



BIRSTALL PARISH COUNCILS TREE POLICY

The Parish Council's Tree Policy was adopted at a Council meeting held on: 14 September 2020.

Introduction:

Birstall Parish Council, as a provider of open access amenity land, is committed to maintaining and expanding its tree and hedge stock for the benefit of all its users and recognises the huge range of benefits that trees provide. Apart from their basic aesthetic value trees are a vital part of natural ecosystems, contributing to the environment by sequestering carbon and producing oxygen. They also help to absorb particulate matter in the atmosphere, alleviate flooding, provide shade and help to regulate temperature, prevent soil erosion and provide vital habitats for wildlife.

The Council currently owns or manages approximately 850 trees and 1.6 kilometres of hedges. The Council accepts that it has a duty under health and safety legislation to provide the public with safe access to open spaces and this policy sets out the framework to ensure that the Council's tree stock is as safe as is reasonably practicable. This policy includes the registering and mapping of trees, inspection regimes and the maintenance and management of trees.

Register:

All trees and hedges managed by Birstall Parish Council have been mapped and entered into a register. Each area of land owned or managed by the Council that contains tree cover is zoned to establish the frequency of use by the public and staff. Each zone is designated as high or low risk depending on the frequency of use by members of the public and by staff which, in turn, determines the inspection and maintenance regimes employed in that zone.

Areas designated as high risk are:

- 1) School Lane Playing Fields (to include Sibson Road Car Park).
- 2) Harrowgate Drive Playing Fields.
- 3) Meadow Lane Playing Fields.

Areas designated as low risk are:

- 1) Greengate Lane Cemetery.
- 2) Greengate Lane Allotments.
- 3) Meadow Lane Allotments.
- 4) Worcester Avenue Allotments (until further notice to include land to the rear of Worcester Avenue).
- 5) Old Archery Field.
- 6) Hallam Fields enclosed play areas

Inspections:

In order to minimise the risk of injury and damage to property from any of the Council's tree stock the following inspection regimes are followed to facilitate recognition of potential problems.

1) Informal Inspections:

All the trees owned or managed by the Council are informally inspected by the Estates Team on an ongoing basis throughout the year whilst carrying out their day to day activities. Local knowledge and experience of the Council's tree stock will enable these workers to identify potential problems at an early stage.

2) Formal Inspections, High risk areas:

All trees in areas designated as high risk are formally inspected twice annually – once in winter and once during the growing season. These inspections will include the following:

- 1) Looking for signs of immediate serious structural failure. These include a lifting root plate, limbs splitting away and a fractured stem moving and opening.
- 2) Assessing the general health and shape of the tree.
- 3) Looking for signs of disease and decay especially fungal attack (twice yearly inspections will ensure that fruiting fungal bodies are observed).
- 4) Looking for dieback and dead or dying branches (often picked up when trees are in leaf).
- 5) Damage to bark by various agents especially where "ringed".

3) Formal Inspections, Low risk areas:

All trees in areas designated as low risk will be formally inspected annually with alternate inspections taking place in summer and winter. The inspection regime will be as above.

Should any inspection, whether informal or formal, provide evidence of immediate danger of collapse of any tree then the Estates Team Manager (or deputising officer) has the power to take immediate remedial action (whether this action is taken in-house or by use of a contractor).

4) Recording of Inspections:

All formal tree inspections must be recorded in writing and these documents held by the Parish Council. Information recorded must include the date of the inspection, by whom it was carried out and the prevailing conditions at the time of the inspection.

It is important to note that not all trees surveyed need to be recorded. The vast majority of the trees managed by the Council will either be in good or excellent health or be too young or small to pose any significant risk. Only those trees that show some signs of damage or disease require notification. This information can then be used when maintenance work is due to be carried out.

Maintenance and Management of Trees:

Maintenance of the Council's tree stock is carried out in accordance with the aforementioned zoning. High risk areas are maintained on a rolling 2-year programme and low risk areas on a 5-year programme. Some tree work, such as the removal of broken branches, suckers or epicormic growth, is undertaken on an ad hoc, "as necessary" basis.

Maintenance of trees will take the form of inspecting the overall shape and structure of a tree and carrying out pruning and other tasks in order to achieve several goals. This work will include the following:

Formative pruning. Formative pruning is the removal of unwanted growth from newly planted and young trees in order to encourage healthy growth and to achieve an aesthetically pleasing shape.

