



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

To review the current tree maintenance operation

**Report of the Overview and Scrutiny
Tree Policy Task and Finish Group**

JULY 2006

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Foreword

The Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group, comprising Councillors Jamie Lane, Lee Mason and Jane Hollis, was set up because the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was unclear whether the Council has a Tree Maintenance Policy. One of the previous Overview and Scrutiny Committees had looked into this but the work had not been finished. The aim of this review was to investigate the need and purpose of such a Policy.

The review examined a range of information. It looked at what the needs were within the Borough of Northampton and the resources it had, it also looked at Tree Policies from other Local Authorities. There was a site visit to Kingsthorpe Recreation Ground, interviews were held with senior staff from Northampton Borough Council, baseline information was received and desktop research carried out using the Internet.

This review was carried out between June and August 2006.



Councillor Jamie Lane

Chair of the Tree Policy Task and Finish Group

Acknowledgements to all those who took part in the Review:-

- Councillor Lee Mason who sat with me on this Task and Finish Group
- Councillor Margaret Pritchard for some very valuable comments.
- Carl Grimmer (Corporate Manager) and Paul Chambers (Team Leader) for their hard work and dedication to this piece of work.
- Bran Sugden (Tree Inspector) for his valuable advice
- Tracy Tiff (Scrutiny Officer) for taking notes and helping compile the final report.
- Councillors Penelope Flavell, John Caswell and Phil Larratt (Portfolio Holders) for their comments.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up this Task and Finish Group to review whether the Council has a Tree Policy in place in order to achieve a consistent Urban Landscape Management Policy within the Council.

A significant amount of evidence was heard, details of which are contained in the report. After gathering evidence the Task and Finish Group established that there is a need for: -

- A comprehensive Tree Policy for the Borough.
- More allocated resources for tree maintenance, particularly due to the age of some of the trees in the Borough which will mean heavy investment of funds over the next five years.
- Freeing up the Tree Inspectors of tree related complaints and other administrative duties so that they are able to carry out their inspections on every tree within the Borough every 12 months.
- A review of the agreement with Northamptonshire County Council and the Borough Council in respect of the number of grass cuts per year.
- Trees to be managed in such a way that they maximise their contribution to the landscape and environment but also minimise their conflict with other urban activities.
- Consulting citizens in tree maintenance policy development.
- The maintenance of hedgerows to be investigated further.

The above overall findings have formed the basis for the following recommendations. The following recommendations are aimed at formalising and improving tree maintenance within the Council. The Task and Finish Group asked the Cabinet to:

- Consider the draft Tree Policy as the basis for a Northampton Borough Council Tree Policy.
- Seek public consultation on the draft Tree Policy.
- Give consideration to further resources to ensure the thorough maintenance of trees and the delivery of the Tree Policy.
- Require tree related complaints to be dealt with by an Administration Officer to free up the Tree Inspectors to undertake their inspections so that every tree within the borough is checked every twelve months for safety.
- Review the agreement with Northamptonshire County Council regarding tree cuttings to be undertaken.
- Carry out further work on involving citizens in awareness raising in tree maintenance.
- Consider including the maintenance of hedgerows in a future Policy.

Northampton Borough Council

Overview and Scrutiny

Report of the Tree Policy Task and Finish Group

1 Purpose

The purpose of the Task and Finish Group was to review the Tree Policy within Northampton Borough Council and achieve a consistent Urban Landscape Management Policy within the Council.

2. Context and Background

2.1 In 1993 the Department of the Environment (DOE) published the document `Trees in Towns (HMSO). This was the result of a study carried out by land use consultants, to investigate the character and distribution of trees in towns in England. The principle conclusions were:-

` the need for each Local Authority to examine the tree stock in its towns; discuss their findings, formulate a long term strategy for maintenance of existing trees, their eventual replacement, and planting of new trees within an overall landscape plan`.

2.2 Regular requests from residents and Councillors have come into the Landscape Maintenance Sections of the Council regarding, trees, shrubs and further environmental work affecting the equality of life within the wards. This is further highlighted with the work of the Community Safety Unit and CASPAR who view the landscape as an area where changes can be made to address anti social behaviour issues.

2.3 There are common issues of concern, Nationally it is recognised that the following issues need attention as part of a Tree Policy:-

- Large shrubs providing poor sight lines
- Trees blocking light
- Trees too big for their environment
- Shrubs affecting car bays
- Fly tipping
- Fear of crime because of vegetation
- Shrubs affecting paths and access to the front and rear of properties

A standard maintenance programme and tree inspection schedule is carried out. A contract is put together which is then put out to tender. The contract is offered to the contractor who submits the lowest priced tender document. Works that are deemed as urgent, such as, trees that are dead, diseased, pose a health and safety risk or are causing structural damage are prioritised.

The development of Northampton in the late 1960's and early 1970's saw a landscape infrastructure which was at the time award winning, but the last 30 years has seen this landscape grow, forest type trees are now reaching maturity, higher levels of cars in parking areas, usage and expectations of the areas are no longer compatible with the design of the landscape which was designed with a different social usage in mind. Today the effects of the landscape are causing increasing concern with an unrealistic expectation of what can be achieved within the routine maintenance cycle. This in itself adds to the frustration of the residents and Councillors and gives a poor impression on Council services.

High quality public spaces are essential features of successful neighbourhoods where people want to live, work, play and invest. Though it should be understood that neighbourhoods have different needs, wants and expectations, public space must be fit for purpose and safe.

2.4 The Council continues to spend revenue funds with little overall impact due to the size of the trees that Northampton Borough Council has to manage.

2.5 The Group agreed that the following needed to be investigated further:

-

- Whether Northampton Borough Council had a Tree Policy
- The current situation with regards to tree maintenance
- The number of trees involved
- Comparison of other Local Authorities' Tree Policies
- Issues of concern regarding tree management

3. Evidence Collection

In scoping this review it was decided that evidence would be collected from a variety of sources.

3.1 Planning Officers and Building Control Officers

The Planning Policy and Conservation Manager and the Interim Development and Building Control Manager attended our meeting on 21st June 2006 (the minutes of this meeting are attached at Appendix A).

The key points of evidence were: -

- Development Control is concerned with planning issues
- Building Control is primarily concerned with the safety of buildings
- It is ensured that trees with 'greedy roots' are not planted too close to buildings and fast growing trees are not planted on new development sites.
- Generally, trees are not contained within Greenfield and Brownfield sites.

- The Planning Policy and Conservation Team have the authority to implement Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) if it is perceived that a proposed development could harm or damage the trees.
- TPOs are made under delegated authority and if a tree has a TPO, formal consent from the Council is required to carry out maintenance work or cut it down.
- There are around 200 trees in the Borough with TPOs.
- Good justification is required to implement a TPO.
- A TPO can be revoked for reasons such as the health of the tree.
- If a tree with a TPO is on private land it is the responsibility of the landowner to maintain it at their cost.

3.2 Tree Maintenance Inspector

The Tree Maintenance Inspector attended the meeting of 1 June and gave the Group a very thorough briefing on trees and the issues he deals with in his job. A very useful Fact Sheet on Frequently Asked Questions was circulated. A copy of this sheet is attached with the minutes of this meeting at Appendix B and Appendix C.

