

# NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland County Council

## ‘Growing Together’

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

**November 2010**



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## **1.0 Introduction**

Trees are an essential asset and yet can be seen as a highly emotive issue, both in terms of benefits they provide and nuisance. The importance, value and management of trees on council owned land are set out in this plan.

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. These areas are covered within policies from other organisations, including ‘Trees, Woodlands and Forests.... And people – The Regional Forestry Strategy for the North East of England’.

## **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

### **2.1 Objectives**

#### **Ambition**

- Champion high quality tree management
- Promote biodiversity and support the Northumberland biodiversity action plan
- Enhancing the well-being of our residents
- Strive to provide a high quality tree management service
- Acknowledge the role trees play in our continually changing climate

#### **Priorities**

- Creating a cleaner, greener, safer County

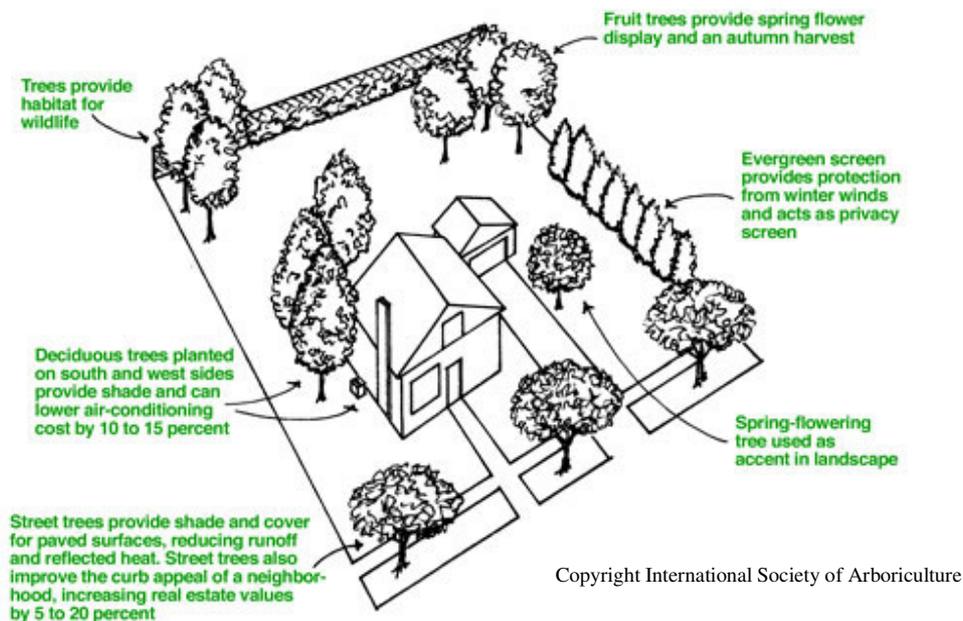
- Maintain current good tree care practice, while taking opportunities to improve where possible
- Enhance the woodland, rural and urban areas within Northumberland

### 3.0 Review Process

The effectiveness of the tree management policy will be monitored every year and reviewed every five years, by the Tree Officers' working group, to take into account of feedback from internal and external sources as well as changes in legislation, industry best practice and council policy.

### 4.0 Tree related benefits

Perhaps because they are constantly present, most of us rarely give much thought to the importance of trees in our lives and communities. As far as the majority of people are



concerned they are mere decorations, adorning highways, parks and gardens for mere aesthetic purposes. Trees are so much more. They are a vital and nurturing force. Urban forestry is a planned approach to the planting and management of the trees, woodlands, plantations, reclamation and development sites in and around towns and villages.

Trees have a multitude of benefits for society, which is why they have been described as the ‘ultimate urban multitaskers’.

