

An Overview on the Vale of White Horse District Council's Policy for Trees

This area suffered greatly at the hands of Dutch elm disease in the early 1970's, some say we lost over one million trees. This policy document outlines ways we can retain and maintain our existing trees and increase the number of flourishing new trees through out the Vale.

Trees by their very nature contribute significantly to the environment and their protection and promotion is a significant contributor to the Council's "Clean, Green, Safe and Healthy" policy. As well as their role in removing CO² from the atmosphere trees improve the environment visually and historically and can have a significant economic value in some areas.

This document is supported by a series of local and national environmental policies.

There are a number of landowners throughout the Vale who own and manage trees. Besides the District Council there is Oxfordshire County Council Highways department, Town and Parish Councils, Vale Housing and the Forestry Commission, but the greatest number of trees are in private ownership.

Objectives

The objectives of this document are for trees within the Council's ownership to:

1. Have an active and defendable inspection programme;
2. Have a set of maintenance standards conforming to British Standard 3998 and its revisions;
3. Have clear criteria for the maintenance of trees;
4. Have a reasonable approach, in conjunction with the Council's Insurers, on how to deal with trees in relation to buildings;
5. Have a willingness to plant more trees as new opportunities arise.

For trees in the ownership of others:

1. Advise the public and local organisations and interest groups about maintaining and protecting their own trees;
2. Use the current law to protect trees;
3. Protect trees in relation to development according to British Standard 5837-2005;
4. Foster and increase community involvement in planting, monitoring and protecting the Vale's trees;
5. Encourage the planting of new and replacement trees and woodlands.

The Rural Landscape of the Vale

The topography and the geology divides the Vale into four landscape zones.

1. The North Vale Area – this includes the river Thames and the edge of the Thames Valley;
2. The Lowland Clay Vale – the pastoral central strip drained, mainly, by the river Ock;
3. The Lower Chalk – the land at the base of the Berkshire Downs;
4. The Middle and Upper Chalk – the Berkshire Downs and the Ridgeway.

Management of Trees in Council Ownership

The Council has a duty to inspect and maintain its trees to ensure public safety and a duty of care to know the location and condition of the trees for which it is responsible.

1. All Council trees will be inspected on a regular basis;
2. The frequency of inspections will be linked to the potential risk of the trees to buildings and people;
3. The computer inventory will be updated with inspection information;
4. A regular review of the system of tree inspection and how it is implemented will be carried out.

In 2002/03 we had a full survey of Council trees which showed the distribution, age range, condition and species range and identified a programme of remedial works starting with the removal of dead and dying trees.

1. Council trees will be maintained in accordance with the specification British Standard 3998 Tree Works;
2. The recycling of arisings following maintenance work shall be encouraged.

Further maintenance of our trees will be carried out with certain criteria in mind.

1. Trees within the Council's ownership will be managed to promote public safety;
2. Formative pruning of young trees will be encouraged;
3. Nuisance such as leaf fall, TV reception or light obstruction etc will not normally provide a reason to fell a tree.

Where our trees have the potential to directly or indirectly damage buildings we will assess possible causes of action.

1. All related building damage claims will be investigated and all relevant information from the Claimant will be required;
2. During all future inspections trees within 10m of a structure will be recorded;
3. Trees recorded within these criteria will be assessed as to their future potential.

Tree Planting

The Council recognises that trees are important to our well being and to the environment so it would like to plant more trees on its own land and encourage planting throughout the Vale especially native species.

1. For every tree removed by the Council it should look to replace it with at least one tree, more if possible, if not in the same place then in the same locality;
2. The Council should replace older trees it owns with new planting to ensure succession;
3. A wide range of species should be planted to prevent over dependence on one species;

4. Planting sites should be chosen with regard to possible nuisance or tree roots and building claims in the future;
5. Grants and incentives should be provided at the Council's Area Grant Committees discretion to encourage other organisations and private individuals to continue tree planting.

Woodlands

Woodlands are an important element in the landscape of the Vale so their upkeep and increase should be encouraged.

1. Woodlands within the Council's ownership should be managed with recreation, ecology, access, education and landscape values as goals;
2. Private woodland owners should be encouraged to manage their woods along similar lines;
3. The amount of woodland cover, both private and Council owned, should be increased;
4. Ancient woodlands should be protected and maintained to ensure their continuance.

Tree Protection

There are two ways that trees in the Vale can be protected.

Firstly there are the legal means at the Council's disposal. Tree Preservation Orders allow the Council a degree of control over a tree deemed worthy enough to be protected by such an order. It means that only appropriate works can be carried out and felled trees can be replaced where necessary. Conservation Areas also give trees a degree of protection. Any tree greater than 7cm diameter at 1.5m from the ground is protected if it is within a Conservation Area and cannot be worked on without prior written permission of the Council.

We can also protect certain hedges using the Hedgerow Regulations.

Secondly we can protect trees by giving advice. Many people either telephone or write requesting information regarding the status of a protected tree or how best to deal with a tree on their land that needs attention. We are happy to give them the information or advice that will help them retain their trees.

1. Using current planning legislation the Council will protect those trees it feels are threatened or that it values;
2. Applications to carry out work to protected trees will be evaluated carefully before permission is given;
3. There will be an ongoing review programme of the current T.P.O's to ensure they are current;
4. The Council will continue to provide advice on trees to private landowners when it is requested.

Trees and Development

Any development that impacts on trees should be guided by British Standard 5837-2005 Trees in Relation to Construction.

Before any decision is made regarding the trees on a development site we will need a tree and site survey, a site layout, a pre-construction and construction agenda and finally details of post-construction and landscaping.

1. The retention of existing trees will be encouraged on new development sites;
2. All tree protection measures agreed with the Council will be fully implemented and monitored;
3. Developers will be encouraged to carry out new tree planting within current sites and beyond.

Community Involvement

The Council currently works in partnership with the Oxfordshire Woodland Project and the Great Western Community Forest and links directly with the Forestry Commission.

1. The Council should also look at a Tree Warden Scheme to see if it would be appropriate for our use.
2. Notification of nearby residents regarding significant tree works will be encouraged.

By adopting this policy for trees the Council will be helping to safeguard a valuable ecological resource for the future and give the Council some rigid guidelines by which to manage this resource.

This policy should be reviewed at least every five years.