- 1) Crown lifting. Crown lifting is carried out primarily to remove the lower branches of a tree in order to lessen the risk of them conflicting with pedestrians and vehicular traffic. This is normally only carried out to a height of 3 metres but can be higher especially on species with trailing branches. As this work is carried out in winter it is important that the extra weight of a branch in full leaf is taken into consideration.
- 2) Crown thinning. Crown thinning is carried out for a number of reasons, including removing crossing branches, removing dead or decaying wood and to achieve a well-structured, balanced crown typical of the particular species of tree.
- 3) Hung up branches. Occasionally tree branches that are shed from a tree can become lodged within the canopy and need to be removed.
- 4) Removing suckers: Certain species of tree are particularly prone to producing suckers and to producing epicormic growth. These are removed for the same reasons as crown lifting.
- 5) Pollarding. It is not the Council's policy to pollard any of its trees as many species, especially willow, will produce an abundance of weakly jointed new stems which can be at significant risk of failure. Where pollarded trees exist within the Council's tree stock they will be removed and replaced where possible.
- 6) Ivy. If left unchecked ivy can cause serious problems by outcompeting trees for moisture and nutrients. If allowed to reach the canopy it can seriously threaten the stability of a tree by creating a "wind sail" in winter and can, in extreme cases, suffocate the trunk by encircling it. Unchecked ivy growth can also seriously hamper tree surveys by preventing close inspection. It is the Council's policy to remove existing ivy from trees and to systematically prevent further incursions.
- 7) Felling. Trees will only be felled if they pose a significant risk of causing damage to persons or property or as part of a structured management plan.
- 8) Stump grinding. Where trees have been felled the resulting stumps will be ground out if they pose a significant trip hazard or prevent other grounds maintenance tasks to be carried out safely.
- 9) Hedges. All hedges managed by the Council are to be hand cut at appropriate intervals by the use of hedge trimmers. Periodic reduction of height or width is undertaken when routine trimming becomes difficult because of its size or the hedge begins to dominate its surroundings.
- 10) The 'Bird Nesting Season' is officially from 1st February until 31st August and it is recommended that tree work, hedge cutting, or site clearance should be done outside of the nesting season.

Birstall Parish Council aim to avoid impact to nesting birds and infringement of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*. When such work has to be undertaken during the nesting season, a pre-works survey will be carried out by the Estates Team Manager. As a general rule, it should be assumed that birds will be nesting in trees and it is down to the Estates Team to assess, record and confirm that any works carried out in the management of trees and other vegetation has not disturbed actively nesting birds

Tree Work:

Chainsaws.

Some members of the Estates Team have attained NPTC Level 2 award in Chainsaw and Related Operations, CS31 – Fell and Process Small Trees (pre-requisite CS30). This allows them to fell small trees up to a diameter of 380mm, remove branches from small trees using a chainsaw, crosscut felled trees and to take down hung-up trees using hand tools. The felling of trees having a greater girth than 380mm and any chainsaw work not carried out from the ground must be undertaken by contractors who are certificated to carry out such operations.

When using a chainsaw, the operator must wear the following level of PPE (personal protective equipment) at all times:

- 1) Safety helmet to EN 397.
- 2) Hearing protection to EN 352-1.
- 3) Eye protection: Mesh visors to EN 1731 or safety glasses to EN 166.
- 4) Upper body protection: Chainsaw jackets to EN 381-11.
- 5) Leg protection to EN 381-5.
- 6) Gloves to EN 381-7.
- 7) Chainsaw boots to EN ISO 20345:2004 and compliant with EN381-3.

In addition to the above it is essential that no chainsaw work is carried out alone and it is recommended that at least one other qualified chainsaw user is in attendance when chainsaws are in use.

Hand tools.

All non-chainsaw work carried out by members of the Estates Team using pole saws, bow saws, pruning saws and loppers must only be carried out from the ground. The use of ladders or the climbing of trees to access branches is strictly forbidden. During tree work members of the Estates Team must wear the following level of PPE:

- 1) Hard hat (during felling operations or the removal of high branches).
- 2) Eye protection.
- 3) Safety boots.
- 4) Gloves.

In addition to the above PPE, hi-viz clothing must be worn when in close proximity of a highway.

Tree Planting:

It is the policy of Birstall Parish Council to undertake the planting of trees and hedges where appropriate on its land. The Council acknowledges all the benefits that trees bring to green spaces and understands the importance of planting schemes that incorporate native or naturalised species (and cultivars thereof).

Planting schemes should take into account the suitability of the ground and soil conditions for particular species and the future impact of a fully mature tree in the proposed location. This will include the proximity to existing trees or buildings, the shading of sensitive areas and the effect of root growth on paths etc.

Planting should always take place during periods of dormant growth (especially bare-root specimens) and should utilise a suitable planting medium. All young trees should be staked, and specimen trees planted in high-use areas should be protected with a tree guard.