They provide a vast array of benefits to people fortunate enough to be graced with their presence. This seemingly endless list include:

- *Improvement of climate extremes* – trees can trap warm air within their canopies and release it back into the environment in the evening
- *Mitigation of urban heat islands*
- *Reduce noise pollution* – trees act as filters to noise
- *Improve air quality* – Trees act as filters to remove particulate pollution deposited on leaves. They remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and release oxygen back into the air.
- *Save energy* – Strategically placed trees can be as effective as other energy saving devices such as insulation and double glazing in reducing heating and cooling costs.
- *Reduce wind speeds* – Trees filter wind passing through their canopy, thus slowing it down.
- *Reduce surface water run off and the effects of soil erosion* – Tree roots help to stabilize soil by creating an underground mesh of roots.
- *Provide a sustainable resource*
- *Absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and ‘lock it up’ within trees*

The benefits briefly highlighted above merely relate to the tree’s ability to mitigate the effects of pollution and environmental extremes. There are numerous other benefits to the public at large, which include:

- *Aesthetic contribution and visual amenity* – Without trees, the built environment would be a sterile collection of concrete, steel and tarmac.
- *Architectural enhancement of buildings* – The correct tree planting in a development can compliment and enhance a structural design.
- *Improve property values* – Property prices in tree lined streets can be as much as 15-20% higher than streets without trees (1).
- *Improve general liveability and quality of urban life*

- *Contribute to human physical and mental health and relaxation*
- *Attract birds and wildlife*

## **5.0 Tree related problems**

Because a large number of people live or work in and around an urban environment, trees can create varying degrees of inconvenience to residents. Problems can arise where a tree or group of trees make an important contribution to the local environment but cause inconvenience to those living nearby.

Within Northumberland County there are a number of recurring sources of complaint or concern.

- Size and spread of tree canopy
- Branches overhanging into gardens and the highway
- Low branches over footpaths
- Trees blocking natural light, street lights and road signs
- Leaf and fruit fall
- Sticky deposits from honey dew
- Physical damage to structures such as buildings, walls, footpaths and driveways
- Interference with utilities
- Affecting TV and satellite reception
- Root encroachment and moisture depletion subsidence concerns
- Obstructing a view
- Highway safety issues
- Fear of tree safety



Sometimes a problem may arise because of incorrect choice of tree species for a particular location. In such instances, pruning can generally improve the situation.

It is not always possible to resolve the issue to the satisfaction of the resident or complainant.

One of the largest worries for residents is the likelihood of an adjacent tree causing structural damage to their homes.

In Northumberland, there is a low level of incidents of proven damage to property from moisture depletion subsidence due to tree related activity. There have been, in the past, certain cases which were found to be attributable to other reasons, including the effect of previous mine working or insufficient foundation depth.

Trees in open spaces, free from significant defect have the ability to withstand the stresses created by stormy and other adverse weather conditions. Occasionally, a few trees fail, whether in part (a branch) or in full (uproot).

In Northumberland, council-owned trees, and those for which the council has a responsibility, are risk assessed, where necessary, in an attempt to identify those trees which pose an unacceptable risk of harm to persons and property. Those trees which pose an unacceptable risk receive appropriate remedial work in order to reduce that risk to an acceptable level.

The frequency of assessment is determined by the type and number of targets within falling distance of the tree and follows the Quantified Tree Risk Assessment methodology (see section 14.6).

## **6.0 Green infrastructure**

Northumberland County Council's draft Green Infrastructure strategy defines green infrastructure as "*the network of green spaces and natural geographic features... that are interwoven and connect villages, towns and cities.*" (12)

The new draft strategy identifies the benefits of the green infrastructure within Northumberland, identifying the different categories of green assets from trees, woodlands, moorland, hedges, heathland, rivers and streams and puts forward actions to manage and improve where possible in order to link areas of existing and proposed green space.

The fundamental aim of the draft Green Infrastructure Strategy is to “*ensure that the rich diversity of natural and historic environments of the county make a positive contribution to the regeneration, sustainable development and quality of life for people who live, work and visit Northumberland*”.

## **7.0 Love Northumberland**

Northumberland is well known for its breathtaking scenery and wide open spaces, but it also has a reputation for its environmental quality.

Northumberland County Council wants to maintain and improve on this ‘clean image’, and is working hard to keep Northumberland beautiful.

Love Northumberland is a campaign whose aim is to show how we are all caring for our county by promoting the work of the council and all its partners in keeping the county clean and green for the benefit of all residents.

