

Tree Maintenance Policy

For Council Owned Trees

Rushmoor Borough Council



Version 1.2 Issue Date: 19th June 2024

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1. Introduction

This policy sets out the principals for the maintenance of the Council's tree population giving details of the considerations for decisions relating to tree work, tree planting and (legal) nuisance. This policy is in accord with Hampshire County Council policy and protected privately owned trees in relation to applications under the Town & Country Planning Act, Tree Regulations.

Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's) and Conservation Areas provide the means to control work to important privately owned trees through the TPO application process. The principles applied to the determination of such applications align with the principles in this policy. The Antisocial Behaviour Act (High Hedges) is a separate matter and not covered by this policy. The Arboricultural Officer [Planning] manages these matters, as governed by Planning Law, within Planning Services.

This policy, in conjunction with the Tree Risk Management Plan (TRMP), forms the overall management policy for Council owned trees. The TRMP details how trees are surveyed, and how work is prioritised in relation to the safety of persons and property.

The following Tree Maintenance Policy (TMP) has been developed by Rushmoor Borough Council with advice from Ben Abbatt BA (Hons), Dip. Arb. (RFS), MICFor, MRICS, CEnv, (Arboricultural Association Registered Consultant) and is subject to review and amendment when appropriate.

Aim - To maintain the green leafy character of the borough and manage the existing tree population by appropriate and sensitive maintenance to ensure a healthy, pleasant, and safe environment now, and ensure adequate canopy cover for the future. To lead by example with regards the value we place on our trees and their contribution to environmental quality within the urban landscape, including climate change benefits.

2. The value of trees

Trees enhance the quality of life, especially in the urban environment, and form an integral part of its character, form, quality, and diversity. 'Woodland Trust Why We Need Trees' [The Benefits of Trees - Woodland Trust - Woodland Trust](#) provides an overview of the benefits derived from trees. These include the benefits to our health by filtering polluted air, providing wildlife habitats, land stabilisation and an enhanced quality of landscape.

3. Ownership of trees

There are various owners of trees within the borough. This policy relates to Rushmoor Borough Council owned trees (Parks, Open Spaces, Estates, Facilities and Cemeteries) but is also relevant as good practice for all trees within the borough.

Trees on the Highway are the responsibility of the Highways Authority (Hampshire County Council), and their policies are in accord with this policy, however, Rushmoor Borough Council does not hold the authority or budget to undertake maintenance for Hampshire owned trees.

4. Objectives for management of the Council tree population

Rushmoor has a high population density (2,636 people per sq. km in 2023) and correspondingly trees provide a significant amenity to residents, businesses, and visitors to the area by virtue of providing a green, leafy outlook within an ultimately urban environment.

We consider trees to be of high importance with management and maintenance focused on the retention and protection of the borough's tree population but with the proviso that safety to persons and property has overriding importance.

Primary objectives

- Safety (persons & property)
- Visual amenity & landscape value
- Healthier lives (clean & green)
- Heritage
- Urban environmental benefits (local climate effects, shade, CO₂, and storm water run-off)

Secondary objectives

- Wildlife (biodiversity)
- Successful local economy
- Sustainable communities

Aim - To manage our trees in a global sense and encourage urban forest with 'continuous cover management' to provide a healthy and diverse tree population. That the amenity provided by the trees is preserved for perpetuity by maintaining and improving tree cover for the future and planting of suitable trees in appropriate locations.

5. Requests for tree work

When we receive a request to carry out tree work, we will record, consider individual merits, and prioritise. Our first consideration is public safety, our legal obligations (including property) and then the impact upon the community (residents, businesses, and visitors to the borough).

We will carry out tree work under the general guidance of dead, dying, diseased or dangerous and specifically where:

- there is a significant risk of harm; or
- damage (for instance subsidence or physical impact from tree growth); or
- free passage is required (for instance below statutory heights on footways and carriageways); or
- sightlines or views of road signs is required.

This includes removal of dead trees, significant dead wood within canopies of trees, removal of diseased trees (which have exceeded acceptable limits of risk), and general lifting of excessively low and obstructing/obscuring branches. We will not carry out work, without exceptional reason, that would cause a significant loss to the community or would be contrary to maintaining a healthy tree population. For instance, requests for improved television reception, telephone line clearance, shading, to reduce leaf fall, fruit fall, bird droppings or honeydew from aphids, branches overhanging a garden (as an example), allergic reactions, children climbing trees, and blocked drains etc. will not normally be carried out.

