

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

13 MARCH 2025

**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Environment and Transport - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Clare Besford

TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY

SUMMARY

The attached report presents the revised tree management policy.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)/DECISION(S)

It was resolved by Cabinet in February 2023 that Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council refreshed its tree management policy. Officers have now completed their review of the tree management policy and present a revised policy for consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 1) The tree management policy is approved.

DETAIL

1. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) has a legal responsibility to inspect, maintain and manage its tree stock which is located across the Borough. There are currently many thousands of trees within parks, open spaces, woodlands and residential estates, including around 30,000 trees as part of the highway stock, for the Council to manage. During 2020-2021, over 2,000 requests for service were received – these ranged from emergency works (e.g. fallen trees or limbs / structural damage to property) through to more routine enquiries (e.g. pruning due to general nuisance factors such as shading, leaf fall, etc., which tends to be of a seasonal nature).
2. Local Authorities have a legal duty of care to ensure they have a defensible system of tree inspection and maintenance for their land and premises. This requires regular inspections (by a qualified person) of all trees and woodlands within a Council's ownership, implementing essential tree maintenance (so there is no danger or unacceptable risk to persons or property), and maintaining adequate records of surveys and inspections.
3. Trees can, at times, be contentious for residents who often express strong and vocal views on their presence, especially those which are in residential locations where concerns about

the safety of trees, potential damage and other perceived nuisance factors are a particular issue for officers to deal with. However, as part of the ongoing climate change challenge, the wider benefits of trees should not be underestimated, including the removal of air pollution, providing a valuable habitat for insects and birds, and acting as a natural flood defence, as well as the proven mental health benefits that a green environment brings.

4. Judgements about the impact of trees and whether or not a tree should be removed or reduced, is always carried out by qualified staff following relevant legislation and best practice. The determination of nuisance or detrimental impact will often appear to be a subjective matter and efforts will always be made to set out the rationale for any judgement. Where the determination is complex or necessitates consideration of wider factors, the decision will be considered by the Director in consultation with the relevant cabinet member.
5. One of the key themes within the Council Plan is clean and green spaces, and the Council's Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Strategy 2022-2032 also has implications for the future levels of tree stock, as do new tree planting schemes and land adoptions / transfers from new developments across the Borough. It is therefore important, and timely, to review the Council's existing tree management policy, covering inspection and operational arrangements, to ensure that it is equipped to deal with both existing and planned tree assets.
6. As the revised policy document covers a substantial amount of required technical information and legislative detail, and to ensure appropriate dissemination and communication, a 'readable' summary document will be prepared to publish key messages and principles of the policy for residents.
7. An all-member briefing will be arranged to ensure members are fully aware of the detail within the tree management policy.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

8. Every person within the Borough, whether resident, worker or visitor, is affected by the local environment. The benefits of a widespread and healthy tree canopy are widely acknowledged but the adequate maintenance of trees is equally as important in terms of sustainability and public safety.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

9. There are no direct implications in the report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10. There are no new direct financial implications as an immediate result of a review of the tree management policy.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11. SBC must continue to ensure it meets its legal duty of care and that it has a defensible system of tree inspection and maintenance for its land and premises.

RISK ASSESSMENT

12. The review is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

13. This review is relevant to all Wards across the Borough.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

14. Tree Management Policy

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