

NORTHUMBERLAND

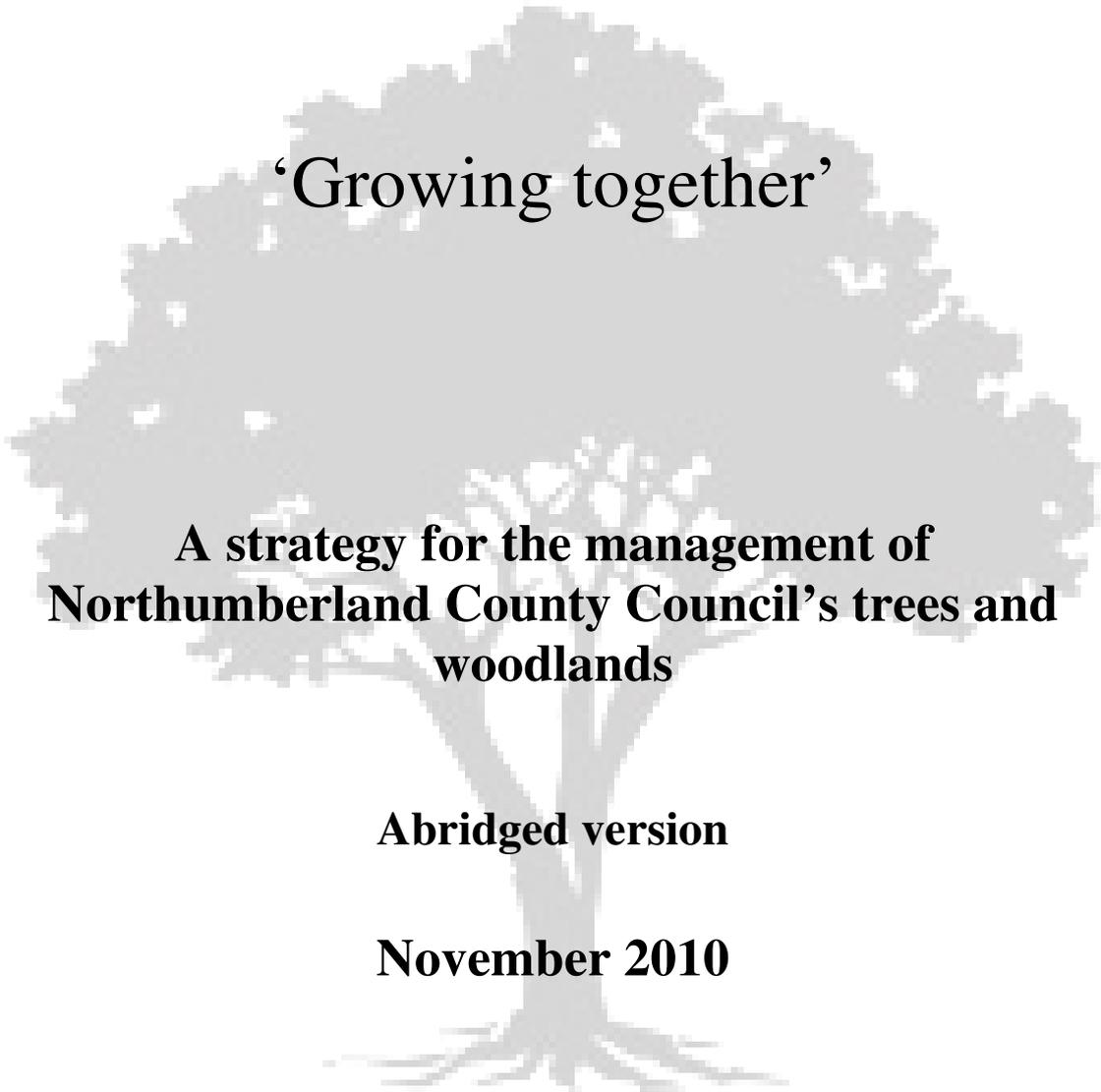
Northumberland County Council

‘Growing together’