The key points of evidence from the interview were: -

- A balance must be found for the public's need and the health need of the trees.
- The budget for parks is £135,000 per annum, £75,000 has been committed from 1 April 2006 to 1 June 2006 for work to be carried out in parks in the Borough.
- The contractor that the Council is now using appears to provide a good value for money service.
- The cost of removing/maintaining a tree is approximately £150 to £180 (half a day's work).
- The Council is invoiced £500 plus VAT for emergency calls.
- Cemeteries have an annual budget of £4,000 for tree maintenance but there is a need to use the budget for the maintenance of parks as a 'back up' Strategy.
- Northampton Borough Council is responsible for all 127 parks and open spaces in the Borough and the Tree Inspectors aim to inspect parks annually.
- Northampton Borough Council is responsible for the maintenance of all trees in the borough.
- The Tree Inspectors deal with other issues: -
 - General queries
 - Provision of information
 - Reports on dangerous trees
 - Insurance claims
 - Nesting birds
 - Unprotected bats

- Fallen leaves
 - Subsidence queries and claims
 - General queries
- Subsidence is a major issue for Northampton, longer, drier summers and shorter, drier winters have increased the problem.
 - Pollution can reduce the life of trees.
 - Tree Inspectors facilitate work for other agencies, such as, British Gas, the Water Company and British Telecom.
 - Tree Inspectors must be able to demonstrate that tree inspections have taken place. A written record of housing and highways inspections is kept. The requirements are different for highways, paths and open spaces; it is more stringent for highway trees.
 - A full written report on trees in parks is not produced; a map is produced together with the type of maintenance work that is required to take place.

3.3 Looking at best Practice from other Local Authorities

Tree Policies from two Local Authorities were considered, Chester City Council and Warwick District Council, as part of the evidence collection. Warwick District Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy is in final format and published on their website. Chester City Council's draft Tree Policy is currently published on its website but it is envisaged that the final Tree Policy will be published shortly. The Group felt that Chester City Council's draft Tree Policy was similar to the way that tree maintenance is currently carried at Northampton. Chester City Council's draft Tree Policy was therefore felt to be a suitable model on which to base Northampton Borough Council's model.

3.4 Site Inspection with a Tree Inspector

A site visit was organised to Kingsthorpe Recreation Ground. Many different species of trees were shown, how they grew, what problems they faced as they grow older was explained and suggestions as to how the Council could safeguard itself against accidents that may occur. The Group also learn about Tree Inspection Reports and how they are compiled..

The key points from the visit were mainly concerned with issues that comprise maintenance work. The following points were noted as significant: -:

- Crown lifting is essential for meeting statutory requirements
- Removal of deadwood is important for reducing the likelihood of falling branches
- Removal of basal suckers to the first major unions to prevent them from overgrowing paths and to keep the site open
- Clearance of buildings and properties by 3 metres is necessary to prevent damage to walls, roofs and gutters
- Trees must legally be one metre away from properties but the Council ensures that there is a three-metre clearance

- To date there is no legal right to light with regards to trees, though the Council does have a responsibility to adequately clear lamp columns and streetlights.
- Concerns have been received from residents regarding tree roots and potential subsidence. In these incidences, residents are informed they should contact their insurers who will facilitate a trained operative to carry out a survey. If after this, it is felt there are genuine grounds for complaint, then the relevant information should be forwarded to the Council's insurance department for further investigation.

3.5 Information about Abington Park

Information was collected about Abington Park to give the Group more information for its review:--

- A survey is almost complete at the top end of the park. 220 trees require maintenance work.
- Two Pine trees have beetle infestation and there is the potential for it to affect the rest of the Pines. The situation must be monitored
- Trees can look in perfect health but the stem is dead. This type of disease is air borne, ground borne and water borne.

4. Conclusions

After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn: -.

4.1 There was no comprehensive Tree Policy for the Borough and there is a need to design one as a matter of urgency to inform planning and resource allocation.

4.2 The age of some of the trees within the Borough will mean a heavy investment of funds over the next five years, in particular the trees in Abington Park.. The current budget of £135,000 is inadequate for the number of trees, as approximately 15% of this money needs to be 'held' for emergency work such as damage caused by storms.

4.3 Currently, the Tree Inspectors inspect each tree within two years but this should be carried out annually, which indicates a lack of resources as seen in Section 3.2. Claims from damage caused by Council owned trees are very rare but in the case of a claim the Council would have to prove that maintenance had been carried out on that tree over the last 12 months. The Group felt that there was a need for an Administration Officer to deal with tree related complaints so that the Tree Inspectors are freed up to undertake their inspections so that every tree within the borough is checked every twelve months for safety.

4.4 Northampton Borough Council carries out grass cuttings on the highways verges and Northamptonshire County Council undertakes shrub maintenance. Northamptonshire County Council pays Northampton Borough Council to carry out four grass cuts per year; but significantly more cuts are done to ensure that these verges are maintained to a high standard. This is heavily subsidised by Northampton Borough Council.

4.5 If the Council wants healthy trees in the Borough a common sense approach needs to be taken. Trees need to be managed in such a way that they maximise their contribution to the landscape and environment but also minimise their conflict with other urban and rural activities. This is what the draft Tree Policy (Copy attached at Appendix D) aims to do, it seeks solutions to common conflicts not just in the short term but also in the long term so that future generations inherit an attractive healthy tree resource which requires the minimum of maintenance.

4.6 As the review was a short, focussed piece of work that concentrated on the maintenance of trees, we did not look at the maintenance of hedgerows. However, the Task and Finish Group felt that there is a need for the maintenance of hedgerows to be investigated further.

4.7 After gathering all the evidence it was felt there is a need to engage and consult citizens in tree maintenance policy development.

5 Recommendations

The Task and Finish Group ask the Cabinet to:-

- 5.1 Consider the draft Tree Policy (copy at appendix D) as the basis for a Northampton Borough Council Tree Policy.
- 5.2 Seek public consultation on the draft Tree Policy.
- 5.3 Give consideration to further resources to ensure the thorough maintenance of trees and the delivery of the Tree Policy.
- 5.4 Require tree related complaints to be dealt with by an Administration Officer to free up the Tree Inspectors to undertake their inspections so that every tree within the borough is checked every twelve months for safety.
- 5.5 Review the agreement with Northamptonshire County Council regarding tree cuttings be undertaken.
- 5.6 Carry out further work on involving citizens in awareness raising in tree maintenance.
- 5.7 Consider including the maintenance of hedgerows in a future Policy.

Appendices

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TREE POLICY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Wednesday, 21 June 2006

PRESENT:

Councillor J Lane (Chair)
Councillor L Mason

Carl Grimmer - Corporate Manager
Paul Chambers - Street and Environment Team Leader
Steve Pointer - Planning Policy and Conservation Manager
David Stewart - Interim Development & Building Control Manager
Tracy Tiff

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jane Hollis and Christine Stevenson (Corporate Manager).

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited attendees to introduce themselves.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 JUNE 2006

Subject to the following amendment the minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2006 were agreed:-

Budget

...the budget for *tree maintenance* is £135,000.

3 EVIDENCE FROM PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL OFFICERS

The Chair clarified that the Task and Finish Group had asked relevant employees from Development and Building Control to provide information regarding new builds and the conditions that are attached to planning permission regarding issues such as the types of trees planted and the distance planted to buildings.

D Stewart, Interim Development and Building Control Manager, advised of the tree issues that development control and building control were concerned with: -

- Development Control looks at planning issues
- Building Control is primarily concerned with the safety of buildings

Development Control

Regarding new builds, staff would look at the planting scheme provided by the developer in respect of issues such as: -

- Trees with 'greedy roots' are not planted too close to buildings
- No fast growing trees are planted

Development Control Officers do not have green experience but rely on advice in all cases from the Street and Environment Team, Asset Management and the Arboricultural Officer.