Through the tree strategy, Northumberland County Council will endeavour to maintain high standards of tree management, in order to ensure the county remains a green place to live and work. This will be achieved by a commitment to tree planting, county wide, to ensure our children and grandchildren can also enjoy the benefits of trees.

## **8.0 Biodiversity**

Trees, woodlands and hedges are very important to the county in terms of sustaining the variety of life currently resident in Northumberland. Their importance is not only as living organisms in their own right, but also in enabling a wide range of other flora and fauna to exist by acting as food source, nesting location, roost site and as links between otherwise fragmented habitats. Without trees many invertebrates, fungi, lichens, mammals and birds would find it impossible to survive. Notable species which depend on trees and are listed in Northumberland’s Biodiversity Action Plan are:

- Red squirrel
- Bats
- Dormouse



- Garden Birds
- Barn Owl

A particular area of conflict which needs careful management is the public perception of ‘untidy’ areas and dead wood being unsafe and in general a bad thing, whereas since the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) ‘all public bodies must have due regard to biodiversity while carrying out their duties’, translating as an instruction to councils to accommodate wildlife and not damage or eliminate it while carrying out grounds maintenance or other works.

However, in areas where remedial work has been carried out and an unacceptable risk of harm would exist to leave deadwood on site, it shall be chipped and removed.

Northumberland County Council is Plan Lead for Trees and Hedgerows Biodiversity Action Plan and as such has a responsibility to lead by example and ensure that the intrinsic wildlife value of trees in the landscape is maintained, enhanced and where appropriate, restored where there has been a loss. Priority actions to achieve these targets are:

- Identify the current extent and condition of protected trees and hedgerows in Northumberland
- Use the survey results to quantify the target to maintain the current extent and create targets for achieving condition
- Promote ‘best practice’ management of Northumberland’s tree and hedgerow resource



- Encourage the establishment and development of a Tree Warden scheme for Northumberland

As part of County Council’s commitment to biodiversity, it has written a draft Green Infrastructure strategy in which it recognises biodiversity as, “*an important and valuable resource*”. The policy commits itself to putting in place plans to support the existing Biodiversity Action Plan and the

Northumberland Biodiversity Partnership, which will help to improve the management and maintenance of existing biodiversity resources and support the expansion of habitat to ensure species protection (12).

Northumberland is especially well endowed with Ancient Woodland sites, especially along river corridors and on steep valley sides (known variously as Denes or Gills / Ghylls). These woodlands are usually classified as Ancient Semi Natural Woodlands (ASNW) or Plantations on Ancient Woodlands (PAWs). There is an estimated total of 5654 ha of Ancient Woodlands in the county, although this is likely to be around 2000ha greater as areas with an ownership of under 2ha were not included in the original surveys and are still being identified.

The condition of ancient woodland in Northumberland was assessed in between 2003 and 2006 and can be summarised as follows:

- 44% of ASNW is in an unfavourable declining or partially destroyed condition
- 82% of PAWS is in an unfavourable declining or partially destroyed condition.

The study identified that woodlands have had a number of threats or problems causing their current condition, especially

- Lack of regeneration caused by inactive management and no protection from grazing animals
- Conifer canopy out competing native broadleaved species
- Invasive alien species such as rhododendron
- Regeneration of non-native tree species such as sycamore, beech and most conifers
- Loss and/or fragmentation due to development
- Opencast mining

Trees, either singly or as part of a woodland or hedgerow, may be protected from harm by Tree Preservation Orders or by being located in a Conservation Area, Site of Special Scientific Interest or other protected area. Trees hosting nesting birds may not be worked on while the birds are in residence and bringing up young (2). For this reason trees must be assessed for nesting birds prior to commencement of any remedial work. Trees which are used by bats are protected at all times even if the bats move. A roost (with or without bats in it) may not be disturbed, blocked, damaged or destroyed either intentionally or

recklessly (2,3). In both cases, should it be possible that proposed work may break the law, a licence must be obtained from the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (which at the moment in England is Natural England).