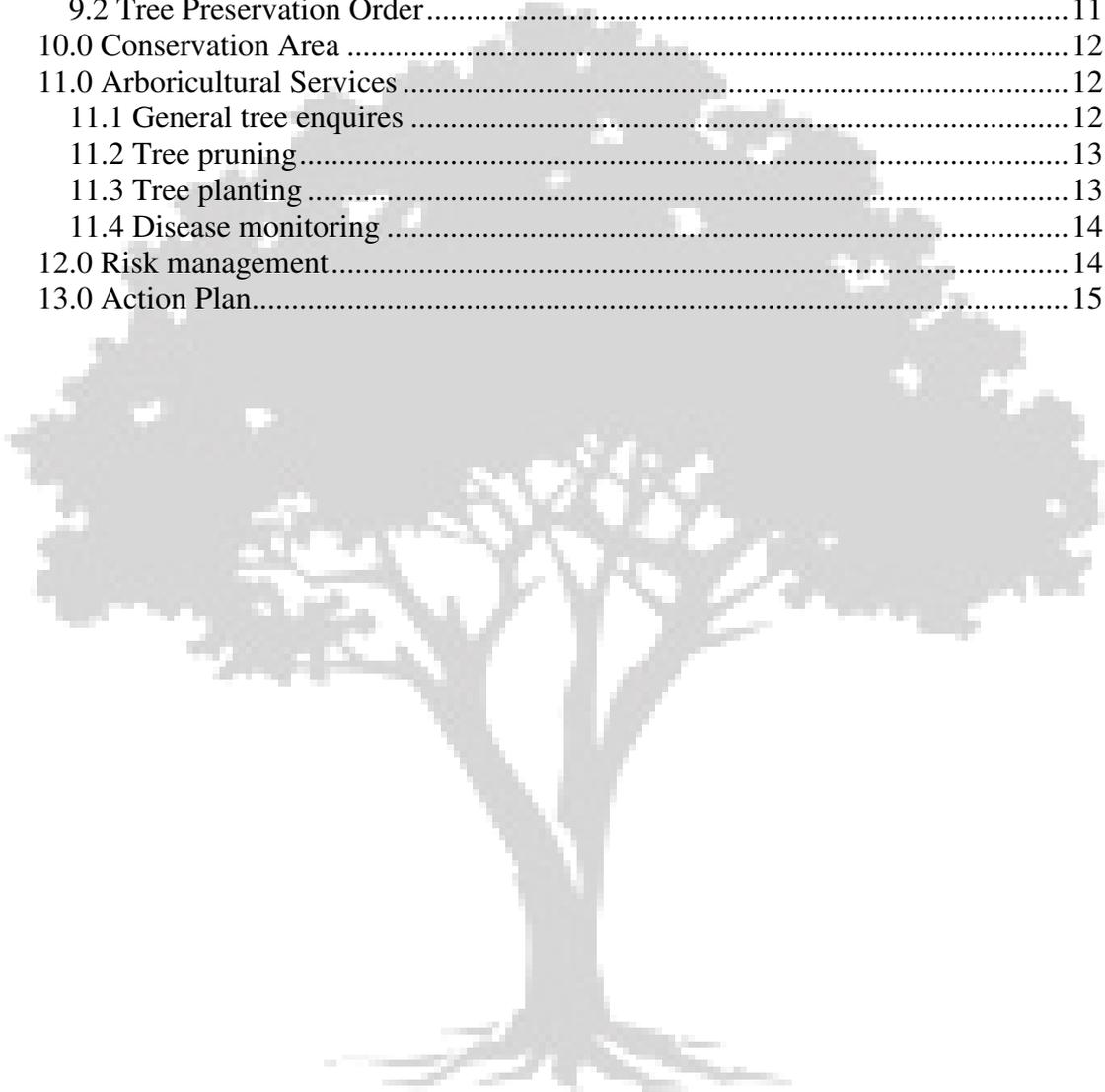
**A strategy for the management of
Northumberland County Council’s trees and
woodlands**

Abridged version

November 2010



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1.0 Introduction

The policy document aims to clearly identify how Northumberland County Council will inspect and maintain trees within their ownership and responsibility whether they are in a housing estate, highway verge, formal park or reclamation woodland.

The scope of the policy does not extend to areas of woodland or plantation outside of the responsibility of Northumberland County Council.

2.0 Aim

To enhance the protection, quality, quantity and diversity of trees and woodlands within the responsibility of Northumberland County Council, whilst managing and maintaining existing tree stock to a high standard, in line with current best practice, to enhance their contribution to the appearance and character of the county for the benefit and enjoyment of all residents and visitors to Northumberland

3.0 General Tree Management Policy

GT1 – Northumberland County Council will try to develop its existing tree population. New tree planting will be carried out where possible and practicable.