Building Control

Regarding new builds, Building Control Officers have similar considerations as that of Development Control Officers such as planting a tree too close to a building, building a property near to woodland or whether a tree that was planted prior to the development could be harmed, for example, bridging the tree roots in anticipation of root growth.

Greenfield and Brownfield sites do not in the main contain trees.

S Pointer, Planning Policy and Conservation Manager, reported that M Rangeley, Arboricultural Officer, was the department's specialist in arboricultural issues and provided specific advice to Development Control Officers. The team has the authority to implement Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) if staff perceive that a proposed development could harm or damage the trees. TPOs are made under delegated authority and if a tree has a TPO formal consent from the Council is required to carry out maintenance work or cut it down. There are around 200 trees in the borough with TPOs. The Tree Panel oversees the monitoring and implementing of TPOs, it also considers any objections received in respect of an impending TPO.

The Task and Finish Group asked questions and heard: -

- Once a tree was covered by a TPO, routine checks are not generally undertaken. Often a TPO attracts local awareness and local residents would probably inform the Council of any maintenance that had been carried out. Arboricultural Contractors carry out their own checks on trees before carrying out maintenance work.
- Enforcement and follow up procedures are in place if a report is made.
- TPOs can either be implemented individually or as a group (woodland).
- Good justification is required to implement a TPO.
- There are fourteen conservation areas in the town.
- A TPO can be revoked for reasons such as the health of the tree.
- Mature trees require careful maintenance management.
- If a tree with a TPO was on private land it would be the responsibility of the landowner to maintain it at their cost.

D Stewart and S Pointer were thanked for their informative addresses.

4 FEEDBACK FROM CHESTER CITY COUNCIL'S TREE MAINTENANCE POLICY

C Grimmer, Corporate Manager, commented that he had carried out research and ascertained that very few Local Authorities had produced a Tree Maintenance Policy and that Chester City Council's was the best that he had read.

C Grimmer advised that he had liaised with departments across the Council regarding a Tree Policy for the Council using Chester City Council's Tree Policy as the baseline. NBC's Tree Policy was currently in draft format and an updated version would be emailed to the Task and Finish Group for comment prior to its next meeting on 20 July 2006. He emphasised however, that Chester City Council's Tree Policy contained a tree management strategy but NBC would not be able to deliver such a strategy. Resources would be required to develop and deliver the strategy.

The Task and Finish Group requested that in be included in the final report that *where resources permit, the possibility of introducing a Tree Management Strategy be investigated*. The report should also detail that tree maintenance is under resourced.

C Grimmer advised that the borough comprised in excess of 500,000 trees with a £135,000 maintenance budget. A bad storm could use half of the budget. Three months into the year, nearly the entire budget has been committed to essential works.

AGREED: (1) That copies of Northampton Borough Council's draft Tree Policy be emailed to the Task and Finish Group for comment prior to the next meeting on 20 July 2006.
(2) That the final report includes: -
Where resources permit, the possibility of introducing a Tree Management Strategy be investigated
That tree maintenance is under resourced.

5 FEEDBACK FROM WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL'S TREE MAINTENANCE POLICY

The Task and Finish Group agreed whilst Warwick District Council's Tree Policy had been useful, Chester City Council's was more comprehensive.

6 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting to finalise the Chair's report was noted as Thursday 20 July at the later time of 7pm.

The meeting concluded at 6:15 pm

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
TREE POLICY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

1 June 2006

PRESENT:

Councillor Jamie Lane (Chair)
Councillor Lee Mason

Councillor John Caswell Portfolio Holder
Councillor Penelope Flavell Portfolio Holder

Carl Grimmer Corporate Manager
Paul Chambers Street and Environment Team Leader
Bran Sugden Tree Inspector
Tracy Tiff

1 Apologies

There were none.

2 Minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2006

Subject to the following amendment: -

*NCC pays NBC to carry out **four** grass cuts per year*

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2006 were agreed.

Feedback from the Site Visit

Site visit

Councillor Lane advised that he had attended a site visit of Kingsthorpe Recreation Ground with P Chambers, B Sugden and T Tiff earlier that day. The location had been chosen as it has a variety of trees for viewing.

A balance must be found for public's need and the health and need of the trees.

A contract is issued to the contractors carrying out the work which details the Latin names of the trees on the site, maintenance work required and a map.

It could take three months before work commenced on a large contract: -

- One month to draw up the contract
- One month for the tenders to be submitted

- A further month before work commenced

Budget

The budget for parks is £135,000 per annum, £75,000 had been committed since 1 April 2006. The contractors that the Council is now using provide a good value for money service.

The cost of removing/maintaining a tree was approximately £150 to £180 (1/2 days work). The Council is invoiced £500 plus VAT for emergency calls. However, it had cost £8,000 to remove a large tree (once removed, four people could stand in the whole where the trunk had been). A large tree weighs approximately 7 tonne. A tree can perspire which can make a leaf weigh three times more; the excess weight this can cause a branch to fall. Branches do not tend to fall in the rain as rain runs off the leaves and does not create additional weight.

Cemeteries have an annual budget of £4,000 for tree maintenance but there is a need to use the budget for the maintenance of parks as a 'back up'.

Tree Inspectors Responsibilities

NBC is responsible for all 127 parks and open spaces in the borough and the Tree Inspectors aim to inspect parks annually. NBC is also responsible for the maintenance of all trees in the borough. Other such issues that the Tree Inspectors deal with are: -

- General queries
- Provision of information
- Reports on dangerous trees
- Insurance claims
- Nesting birds
- Bats that are a protected species
- Fallen leaves
- Subsidence queries and claims
- Queries from NBC, Atkins, Seaman's,
- The tree inspectors facilitate work for British Gas, Water Company and British Telecom.

Subsidence is a main issue for Northampton, longer, drier summers and shorter, drier winters have increased the problem.

Tree Inspectors must be able to demonstrate that tree inspections have taken place. A written record of housing and highways inspections is kept. The requirements are different for highways, paths and open spaces; it is more stringent for highway trees. A full written report on trees in parks is not produced, however, a map is produced together with the type of maintenance work that is required to take place. A sheet is kept detailing the date, location, condition of tree and whether there is a need for maintenance work.

B Sugden confirmed that the trees in St Giles churchyard are the responsibility of the Church and NBC Tree Inspectors have to seek permission to carry out maintenance work. The church is legally responsible for the trees on its land.

The crowns on trees situation on footpaths are lifted to 3 – 3.5 meters in excess of the legal limit which is 2 meters. Trees must clear light heads to give an adequate splay of lighting. The general standard is to clear lamp heads by 1.5 metres.

If a footpath crosses a public right of way, highways law pertains.

Tree Maintenance Staff

- Paul Chambers Team Leader
- Two Tree Inspectors
- Temporary Administration Officer

A site visit of Kingsthorpe Recreation Ground took place at 12 noon on 1 June 2006. The location was chosen as it has a variety of trees for viewing.

Abington Park

A survey was almost complete of the top end of Abington Park. 220 trees need to be worked on.

Two Pine trees had beetle infestation but there was the potential for it to affect the rest of the Pines. The situation must be monitored. It would not be known until the end of the Beetle-breeding season (end of July) the extent of the infestation. Beetle infestation is untreatable.

It was possible that all the Horse Chestnut trees in Abington Park will have to be removed due to disease. Trees have a lifespan of approximately 120 to 150 years. When they become over 100 years they can become less resistant to diseases and pollution.

Abington Park has an aging tree stock with various diseases. The aging tree stock is being investigated for public safety reasons.