Persons can contact Rushmoor Borough Council via the following methods:

- Online - Visit <http://www.rushmoor.gov.uk/article/2795/How-we-look-after-our-trees> to access further information.
- Email - customerservices@rushmoor.gov.uk
- Telephone - Customer Services on 01252 398399
- Address - Rushmoor Borough Council,
Customer Services
Farnborough Road
Farnborough
Hants.
GU14 7JU

6. Rationale/Justifications for tree work

Common requests for tree work and the reasoning and/or justification as to whether tree work is undertaken is given in Appendix 1 'Rationale/Justifications for tree work'.

We have a dedicated budget for tree work to maintain trees in a healthy and safe condition. To manage within our financial resources, we prioritise work to ensure that the budget provides the most benefit for the money spent and deals with those matters of high importance.

7. Types of tree maintenance work

There are various operations undertaken in the process of maintaining trees, appendix 2 'Types of tree work' gives details of the most common with comments upon where and when they are normally used and the impact they can have upon the tree.

We do all necessary tree work in line with the current industry guidance (for instance BS3998 Recommendations for tree work). We will not do any tree work that exceeds these recommendations.

8. Common law rights to carry out tree work

Adjacent property owners can exercise their common law right and remove overhanging branches (where they extend across their boundary) so long as the trees are not subject to a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), within a Conservation Area, cause significant damage to the tree or leave the tree in an unsafe condition.

Private individuals should always make their intentions known to the tree owner so that any proposed work is mutually agreed. No work should be carried out which could prove detrimental to the long-term health of the tree. In such an instance, persons can be held liable for the failure of the tree or any damage or harm that occurs because of unauthorised work.

We encourage people to dispose of the arisings/debris themselves if they decide to take such action, otherwise the Council will need to dispose of the debris which may reduce capacity for carrying out priority safety work elsewhere.

9. Woodland Management

We will take reasonable steps to preserve and enhance woodland trees that are indigenous to the region. Where possible we will encourage natural regeneration in woodlands, aim to protect existing sites and have due regard for the potential impacts of climate change.

When dead trees and dead wood is within established woodlands and copse areas, where appropriate and the risk of harm or damage is acceptable, it will remain as this can enhance the woodland habitat and improve biodiversity. Management and maintenance of our woodlands and copses will consider existing landscape features, wildlife habitat and amenity value.

We will ensure that all our woodlands are managed and maintained in accordance with the accepted forestry and arboricultural methods. We actively encourage access to woodlands, and we will develop and maintain pathways within our managed areas.

Aim - We will support and encourage community involvement in the planning and operation of woodland management. Where possible we will seek to expand and look for opportunities to create woodland.

10. Tree Planting

To help maintain a continuity of tree cover we will undertake the planting of new trees where suitable opportunities arise. We will endeavour to plant and maintain trees within the borough on our land to help maintain a viable tree population with a range of maturity.

The council support tree planting within the borough through a variety of schemes and where appropriate take opportunities to enhance tree planting.

Aim – To plant 50 trees per year within council land to help improve the visual amenity of the borough and provide a tree population for future generations.

If you would like any further information on Rushmoor Borough Council's tree management policies, please visit <http://www.rushmoor.gov.uk/article/2795/How-we-look-after-our-trees> or contact us on 01252 398399.

Appendix 1: Rationale/Justifications for tree work

Common requests for pruning trees include:

Light/Shade

Shading and low light to gardens and property is an emotive issue and we receive frequent enquiries concerning light and shading. In many instances people believe they have, a 'right to light,' therefore the following information seeks to clarify both our position and the legal/legislative framework.

Factors that we consider in relation to pruning for light are:

- Condition – the trees overall health, potential lifespan and general crown structure as other work may be necessary, and which may also assist with increased light.
- Species – for instance broadleaves allow dappled light through the canopy in winter when not 'with leaf;' certain species have smaller and less frequent leaves, for instance Birch which allows dappled shade in summer.
- Impact – the potential impact any such work would have upon the condition of the tree and the amenity that it (they) provides.
- Location – the position of the tree(s) has a bearing upon when shade may occur, for instance trees to the east of a property will cast shade in the morning whereas trees to the west will cast shade in the afternoon. The closer a tree is to the area the greater the amount of shade is likely to be cast.
- Character of the locality – whether an area has a 'woodland' or 'wooded' nature or if the tree is a specific feature in the locality.
- Relative ages of the trees and property – it may be unreasonable to prune trees that were present at the time of construction of a property. The tree landscape evolves over time and the growth of trees is a natural feature that needs consideration when making the decision to occupy a property or not.

