



GILLINGHAM TOWN COUNCIL

The Town Hall, School Road, Gillingham, Dorset SP8 4QR

Tree Management Policy

Revision 001 - April 2022

1. The Benefits of Trees

1.1 Trees are important features in the landscape. They help to create an attractive environment, making the town a better place to live, work, study, and visit. They bring colour and contrast, screen unsightly structures, give privacy and soften the hard lines of streets and landscapes. Not only do trees have a visual quality, but they also enhance the environment in less obvious ways:

- Improving air quality by filtering airborne dust, smoke and fumes.
- Absorbing traffic noise in built-up areas and can help limit noise pollution.
- Reducing temperature extremes by providing shelter in hot weather and insulation in cold weather; trees adjacent to buildings can reduce air conditioning and heating costs.
- Acting as a screen, increasing privacy in residential roads and gardens.
- Converting carbon dioxide to oxygen, increasing the quality of the air locally and helping to reduce the “greenhouse effect”.
- Providing food and habitat for birds and other wildlife, thus supporting nature conservation value and biodiversity.
- Research has shown that trees provide many psychological and health benefits and have been shown to reduce stress significantly.
- Commemorate or celebrate individuals, events and/or communities.

2. The Policy Scope

2.1 Trees are highly valued by the Council they make an enormous contribution to the character and beauty of the landscape and create environments rich in biodiversity. The Council recognises both the human and environmental benefits of having a healthy and sustainable tree population. In 2017 the Council signed up to the Woodland Trust’s Tree Charter www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

- 2.2 The Council also recognises that although trees are a positive feature, they can be the cause of a number of problems ranging from being a nuisance or inconvenience to causing potential serious injury or even death. As a tree owner the Council has a direct responsibility for ensuring it's trees do not pose a danger to the public or property and are managed appropriately. This policy sets out the Council's approach to tree management.
- 2.3 The Council aims to inspect it's tree stock at an appropriate frequency and following inspection, the trees will be assigned a risk classification which will determine their prioritisation for maintenance works.
- 2.4 This policy details the Council's methods for managing the tree stock owned and maintained by it. The policy has been written to:
- Endeavour that the Council maintains a safe tree stock
 - Endeavour health & longevity of tree stock.
- 2.5 The Council is responsible for over 700 significant trees on Council owned land. The management of Council owned trees will, where possible, follow relevant national guidance, such as 'Common sense risk management of trees – guidance on trees and public safety in the UK for owners, managers and advisers,' published by the National Tree Safety Group. www.ntsgroup.org.uk

3. Tree Management & Maintenance

The Council works to a risk-based approach to tree management.

- 3.1 Tree maintenance work will be conducted as a result of information gathered during pro-active tree inspections. However, reactionary tree maintenance will always form a key element of overall tree maintenance operations and normally originates from the following:
- programmed and routine inspections by a qualified arboriculturist consultant.
 - Ad hoc inspections by the Councils Grounds Team following enquiries, reports, and service requests.
 - reports from utility companies.
 - emergency works (e.g. resulting from high winds).
- 3.2 Trees will not be removed unless there is a demonstrable arboricultural, safety or legal reason.
- 3.3 All requests for arboricultural work to trees growing on Council owned land will be considered by an appropriate member of the Councils Grounds Team and advice from an arboriculturist will be sought if necessary.
- 3.4 All work will be carried out in accordance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and therefore it may be necessary to delay requested tree work until the end of the nesting season.
- 3.5 No tree work will be undertaken on trees where there is potential to impact upon protected species (for example bats or badgers) until consultation has been undertaken with appropriate external experts.

- 3.6 When dealing with planning applications for privately owned land, the Planning Committee are encouraged to consider, whether there are Council owned trees on adjacent land that may be affected by the development before approving the application (e.g. for site access, dropped kerbs or storage of materials).
- 3.7 The Council is committed to explore and develop opportunities to utilise the arising woodchips, logs, habitat piles and dead standing timber, generated by arboricultural operations towards greater environmental sustainability.

