

Tree Management and Maintenance



1 Introduction

This policy has been prepared to provide a public statement of the Council's approach to the maintenance and management of its tree stock.

The policy will have two functions:

- 1) To set out a clear procedure with regards to how it intends to manage its tree stock on a proactive basis in accordance with its responsibilities under the Occupiers' Liability Act 1957 & 1984

- 2) To provide clear guidance on our service standards with reference to reactive service requests on Council owned trees

Chorley Borough Council has responsibility for amenity woodland throughout the district all of which the public has unrestricted access too. In addition there is an extensive tree stock within other public areas that would need to be considered under this policy

On average 7 or 8 people are killed each year by falling tree incidents nationally. With the public's greater expectations of a safe environment in which to work and play, along with an increasingly active compensation culture and a raft of litigation, there is a need to introduce clear procedures with regards to the introduction of an inspection scheme.

As with any improved scheme it will require a considerable financial resource to fund both the inspections and carry out remedial work identified as part of the inspections.

As a consequence there will be a need to realign existing tree maintenance budgets that were traditionally used to satisfy reactive service requests to fund the work identified during the proactive inspections.

There will be a need to manage expectations as this change will result in perceived reduced levels of customer service, however this can be minimized by the proposals within the policy

2. TREE INSPECTION PROGRAM

The Council will, where possible, inspect all trees of which it has a responsibility for, to assess whether they represent a risk to persons or property.

A program of inspection will be undertaken which will cover the three areas below:

- An assessment of risk;
- An assessment of hazard;
- And a prescription of remedial action.

3. ASSESSING THE LEVEL OF RISK

For a program of tree inspection to be manageable, resources need to be directed to areas where there is potentially most risk. This is initiated by assigning each area to one of three Risk Zones. These will be clearly documented in the form of detailed plans

High Risk:	e.g close to main public areas, buildings, roads, car parks, major footpaths, picnic areas etc.
Medium Risk:	e.g other footpaths, bridle ways etc in regular but not intensive public use, quieter areas of parks and gardens etc.
Low Risk:	e.g farmland and woodland away from paths or only lightly used etc.

These zones will reflect normal usage but must be kept under review. The level of risk changes over time. For example, plans to hold an event involving many people in a medium risk zone will change its status to a high-risk zone for the duration of the event new facilities or activities on a property may lead to a more permanent change.

The assessment of Risk Zones is a matter of informed judgement and will be subject to periodic review.

4. ASSESSING THE HAZARD

This is to be undertaken by a member of staff within the service who has suitable experience to identify potential defects and suggest appropriate remedial action. It will be the responsibility of the inspector to ensure that the hazard is assessed to the best of their ability and recorded accurately.

Many trees are potentially hazardous but only the conditions most likely to lead to injury or damage to people or property can reasonably be addressed as part of these inspections. These are physical or psychological conditions that might lead to break up or collapse of the tree.

In practice only visible defects are likely to be identified. Techniques available to assess structural integrity of standing trees, such as electronic sensors and hand operated borers will not be used as a matter of course

The frequency and method of inspection will reflect the designated Risk Zones. The inspection frequencies within each risk zone tend to be national standards and are adopted by most Local Authorities and those adopted by other major the National Trust, Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust

Risk Zone	Inspect	Method
High Risk	Every Year	Careful searches for clear defects especially in the crown and around the base of the tree. Binoculars required.
Retained Trees in High Risk Zones showing Significant Defects	Every Six Months and after serious storms	As above
Medium Risk	Every Three Years	Careful searches for clear defects.
Low Risk	Every Four Years	Careful searches for clear defects.

5. RECORD OF INSPECTION AND MAINTENANCE

Each zone will be categorised by a numeric identifier. This will form part of a database to record the areas that have been inspected

Due to the number of trees across the Borough only trees requiring remedial action will be identified. Trees that appear to be sound during the inspections require no individual record of their condition

Each zone will be inspected and a record kept of the times and dates of the inspections. These inspections will be recorded manually and input onto a database back at the office.

Each inspection will then be available for litigation etc and will contain the times and dates of the inspection and also any work identified.

6. DETERMINING REMEDIAL ACTION

Work identified during the inspections will be dealt with in the following way:

1. Any work identified on site will be classified as either extremely dangerous or requiring treatment. This classification will determine our action. The work will then be recorded on the inspection sheets and on a schedule of works, the work will then be collated and an informal tender circulated to our select list in order to secure the best price. The trees will be marked clearly on site to allow the contractor to identify them when pricing the tender
2. The successful contractor will carry out the works in conjunction with a nominated officer and LCC if it may affect the Highway.

3. The contractor will on completion of the works submit their work sheets which will include the dates of the work to allow us to update our database of inspections

The Nominated Officer will be responsible for liaising with the contractor, checking the standard of the work; approving the payments and updating the databases to ensure our inspection systems are as robust as possible.

Section 2 – Customer Expectations and Service Standards

The Council has had established Council standards for a number of years that relate specifically to what can be expected from Chorley when making requests for work on Council owned trees. Naturally trees reported as dangerous will be attended to and whatever work is necessary will be initiated.

However we do receive service requests for non-urgent issues. As detailed below: -

- Trees overhanging Private Property
- Sap from Trees damaging Cars etc
- Perceived damage to properties from roots
- Poor TV reception
- Reduced light levels to property
- Leaf Fall

The service request is assessed against cost, benefit and impact on the tree. Traditionally the service spends around £35k on works identified as part of this process and this is taken into consideration when programming non-urgent works.

However, with the introduction of the inspection program there will be a need to re-align financial resources towards the greater risk area, which is the maintenance of potentially dangerous trees.

As a consequence of this we will not have the resources to deal with non-urgent service requests and we will have to provide clear guidance going forward.

The first step will be making changes to the scripting / dialogue within CRM and to the website which informs both Elected Members and the general public that CBC does not carry out any work to trees which is deemed non-urgent.

However we will give a commitment to attend and respond to all tree related service requests within five days.

On attending site the responsible officer will usually determine that:

- 1) The service request relates to a potential risk or hazard for property or members of the public
- 2) The service request is for a non-urgent issue and the requested course of action would not be detrimental to the health of the tree
- 3) The service request is for a non-urgent issue and the requested course of action would be detrimental to the health of the tree
- 4) The service request is unjustified and the responsible officer cannot authorise any work on site.

The proposed actions for each service request type would be as follows:

- 1) CBC takes whatever action is necessary to remove the hazard and therefore mitigate the risk to persons and property
- 2) CBC gives consent for the work to be carried out, subject to the customer funding the work. CBC will support this by providing details of reputable contractors from our own select list. Management systems will need to be introduced to ensure that the work agreed on site is not exceeded during discussions with the customer and contractor.
- 3 + 4) No action is proposed, however clear reasons for inaction are provided.

Presently with a softer approach we are subject to challenge quite regularly when people don't agree with the information provided during the initial inspection and challenge our decision to do nothing. It is therefore necessary to provide a consistent approach across the Borough as it likely that the introduction of this policy will potentially lead to more elevated complaints, formal complaints and Member involvement when responses to service requests are not positive