Summary of relevant legal and legislative framework

GARDENS - There is no legal 'right to light' or guidance upon the amount of sunlight or skylight for gardens.

PROPERTY - The 1832 Prescription Act and British Standard 8206: Part 2: 2008 – Code of Practice for Day Lighting (BS8206 as updated) both relate to the amount of sunlight and day light appropriate for a building and its use.

These are best summarised as follows.

- An opening into a building (for example a window) acquires a 'right to light' if it has had uninterrupted enjoyment of a given amount of skylight for a period of at least twenty years. However, this takes into consideration trees as the 1832 Act excludes trees and vegetation germinating or growing within this period. This protects a householder from persons erecting a structure such as a wall directly in front of their window thus blocking light.
- The British Standard states the amount of sunlight and day light that is appropriate for a building and its use. The calculations within this standard are complex and are best summarised by the following quote from The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors:

BS8206 is effectively *'In your home, just over half the room should be lit by natural light. Broadly speaking, the minimum standard is equivalent to the light from one candle, one foot away.'*

In summary, we rarely carry out work due to light or shade. Any tree work carried out is normally instructed due to other reasons, for instance the condition of the tree, or to reduce the potential for damage to adjacent structures, etc. Such work may have the associated benefit of reducing the specific light/shade concerns of the individual.

Falling debris (branches, twigs, leaves/needles, flowers, seed/fruit, honeydew)

We do remove dead, dying, disease and dangerous branches from our trees where there is a high possibility of harm or damage occurring. We do not prune trees because they shed twigs, leaves/needles, flowers, or seed/fruit as part of their natural processes.

Honeydew is a result of aphids feeding upon the tree. The amount produced can vary depending upon climate and levels of predation. There are no practicable ways of managing such issues, without removing the trees. As such, honeydew is not normally sufficient reason to prune a tree.

Basal growth (sucker/epicormic growth)

This is the growth at the base of the tree and sometimes up the main trunk and is common with mature Lime trees. Where this growth causes obstruction or blocks sightlines then it will be removed and, in some cases, it is desirable to remove the re-growth periodically for aesthetic reasons.

Overhanging branches

We do prune low overhanging branches to allow for reasonable access beneath the canopy where access is required. We do not normally prune branches that overhang adjacent properties above normal access requirements (see crown lifting in appendix 2).

Size

The height and size of a tree is not normally sufficient reason alone to prune a tree if the tree is in good structural and physiological condition.

Drains

Tree roots will access drains through existing faults in the physical structure of the pipe as they are usually a reliable source of water. It is rare that they are the cause of pipework damage. Any tree roots that do find ingress are opportunistic and will exploit a reliable source of moisture and subsequently grow and expand. Once within a pipe run, tree roots can cause further damage to the structure and block pipes by incremental growth. Presence of tree roots within drains is common and removal is the responsibility of the owner of the individual services effected.

Transmitted signal reception

We do not prune for transmitted signal as there is no legal right to a transmitted signal and there are a variety of other means to obtain a similar service (sometimes the simplest solution can be to move the position of the aerial or dish to a new location). In most cases the tree would have been an established feature of the landscape prior to its growth causing disturbance to a signal. Any tree work carried out is normally instructed due to other reasons, for instance the condition of the tree, to reduce the potential for damage to adjacent structures, etc. which may have the associated benefit of improving reception.

Allergies

With wind borne pollen and scent it is often difficult to determine where the origin for the trigger to an allergic reaction originates. As it is difficult to determine the cause of the allergic reaction and with the variety of vegetation in the environment it is sometimes not realistic or feasible to carry out tree work/removals that would significantly alleviate the symptoms. Consequentially we do not normally undertake work on trees to address allergic reactions.

Children climbing trees

We do not carry out work to prevent children climbing trees unless there is an exceptional circumstance, and other factors involved such as access onto roofs etc. We would then only carry out minimal work to prevent easy access into the tree where appropriate.

Research shows that children should be exposed to a certain amount of risk, and it is an important part of growing up and learning. It is a normal part of life for children to want to climb trees and we do not wish to hinder this involvement with the environment unless there are specific and exceptional concerns.