4. Publicising Tree Felling or Pruning

- 4.1 Where works are minor, such as pruning (including repeat cyclical pruning of trees) or involve removing trees that are less than 15 cm diameter (6 inches) at a height of 1.3 metres, the proposed works will not be publicised.
- 4.2 Where works are more impacting, for example, felling larger trees, carrying out works to a veteran tree or a tree with a Tree Protection Order (TPO), an informative site notice will be erected on, or very close to, the affected tree. If multiple trees at the same location are affected, a site notice including a map and schedule of the proposed works may be erected.
- 4.3 If a tree scheme (felling, pruning or planting) is judged to have a substantial impact on the local area additional publicity as appropriate may be undertaken.
- 4.4 Where it has determined that the tree should be felled on public safety grounds there will be no publicity.

5. Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) and Conservation Areas

- 5.1 Some trees may be situated within a conservation area or be protected by a tree preservation order. The Council recognises its responsibilities regarding these trees.

6. Claims for Subsidence and Damage

- 6.1 When investigating a claim of subsidence and/or other damage to property allegedly caused by tree roots emanating from a tree owned and maintained by the Council, the Council requires the property owner or their building Insurer to provide a structural engineer's report with the following:
 - A description of the property, including a description of the damage and the crack pattern, the date that the damage first occurred/was noted; details of any previous underpinning or building work; the geological strata for the site identified from the geological map.
 - Details of vegetation in the vicinity and its management since discovery of the damage, including a plan showing the vegetation and the affected building.
 - Measurement of the extent and distribution of vertical movement using level monitoring. Where level monitoring is not possible, state why and provide crack-monitoring data.
 - A profile of a trial/bore hole dug to identify foundation type and depth and soil characteristics.
 - The sub-soil characteristics including the soil type, liquid limit, plastic limit and plasticity index.
 - The location and identification of roots found.
 - Proposals and estimated costs of options to repair the damage.

6.2 To manage risk and reduce liability with regard to tree related subsidence, the Council may choose to remove trees. Where the amenity value of the tree is high the Council may choose to instigate repeated crown reductions or such other mitigation treatments.

7. Obstruction by Overhanging Branches

7.1 Tree branches from Council trees that obstruct footpaths, the carriageway, highway signage, street lighting or CCTV will be inspected and have the appropriate pruning work undertaken within the timescale appropriate to the situation.

7.2 Low branches from trees which are the responsibility of the Council and which overhang private gardens will be cleared to a height of 3m maximum when requested by the property owner.

8. Television or Satellite Signals

8.1 There is no legal right to good television or satellite signals and no legal requirements to rectify a loss of television, satellite, or radio service in respect of trees. In many cases, it is possible to resolve issues of poor reception involving trees by finding an engineering solution.

9. Shade or Blocking of Light

9.1 The Council will consider requests to prune trees on an individual basis. but is under no obligation to carry out such work

10. Leaf, Fruit Fall and Secretions

10.1 Tree work will not be carried out solely to alleviate problems caused by natural and or seasonal occurrences as follows:

- Falling leaves.
- Sap exudation (e.g. honeydew).
- Falling fruits and nuts.
- Bird droppings.
- Blossom.
- Reduction or increase in moisture to gardens.
- Blocked or obstructed drains, gutters, flat roofs from tree deposits
- Leaves, presence of algae and moss build up.

11. Highway Tree Management

11.1 Street trees are defined as trees planted or growing in road verges along the town's highway network that are on Council owned land.

11.2 The Council will undertake, within planned work programmes, the regular removal of basal (epicormic) growth on street trees for safety reasons.

11.3 The Council will prune street trees to ensure free, unobstructed passage for pedestrians, traffic and visibility of all road signs, streetlights and street furniture.

12. Greenspace Tree Management

- 12.1 The Council aims to create a varied and sustainable tree population in the public open spaces for reasons of aesthetics and for the benefit of the biological diversity of the town.
- 12.2 The Council will maintain the overall number of trees in the public open spaces through replacement planting programmes.
- 12.3 Trees on public open spaces, which are not blocking the highway or sightline, will be left with a more natural shape where the branches may extend down to the ground.