Scrub and hedgerows are also important parts of Northumberland's wildlife habitat. Although neither are trees in the classic sense of the word, both, if neglected, become woodland or lines of trees. This is often undesirable, as they are important habitat types in their own right and succession into woodland or a tree line may well alter the nutrient and groundwater levels in the surrounding land, as well as changing the overall character of the area. This could potentially cause it to become unsuitable for the other species that depend upon that habitat. Important hedgerows are protected from removal by the Hedgerow Regulations (1997) but mis-management of hedges is not an offence. Higher hedges may be desirable along busy roads bordering fields (where road user visibility allows) as this will reduce the likelihood of barn owl fatalities. Traditional practices of laying hedges should be encouraged as this reduces the likelihood of succession and usually gives a much denser hedge, able to support a wider range of species.

Finally, although trees are an important part of Northumberland's natural environment, care should be taken not to damage the biodiversity of other habitats by badly planned or inappropriate tree planting. Floristically diverse grasslands or highway verges, wetlands and moors have all been damaged within Northumberland by such action in the past and care should be taken to prevent this from happening in the future and remove trees from affected habitats where possible.

## **9.0 Tree Management Policies**

The tree management policy has identified six main areas that together make up the council's tree stock.

- General Tree Management Policy (GT)
- Highway Tree Management Policy (HT)
- Parks and Open Spaces Management Policy (PO)
- Woodland Management Policy (WT)
- School policy (SP)
- Trees on private land Policy (PT)

## **10.0 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.

### **11.0 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.



Trees adjacent to highways are extremely beneficial in that they filter traffic pollution and help reduce traffic noise to adjacent properties. They also act as shade providers to parked cars and passing pedestrians.

Several academic studies carried out in the United States have found that property prices have increased in areas with tree-lined streets (1).

As part of the County Council's Transport Asset Management Plan, it has identified 10,000 trees recorded within its inventory. This plan also suggests that there may be one million more within the highway boundary, based on the Building Research Establishment figures supported by the Highways Agency(13).

The management of highway 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.

## **12.0 Parks and Open Spaces Management**

Trees growing in the county's parks and open spaces are some of the most significant in respect of size and aesthetics. If such a valuable tree cover is to survive then it is necessary to implement a high quality, sustainable management programme.

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.

Linked very closely with public open spaces is Planning Policy Guidance no. 17: Planning for open space, sport and recreation. This planning document deals with assessing the needs and identifying quantitative or qualitative deficits of an area of open space or sport facility with regards to the existing and future use by the community. For open and leisure space to be truly effective it is essential to liaise and engage with the public and other stakeholders to obtain their support in order to maximise the effective use of an area. This ethos is the same for tree planting as it is for any other development work.

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.

### **13.0 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.

#### **13.1 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW)**

This type of woodland is essentially the nearest to completely native woodland that we have in this country. It cannot be classed as Wild Wood, as humans have been involved in all woodland sites in the country to a greater or lesser degree, but it is essentially a wood that has existed without total clear felling or replanting at any point in its history since the first maps were drawn up and records began. These are our most important woodland sites in terms of biodiversity and wildlife value, as the ground flora, lower plant, fungi and invertebrate populations within them have had centuries to develop and are specialised to that environment. Consequently these sites often contain populations of unusual and rare species. Habitat fragmentation of such habitats is a threat to their survival and should be resisted and ASNW sites should be linked by tree planting where it is possible and appropriate. Importantly, some sites that may be ancient are not classed

as ANSW in the register held by Natural England / Forestry Commission as the ownership of parts of it was less than 2 hectares in size at the time the register was compiled. These sites should still be treated as ASNW.

### **13.2 Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)**

As this term suggests, the site did once have native woodland growing on the site for many years, but at some point in its history, these trees were either partially or totally felled, or substantially replaced by new planting either immediately or eventually.

Although the species of trees may not be native, the ground flora will still be present either visibly or as a seed bank in the soil. Although these ancient sites have been damaged in the past, they can be returned to a more favourable condition for wildlife by removing the non-native trees and allowing native trees of various ages to grow on the site, which in turn should enable the ground flora, fungi and animal species to return.