GT2 – We will maintain a high quality and sustainable tree population. Native tree species will be given priority in order to expand indigenous flora and fauna.

GT3 – Where a tree has been removed from a site it will be replaced on a two for one basis within the local area capable of allowing the tree to grow to maturity.

GT4 – Whilst delivering arboricultural services, we will strictly adhere to BS3998 and all other legislation and current industry best practice.

GT5 – We will take all reasonable steps to fulfil duties and obligations to ensure tree safety for all members of the public and property.

GT6 – We will inspect our tree stock at an appropriate frequency, depending upon number of pedestrians, vehicles and other targets either passing beneath or within falling distance of the tree, to ensure continued public safety

GT7 – We will introduce a tree management computer system to enable an accurate analysis of our tree management population.

GT8 – We will resist the unnecessary removal of any tree within the county unless there is a justifiable legal, arboricultural or infrastructure reason.

GT9– All requests for tree work will need to be assessed and authorised by the appropriate Tree and Woodlands Officer for that specific geographic area.

GT10 – Where a request for tree work is refused, to the dissatisfaction of the customer, there will be a right of appeal, in writing within 28 days, to the Tree Officers Working Group.

GT11 – Where members of the public have requested to meet the cost of pruning a council tree, this will be assessed on an individual basis.

GT12 – We will assess requests for tree removal or pruning because of the natural or seasonal phenomena below on an individual basis.

- Falling leaves;
- Honeydew;
- Blocked drains or gutters, obstructed flat roofs unless causing a legal nuisance or a wider environmental issue.
- Bird droppings (or noise arising from bird communities such as rookeries)
- Presence of moss
- Falling fruits/seeds
- Germinating seeds from council owned trees
- Reduction or increase of moisture to gardens
- Blossom

GT13 – We will assess requests for tree removal or pruning directly attributable to the issues below on an individual basis:

- TV or satellite signal reception;
- Omission of natural daylight or artificial light at any time of day;
- Blocking or obstructing a view from a residence;
- Obstructing BT wires

GT14 – Where birds are found to be nesting, tree work will be postponed until the end of the nesting season, other than when there is an immediate risk to safety.

GT15 – Where trees have been identified as a roosting site for bats, work will not be carried out until Natural England have been consulted, other than when there is an immediate risk to safety.

GT16 – We will not carry out any tree work which does not comply with legislation or industry best practice or is deemed to be arboriculturally or legally unnecessary.

GT17 – We will carry out selective pruning to allow clearance of police CCTV, speed cameras and where possible, security cameras.

GT18 - We will arrange to have basal epicormic growth removed as part of our winter works programme, where this poses an obstruction to the public.

GT19 – We will continue to explore ways of utilising arisings (woodchip, logs) generated by arboricultural operations towards greater environment sustainability.

GT20 - We aim to monitor and identify the geographical distribution of any moisture depletion subsidence cases. This will help to improve future planned maintenance of trees in these areas.

GT21 - Where moisture depletion subsidence to a property has been alleged, we will require appropriate expert evidence from the claimant's insurer, sufficient to prove their case.

GT22 - The Council will endeavour to involve the community by:

- Consulting residents in proposed large-scale tree works, allowing time for comments to be received and take these into consideration where they are conducive to good tree care and do not hinder the abatement of a hazard or nuisance.
- Establishing schemes that involve the public more directly with the trees in their neighbourhood.
- Giving support where possible to community initiatives that promote the planting and care of trees.
- Where a tree or trees of community significance are to be removed, we will consult the community in the appropriate replacement planting.

Within the general tree policy, sections GT12 and GT13 identify examples where tree work will not be carried out by Northumberland County Council. These reasons apply to all sections of the policy and thus will not be identified specifically within each individual policy section.

In instances where tree related activity is suspected of being a causal agent in physical damage, legal nuisance or wider environmental issues i.e. flooding, the issue will be thoroughly investigated and passed to the Tree Policy Working Group for consideration and decision.

4.0 Highway Tree Management

Highways trees are recognised as those growing in land identified as a right of way and categorised as a highway maintainable at the public expense.

Northumberland County Council as well as being responsible for specific highways verges are also responsible for trees within certain reclaimed colliery sites; as part of the restoration of landfill sites and refuse tips; country parks and local nature reserves.