13. Replacement Planting

- 13.1 The Council will select trees that are appropriate for their location and the anticipated maintenance needs throughout the life of the tree.
- 13.2 To help maintain a continuity of tree cover, The Council will undertake the planting of new trees where suitable opportunities arise.

14. Overhead Cables / Telephone Wires

- 14.1 Utility companies have certain legal rights to carry out works to public or privately owned trees to address health and safety problems and to maintain a clearance between trees and their apparatus to ensure continuity of supply. This may sometimes involve the loss of trees. Where works to trees are necessary as a result of proximity or conflict, utility operators will be encouraged to adopt the most appropriate long-term solution, giving consideration to tree health, local tree cover and visual amenity.
- 14.2 Problems caused by branches interfering with privately owned telephone wires can usually be eliminated through appropriate pruning and tree removal would not usually be considered.

15. Method of Risk Assessment

- 15.1 When the Council undertakes a risk assessment of a tree or group of trees some basic risk management principles are applied. The assessment of tree risk is made up of the following components:

Usage Zone:

- Higher use areas – trees within falling distance of highways, railways, residential dwellings, gardens, commercial buildings, areas used for events, allotments, play areas and land of regular use. Inspected every 3 years
- Lower use areas- trees within falling distance of open space, footpaths, open recreational areas, cemeteries, and other lower public use areas. Inspected every 5 years

16. Scheduled Surveys

- 16.1 Inspections of trees are undertaken on all Council owed land. The initial tree survey and risk management plan was undertaken by Astill Treecare in March 2015 for all trees within the higher and lower use areas. Detailed reports were created for all individual trees. Re-inspection of tree stock in higher risk areas takes place every 3 years. A full re-inspection of higher and lower used areas happens every 5 years.

16.2 Tree inspections will be recorded to ensure decline in trees can be identified and appropriate arboricultural work carried out when needed.

16.3 The tree inspection procedures take into account the following criteria:

- Species
- Approximate stem diameter
- Physiological health
- Age of the tree
- Structural condition (relevant to surroundings).
- A qualitative assessment of risk
- Management recommendations
- Priority rating to undertake works
- Usage zone.
- Scoping rating for 'bat habitat potential and other protected species-

17. Acceptable Level of Risk

17.1 Once the level of risk has been established through the report, it is given a risk-based action, which is then required to be actioned within the time frame recommended (see below table). The legal framework does not require the elimination of risk altogether, but that the risk is minimised to an acceptable level.

Urgent	Imminent risk of harm	Immediately
High	All works should be carried out at the earliest opportunity	3 months
Medium	All works should be carried out at the earliest opportunity	6 months
Low	All works should be carried out at the earliest opportunity	12 months

17.2 It may be possible to reduce the risk associated with a tree by pruning or e.g. rerouting a footpath.

17.3 There may be exceptional occasions when a higher risk may be acceptable for example, if there is a tree of particular additional value or for reasons of heritage. In these circumstances the advice from an independent arboricultural expert and further investigations into the condition of the tree may be sought.

18. Types of Risk Assessment Inspection

18.1 The Council carries out the following levels of inspection:

- Detailed tree survey inspection – carried out by an arboricultural consultant, who provides a comprehensive report with all relevant details recorded and specific management recommendations made.
- The Council's Grounds Team surveys on relevant trees highlighted for further monitoring or reports of declined trees. Members of the Grounds Team will be trained in basic tree survey and inspection level approved by the arboricultural association.

19. Summary

- The risk associated with trees is generally relatively low.
- The identification of risk associated with trees is always considered when a tree is inspected.
- A strategy of pro-actively surveying trees in areas under the responsibility of the Council is in place.

20. Review

The Tree Management Policy was presented to the Finance and Policy meeting held on 19th April 2022, for approval and adoption, minute no. 401(f), and ratified at the Full Council meeting on 25th April 2022.

Signed:
Mayor of Gillingham

Date: