

WHISSONSETT PARISH COUNCIL

TREE & HEDGE POLICY

Adopted: 13th March 2023

Review Schedule: Three yearly.

GENERAL POLICY

This policy defines the Council's approach to tree management on its land. It is intended to be a point of reference for the Public, Councillors and Officers to ensure a consistent and structured approach to the management of the Council's trees. This policy sets out a proactive and systematic method of management that will both conserve and enhance our tree population and the amenity value of our land. For sites of special character, or that have trees of particular significance or are subject to preservation orders, this general policy will be supplemented with the site's particular management needs.

TREE PROTECTION

Due care will be taken by the Council to ensure that damage to trees by mowing and strimming is prevented. Longer grass margins around trees may be left. Protection will be provided for newly planted or young trees where appropriate, e.g. timber-sided planting boxes and strimmer guards.

TREE INSPECTIONS

The Council has a duty of care for its trees and will inspect trees in high risk areas by a recognised tree surgeon, on a fifteen-month basis. This will be in addition to a twice-yearly inspection by a Councillor, appointed as Tree Warden. High risk areas will include such areas as adjacent to the public highway, footpaths and other areas of high use such as the Council play area.

The Council will also consider requests to conduct work on the Council's trees from members of the public. If the request concerns a potentially dangerous tree, the tree will be inspected as soon as possible, initially by the Tree Warden or other member of the Council if the Tree Warden is unavailable, and then by a recognised tree surgeon if necessary. If the request is of a non-urgent nature, an inspection by the Tree Warden will be undertaken within 30 days. In all cases, the member of the public will be informed of this inspection policy and will be informed of any action to be taken resulting from the inspection.

The Council recognises the importance of mature and ancient trees and will balance safety with a duty to protect the environment. Higher levels of risk will be acceptable in areas of lower footfall as opposed to highly visited areas (e.g. play areas etc). This will allow the Council to keep veteran trees to encourage biodiversity without creating undue risk.

TREE FELLING

The Council will avoid felling trees unless it is necessary. This will usually be for health and safety purposes, or to prevent the spread of serious tree diseases and pests. However, the Council reserve the right to fell trees to prevent overcrowding, to improve habitats or restore landscapes in line with site management or where a tree is inappropriate to its location and has a significantly detrimental impact on the appearance or amenity of a site.

It is important to check that any relevant permissions are acquired prior to any felling or major works are carried out to trees.

WOODY DEBRIS

Subject to a safety assessment and if appropriate to the specific site, large woody debris will be left in situ for the creation of wildlife habitats. Where possible, the trunks will be left standing, or lying on the ground in habitat piles. Tree stumps will also be left in situ where it is safe to do so as they provide a valuable wildlife habitat whilst they rot down.

HEDGES

Hedges are an attractive feature in Whissonsett and provide an important habitat for a wide range of species, offering food, shelter, protection from predators, wintering and nesting sites, and act as transit corridors. It is recognised that trimming hedges too severely can have a detrimental impact on their wildlife value. Where there is no negative impact on health and safety (e.g. visibility for motorists), the Council aims to have taller, bushier hedges. However, the Council will ensure that hedge growth does not impair the safety of highway/footpath users nor impede their access. Unless for urgent health and safety reasons, hedge cutting will not be conducted between March and August (inclusive).

MAINTENANCE

Tree work will be prioritised and carried out according to identified hazard and risk. After investigation and inspection, the Council will produce a programme of works within the available budget. The emphasis will be on planned, rather than reactive, tree maintenance.

The following categories will be used to categorise our tree works:

- **Emergency:** Dangerous trees requiring immediate attention - Timescale for works: Same day or next day wherever possible.
- **Category One:** Essential works to mitigate hazard - Target timescale for works: Within 12 weeks of identification.
- **Category Two:** Desirable works, e.g. to improve tree health, loosening/removing tree ties as the trees grow - Target timescale for works: Within 6 months of identification if budget allows.

- **Category Three:** Non-essential works, e.g. thinning out, formative pruning - Target timescale for works: Within 12 months of identification if budget allows.

Tree maintenance will be conducted by trained Council Officers or by Contractors subject to the nature of the work. All tree works will be conducted to comply with BS 3998: 2010 Tree Works - Recommendations.