The County Council is not however responsible for trees planted along major trunk roads or on private roads.

The management of highways trees will fall within the same general guidelines as set out in section 9 as well as the more specific guidelines below.

HT1 – We will resist the felling of any highway tree purely on the grounds of complaint. A tree will only be removed if there is a justifiable arboricultural or legal reason on the grounds of safety.

HT2 – We will prune trees to ensure free unobstructed passage for pedestrians and road users in accordance with the Highways Act 1980.

HT3 – We will prune trees to provide unobstructed lighting columns and road signs.

HT4 – We will carry out tree pruning in accordance with the British Standard 3998 – “Recommendations for tree work”, and all relevant industry best practices.

HT5 – We will resist the removal of trees for the purpose of vehicle crossings for driveways. If a tree is removed for this reason, then the cost of replacing the tree, on a two for one basis, will be borne by the resident requesting the crossing.

HT6 – Where highway damage has been identified and a tree suspected as a causal agent, the issue will be referred to the Tree Policy Working Group for consideration and decision.

HT7 – Where it is necessary to remove a tree from the highway, the council shall replace suitable species, on a two for one basis, within an appropriate location.

HT8 – When selecting trees for planting within the highway verge, the council will select the correct species appropriate to that location. Priority will be given to native species, however where this is not practical, an appropriate choice will be taken from appropriate non-native species.

HT9 – Newly planted trees of standard size or greater will be double staked and fitted with a strimmer guard to protect the tree base from mechanical damage, and a root director, where appropriate, to protect the highway from potential future root damage.

HT10- We will not prune or fell trees within a private boundary hedge unless required to by section 154 of the Highways Act 1980 for public safety, but will arrange for the tree owner to make their tree safe.

HT11 – We will systematically risk assess our highways tree stock using the Quantified Tree Risk Assessment method, identify those trees with an unacceptable risk of harm and carry out remedial action accordingly.

5.0 Parks and Open Spaces Management

Within the Parks and Open Spaces Management Policy we would include the tree management of our cemeteries. These are large open spaces with a moderate density of tree cover. As well as places of remembrance and contemplation, they are also aesthetically and environmentally important. Play areas would also be included under this policy.

PO1 – We aim to create a wide, varied and sustainable tree stock within our parks and open spaces.

PO2 – We will plant trees within our parks and open spaces, where appropriate, in order to ensure continuous tree cover, with priority being given to native species.

PO3 – Where possible, we will use arboricultural practices to create wildlife habitats within appropriate areas of our parks.

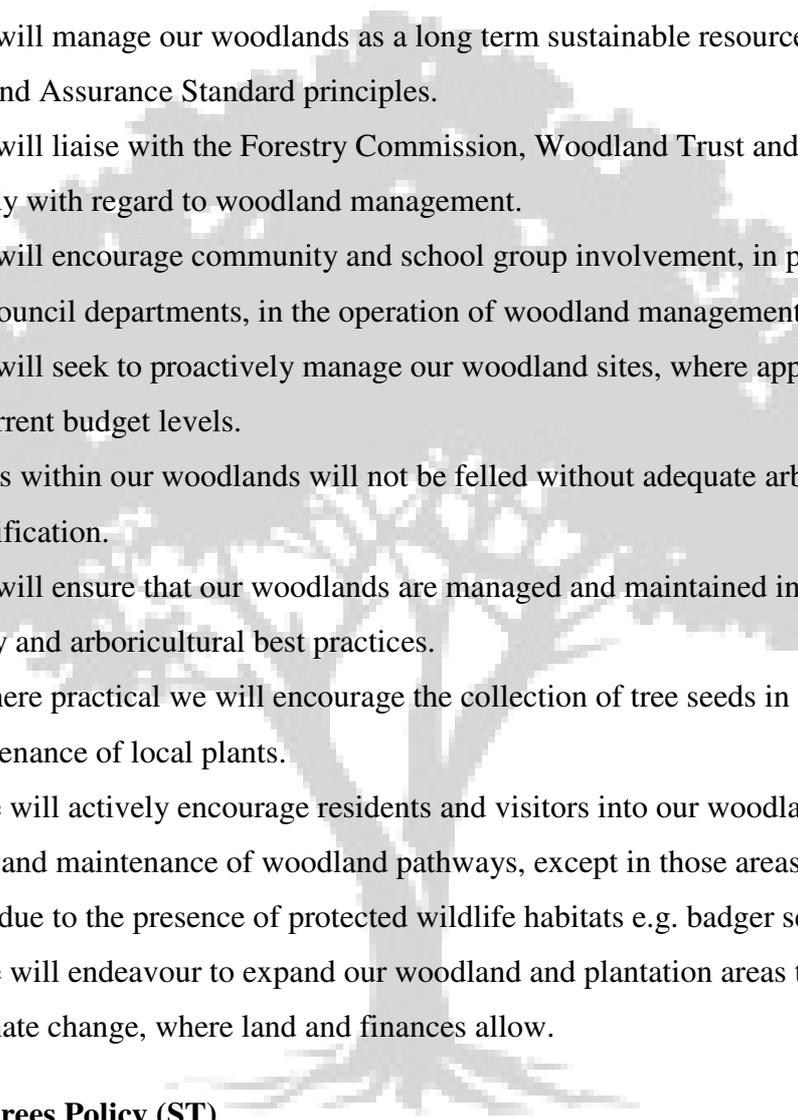
PO4 – We will continue to explore and develop environmental sustainability within our parks and open spaces, using arboricultural practices where possible.