These sites are sensitive and could be damaged by sudden change therefore each site should be assessed before any work is undertaken to determine the most appropriate restoration method.



### **13.3 Plantations on Reclamation Sites**

Reclamation sites are generally sites that have previously been used for a non-woodland or agricultural purpose. In Northumberland, these sites are often typified by woodlands planted on land that was previously an ex colliery site or colliery shale waste tip, an opencast mine site, a general waste tip, a demolished industrial area, or a mix of any of these. These sites have been reclaimed by capping with a soil based substrate to either re-form the land or bury waste, and then planted with trees. Historically woodland management on these sites was based on establishment techniques as practiced at that time, and as such these plantations are often populated by non-native trees, planted in straight lines with little dead wood and practically no ground flora or age succession. Sometimes deep rooted species struggle to live a healthy life in maturity if the land beneath was contaminated in any way, and as with all plantations of uniform age,

problems can occur with windthrow and localised failure. Management of these woodlands will seek to diversify the species composition, wildlife habitat value and age structure of the woodlands (including the provision of rides and glades) and when replanting, favour native trees where possible. Opportunities will also be sought to sustainably utilise the timber resource of these woodlands.

### 13.4 Other Council Plantations

This is a catch-all term that covers plantations of trees that are on sites other than reclamation sites. This includes a wide variety of woodlands, but most usually small amenity plantations on housing estates, road schemes, development sites or plantations on previously agricultural land. These may be composed of native tree species and look much like an ASNW (but without the associated history and ground flora), ornamental species to offer visual appeal to human residents of the area or non-native species for



timber production.

- We will resist development impacting on ASNW in line with Planning Policy Statement 9
- We will work to restore council owned ASNW in unfavourable declining condition to favourable or favourable recovering condition
- We will restock council owned PAWS with native species where appropriate
- We will Increase the diversity of council owned conifer plantations by increasing the ratio of native broadleaves)

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.

#### **14.0 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.

### **15.0 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.

## **16.0 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.

### **16.1 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.

Following submission of an application, should trees or woodlands be present on the site, a copy of the application will be sent to the appropriate Tree Officer for comment.

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 either A, B, C or R as per BS5837, and plotted in relation to the development on a scale map.

Once a site visit has been made by the tree officer, further information may be requested as per BS5837 (2005) Trees in relation to construction. This may include:

- Tree Constraints Plan (TCP) – This shows all trees in relation to the development plotted on a scale plan, including each tree’s crown spread and Root Protection Area (RPA)
- Arboricultural Implications Assessment (AIA) – This looks at the present and future use of the site and the effects the trees and development will have on each other.

- Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) and Tree Protection Plan (TPP) – Following agreement of the final development design, a TPP should be developed in accordance with section 7 of BS5837 (2005). This identifies trees to be retained and removed; location of protective fences; position of construction exclusion zones (CEZ); position of areas of special construction measures (SCM) and location of construction related buildings and storage.

All of the above documents should be submitted to the local planning department upon request. No work should be carried out without prior written consent of the local planning authority.

## **16.2 Tree Preservation Order**

### **16.2.1 Applications for work**

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 relating to any proposed tree work.

A copy of the application and any reports and plans will be passed to the relevant Tree Officer for investigation and comment. Any request for further information will be made by the local planning authority directly to the applicant or their agent.



Once all information has been considered, a decision regarding the application will be made by the local planning authority within a time scale as set out in the 1999 act and Tree Preservation Orders: A Guide to the Law and Good Practice.

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.

### **16.2.2 Request for 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.

In order to determine the suitability of the tree or trees for protection, the appropriate Tree Officer will arrange a visit to the site and will carry out an assessment of the tree using the Tree Evaluation Method for Preservation Orders (TEMPO).

This method takes into account the condition, longevity and visibility of the tree to the general public, as well as other features, such as any historical, habitat or aesthetic importance, as well as determining the level of possible threat to the tree.

Following completion of the assessment, 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.

