Executive Summary of the Vale of White Horse District Council Tree Policy

In 1992 the Earth Summit Conference recommended that through Agenda 21 Local Authorities should work with communities to achieve local action plans and a comprehensive tree policy would be an important part of this.

Our policy will help to protect and care for trees in the Vale. It was compiled by first finding out what the District Council has in terms of tree stock. A full survey was carried out in 2002/03 and from that we could help decide what we want to do with this resource and how it can be improved.

The document contains:

1. A description of the treescape and landscape of the Vale;

2. An explanation of the parameters through which we manage our trees;

3. Our policy for tree planting and how we encourage others to plant trees;

4. The methods by which we protect trees through the legal and planning processes;

5. Our link with other organisations that help increase community involvement.

We have drawn together a range of actions that will help improve our existing trees and help increase the number of trees on both Council land and land within private ownership.

The policy also looks at what we do and how we do it. This document will enable us to justify our actions and decisions and give us a measurable standard to judge the quality of our tree work. We will be able to identify areas of low tree cover and target these areas for new planting as well as help correct problems such as age imbalance (large numbers of over mature trees) where they occur.

By continuing to survey and monitor our trees we will be able to tell if the objectives of the policy are working.

This is not a “one off” document it will evolve and need to be revised on a regular basis to improve and expand its scope.

VALE OF WHITE HORSE

POLICY FOR TREES

Contents

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Imagine turning the clock back 40 years to the mid 1960's and standing on the White Horse Hill looking out over the Vale. The amount of extra trees you would see, in comparison to today, would astound you.

Now turn the clock back 3000 years to the time when the White Horse was actually carved into the hillside. You would be looking at a mainly wooded landscape for as far as the eye could see.

So where have all the trees gone?

Agriculture and the spread of population have accounted for the disappearance of the original Bronze Age woodland and Dutch Elm Disease in the early 1970's, meant the loss of thousands of mature trees (nearly 20 million elms were lost throughout the country at this time).

This created a major change in the landscape. So what can we do to try and redress the situation?

The aim of this document is to outline ways we can retain and maintain our existing trees and increase and help new trees flourish throughout the Vale for the future.

1.2 The policies upon which this document is based are both local and national. From the Council's Vision the document will help to:

a). Improve the level of public service by making the management of trees more effective and efficient;

b). Increase public involvement by including a new district-wide parish tree warden scheme and increase public awareness of trees;

c). Protect the local environment through the legal and physical protection of trees and improve it by encouraging more tree planting and maintaining existing trees to the correct standards;

d). Support the regional economy as trees enhance the environment where people live and work and so help to attract inward investment;

e). Improve the quality of life of all members of the community by creating a healthier and more attractive environment.

1.3 The document also complies with the Council's environmental policy in that it will help:

a). Minimise waste management;

b). Protect and enhance the natural environment and open spaces;

c). Protect and enhance the character of the built environment;

d). Improve healthy living and working conditions for all;

e). Seek to reduce air, water, land and noise pollution and minimise light pollution in new developments;

f). Raise environmental awareness.

1.4 On a national level the Government recognises the value of trees and the need to plan for a more sustainable future, particularly in an urban context, so it encourages Local Authorities to produce long term plans for the care of their trees, and through various bodies, e.g. the Forestry Authority, it seeks to encourage tree planting.

1.5 As a landowner and a Local Authority the Council has duties, both moral and legal, that effect the management of its own trees and those belonging to private individuals

The trees through the Vale are owned and cared for by a number of different organisations.

Vale of White Horse District Council

The Council looks after around nine thousand trees throughout the Vale in a variety of situations. Many are trees in urban areas such as parks, open spaces and streets, but it also owns areas of woodland in various stages of development.

Oxfordshire County Council Highways

The trees along most of the important highway routes and many roads and streets in the urban areas are the responsibility of O.C.C Highways.

Abingdon, Faringdon and Wantage Town Councils

These three Town Councils look after trees within their boundaries. Abingdon is the largest of the three with between 500 and 600 trees in its care. Faringdon and Wantage do not have this many but they do look after the more significant trees in the two towns.

Vale Housing Association

All trees within the gardens of their properties and open spaces within their ownership are the responsibility of Vale Housing Association.