Adjacent buildings

Where council trees are adjacent to buildings, we will normally maintain a branch clearance of up to 1.5 to 2.0m to prevent the tree branches from damaging the building, for instance dislodging roof tiles. Branches outside this 1.5 to 2.0m distance will normally be retained (this includes branches which overhang a property, i.e., above the roof).

Subsidence and heave

Subsidence is a complex interaction between the soil, building, climate, and vegetation that occurs on highly shrinkable soil (normally clay). When the soil supporting all or part of a building dries out and consequently shrinks it results in the unsupported part of a building moving downwards. Trees lose water from the leaves through transpiration that is replenished by water taken from the soil by the roots. If the tree takes more water from the soil than is replaced by rainfall the soil will gradually dry out. Trees have a large root system, and they can dry the soil to a great depth, sometimes below the level of foundations. The amount of water trees can remove from the soil can vary between tree species.

The opposite of subsidence is a process called 'heave' and this occurs as a shrinkable soil re-hydrates (re-wets) and begins to increase in volume exerting upward pressure. Heave can also cause damage to buildings and is just as undesirable as subsidence.

Trees are not the only factors that can cause building movement. For example, natural seasonal soil moisture changes, localised geological variations, lack of flank wall restraint, over loading of internal walls, internal alterations reducing the load bearing capacity of the original building, installation of replacement windows without proper support, loft conversions, settlement, and land slip, amongst others. Settlement is common but is frequently unrelated to the presence of nearby trees. We recognise our responsibilities for the trees we own and manage, however, any claim for damage must prove that, on the balance of probability, the council's tree/vegetation materially contributed to the damage (I.E. the tree was an effective and substantial cause).

Any formal approach to the council in relation to alleged damage to property suspected to be caused by a council owned tree and/or vegetation will be passed to the council's insurers.

Appendix 2: Types of tree work

Types of tree work for individual trees:

Formative pruning

This task is normally carried out on young trees to improve their structure, form, and remove parts of a tree that could develop into future weak point (for instance removal of a single stem from a co-dominant pair).

Dead wooding

Dead wooding is the removal of dead, dying or diseased branches, broken and or hung-up branches. Differing tree species produce and retain deadwood in different ways, and this can be an important wildlife habitat. The production of dead wood is a normal and constant process and can occasionally help to determine the condition of a tree.

We normally will clean out or dead wood trees in high use areas (for instance in busy parks/open spaces, and beside principal roads/footpaths) depending upon the extent of the deadwood in the canopy and in relation to the species characteristics. In lower use areas, we try to retain deadwood to maximise the efficient use of the budget available for tree safety work (greatest benefit for the least cost) and help retain valuable habitat for nature conservation reasons.

Crown lifting

This is the removal of the lowest branches in the tree's canopy to create an appearance of 'lifting' the tree canopy. This work is usually carried out to allow access beneath the canopy of a tree for pedestrians or vehicles on a carriageway and the extent of crown lifting will depend upon the reasonable use of the land beneath the tree canopy.

Crown lifting can be detrimental to a tree by:

- changing the mechanical action upon the tree and this can increase the potential for limb or tree failure,
- introduction of wounds for pests and diseases to enter the wood which the tree will need to respond to,
- increasing the distances between leaves (energy production) and roots (energy use) with the result that more energy is required to transport the materials around the canopy leaving less energy available for other processes (for instance defence against detrimental organisms).

Where we consider that the requests for crown lifting will cause significant detriment to the tree, we will not carry out the requested work without good reason. We do not usually crown lift lower branches to more than 3.0m. However, we may have to crown lift to more than 3.0m to comply with legal requirements (for instance to make a clearance around streetlights and vision splays for the safe use of the highway, to clear adjacent buildings and structures, etc.).

Crown thinning

This involves removing some small secondary branch growth to create a less dense canopy. It is carried out by preferentially removing the dead, dying, diseased and damaged/broken branches first with branches that run parallel or overlapping one another secondly. Crown thinning is normally specified as a percentage (of the foliage area) and is carried out to produce an even canopy of well structured, balanced, and good framework of limbs and branches typical of the species or variety of tree.

There is a common misconception that crown thinning will help to alleviate concerns of light or transmission signals. Such crown thinning work is often unsuccessful in alleviating these concerns because the amount of branch wood removed without harming the tree (up to 10% of the foliage area) is insufficient to significantly improve light levels passing through the tree's canopy or remove the 'obstruction' to the transmission signal.