### **16.2.3 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.

Following receipt of this written notice, the relevant Tree Officer will visit the site to determine whether the tree is worthy of a TPO by using the Tree Evaluation for Preservation Order method (TEMPO). Following this site visit, comment will be passed to the planning authority for a formal decision.

## **17.0 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. All

of our staff employed for the purpose of carrying out tree work are trained and qualified through the National Proficiency Test Council (NPTC), a body set up to ensure operators are competent to carry out specific arboricultural operations. These competencies are kept up to date through regular training and updating of qualifications, as well as keeping abreast of new advances and developments in the arboricultural industry.

### **17.1 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.



Certain tree work is carried out by our own in-house team. This team is equipped and trained to carry out the following:

- Tree pruning
- Tree felling
- Tree planting
- Tree climbing

- Large limb removal
- Installation of artificial support systems
- Epicormic shoot control
- Use of Mobile Elevated Working Platform (MEWP)
- Herbicide application
- Signing and guarding for work on or adjacent to highways.

Our team will carry out work to trees growing:

- In highway verges
- In parks and open spaces
- In closed churchyards and cemeteries
- In woodlands and country parks
- In non-residential housing land
- In the grounds of establishments in the ownership of and/or leased to the County Council.

In certain specific circumstances it is necessary to engage the services of an external arboricultural contractor. Northumberland County Council is very selective and only engages contractors who comply with stringent and specific criteria.

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

- Tree inspections
- Tree surveys
- Quantified Tree Risk Assessment
- Disease and decay detection
- Producing management plans
- Producing tree work programmes
- Overseeing tree team
- Advising on tree related law
- Advising the public, council officers and members
- Investigating complaints relating to council tree stock

- Producing arboricultural specifications, tenders and evaluations
- Managing woodland
- Representing the council on legal issues
- Represent the council on insurance issues
- Investigate cases of moisture depletion subsidence
- Advise on Tree Preservation Order and conservation area issues
- Advise on high hedge issues

### **17.2 Tree works specification**

In order to ensure the highest standard of tree management, across the county a new specification for tree work has been designed, taking into account changes in legislation and advances in tree management best practice.

### **17.3 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”.

### **17.4 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. These will range in size from 45cm – 120cm high (whips), including extra heavy standard (16-18cm girth), to semi-mature trees (>20cm girth).

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.

The purpose of new tree planting will be to:

- Maintain continuity of tree cover across the County
- Provide all year round interest
- Encourage species diversity
- Encourage the development of wildlife habitats
- Replace removed trees
- Improve air quality
- Provide screen, shelter and windbreaks
- Develop community involvement in partnership with other council departments



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.

### **17.5 Disease monitoring**

We will actively monitor our tree stock for the presence and spread of tree diseases. Recent examples of tree diseases which have significantly affected the county's tree stock are:

- Dutch Elm Disease
- Horse Chestnut bleeding canker

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.

We observe differing amounts of fungal fruiting bodies throughout the year as part of our routine tree inspection programme. Any diseased tree which poses an unacceptable risk to persons or property is removed in line with current authority priority guidelines.

### **18.0 Statutory Undertakers**

Statutory undertakers are organisations with a legal right to provide and maintain apparatus within public highways. Their operational activities include excavation of the highway, must comply with the provisions set out in the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991.

They include all utilities electricity, gas, water, telephone, cable and television and other telecommunication companies. All works must be carried out by qualified people, who hold a New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 certificate.



All statutory undertakers have voluntarily signed up to an industry code of practice known as the National Joint Utility Guidelines (NJUG). These guidelines relate to all utility working, with volume 4 relating to the planning, installation and maintenance of utility apparatus in proximity of trees.

Northumberland County Council will continue to improve communication with the relevant utility companies and their appointed contractors to ensure trees requiring remedial work or excavations near to trees, do so in accordance with current industry best practices and statute.

## **19.0 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 Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) system applies established and accepted risk management principles to tree safety management. Firstly, the targets (people and property) upon which trees could fail are assessed and quantified, thus enabling tree managers to determine whether or not and to what degree of rigour a survey or inspection of the trees is required. Where necessary, the tree or branch is then considered in terms of both impact potential (size) and probability of failure. Values derived from the assessment of these three components (target, impact potential and probability of failure) are combined to calculate the probability of significant harm occurring.

