,000,000.

4.4 Yateley Town Council will seek to ensure that tree works are carried out to the highest standards. In carrying out tree works we will ensure that pruning conserves the overall amenity value, form and shape of the tree. We will carry out stump grinding where necessary to enable new trees to be planted or remove a significant hazard. Where stump removal is not necessary tree stumps will be left at an appropriate height for the location.

5 DEALING WITH TREE CARE

While works are sometimes necessary to ensure that trees are in a safe and healthy condition, we often receive requests and complaints regarding trees. It is important that such issues are dealt with consistently and that decisions are balanced and proportionate taking into account the positive contribution trees make to the environment and street scene and the use of public funds.

5.1 Overhanging/Obstructing Branches

- Tree branches can cause obstructions to public footpaths, roads, signs and open spaces. Appropriate pruning to eliminate hazards will be undertaken.
- We will not prune trees that overhang neighbouring properties unless they have been assessed as dangerous by a suitably qualified person.

NB. Adjacent landowners have a Common Law right to prune back tree branches to their boundary, providing this would not lead to tree death and providing that the tree in question is not protected by a Tree Preservation Order or situated within a Conservation Area (in these circumstances permission to undertake any work to the tree must be obtained from the local planning authority)

5.2 Loss of Light

We will not prune or fell trees if they are being perceived to be blocking light. Consideration will be given to granting permission to householders to prune or remove a tree at their expense taking into account the quality and importance of the tree in question as well as the benefits to the wider community. Pruning of evergreen trees which would fall under the high hedge legislation will be considered on a case by case basis

5.3 General/Minor Nuisances

We will not prune or fell trees solely to alleviate problems caused by natural and/or seasonal phenomena, most of which are minor and considered to be normal and acceptable consequences of living near trees. Examples are

- Falling leaves, sap, blossom, fruits, nuts, bird and insect droppings
- Insects associated with trees
- Reduction or increase of moisture to gardens
- Suckers or germinating seedlings in gardens
- Leaves falling into gutters, drains or roofs
- The buildup of algae on fences, paths or other structures

Clearing of leaves from gutters and pathways, weeding of set seeds and cleaning affected surfaces is, considered to be, normal routine seasonal maintenance of owning a property.

5.4 Trees Considered too Big or too Tall

We will not prune or fell a tree because it is considered to be 'too big or 'too tall' for its surroundings. Trees grow adaptively to support themselves in relation to their surroundings and the typical loads they can be expected to experience. All trees have the potential to fall and whilst we understand that living near a tall tree can worry some people we will not remove or drastically reduce the height of trees simply because they would hit a structure 'if' it were to fall.

5.5 Ivy

Ivy (*Hedera helix*) is a native species which provides important habitat to a wide range of wildlife. Ivy does not kill or damage trees and its presence doesn't indicate that a tree is unhealthy or create a tree safety issue in its own right (Woodland Trust) We will only consider the severing of Ivy if we believe it may be concealing a defect on a tree or producing a sail effect which could affect the stability of an old or otherwise compromised tree.

6 INSURANCE

The council accepts that even with this policy in place there will always be residual risk which could lead to harm or damage. Therefore, the council will hold adequate public liability insurance (currently £10,000,000) to cover such eventualities.

7 REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed by the council on an annual basis and will be subject to external review upon adoption and every 5 years thereafter, this will be carried out by a suitably qualified person (Level 6 in Arboriculture e.g. BSc or Professional Diploma, or above)

As site use may change over time, it is necessary to subject all Risk Zones to periodic review. This must be no less than once every 3 years. The Site Manager is advised to review specific areas if new play equipment or site furniture is installed or removed, new development occurs on adjacent land or there is a change of land use.

Adopted 6/7/2020

Review date July 2021

External Review:

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Arbor Cultural Ltd

Date 22/6/2020