Excessive crown thinning can be of detriment to the tree through:

- introduction of wounds for pests and diseases to enter the tree which the tree will need to respond to,
- removal of leaves (energy production parts of the tree) reducing the amount of energy available for the tree,
- removal of stored energy in the branches,
- increased energy expenditure from the tree to recreate the lost canopy reducing the amount of available energy for other tree processes,
- changing the mechanical loading upon the branches increasing the potential for branch failure.

Crown reduction and tip reduction

Crown reduction is the reduction of the complete outline dimension of the tree canopy from the height and sides towards the centre of the tree. This work is normally carried out to reduce the potential for failure on a tree worthy of being retained (for instance a veteran tree). This work is not normally carried out on a tree in good condition (physiologically and structurally) without good reason as there is a higher likelihood of branch failure from any re-growth and a crown reduced tree is usually aesthetically less attractive and unnatural in appearance.

Excessive crown reduction can be of detriment to the tree through:

- introduction of wounds for pests and diseases to enter the tree which the tree will need to respond to,
- removal of leaves (energy production parts of the tree) reducing the amount of energy available for the tree,
- removal of stored energy in the branches.
- increased energy expenditure from the tree to recreate the lost canopy reducing the amount of available energy for other tree processes,
- increased potential for branch failure from re-growth due to a weaker branch attachment.

Crown reductions can predispose the tree to a premature decline and therefore, for these reasons, crown reductions are rarely carried out and normally only on significant and important trees where crown reduction is necessary to abate a known structural or physiological feature.

Tip reduction is the localised reduction of a branch. It is frequently carried out to clear an adjacent structure. Normally a clearance of between 1.5 to 2.0m is carried out to prevent damage to the structure (for instance a house or garage) and to minimise the long-term exposure of the tree to damage and infection/colonisation by detrimental organisms. Overhanging branches above/outside this 1.5 to 2.0m distance are normally retained.

Pollarding

This is the cyclic removal of new shoots from the pollard head (point where previous pollarding has cut back to). It is recognised practice that this growth is removed on a 3-to-5-year rotation. Trees are either grown and managed as a pollard for a specific reason or are heavily reduced and subsequently managed this way to retain an otherwise unviable tree within the landscape. Owing to its intensive and costly nature this management regime is not initiated unless in exceptional circumstances.

Felling/tree removal

Healthy trees are not normally removed. Reasons for tree removal can include:

- when it is in a poor structural or physiological condition,
- as part of planned management for the site,
- the tree has caused damage, or is likely to cause imminent damage, to adjacent structures, but where pruning is not an option,
- the tree's roots have damaged the path or road causing potential hazards, but where root pruning is not an option,
- we need to remove a tree to allow other trees nearby to develop,
- the tree is a species which is known to outgrow where it is planted, and if it will unreasonably restrict the use of this area,
- the benefit or view of the tree is so limited by where it is, that the inconveniences outweigh all arguments in favour of keeping it,
- the tree stands in the way of essential development work (for instance road improvements).

Stump removal

Stumps are removed (ground out) when there is a high probability of them being a trip hazard, to allow grass cutters to pass over the stump or to allow reinstatement of a footway or other man-made feature. Additionally, stumps may be removed where it would be a resource for decay fungi (for instance honey fungus *Armillaria mellea*). Where these reasons are not applicable, the stumps are normally left in place to allow the most effective use of the budget.

Coppicing

Coppicing is the removal of all the growth of a tree or shrub to a point close to the ground with the objective of producing a quantity of vigorous new growth from the retained stool. This is normally carried out on previously coppiced trees (for instance hazel) as part of woodland management.

Root pruning

Occasionally, tree roots can damage footpaths and pavements. In these cases, we can prune the roots. However, if root pruning threatens tree health or stability, removal may be our only alternative.

Ivy

Ivy is good for wildlife in terms of being a source of nectar in the late summer months and shelter. It does compete with trees for water and nutrients. When ivy grows into the upper canopy, it can shade out leaves and act as a 'wind sail' over the winter months. Ivy also obscures survey of the trees for structural defects. In consideration of these issues, we normally will remove ivy from trees in high use areas particularly if the ivy gets to 1/3rd the height of the tree or along primary branches (the first branches that occur from the main stem) or where a detailed assessment of the tree is necessary.

Other

If there is no alternative, we can clear branches that obstruct the view of CCTV cameras or street lighting. However, we expect the design specification and installation engineers to consider any nearby trees and their future growth before installing apparatus.