Trees can look in perfect health but the stem is dead. This type of disease is air borne, ground borne and water borne.

Councillor Lane advised that the aging tree stock should be highlighted in the final report.

AGREED: That the aging tree stock be highlighted in the final report.

4 Presentation from the Tree Inspectors

B Sugden advised that since the 1930s Northamptonshire had been proud of its plentiful stock of trees. The expansion of the area in the 1960s through to the 1990s created an expansion of the tree population and the amount of land bequeathed to the Borough. For example, six trees were planted in the Eastern District with the expectation for one to survive, but in reality five out of the six survived. Semi mature, small trees are often planted in housing areas. There has been an increase in insurance claims in the Eastern District in relation to subsidence, pathways, lighting and fallen leaves.

B Sugden reiterated that a lot of the Borough's tree stock was aging.

Pollution can reduce the life of trees. Many of the mature Horse Chestnut trees in the borough will have to be removed over the next few years due to disease.

The Task and Finish Group heard that the Tree Inspectors were responsible for: -

- Issues raised by the public, agencies, NBC staff
- Public queries, such as legal obligations, Tree Preservation Orders, Legal rights to pruning, ownership of trees.
- Drawing up and maintaining contracts
- Health and Safety issues
- Working to British Standards and NBC standards
- All highways issues – except emergency issues out of working hours (this is the responsibility of WS Atkins)
- Insurance Claims – If a tree is within 10 metres of a property it has to be removed.
- Mayoral Tree Planting
- Provide advice on the types of trees to plant
- Order trees and maintain for the future

In answer to the Task and Finish Group's queries B Sugden advised that: -

- A plan for the future of the trees in Abington Park had been produced. The trees at the top end of Abington Park were in the worst condition and were a priority for tree maintenance for this year.
- There were minimal costs to maintain the trees outside the museum
- Tree Inspectors had a good working relationship with Planning Officers regarding conservation areas and Tree Preservation Orders.
- Most storms tended to occur towards the end of the financial year; therefore, a percentage of the budget (£80,000) is kept back 'just in case'. In the storms of 2004, 89 trees fell countywide in 22 hours.
- Often when a tree is inspected following a complaint, the tree is found to be of the required standard and maintenance work is not required.

In responses to the Task and Finish Group's suggestion that it would be beneficial for the Councillor Contact Centre to send a letter to the Councillor who had reported a complaint regarding the condition of a tree that maintenance work was not required, C Grimmer advised that with the introduction of the Customer Relationship System, all calls/emails/letters are now centrally logged and are easily accessible.

The Chair requested that the Tree FAQ sheet, circulated at the meeting, should be appended to the final report.

It was suggested that WS Atkins is sent a copy of the Task and Finish Group's final report.

ACTION: **(1) That the Tree FAQ sheet would is appended to the Task and Finish Group's final report.**
(2) That WS Atkins is sent a copy of the Tree Policy Task and Finish Group's final report.

5 Best Practice Tree Maintenance Policies

C Grimmer had carried out research and ascertained that very few Local Authorities had produced a Tree Maintenance Policy. None of the Councils in Northamptonshire had such policies. He had obtained copies of Tree Maintenance Policies from Chester City Council and Warwick District Council. Generally Tree Maintenance Policies are short and comprise one page, but both these documents were very comprehensive. Copies of the policies would be emailed to all Councillors on this Task and Finish Group for feedback to the next meeting.

C Grimmer advised that Chester City Council's Tree Maintenance Policy was very good and he suggested that it be used as a baseline for this Council's Tree Maintenance Policy.

ACTION: **That Chester City Council and Warwick District Council's Tree Maintenance Policies be email to the Task and Finish Group for feedback to the next meeting.**

5 Date of Next Meeting of meeting

The next meeting was noted as Wednesday 21 June 2006 commencing at 5.30pm in the Gallery Room at the Guildhall.

The agenda would include: -

- Evidence from Planning and Building Control Officers
- Feedback from Chester City Council's Tree Maintenance Policy
- Feedback from Warwick District Council's Tree Maintenance Policy

The Task and Finish Group would hold a further meeting to its finalise report.

The meeting concluded at 6.45 pm

TREES FAQ SHEET

1. The tree(s) outside my property block light to my house/garden, can they be removed/pruned?

In law there has been no tested case to prove or disprove right to light and as such there is NO ABSOLUTE RIGHT TO LIGHT, to either land or property.

Whilst Northampton Borough Council is sympathetic we do not undertake tree works to facilitate light to either land (gardens, etc) or property (houses, conservatories, etc).

2. Trees overhand my garden, can I prune them?

In law there is no legal obligation for a tree owner, private or public, to prune trees in order to prevent branches spreading over a boundary, unless structural damage is caused.

Northampton Borough Council endeavours to ensure a 2 metre clearance distance from overhanging trees to residential structures (i.e. sheds, fences, houses, etc) as part of our maintenance programme. However, there is a common law right which permits a person (or their agent i.e. tree surgeon, gardener, etc) to prune back any growth of tree, shrub etc to the line of their boundary, e.g. fence line, as long as any cuttings are disposed of in a reasonable manner, i.e. not dumped on public property or private land.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- B.1 Any prunings, fruit, etc must be offered back to the owner of the tree, but if the owner declines to accept them it is up to the person who has pruned them to dispose of the waste in a responsible manner.
- B.2 The law of trespass applies, so the pruning can only be carried out from the enquirer's side of the fence unless permission is obtained from the landowner.
- B.3 By carrying out any work to a tree as above, the person takes responsibility for their actions. Should injury/damage or failure of the tree occur, as a result of such action, the person who carried out the work becomes liable.
- B.4 If the tree carries a Tree Preservation Order or is in a Conservation Area permission must first be obtained from the local planning authority (LPA). This information can be found in a leaflet "Protected Trees – A Guide to Tree Preservation Procedures".

3. My TV signal is poor. The company who supplied it says the trees are interfering. Can they be removed/pruned?

Northampton Borough Council does not prune trees to ease the difficulty. A TV Licence does not give the holder a guarantee or legal right to reception, be it analogue, digital or satellite.

An Information Fact Sheet offering advice on how to ameliorate tree-related reception problems can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/reception.

4. The leaves/seeds/sap make such a mess when they fall and make the garden path slippery/block the drains/dirty the car. Can they be removed/pruned?

Northampton Borough Council has a duty to care to keep pavements in good structural repair (County Council Highways Department) but gardens (front or rear) whether those of the Council or private properties are the concern of the occupiers.

Northampton Borough Council can accept no responsibility for the tree leaf litter, seed drop, sap exudation, etc as these are natural physiological occurrences only to be expected by trees.

Northampton Borough Council does not undertake tree works to facilitate the prevention of leaf litter, seed or sap drop in gardens or footpaths.

It is important to note that except in the most extreme and exceptional circumstances, Northampton Borough Council does not remove any tree without there being sufficient disease, decay or structural damage, identified and assessed by a qualified arboriculturalist.

5. I am worried about the tree roots getting under the house and damaging foundations. What should I do?

Generally tree roots do not damage buildings. However some of Northampton soil has high clay content and this, when coupled with vegetation (trees or shrubs) can cause excessive moisture loss during periods of drought. If you think your property is affected this way, you should first obtain a structural survey (often via your own building insurance company). This should then be forwarded to Insurance Services, Northampton Borough Council.

6. Is there a law about the height of hedges?

No law has yet been passed to control the height of hedges. If you require any further information regarding the proposals to introduce legislation relating to high hedges please contact your local Planning Department.

