

### Draft Tree Principles for Council Owned Trees

#### Principle Aims

- To confirm the Councils approach to the management of Council owned trees.
- To promote good practice in the management of Council owned trees throughout both districts.
- To enable community engagement to support the planting and management of Council owned trees.

#### Key Principles

**To confirm the Councils approach to the management of Council owned trees.**

Trees are of vital importance to the landscape. They are widely appreciated for enhancing rural and urban environments and make a positive contribution to the scenic character and diversity of a locality. The Councils have an important role to fulfil by providing healthy, safe and well managed trees that will:

- Protect and enhance bio-diversity.
- Maintain and improve the quality of the landscape.
- Ensure compliance with legal responsibilities.
- Foster community engagement
- Mitigate against climate change and flooding.

The Councils will ensure all trees and wooded areas are sustainably managed and where appropriate encourage community participation in their development and management. Where resources allow, take a planned approach to the management of the Councils tree stock. Effective management will also support the development of a diverse range of trees of all ages for public enjoyment, wildlife habitat and landscape amenity.

The benefits that trees attach to the environment greatly extend beyond perceived visual amenity and include:

- Social, educational and community benefits through connecting people with nature
- Reduce the impact of building development and hard landscaping
- Environmental benefits, such as carbon sequestration, improved air quality, screening from sun, wind and rain, filtering noise and attracting wildlife.

- Provide indirect economic benefits including adding value to property and reduced energy costs
- Reduce surface water run-off and the effects of soil erosion
- Green and leafy industrial sites, retail and/or shopping areas attract more inward investment than similar areas devoid of trees
- Crime levels have been shown to be lower in leafy areas than those in areas devoid of trees.
- Contribute to people's physical health and mental wellbeing including encouraging outdoor activities
- Provide a sustainable resource of timber where appropriate.

**To promote good practice in the management of Council owned trees throughout both districts.**

Babergh & Mid-Suffolk District Councils have a combined tree stock in the region of 20,000 trees which have been recorded individually in an area of around 600 square miles, and many others which form part of woodland or other public open space planted areas. The Councils aim to create a wide, varied, and sustainable tree stock.

Due to the budget provision available priority has always been given to health and safety works.

The person responsible for a tree has a duty to take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions that can be reasonably foreseen as likely to cause harm. The law requires an owner to take reasonable care to identify possible causes of foreseeable danger and take appropriate steps to remove them, as far as reasonably possible.

The Occupiers Liability Act 1957, deals with the relationship between an occupier of a property and a visitor to that property. It imposes the duty on the occupier to take such care as is reasonable to ensure that the visitor will be reasonably safe. This duty includes reducing as far as is reasonably possible, the risk of visitors being harmed by trees. The Occupiers Liability Act 1984 extended this duty to trespassers who are also protected but only from risks of which the occupier is aware.

We have a pro-active programme of inspection utilising a risk-based approach to identify work priorities. The criteria utilised to establish priority includes tree location in relation to highways, footpaths, built structures, high or frequently used areas.

It has in recent history been considered sufficient to adhere to a tree condition inspection regime and associated record keeping of these inspections between 3-5 years apart.

The programme of inspection is primarily concerned and focused on health and safety, identifying foreseeable risks and hazards commonly associated with trees rather than aesthetic or amenity value.

Where inspection identifies that a tree constitutes a hazard, action is taken as soon as practicably possible to undertake appropriate works.

Other than where a tree is subject to a woodland management plan there is a general presumption against the removal or pruning of trees which are healthy.

The Councils will not complete works on trees due to the fall of leaves, fruit and sap which are not considered a legal nuisance or for the disruption of television, satellite or radio reception.

Works to mitigate against the loss of natural light or disruption to views will also not be considered unless under exceptional circumstances.

New tree planting can also open opportunities to increase age and species diversity and improve the local landscape. To achieve this, we will plant new and replacement trees, where appropriate, to ensure continuous tree cover with priority being given to native species.

Retaining dead and standing timber, where safe to do so will be encouraged to create additional wildlife habitats.

Before reaching a decision as to whether a new or replacement tree(s) are to be planted the Councils will take into account the following considerations:

- Will the new or replacement tree(s) be of public benefit
- Is there sufficient room for a new tree(s) to grow and develop without causing future problems
- Is there a deficit of trees in the area
- Was the removed tree part of a local feature or of historical/landscape significance
- What species are appropriate for the site

When planning a planting programme for open spaces within community areas local community groups will be consulted wherever possible.

New planting will be subject to the resources available to each Council at the time of the proposed planting. External sources of funding will be actively pursued to enable this approach.

### **To enable community engagement to support the planting and management of Council owned trees**

Involvement and engagement with communities is critically important. Part of the management of trees in the public domain is all about the working with people, both those who own trees and those that wish to volunteer to look after them.

Whilst the majority of the work completed will be by qualified Council staff or appointed contractors, the Councils will also positively welcome the involvement of the local community and volunteers to enhance that work.

Tree planting and maintenance budgets are relatively small, so the work carried out by the Councils is going to be limited to largely routine maintenance. The involvement of the local community offers an exciting opportunity to undertake additional planting or work which would otherwise not take place.

In addition to consultation over the design of new planting there is considerable opportunity to involve the community in the practical implementation of certain tasks such as tree-planting and after care. Also, small scale thinning, crown lifting of young trees as well as other works associated with tree and woodland management can easily be completed by volunteers.

This is an area of work that could be further developed through the Council emerging Community and Environment Strategies.

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