Parish Councils

There are 68 Parishes within the Vale with varying numbers of trees to look after. Some of the smaller Parishes have none, where others such as Shrivenham or Steventon look after a number of significant trees.

Private Ownership

Some individuals own one tree while others own thousands, but put together this is the biggest tree ownership sector in the Vale.

Forestry Commission

There are a number of large Forestry Commission plantations within the Vale some of which are currently undergoing strategic evaluation.

1.6 Under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Town and Country Planning (Trees) Regulations 1999, the Council has a duty to protect trees that it feels may be under threat. This is done by administering Tree Preservation Orders and the Conservation Area Legislation.

1.7 The Council has a duty to maintain its own trees to best current management and maintenance standards and encourage private individuals to do the same. It also has a duty to expand and nurture a diverse tree population for the public and for the benefit of wildlife throughout the Vale.

1.8 This document looks in detail at how the Council will manage and value its trees. It will lead to changes in how it views and uses this valuable resource and in how it will seek to promote tree importance and awareness amongst the general public, other Local Authorities and interest groups. This document will be reviewed every five years.

1.9 The document sets out a programme of policies and actions as a framework for the Council's future arboricultural work.

The objectives are:

a). For trees in its ownership to:

- Have an active and defendable inspection programme;
- Have a set of maintenance standards conforming to British Standard 3998 Tree Work;
- Have clear criteria for the maintenance of trees;
- Have a reasonable approach in conjunction with the Council's insurers on how to deal with trees in relation to buildings;
- Have a willingness to plant more trees as new opportunities arise.

b). For trees in the ownership of others:

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

2.0 The Rural Landscape of the Vale

2.1 An important element of any tree document like this should be an understanding of the character of the landscape within which this document will apply. The topography and geology of the Vale leads to four distinct landscape zones.

2.2 <u>The North Vale Area</u>

The water meadows of the upper Thames are in Oxford's clay and alluvial valleys, along with the East West ridge of high ground formed by Corallion limestone. This runs from Wytham to Buscot and constitutes a distinct northern landscape zone. Most of the Vale's existing woodland, including much ancient woodland, is found in this zone.

In the river valley, moisture loving trees such as willow and poplar are common, where as the much drier limestone ridge is more suitable for conifers.

Country houses in parkland enjoy magnificent views of the Thames Valley, as they are situated along the ridge, and the limestone of which it is formed is commonly used as a building material.

2.3 The Lowland Clay Vale

This is the pastoral central strip of the Vale which was formed by a swathe of Gault and Kimmeridge clay. Hedges and woodlands are common, with oak and ash being the dominant species. Willows line the streams that drain the River Ock.

This area was most affected by Dutch Elm disease with the dead suckers of the original elm trees still common in hedgerows.

2.4 The Lower Chalk and Upper Greensand

Between the clay vale and the upper chalk lays a narrow band of fertile soil with a string of settlements which follow the spring line and old track ways such as the Portway.

2.5 The Middle and Upper Chalk

This zone is formed by the upper slopes of the Berkshire Downs. Large open arable fields or an area of grassland broken only by hedges and clumps of beech trees is typical. The Ridgeway follows the top of the scarp.

3.0 Management of Trees in Council Ownership and Jurisdiction

3.1 The Council has a duty to inspect and maintain its trees to ensure it meets all legal obligations and maintains public safety.

The Council also has a duty of care to know the location and condition of the trees for which it is responsible.

During 2002/2003 the Council carried out a survey of its trees for the first time from which the following conclusions can be drawn.

3.2 Distribution

Of the approximate 9,000 Council owned trees surveyed 61% are located in Abingdon. The other 39% are spread across various towns and villages within the Vale; Wantage has the next largest concentration at 16% of the total.

3.3 Age

The age range distribution is relatively healthy with nearly 75% of the trees being no older than semi mature (between 20-30 years old).

This is probably due to extensive planting schemes that accompanied the housing developments in the Vale from the middle to late seventies, and the Council's continuing willingness to plant trees.

3.4 Condition

The condition survey reflects the age survey in that the majority of younger trees are in relatively good health.

Over 90% of the Vale's trees are in either good or reasonable condition.

3.5 Species

The range of species is typical of most urban areas. Norway maple and sycamore are particularly prevalent with cherry, thorn and whitebeam also commonly found. It would be worth increasing this species range with any future plantings.

It is important to maintain a healthy age structure and species range to ensure the Vale would still have a healthy tree population should something equivalent to the storm of 1987 occur again; or a particular species of tree is affected in the way that Dutch Elm Disease ravaged this area.

3.6 Inspections

The majority of the Council's trees have been inspected during 2002-2003 and as resources allow it should inspect its trees on a regular cycle, every 5 years at least. In more "high use" public areas the inspection cycle should be more frequent. In future inspections any tree within 10m of a structure should be recorded for risk assessment provision.

For details of the inspection process – see Appendix 1 Arboricultural Maintenance.

Actions

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;

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.

3.7 Maintenance

All Council trees will be maintained in accordance with the agreed specification – see Appendix 1.

All works will be carried out in line with BS3998 Tree Works and any subsequent amendments. All staff carrying out these works will wear the appropriate safety clothing and be adequately trained in up-to-date techniques in working and safety.

The magnitude of crown reductions will normally be no greater than 30%. Heavy crown reduction of trees leads to excessive re-growth and consequent poor growth habit.

The exception to this is pollarding. This is an ancient method of management involving removal of all branchwood to leave a bare trunk that was widespread throughout rural parts of the Vale, carried out mainly on willows. Originally practised to produce fodder and fencing materials it has fallen into decline with the result that the old pollards are breaking up due to the excessive size of the re-growth.

The Council is keen for pollarding to continue so that the old willows can survive and to this end offer grant aid for this practise to carry on.

As part of taking an environmental and responsible approach to tree work the Council will seek to send as little material as possible to landfill. All branchwood below 200mm should be chipped with the resulting material either used by the contractor or collected for bio energy use. Any trees to be felled should have their potential timber value assessed with the resulting work maximising this value.

Actions

1. Council trees will be maintained in accordance with the specification (Appendix 1) and British Standard 3998 Tree Works;

2. The recycling of arrisings following maintenance work shall be encouraged.

3.8 Safety

The Council should manage its trees with the safety of the public in mind. Following the inspection programme a list of works has been generated. This has been put into priority, firstly on the grounds of safety. Those trees that present a significant risk to the public e.g. dead or poor condition trees are being dealt with. Remaining trees will be assessed as to their risk factor and dealt with accordingly. This assessment must be carried out by a person trained in arboricultural matters. Unless there is a very good reason removal of trees will be resisted.

3.9 Good Husbandry

Works to trees, mainly those not yet mature, that will prolong their life and create a good structure should be carried out. This will include removal of low branches, crossing branches, double leaders and any diseased material.

3.10 Nuisance

Throughout the Vale, but mainly in urban areas, the Council has trees impacting on residents and their properties. Pruning work will not normally be carried out to alleviate seasonal occurrences unless an acute problem is identified. The main nuisances associated with such trees are blocking of light, leaf fall and T.V reception.

Light Obstruction

To determine how much of a shading problem a tree presents its amenity value is compared with its shading potential and a decision is based on the outcome. It is usually very difficult to prune a tree to give lasting increases in light levels to a property, although crown lifting can help in certain situations, therefore, the Council will resist this course of action.

Quite often the amount of pruning required would damage the tree or destroy its amenity value. However, where trees are blocking street lights etc and jeopardising public safety the Council will consider carrying out work that will help solve the problem and retain the tree. In extreme cases removal of the tree and replacement with a less troublesome species or finding a nearby replacement planting site would be considered.

Leaf Fall

The Council is not legally responsible for fallen leaves; they are described as seasonal embarrassments. Pruning of existing trees is not a solution to this occurrence and care should be taken in future species selection to try and diminish it. The same criteria apply to trees with associated aphid problems or trees that produce large amounts of fruit.

T.V Reception

The Council will not carry out major works to trees, or remove them, to improve T.V reception. Careful positioning of aerials and satellite dishes at the time of installation is advised with the thought of how trees may grow in the future taken into account.

Actions

1. Trees within the Councils ownership will be managed to promote public safety;

2. Formative pruning of young trees will be encouraged;

3. Nuisance such as leaf fall, T.V reception or light obstruction etc will not normally provide a reason to fell a tree.

3.11 The last 15 years has seen a huge rise in the number of claims of direct and indirect damage to properties that have involved trees. Direct damage is that caused by the physical presence of roots which is usually restricted to walls and paths and is relatively minor – but there are exceptions. Indirect damage is that caused by the extraction of water by plant roots from soils and the subsequent soil shrinkage caused. This is by far the largest problem of the two.

3.12 The Council has been fortunate in not being hit by an avalanche of such claims but neighbouring authorities have not been so lucky. The Council should take adequate steps in dealing with any claims should they arise by assembling the relevant information:

a). Tree species;

b). Age of tree;

c). Condition survey and past pruning history;

d). Tree root survey;

e). Dimensions (height, crown spread, trunk diameter);

f). Distance from tree to building;

g). Amenity value of tree;

h). Recommendations for tree management;

i). Age of property;

j). Depth of foundations;

k). Extension history;

l). Drainage construction and condition;

m). Spatial arrangements and amplitude of damage;

n). Monitoring results to determine movement cycles in relation to tree growth and time of year;

and by following a recognised tree damage assessment protocol.

3.13 Why the Council has not received large numbers of claims could be down to a variety of factors.

The three main population centres are situated on what is not considered to be highly shrinkable clay soils. Faringdon is on sand and limestone Corrallian Beds. Wantage is mainly on greensand and Abingdon is a mixture of glacial drift, alluvium and, in the case of Peachcroft Estate, Kimmeridge clay. This estate is the largest area of dense population on shrinkable clay in the Vale with a high proportion of trees close to buildings.

<u>Actions</u>

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.

4.0 Tree Planting

4.1 Trees are an important resource and are essential to our health and well being so the District Council would like to plant more trees on land within its control and to encourage the planting of trees throughout the Vale.

4.2 It aims to maintain and extend its current tree cover and introduce new and varied planting. Careful consideration as to the siting of these new trees will be necessary in order to attempt to avoid nuisance problems such as honeydew and fruit. Honeydew, the sugary substance excreted by aphids, can at certain times of the year make hard surfaces close to trees sticky and dirty. Trees that produce large qualities of fruit such as horse chestnut or certain varieties of ornamental crab apple cause problems when the fruit falls to the ground.

4.3 The Council will encourage other organisations and private landowners to plant trees.

4.4 Parish Councils will be offered advice on the best sites and species of tree to plant and those Parish Councils that currently do not plant many trees will be encouraged to do so.

Actions

1. For every tree removed the Council 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 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.

5.0 Woodlands

5.1 Woodlands provide an important element within the landscape of the Vale. The Council supports and works in partnership with the Oxfordshire Woodland Project to arrange the proper management of small woodlands throughout Oxfordshire (and the Vale).

5.2 The Council owns a small number of woodlands in various stages of development, Besselsleigh being our one large area of mature woodland (10 ha). However, most of the woodlands within the Vale are in private hands or are owned by such organisations as the Woodland Trust.

5.3 Woodlands require regular maintenance to ensure they develop healthily and provide a varied habitat for wildlife and a safe environment for the public.

a). Woodlands should be checked periodically to ensure safety and good development;

b). With developing woodland, trees should be thinned to allow development of long term species;

c). When trees reach maturity some should be removed to allow room for succession;

d). Some older trees, as long as they are safe, should be left for their wildlife value;

e). When woodlands are established weeds and grass should be controlled around whips by chemical spray or mulch mats (See Appendix 1);

f). Paths that promote public access should be maintained on a regular basis.

5.4 Along with the developing woodlands there are a number of ancient woodlands situated throughout the Vale. These are sites that have been continually wooded since 1600 AD, and have a high ecological value. Should these woods disappear it is unlikely they could ever be recreated.

Actions

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 via the Oxfordshire Woodland Project;

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.

6.0 Tree Protection

There are two ways trees in the Vale can be protected. One is through the Council using the legal means at its disposal, the other is by giving advice to tree owners.

6.1 Legal Means of Protection

As a general rule the Council does not impose legal protection on its trees. It is deemed to be a responsible tree owner and, as such, will follow the best current practice.

6.2 Tree Preservation Orders (T.P.O)

The Council has a duty to protect trees that it decides are of a public amenity value that may be under threat by use of a Tree Preservation Order through the powers of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Town and Country Planning (Trees) Regulations 1999. These powers will be used following the guidelines of the D.E.T.R publication Tree Preservation Orders – A Guide to the Law and Good Practise.