7. Why can't you "Top"/reduce the height of trees outside my house?

"Topping" is an outdated arboricultural practice that is no longer considered to be acceptable by the industry for a number of reasons including:

- Topping removes so much of the tree's canopy it upsets the crown to root ratio temporarily reducing its food making ability.

- Topping exposes the rest of the tree, and surrounding trees and vegetation, to scorching from direct sunlight, which can damage the natural physiological processes and future survival of the trees.
 - The large stubs and wounds caused by “topping” open the tree to insect attack, disease and decay entry, compromising the future survival of the tree.
 - Any new shoots that grow from the cut stubs will be weakly attached and pose risk to safety when they become larger and heavier.
 - “Topping” a tree will encourage rapid re-growth often with larger leaves and denser crowns.
 - Some species of trees cannot cope with “topping” and will die as a result
 - A “topped” tree is ugly and deformed and will never regain its natural shape and character.
8. Somebody is working on a tree but it has birds nesting/bats roosting in it. Who do I call?

Contact one of the following:

RSPB
English Nature Reserve
Bat Conservation Trust

Further details can be obtained from your local library.

DRAFT

TREE POLICY 2006
NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL



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INTRODUCTION

Trees are amongst the most important and significant features in the landscape, in the countryside and within our towns. For hundreds of years trees have been cultivated not just for timber, food, shelter and medicine but simply for their intrinsic beauty. Even the ancient Greeks planted trees for amenity. They are a part of our history and culture and have been worshipped, celebrated and revered in myth and folklore.



THE IMPORTANCE OF TREES IN TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS

Trees play an especially important role in enhancing the urban environment. They screen unsightly structures and activities, give privacy and soften the hard lines of buildings. Trees also bring colour and contrasts into the urban environment.

Not only do trees have a visual quality, but they also enhance the environment in less obvious ways.

Trees improve air quality by acting as natural air filters removing dust, smoke and fumes from the atmosphere by trapping them on their leaves, branches and trunks. Just one hectare of beech woodland can extract four tonnes of dust a year from the atmosphere.

Trees reduce the 'Greenhouse' effect by absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen. Each year a mature tree produces enough oxygen for 10 people.

Trees are also an effective sound barrier and can limit noise pollution. Recent research shows that trees also help reduce the stress of modern life

Trees in themselves benefit the environment and the landscape, but they are also an integral part of the ecosystem providing benefits to wildlife and biodiversity. Trees, especially older or veteran trees and those in groups or woodlands, provide habitats for native ground flora such as bluebells and fauna, particularly birds, bats and invertebrates.



Even though trees can enhance our urban areas, this environment is often a hostile one. Many urban trees show signs of stress. They grow slowly and are more prone to disease. They are subjected to a variety of pollutants such as car fumes, herbicides, salt and other de-icing agents from roads. Vandals rip off branches; strip off the bark or set trees on fire.

Even under the guise of tree care there can be subconscious acts of vandalism. For example, tree ties that are left in place can strangle the tree they were meant to support. Also, incorrect pruning can leave unsightly trees struggling to survive.

Urban trees are more susceptible to drought. Many of the surfaces that they grow in are impervious to water and air; because the soil is compacted and any excess rainwater is drained away.

Tree roots are frequently severed during installation of underground services or to allow for construction work. This can lead to the premature death of trees.

All these factors mean that the life expectancy of urban trees is greatly reduced. Latest research indicates that the life expectancy of a newly planted street tree is approximately 11 years.

TREES AND MODERN LIVING.

Trees are widely accepted as 'a good thing' but a common comment made about urban trees is "Don't get me wrong I love trees, but not this one." In general people want trees in towns as long as they are not on their doorstep, shading their garden, shedding leaves or interfering with their television reception.

If the Council wants healthy trees in the Borough a common sense approach needs to be taken. Trees need to be managed in such a way that they maximise their contribution to the landscape and environment and minimise their conflict with other urban and rural activities. This is what the Policy aims to do. It seeks solutions to common conflicts not just in the short term but also in the long term so that future generations inherit an attractive healthy tree resource which requires the minimum of maintenance.

PURPOSE AND AIMS OF THE TREE POLICY

TREES IN TOWNS

In 1993 the Department of the Environment (D.O.E.) published the document 'Trees in Towns' (HMSO). This was the result of a study carried out by land use consultants, to investigate the character and distribution of trees in towns in England. The principal conclusions for Local

Authorities were the need to:-

- Examine the tree stock in its towns and discuss their findings,
- Formulate a long term strategy for maintenance of existing trees and their eventual replacement,
- Ensure the planting of new trees within an overall landscape plan.

The common theme of these documents is the need for regular inspections the careful planning of: pruning, felling, planting and the encouragement of private landowners to manage their trees appropriately.

SCOPE OF POLICY

Much of the Policy is aimed at the management of Northampton's 'urban trees'. These are classed as trees that are within the built up areas of the town. This definition includes trees adjacent to highways, in residential and commercial areas as well as in parks and open spaces.

The Policy also provides for the management of Northampton's rural trees and woodlands in its control.

AIMS

The aims of the tree policy are addressed **in the following five sections:**

- 1 To ensure the management of trees contributes to making Northampton Borough's environment attractive and healthy for people who visit, live and work in the Borough.
- 2 To ensure trees enhance the landscape.
- 3 To ensure efficient management and sustainability of the trees.
- 4 To ensure an increasing and varied tree population within the Borough which is in harmony with other land uses.
- 5 To promote awareness of the importance and value of trees to the residents of Northampton.

SECTION ONE -TREE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The aim of this section is to develop efficient working practices that will provide a continuous safe, healthy and attractive tree population. At present much of the Borough Council's tree resource is managed by responding to enquiries and a programme of planned inspections.

The section is sub-divided into the following areas: -

- 1.1 Tree Survey**
- 1.2 Administration and Financial Management**
- 1.3 Standard of Work**
- 1.4 Quality of Service**

1.1 TREE SURVEY

There are limited records of the exact number and location of trees that the Borough Council is responsible for. Information about trees is essential if the Council's trees are to be managed effectively and for planned management to be used.



The need for Councils to carry out tree surveys has been recognised for some time. The Department of Transport's (DOT) (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)) Circular 52/75 "Highway Trees" noted that trees adjacent to highways should be examined for signs of injury or decay that could lead to them becoming a hazard. A competent person should carry out the inspection. It also suggests that it would be useful to keep a record of previous work.

In 1978 the Department of Environment's (DOE) (ODPM) Circular 36/78 "Trees and Forestry" - extended this advice to cover all trees:

"An assessment of existing tree cover is desirable in order to determine the present and potential need and areas of priority"

"A competent inspection at reasonably frequent intervals helps to ensure that disease is noted and treated."

More recently, in 1993, the D.O.E.'s (ODPM) research report 'Trees in Towns', identifies as one of the principal conclusions of its study that Councils need to survey all the trees they are responsible for, in a uniform way, and store the information on a database.

There would be an extra cost incurred to collect the information due to the need to introduce a new database. This will lead to an improvement in the quality of service to residents. The D.O.E.'s study of Councils which have initiated tree surveys and strategies found that they had more than recovered the cost.

With this information a long-term coherent strategy for the management of the Borough's trees can be established. It will allow the Council to identify problems early and solve them in a planned way. It will also enable the Council to plan work schedules with its approved tree contractors making best use of the resources.

OUTCOMES SECTION 1.1

The Council will: -

Continue with surveys and inspection of Council owned and managed trees, so that collected information can be used to manage the tree resources in a planned and efficient way, which allows for the development and implementation of management plans, work schedules and the prioritisation of tree work.