PO5 – We will consult local community groups when planning a planting programme for open spaces within community areas.

6.0 Woodland Tree Management

Woodland areas within Northumberland County exist in different forms. There are in essence four main types of woodland in the county, although within each of these types there are various specialised habitats.

The four woodland types are: Ancient semi-natural woodland; plantations on ancient woodland sites; plantations on reclamation sites; other council plantations.

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- WT1 – We will take all reasonable steps to preserve and enhance woodland trees which are indigenous to the county.
- WT2 – Where possible and safe to do so, we will retain dead standing trees as nature habitats, preferring to prune rather than fell.
- WT3 – We will allow to remain *in situ* any dead or felled trees (other than those felled for timber, or in circumstances where this may lead to a significant fire risk) in order to create wildlife habitats.
- WT4 – We will manage our woodlands as a long term sustainable resource following, UK Woodland Assurance Standard principles.
- WT5 – We will liaise with the Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust and other relevant body with regard to woodland management.
- WT6 – We will encourage community and school group involvement, in partnership with other council departments, in the operation of woodland management.
- WT7 – We will seek to proactively manage our woodland sites, where appropriate, in line with current budget levels.
- WT8 – Trees within our woodlands will not be felled without adequate arboricultural or legal justification.
- WT9 – We will ensure that our woodlands are managed and maintained in accordance with forestry and arboricultural best practices.
- WT10 – Where practical we will encourage the collection of tree seeds in order to protect provenance of local plants.
- WT11 – We will actively encourage residents and visitors into our woodlands through the creation and maintenance of woodland pathways, except in those areas designated as sensitive due to the presence of protected wildlife habitats e.g. badger setts.
- WT12 – We will endeavour to expand our woodland and plantation areas to help combat climate change, where land and finances allow.

7.0 School trees Policy (ST)

Trees are present in varying numbers within the grounds of High, Middle and First Schools and at other educational establishments in the ownership of Northumberland County Council. As well as enhancing the general attractiveness of the school and its grounds they often contribute significantly to the wider landscape. School trees act as an important source of shade to children during hot weather as well as a source of

shelter from the rain. They provide an important teaching resource in terms of biology and environmental sciences. Their presence offers the opportunity to convey and promote the importance of environmental and conservation issues to young people.

ST1 - In conjunction with teachers, school representatives, and governing bodies, we will promote the maintenance of a diverse and healthy tree stock within our school grounds.

ST2 - We will encourage the planting of trees within school grounds. In particular we will promote the involvement of pupils and students of all ages to engender and instil an appreciation of the importance of trees to future generations.

ST3 – Due to the demands placed upon space at school sites for playing fields, tree planting is frequently confined to playing field and site perimeters. It follows therefore that school trees are often located in close proximity to residential property. We will not undertake tree pruning in direct response to complaints arising from any of the issues as set out in the General Tree Policy.

8.0 Trees on Private Land

PT1 – Northumberland County Council has a specific duty of care to assess the risk of harm caused by trees for which it is directly responsible and those within falling distance of a public highway. Private tree owners have a direct responsibility for their trees.

PT2 – We will provide professional, impartial general tree related advice to all private tree owners.