Tree pruning will be carried out when deemed necessary following an assessment. Pruning will be carried out:

- for health and safety reasons e.g. to remove some of the lower branches of a tree located near a road to enable traffic to pass safely.
- where it benefits the health of the tree e.g. pollarding will be conducted regularly on certain species where it extends the lifespan of the tree and prevents splitting.
- where it is in-line with site-specific management plans.

There may be times when the tree maintenance the Council conducts does not meet the expectations of members of the public requesting works. In this situation, members of the public are advised to follow our Complaints Policy.

When the Council will not undertake tree pruning or removal maintenance:

- in response to natural occurrences that do not pose a health and safety risk, such as falling nuts, bird droppings, falling leaves, or sap exudation.
- where trees have a negative impact on television reception or where the canopy is blocking lighting.
- where the tree is blocking views from a residence.
- during the nesting season (March to August), unless the work is for urgent health and safety reasons. It is an offence to intentionally damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built; therefore tree works will avoid this.
- if a tree contains roosting bats (it is a criminal offence to recklessly or intentionally disturb bats, or to damage or destroy a roost). If work is required for health and safety reasons, the advice of Natural England will be sought.
- trees overhanging an adjacent property unless it poses a health and safety risk.
- removal of dead branches (crown cleaning) from trees located in relatively quiet locations due to their ecological value. However, if the dead or diseased branches pose a health and safety risk or are felt to be impacting upon the tree's health, crown cleaning will be conducted.

TREE PRESERVATION ORDER –District Council responsibility

A Tree Preservation Order (TPO) is a form of planning control that protects trees that make important contribution to their local surroundings. TPOs are made when trees are under threat of being cut down or damaged.

It is illegal to cut down, prune, or damage a tree protected by a TPO without the District Council's consent. The unauthorised lopping or felling of a tree is a serious criminal offence and can result in a large fine and a criminal record.

Consent is needed to work on a protected tree and an application must be made to the District Council for permission.

TREE WARDEN

The Tree Warden (TW) role enables a Councillor to take an active role in conserving and enhancing the trees in the parish of Whissonsett. They are appointed by the parish council. Their main role is to:

- Gather information about parish council maintained trees.
- Undertake a twice-yearly informal health check of all trees – signs of disease, weather damage or vandalism and report to Council at each meeting.
- Advise the council of any urgent or remedial works which might need to be done.

The Parish Council asks the TW to keep a log-book of the Council trees in the parish, date of inspection as well as details of any concerns they may have about the trees. The log should be signed off by the Clerk annually and passed to the Clerk for retention when complete. A written report from the TW should be given to Council twice a year.

The TW must arrange for an inspection and any emergency works to be carried out as soon as possible after any dangerous trees are identified, reporting to the Chairman and Clerk. This will be reported to Council at the next meeting.

The TW for the Parish Council will be covered by the Parish Council's insurance provided they are undertaking work agreed by the Parish Council and provided the Risk Assessment has been followed (see Appendix 1).

In addition to checks by the TW, a fifteen-monthly survey will be carried out by a recognised tree surgeon on the high risk trees in the parish and any other trees as identified by the TW.

Risk Assessment for the Tree Warden of Whissonsett Parish Council

The Tree Warden (TW) is a voluntary role for a Councillor with an interest and some knowledge about trees.

The TW will be provided with a map of the trees which the parish council has responsibility for and which will also identify those with a tree preservation order. The map will identify the high-risk trees and those with a TPO.

While the risks for this role are considered to be low, it is important for the TW to wear appropriate clothing during inspections.

Training advice will be made available, as advised by the Tree Council.

Greater care should be taken at certain times of year – when the weather is wet or in heavy snow and the TW may be unsure of their footing. The Parish Council considers that the safety of the TW is more important than the tree inspections and surveys should be left until the conditions have improved.

No additional equipment should be used by the TW.

Trees in the Parish Council's ownership should be inspected twice a year, or sooner if conditions dictate, for example, after a bad storm. A health check of every tree is required, the TW is looking for signs of disease, weather damage or vandalism.

The TW should not enter other people's property to inspect trees.

The Parish Council will provide a tree log-book.