.....

1.2 ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Council owned or managed trees in open spaces include; parks, car parks, grassed areas, hard landscaped areas, playing fields, allotments, cemeteries, closed churchyards and woodlands. In terms of annual funds needed to improve the tree stock and provide further plantings, provision has not been made for each separate area within its designated budget.

A full survey of the tree stock will provide information which can be used to inform a management plan with projected annual costs.

OUTCOMES SECTION 1.2

The Council will:-

Ensure the effective implementation of all sections in this document.

Allocate appropriate resources over a period of time specifically for arboricultural work including tree planting where necessary.

1.3 STANDARD OF WORK

It is important to ensure that trees are pruned as required to a high standard.

The Council's tree work is carried out by private landscape contractors appointed through a tendering process. The standard of work required is outlined in the contract specification documentation. This specification is updated with every contract issued. The accepted standard for tree work at present is the British Standard Recommendations for Tree Work. This is used as a guide for the specification of tree work to ensure the standards are up to date.

Poor tree pruning can not only look unsightly, but also reduce the life expectancy of a tree or lead to it becoming hazardous.

Tree surgery is not only specialised and skilled work, but can be dangerous. Staff who are involved in this work require training to protect themselves and the public.

Tree planting is a specialised task and requires proper consideration. All too often trees are planted in poorly prepared pits with inadequate protection and maintenance.

It is important that the Trees and Woodlands Officers continue to be aware of new developments in methods of tree care to ensure the 'Council's tree resource is managed as efficiently and effectively as possible.

OUTCOMES SECTION 1.3

The Council will: -

Endeavour to maintain high standards of tree work by: -

- a) Regularly reviewing the specifications in the contract to ensure that they are precise and meet with currently accepted standards.***
- b) Supporting the development and training of all arboricultural staff involved in Council tree work.***

1.4 QUALITY OF SERVICE

When a resident makes a request for work to a Council tree, an inspection is carried out to assess the tree and specify any work required. The money is then allocated from the appropriate budget. This work is then issued to a contractor. This process may take some time from the request being made to a tree being pruned.

The implementation of associated areas of this Policy will, in the long term, help to reduce the number of complaints received as future work is planned and potential problems are identified earlier. This will result in the response time to individual enquiries being reduced.

Response time depends on the performance of all parties involved. Working together and setting targets will make this process more efficient and productive so the customer receives a consistent quality service.

OUTCOMES SECTION 1.4

The Council will:

Ensure effective implementation of Policies and provide a quality tree management service by:-

Making sure there is a quality tree management service by monitoring the aspects of tree work and ensuring that:

- ***The customer receives a***
- ***•Applicable sections are being effectively implemented***
- ***When problems arise in the system they are identified***
- ***The customer receives a quality service***
- ***Maximum output is attained for the resources available***

SECTION TWO – TREES IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Northampton's urban tree population is under considerable pressure in certain areas as much of the stock has been severely pruned at some point in their lifetime and consequently this has led to some trees being treated as pollards e.g. Abington Park. These pruning operations have led to some trees developing structural problems such as: decay, excessive re-growth, included bark and weak branches.

It is important to remember that people rarely contact the Council when they are happy about local trees. Only when trees become an apparent problem are comments made, and therefore a distorted picture of peoples' perception of trees develops. It is important therefore to seek alternatives to felling or severe pruning when conflicts arise.

It is important to retain the Council's mature trees for as long as possible. A mature tree may have taken 80 years or more to reach its peak. To replace this tree may be relatively cheap in financial terms, but there is no substitute for the time it will take a young tree to reach maturity. It is not always necessary to remove or severely prune a tree because it is causing a problem. There are other options available and these need to be considered before a tree is felled.

This section looks at some of the most common conflicts that the Council's urban trees cause and how these can be mitigated or overcome without felling or excessive pruning. It is important to strike a balance between removing problem trees and retaining trees in good health.



This section will cover the following areas: -

- 2.1 Damage to Property**
- 2.2 Right to Light**
- 2.3 Television and Satellite Reception**
- 2.4 General Nuisances**
- 2.5 Removal of Trees**
- 2.6 Phased Felling and Replacement**
- 2.7 Emergency Procedures for Dangerous Trees**

2.1 DAMAGE TO PROPERTY

Trees tend to cause concern where they are very close to buildings. A common concern is that the roots are undermining a person's property. It is rare for the direct action of roots to damage a house. However, they may affect lighter structures such as garden walls or porches.

The effect is variable and depends on the type of clay soil, species of tree, rainfall, and distance between the tree and the property. This is a complex relationship and all cases will need to be investigated thoroughly to ensure that it is the tree that is causing the problem and not some other factor.

OUTCOMES SECTION 2.1

The Council will:-

- a) Take into account the long-term effects of planting trees near buildings when designing planting schemes referring to current relevant guidance such as NHBC Standards 'Building near trees' and British Standard 5837 'Trees in relation to construction.'***
- b) Remove or prune Council owned trees that are causing damage to property if it is the most appropriate solution.***

2.2 RIGHT TO LIGHT

A common complaint about urban trees is that they block light from properties or shade gardens. The seriousness of this effect is as variable as the perception of it. Often removal of the tree will have little effect on the amount of sunlight reaching the house or garden. An example of this is where the house is north facing and the tree is small or at a distance. There is no right to light under the law.

OUTCOMES SECTION 2.2

The Council will:-

Only remove dead or diseased trees or those considered a hazard.

2.3 TELEVISION AND SATELLITE RECEPTION

Interference with television or satellite reception are the causes of frequent complaints. Interference is worse when the leaves are on the trees and in bad windy and rainy weather. Satellite reception is more sensitive to interference than television reception. There has been an increase in these complaints in recent years with the advent of this new technology.

In most cases the situation can be significantly improved by the relocation of the aerial. Boosters are also available which can improve the reception. These options are far cheaper and less destructive than the felling or pruning of a tree. In the vast majority of cases the tree was there long before the occupant of the dwelling.

This situation is expected to change as technology advances.

People need to be encouraged to seek alternative solutions to the removal or pruning of the

trees. These will usually be cheaper and more sustainable, leaving money available for more essential tree works.

OUTCOMES SECTION 2.3

The Council will: -

Consider a complaint made about satellite and television reception by, pruning a tree according to the current accepted pruning techniques, only where it is possible to do so without being detrimental to the health or amenity of the tree.

2.4 GENERAL NUISANCES

There are a variety of nuisances associated with trees that are not mentioned above. The more common ones include:

- Branches interfering with telephone wires
- Bird droppings and honey dew dropping from leaves on to cars and pavements
- Fruits and leaves dropping on footpaths making them hazardous in wet weather
- Roots lifting pavements and walls
- Insects associated with trees, such as, wasps and flies.
- Heavy leaf fall

Most of these problems are minor or seasonal and are considered to be social problems associated with living near trees. They can often be minimised by careful pruning and by giving due consideration to species choice in the first instance.

OUTCOMES SECTION 2.4

The Council will:-

Not fell or drastically prune trees which cause minor nuisances, but strive to find alternative solutions or prune trees to the accepted standard as outlined in the current Arboricultural Specification.

2.5 REMOVAL OF TREES

Mature trees are a valuable part of the urban landscape. Once removed it can take decades before another tree can reach a similar size. Also, mature trees are an important habitat and valuable to conservation and biodiversity. A single tree can be the home to many different species including insects, birds, fungi, mosses and lichens. An English Oak has around 400 species of insect associated with it. When a mature tree is felled, a valuable habitat is lost.

The larger a tree, the greater its contribution to improving air quality by, for example, removing dust from the air and producing oxygen. Mature trees are local landmarks and may have

historical significance. They may be the last remnants of what was once open countryside or woodland which some older residents remember from their childhood.

Due to these special values, the removal of mature trees should be given careful consideration. These trees will take a lifetime to replace.

OUTCOMES SECTION 2.5

The Council will:-

(a) Not remove a tree unless it is dead, dying or dangerous, (which cannot be significantly alleviated by any alternative method) or it is in the interest of good arboricultural or forestry practice.

The Council will: -

(b) Where it is safe to do so leave standing dead trees for wildlife habitat.

2.6 PHASED FELLING AND REPLACEMENT

Over-mature or veteran trees are an important ecological resource within the Borough, however in an urban environment they can be a potential hazard. To ensure these trees do not become a danger, pro-active maintenance is required. It is therefore important that these trees are identified and regularly inspected to ascertain their condition and carry out any necessary maintenance.

Regular inspections will help the Council to formulate a long-term strategy on the removal and replacement of these trees where necessary. The re-pollarding of over-mature trees to prolong their life may be an option in certain circumstances. The Council will follow the national guidelines on the management of veteran trees published by English Nature in these cases.

OUTCOMES SECTION 2.6

The Council will:-

- a) Identify and regularly inspect all Council owned trees that are potentially hazardous**
- b) Begin phased removal of inappropriate over-mature trees, from situations where they are unsuitable and replace all the trees within Parks and Open Spaces only.**

2.7 EMERGENCY PROCEDURES FOR DANGEROUS TREES

The 1987 gale highlighted the fact that in bad weather even the healthiest of trees can become hazardous. The Council needs a procedure for prompt action, to ensure that everything possible is done to protect residents and property.

Trees on privately owned land may also become dangerous. Usually, after negotiation with the owner this situation can be resolved.

OUTCOMES SECTION 2.7

The Council will:-

- a) Remove trees that are posing a hazard
- b) Act promptly in emergency situations to make safe trees that are imminently dangerous.

SECTION THREE - TREE PLANTING, ESTABLISHMENT AND DESIGN

Trees have a major influence on environmental quality and the quality of life in general. This is embodied in the Council's key aims.

Northampton Borough's mature tree population is beginning to decline due to their gradual removal. These removals combined with minimal replanting will begin to leave many areas virtually devoid of tree cover. The Council needs to re-address this imbalance through proactive and appropriate tree planting on a strategic basis.



Decisions made today about the planting of trees will shape Northampton Borough's landscape in the future. Many problems caused by trees can be avoided by careful design of planting schemes. The aim is to get the right tree in the right place so that urban trees are in harmony with the environment and the community.

The appropriate use of trees can transform the quality and image of an area. With careful consideration at the design stage tree planting schemes can create quality sustainable landscapes.

Inappropriate planting such as large trees being planted in close proximity to properties is a prime

example of the wrong tree in the wrong place

This Section covers the following:-

- 3.1 One for One Replacement in parks & open spaces**
- 3.2 Young Tree Care**
- 3.3 'The Right Tree'- Species Selection**
- 3.4 'The Right Place'- Site Selection**
- 3.5 Priority Areas for Planting**

3.1 ONE FOR ONE TREE REPLACEMENT IN PARKS & OPEN SPACES

From time to time trees have to be felled. However, these trees need to be replaced or the tree population will continue to decline.

Replanting trees removed from parks and open spaces is essential to maintain and help the urban tree population grow. Research has shown that as many as 46% of trees planted in an urban situation do not survive more than five years. This is due to a number of factors including vandalism, poor after-care and the hostility of the urban environment.

The size and scale of replacement planting should reflect both the trees removed and the situation. For example, in a large open space it may be more appropriate to plant 20 feathered trees rather than two larger standard size specimens. By contrast, if a specimen tree that was individually important in the landscape had been felled, replacement with a semi-mature tree may be more appropriate.

Cost consideration should also be made. Smaller trees are cheaper and usually establish better.

Other policies will look at the ways in which tree survival and life expectancy can be improved.

The cost of planting a replacement tree will add approximately 20% to the cost of felling a mature tree. This additional cost can be accommodated within the overall policy by improving general management

OUTCOMES SECTION 3.1

The Council will:-

Endeavour to plant at least one tree of a suitable species and size at the most appropriate site in the locality, should this not be possible then an alternative site will be sought.

3.2 YOUNG TREE CARE

When trees are first planted they are at their most vulnerable. They are more likely to die within their first five years than at any other time in their life. Research indicates that 75% of urban trees are destined to die through malpractice. Twice as many trees die through strangulation by failure to remove tree ties than through vandalism.

Care and maintenance of young trees is vital. Care taken in the early stages can avoid expensive maintenance at a later date. It will also increase the number of trees that we can expect to survive to maturity.

OUTCOMES SECTION 3.2

The Council will:-

Seek to ensure that trees planted are given the best possible chance of surviving to maturity by ensuring that:

a) high standards of planting and young tree maintenance, as prescribed in the current Arboricultural Specification

b) appropriate measures are taken to reduce vandalism

3.3 THE RIGHT TREE – SPECIES SELECTION

Careful selection of tree species can ensure that some of the common problems caused by trees are avoided. Particular consideration needs to be given to the ultimate size of the tree planted, but other characteristics of tree species also need to be considered. For example, trees with vigorous root growth, which may lift paving should not be planted near footpaths. Similarly, when planting trees with dense foliage consideration should be given to the shade they will cast.

With hundreds of species of trees to choose from, finding a suitable variety for most locations should be possible. There are only 33 trees native to the British Isles and these are the trees with the greatest wildlife value; these species should be planted where conservation and biodiversity are a priority. However, within built up areas the planting of exotic as well as native trees increases the chance of selecting the most appropriate tree for the site.

If a single species of tree predominates in an area it may become prone to disease and the effect can be devastating. This happened in the past with Dutch Elm disease. A greater diversity of tree species helps avoid the environmental danger of disease.

However, some species of trees are characteristic of certain areas of Northampton for example the species dominating Abington Park is mostly Horse Chestnut and the dominant species of the city is Lime.

Careful consideration should be given to the selection of species when planting near to structures and low-rise buildings in order to alleviate risk of future subsidence damage.

Judicious species selection should aim to select a tree which will give the greatest long-term amenity and environmental benefit, while requiring minimal maintenance.

OUTCOMES SECTION 3.3

The Council will:-

Seek to create a diverse and appropriate tree population by:

a) giving careful consideration to the selection of suitable tree species depending on site, locality and characteristic of the area

b) aiming to increase the diversity of tree species in planting schemes

c) producing guidance on species selection for certain areas of the Borough

3.4 THE RIGHT PLACE – SITE SELECTION

The 'right tree for the right place' will minimise conflict and maintenance in the future. For example, a cherry tree with a wide crown may not cause any problems in a small open space. However, if planted in a narrow grass verge it will cause obstruction and will require regular maintenance to remove low branches.

Not only does an inappropriate tree have a less beneficial effect on the landscape, but it also leads to more complaints and costs more to maintain.



OUTCOMES SECTION 3.4

The Council will:-

Select tree planting sites, where possible, which avoid conflict with other elements in the urban environment using any relevant guidance available as stated in Section 2.1

3.5 PRIORITY AREAS FOR PLANTING

There are areas within Northampton Borough that would benefit greatly from tree planting. Some require minimal planting to ensure an impact.