PT3 – Where there is an outbreak of a tree disease within Northumberland County we will provide advice regarding control and possible future prevention to private tree owners.

PT4 – We will not arbitrate in private tree owner disputes unless the tree in question would affect land or property we own.

PT5 – We will not carry out general tree work on private property. Advice will be provided to private tree owners with respect to selecting private contractors.

PT6 – Where private trees pose a danger, threat or nuisance to the public or public property, the owners will be requested to carry out remedial work. Where this work is not carried out, we will use statutory powers (5) to carry out the work ourselves and recharge the owner.

PT7 – Where trees pose a nuisance or obstruct the highway, Northumberland County Council have statutory powers (6) to ensure the nuisance or obstruction is removed, and to recharge the owner.

PT8– We will only carry out inspections and surveys of trees on private land in the following circumstances:

- In the event of a planning application where trees are implicated.
- Where there are proposals to make, revoke or review Tree Preservation Orders.
- Where an application has been made to carry out works to trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order or within a conservation area.
- Where unauthorised works to protected trees have been brought to the attention of the planning authority.

Such inspections and surveys are in accordance with The Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

We will carry out inspections and surveys of trees on private land only in the event of a planning or Tree Preservation application.

PT9 – Where a tree in private ownership is of such quality and /or enhances the landscape around which it grows and is in danger of removal, Northumberland County Council planners can exercise powers under statute (5) to place a Tree Preservation Order on the necessary tree. This order will protect the tree from lopping, topping, cutting down or wilful damage.

Any legitimate pruning work will require written consent from the County Planning Authority.

PT10 – Trees growing in a conservation area are protected under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. In this instance, anyone wishing to carry out any tree work growing in a conservation area is obliged to give the planning authority six weeks written notice prior to the commencement of work. Anyone wishing to carry out any tree work growing in a conservation area is legally obliged to obtain the consent of the County Planning Authority. The authority will decide within six weeks whether to protect the tree via a Tree Preservation Order. Where trees are to be felled and the volume of timber is greater than five cubic metres in any calendar quarter and a felling licence exemption does not apply, then a felling licence must be applied for from the Forestry Commission.

PT11 – Where we are called out to attend an emergency tree on land not owned by us, we will carry out emergency work and recharge the landowner for this service.

9.0 Planning Services

During the course of normal tree management, it is common from time to time to inspect or comment on trees in private land due to either a planning application, Tree Preservation Order (TPO), or because a tree is in a conservation area. In these circumstances the following system applies.

9.1 Planning Application

For anyone submitting an application to develop their property a completed application form would need to be submitted with the appropriate fee to Northumberland County Council planning department as per current council planning policy.

When submitting an application for development which could have an influence on trees on the site, the applicant must ensure that a complete tree survey has been carried out, with all trees categorised as per BS5837, and plotted in relation to the development on a scale map.

9.2 Tree Preservation Order

Where a member of the public would like a tree protected under Tree Preservation Order legislation they must write to the local planning authority identifying the type and location of the tree and the reason why they would like it protected.

Following completion of an assessment of the tree(s), the data will be passed to the local planning authority to determine whether a TPO is appropriate.

If a TPO is warranted, then the order will be placed on the tree following the procedure as set out in chapter 3 of Tree Preservation Orders: A Guide to the Law and Good Practice.

Anyone wishing to amend or revoke a TPO may contact the local planning authority in writing stating their case.

Trees which have been protected by a Tree Preservation Order under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Town and Country Planning (Trees) Regulations 1999, The Town and Country Planning (Trees) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2008 and any subsequent revisions and updates, require the submission to the local planning authority of a formal application by anyone wishing to carry out work to a protected tree.

Where trees are to be felled and the volume of timber is greater than five cubic metres in any calendar quarter and a felling licence exemption does not apply, then a felling licence must be applied for from the Forestry Commission.

10.0 Conservation Area

Where a tree is not protected by TPO but within a conservation area, the person wishing to carry out the tree work is required to provide the local planning authority with six weeks written notice of intent prior to carrying out the work.

11.0 Arboricultural Services

Northumberland County Council makes every effort to ensure that the tree works it carries out is of the highest standard and complies with current industry best practice.

11.1 General tree enquires

All general tree enquiries or request for service should be made through the County Council contact centre.

Once enquiries are received by the Tree and Woodlands Officer, a response will be sent to the customer in accordance with County Council policy.