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.

## 20.0 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

## ***Appendix 1.***

### **21.0 Glossary of terms**

**Adventitious** – Describing roots, shoots or other plant organs which develop at another position other than their normal positions of origin.

**Arboricultural Association** – Recognised as the leading authority for the care of amenity trees in the UK.

**Arboriculture** – The study and growth of trees for amenity and non-forestry purposes

**Arboriculturalist** – A professional who manages and maintains trees, generally in the urban environment.

**Arboricultural Implications Assessment (AIA)** – A study carried out by an arboriculturalist, to identify, evaluate and possibly mitigate, the extent of direct and possibly indirect impacts on existing trees that may arise from the implementation of a proposed development.

**Arboricultural Method Statement** – The methodology for implementing any aspect of a development which may result in damage or loss of any tree.

**Bole** – Also known as stem or trunk – It is the main supporting structure of the tree above the root plate upto the first major branch.

**Coppicing** – The cutting of a woody plant near the ground to encourage the growth of multiple stems.

**Crown lifting** – This is the selective removal of the lower branches of a trees crown to increase the distance between the base of the canopy and ground level. This type of pruning should, if possible, be carried out before a tree reaches maturity in order to avoid large wounds. This allows more light through and can prevent obstruction.

**Crown thinning** - Crown thinning is the selective removal of internal branches evenly throughout the tree to reduce the density of the crown and thus reduce the sail area so as to place less stress on the stem and root plate in windy conditions. However, it does not change the overall size or shape of the tree. Crown thinning would not normally be carried out on conifers, so it is generally confined to deciduous broadleaved trees.

**Crown reduction** - With Crown reduction we reduce a certain percentage of the overall height and size of the tree by removing the ends of branches evenly throughout the crown, leaving a balanced and maintained shape. It is normally specified in percentage terms that the crown is to be reduced by and should never exceed 15%. This technique is used for many reasons such as to reduce wind resistance, water up-take, to control the size of a tree in a restricted environment or to allow more light through.

**Defect** – in relation to hazard assessment – any defect which detracts from the uniform distribution of mechanical stress, or which makes the tree mechanically unsuitable for its environment.

**Epicormic shoots** – This relates to shoots which are initiated on mature woody stems. Epicormic growth can be formed from dormant buds, however most shoots arise from adventitious buds.

**Hazardous trees** – These are defined as trees identified as having defects of such severity that they pose an unacceptable risk of harm to person or property.

**Indigenous trees** – Those trees referred to as native which have not entered the British Isles by human agency and have grown following the recession of the last ice age.

**Pruning**- The selective removal of twigs and branches to achieve a specific aim.

**Pollarding** – the complete or partial removal of the crown of a young tree in order to encourage the development of numerous branches, and the subsequent pruning to maintain this growth pattern.

**Remedial Action** – In hazard tree management this refers to the action to remove or mitigate the risk of injury to persons or damage to property.

**Root Protection Area (RPA)** – A layout design tool indicating the area surrounding a tree that contains sufficient rooting volume to ensure the survival of the tree.

**Tree** – Whilst there is strictly no legal definition of a tree, one typical definition would be: A woody perennial plant, typically having a single stem or trunk growing to a considerable height and bearing lateral branches at some distance from the ground.

**Tree Constraints Plan (TCP)** – A plan prepared by an arboriculturalist for the purpose of layout design showing the RPA and representing the effect that the mature height and spread of a mature tree will have on any layout through shade.

**Tree Preservation Order** – In the UK, an order made by a local authority, whereby written permission is required for the pruning or felling of a protected tree.

**Tree Protection Plan (TPP)** - A scale drawing prepared by an arboriculturalist showing the finalized layout of a development, including tree retention and tree and landscape protection measures detailed within the arboricultural method statement.

**Whip** – A young, single-stemmed tree supplied for planting before the appreciable development of side shoots.

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