The areas, which should have priority for planting, should be:

- • Where there are few trees
- • Those in the heart of the urban areas
- • Large areas of open space where conflict with other urban uses will be minimal
- • Where a number of mature trees have been or are about to be removed

OUTCOMES SECTION 3.5

The Council will:-

Identify and prioritise areas of Northampton that would benefit from tree planting to ensure that resources available for tree planting are directed to the most appropriate areas.

SECTION FOUR - AMENITY TREES

The way that mature trees are managed and the amount and type of attention that they require depend considerably on their situation. Northampton Borough Council is responsible for many trees within urban and rural areas.

The following areas are designed to provide a planned approach to dealing with these trees:

4.1 Trees in Residential Areas

4.2 Highway Trees

4.3 Trees in Open Spaces

4.4 Woodlands

4.1 TREES IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS

Trees around housing give a 'sense of place' and character and have an impact on the living environment. For example, retaining mature trees on new housing developments can give an estate a sense of history and an established feel. Mature tree-scapes are usually associated with desirable residential areas and can increase property values.

On the other hand, trees close to housing can sometimes cause conflicts. These are discussed in Section 2. Most of these problems can be solved in the short term by good pruning and in the long term by giving more consideration to appropriate species choice as discussed in Section 3.

'Trees in Towns' identified that in areas where property is tenanted, or the population is largely transient, it is difficult to gain commitment from residents to care for trees in their areas.

Although the Council maintains many trees within the urban area, nationally around 60% of urban trees are privately owned and many are in private gardens. These trees are equally important in contributing to the residential environment.

OUTCOME SECTION 4.1

The Council will:-

Create and maintain an appropriate tree-scape in residential areas by:-

- a) retaining mature trees and planting***
- b) developing a system of regular residential areas***
- c) Working with Developers to advise on trees and sites on new housing developments within the Borough***

4.2 HIGHWAY TREES

Street trees are a very important landscape feature. They are also important as they reduce the dust, fumes and noise from cars. Northampton is committed to the principle of street tree planting to improve environmental quality and image.

However, they may need a great deal of maintenance, especially if the wrong species is planted or when little attention has been given to their placement. Consideration should be given in relation to roads, windows at the front of properties, overhead telephone wires, underground services and sight lines. The roots of trees can cause problems with footpath surfaces adjacent walls and structures. Species selection is therefore very important, as outlined in section 3.3.

Despite these problems there are still opportunities to plant large growing species of trees. These can create a bold effect, for example along primary routes or in industrial and business areas where there is appropriate space and scale.

Digging trenches for cable television and the possible adverse effect this can have on street trees has previously received high profile media coverage in certain areas. This has also drawn attention to the effect that other utilities may have on street trees during their excavations. If trenches are dug with no consideration for tree roots, a tree can be damaged and may become unstable.

There are working methods which leave the tree roots intact and cause a minimum damage. The National Joint Utilities Group (N.J.U.G.), which represents all the statutory undertakers, has guidelines for the planning, installation and maintenance of utility services close to trees. These are nationally recognised and the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions (D.E.T.R) (ODPM) recommends that Councils adopt them.

OUTCOME SECTION 4.2

The Council will:-

Encourage Northamptonshire County Council to incorporate trees into the street scene by:-

a) giving careful consideration to the species and to the placement of trees so as to minimize conflict with other highway uses

b) adopting the NJUG guidelines for trenching and working near trees in the highway and enforcing their use within the County.

4.3 TREES IN OPEN SPACES

Within urban areas, and green spaces whether they are managed formally or informally. Trees are an essential part of these green spaces. Parks are ideal sites for tree planting because there are relatively few conflicts and species that would be unsuitable elsewhere can be grown here.

Parks and cemeteries in Northampton provide an opportunity to develop collections of different varieties of tree both for their aesthetic contribution and as a valuable educational resource.

Many open spaces in the Borough are little more than fields of mown grass. These could be enhanced by the planting of trees especially in copses, which in the longer term would reduce the costs of regular mowing.

Other areas considered as open spaces that are important for tree planting include: grass verges adjacent to housing and industrial areas, car parks and other hard landscaping. Providing trees in these areas helps to soften the harsh landscaping and adds some character.

It is important that the ultimate aims of planting are clearly set out and long term management and maintenance commitments are fully assessed.

OUTCOME SECTION 4.3

The Council will:-

Seek to enhance the value of its parks and open spaces by:-

- a) Providing opportunities for the planting and use of trees within public open spaces as an educational, amenity and recreational resource.**
- b) Developing balanced tree management plans for all the major trees and stocked areas.**



4.4 WOODLANDS

Woodlands are an extremely important feature of the Borough's landscape and provide many benefits to the community as well as the environment. They provide tranquil places for recreation and absorb harmful greenhouse gasses.

Woodlands' role in protecting biodiversity is especially crucial. Ancient woodland is home to more threatened species than any other habitat in the UK.

Northampton Borough Council is currently responsible for extensive woodland.

OUTCOME SECTION 4.4

The Council will:-

Seek to maintain and enhance its woodland by regularly surveying all wooded areas in order to maintain safety and identify works required in order to conserve their health and structure.

SECTION FIVE – TREES AND THE COMMUNITY

The primary aim of managing trees within the urban area is to provide an attractive, healthy and safe environment. The wrong tree in the wrong place may cause a nuisance and contribute to a resident's or visitor's diminished perception of the environment. However, appropriate trees in appropriate places can positively benefit the environment and the amenity of an area considerably.

It is the role of the Council to balance these views when managing trees. To do this effectively the views of the community must be considered. A tree may be considered an intolerable nuisance by one person and a positive asset by another. It is the Council's role to balance these views when managing its own trees or controlling trees that are protected. To do this effectively the Council must consider the views of the community wherever possible by consulting residents, parish councils, ward members and other community groups.

The Council needs to develop channels to get all points of view of the community. Continuous consultation and education will give people more opportunity to influence their environment.

This section covers the following areas:-

5.1 Tree Awareness **5.2 Empowering the Community**

5.1 TREE AWARENESS

All trees within the Borough of Northampton contribute to the environment. Most of these are on private land. Unless they are covered by a Tree Preservation Order or within a Conservation Area, they are beyond our control.

Many people can influence the tree resource in Northampton, including developers, private landowners and residents. The opportunities that arise to inform and educate these groups on tree issues should be taken wherever possible.

OUTCOME SECTION 5.1

The Council will:-

Seek to raise the understanding and awareness of trees to benefit the health of the tree population as a whole throughout the Borough by:-

- a) Promoting and encouraging good arboricultural practices and woodland management.*
- b) Providing up to date information on tree issues*
- c) Raising awareness of tree issues where possible and appropriate.*

5.2 EMPOWERING THE COMMUNITY

The communication of information needs to be developed in order to effectively empower the community. Northampton Borough Council provides Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) sheets on request to enable its residents to be informed.

Responsive management does not help the consultation process as much as planned management. This is because current work tends to be on individual trees rather than on groups of trees within a particular locality. It is the intention of the Council to move towards a more co-ordinated way of maintaining its trees, working on distinct areas of trees at a time.

There are many commonly held myths about the way that trees grow and the damage that they can cause. Accurate information and expert advice about trees is necessary to raise people's awareness and understanding. This will contribute to a healthy and well cared for tree population.

OUTCOME SECTION 5.2

The Council will endeavour to involve the community by:-

Giving support where possible to community initiatives that promote the planting and care of trees in its Parks and Open Spaces.