The tree will be inspected within fifteen working days, unless reported dangerous where it will be inspected as soon as possible, and the customer updated in writing where possible.

All identified tree work will be prioritised and carried out according to identified hazard or risk.

Any tree work identified as non-urgent are categorised as either medium or low priority and placed within the council's winter works programme accordingly.

Whilst we will endeavour to complete the programmed tree works during this next period, the occurrence of emergencies, storms and other events beyond our control do

occur and thus would have to take priority over programmed work. This would result in scheduled work being delayed until the following winter works period.

The management of our tree stock is carried out by qualified and experienced staff trained specifically in arboriculture. Tasks typically undertaken are:

- Tree inspections, surveys and tree risk management
- Disease and decay detection
- Producing management plans, arboricultural specifications, tenders and evaluations
- Overseeing tree team and producing work programmes
- Advising the public, council officers and members on all tree related issues
- Investigating complaints relating to council tree stock
- Managing woodland
- Advise on Tree Preservation Order and conservation area issues
- Advise on high hedge issues

11.2 Tree pruning

All tree work carried out by our own tree team and external contractor will be in accordance with the County Council tree works specification, BS3998: 1989 “Recommendations for Tree work” and with reference to the Arboricultural Associations Guidance note no.5 “European Tree Pruning Guide”.

11.3 Tree planting

All new planting will be carried out as part of the winter works programme, more specifically during the period of November/February, in accordance with the relevant British Standards (10).

New trees will be selected based on the requirements of the site and general area.

We will encourage the planting of trees appropriate to their location. When selecting new trees, priority will be given to native species with a local provenance, although when this is not practical or appropriate, selection will be made from native species from another national source.

Due to the nature of our current climate and the effect to be faced from climate change, additional planting will include some non-native species, where finances and appropriate locations allow.

We will select trees based on their habit and needs in relation to their final planting site.

All of the standard and heavy standard trees we plant will be double staked and protected with a galvanized steel mesh cage for at least two seasons.

Following the removal of the tree cages and stakes, immature trees will be fitted with strimmer guards to protect the stem bases from accidental mechanical damage.

11.4 Disease monitoring

We will actively monitor our tree stock for the presence and spread of tree diseases. The presence of any significant or new disease found within the county will be reported to DEFRA and the Forestry Commission in order to identify and put in place a programme of preventative and remedial work.

12.0 Risk management

In order to improve the proactive, efficient tree inspections to all council owned trees, an updated inspection method, known as Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA), has been adopted.

According to the method's author and developer, QTRA and tree safety management is in essence,

“A matter of limiting the risk of significant harm from tree failure whilst maintaining the benefits conferred by trees. Although it may seem counter intuitive, the condition of trees should not be the first consideration. Instead, tree managers should consider first the usage of the land on which the trees stand, which in turn will inform the process of assessing the trees.”

The system moves the management of tree safety away from labelling trees as either 'safe' or 'unsafe', thereby requiring definitive statements of tree safety from either tree surveyors or tree managers. Instead, QTRA quantifies the risk of significant harm from tree failure in a way that enables tree managers to balance safety with tree value and operate to a predetermined limit of reasonable or acceptable risk. (11)

In terms of acceptable risk the HSE identify an acceptable risk of harm as being 1:10,000. It is the intention of this policy to support the tree inspection process by identifying those trees with a risk of harm greater than 1:10,000 and use current resources to reduce those risks to an acceptable level through appropriate tree maintenance practices.

13.0 Action Plan

Action No.	Proposed action	Implementation date
1.	Introduce tree management plans for all closed churchyards	April 2013
2.	Implement systematic risk assessment of highways trees	2011
3.	Implement systematic risk assessment of schools trees.	2011
4.	Produce a series of downloadable tree information leaflets available to the public from the council web site.	2011
5.	Ensure completion of tree management plans for all parks and country parks	2013
6.	Improve consultation and communication with the public	Ongoing
7.	Improve on our commitment to tree planting across Northumberland County by replacing felled trees on a two for one basis.	Ongoing
8.	Improve our commitment to ensuring that new developments provide adequate provision for new and appropriate tree planting.	Ongoing
9.	Improve liaison with statutory undertakers to ensure any utility work near trees is carried out as per NJUG guidelines causing minimum damage	Ongoing
10.	Seek to develop the current tree warden scheme across Northumberland	Ongoing