Currently the Council administers in the region of 300 Tree Preservations Orders but this is rising all the time.

A Tree Preservation Order takes away none of the responsibility of the owner towards their tree but it does give the Local Authority a degree of control about what happens to it. Only trees that fulfil the criteria in the Council's checklist (see Appendix 3) will be considered for protection unless they are of exceptional amenity or historic value.

A Tree Preservation order allows the Council to make sure only appropriate work is carried out to the tree, and that felled trees are replaced where necessary. Applications must be made in writing to the Council in order to carry out works to protected trees, and applicants are encouraged to consult with a tree surgeon or arrange a pre-application site meeting or discussion with the Arboricultural Officer before applying. There is an 8 week period between receiving the application and works being able to be carried out.

Poor quality applications will be discouraged and where it is claimed that a protected tree is dangerous then, if a visit from the Arboricultural Officer cannot be arranged, a thorough arboricultural report must be submitted.

Applications to fell protected trees to allow for development will be resisted. Alternative construction methods such as “no-dig” drive construction or pile foundations should be considered and if these are not suitable then a new design should be found.

For those people who have trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order, the Council operates a grant scheme that enables up to 40% of the cost of works to a protected tree to be claimed back as long a the works are carried out in line with British Standard 3998.

The Council has a duty to review and rationalise its Tree Preservation Orders. Orders should be checked to make sure the information contained in them is correct and up to date. Are the trees correctly plotted on the plans and are they the correct species? Are the trees still there?

Also the Council will review:

1. Tree Preservation Orders with woodland classification made pre- 1988;

2. Tree Preservation orders made pre-1975;

3. Area Tree Preservation Orders;

4. Multiple orders on the same tree;

and consider whether to revoke these orders and re-serve them should they no longer be relevant.

6.3 Trees in Conservation Areas

Trees that are sited within a Conservation Area are protected under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Anyone wishing to carry out works to a tree in such an area must give the Council 6 week’s prior notice. During this time the Council can consider whether the tree is worthy of a Tree Preservation Order.

Any tree greater than 7cm diameter at 1.5m from the ground is protected within a Conservation Area.

There is still an amount of unauthorised tree work going on within Conservation Areas so we must continue to inform residents of their responsibilities in order to try and prevent this.

6.4 Hedgerow Regulations

Any person wishing to remove a hedgerow should first issue the Council with a Hedgerow Removal Notice. If a hedgerow meets certain criteria concerning its historical aspect, its number of woody species and its associated features then it can be classed as important and so protected by the above regulations. This means that the hedge can not be removed without prior permission of the Local Authority and an unlimited fine can result if it is.

6.5 Felling Licence

Felling licences are operated by the Forestry Authority. In a calendar quarter landowners can fell up to 5 cubic metres of timber on their property without a licence. Any more than this may require permission.

6.6 Protecting Trees through Advice

The other way the Council can help protect trees, especially those on private land, is through the giving of advice.

Many people either telephone or write requesting information regarding the status of protection of their trees and a representative of the Council is happy to attend sites for pre-application advice. These are beneficial for both parties. Detailed reports, as sometimes requested, are not usually possible but general advice on the type or species of tree to plant or the extent and nature of tree surgery can be provided.

Actions

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 up to date;

4. The Council will continue to provide advice on trees to private landowners when it is requested.

7.0 Trees and Development

7.1 The Vale of White Horse District Council Local Plan states:

> Existing landscape features, trees, hedgerows and ponds can make an important contribution to the character and biodiversity of an area and it is essential that new development does not lead to the loss of, or pose a future threat to, such features. The location and siting of new developments, and in particular buildings, should seek to retain important landscape features and integrate them into the design of the development. The provision of new landscape features can often be an essential prerequisite for creating an attractive development which complements and enhances its surroundings. It can also enhance the quality of life of local people and contribute to local biodiversity through the conservation and creation of new wildlife habitats. For these reasons the Council will seek a high standard of landscaping associated with development proposals.
>
> When designing a scheme careful consideration should be given to the functional and aesthetic aspects of landscaping. A survey of existing features will often be required from the applicant. Such surveys will be expected to include site contours, accurate positions of trees and shrubs, their condition, height, stem diameter, extent of canopy, species and details of other aspects of the sites ecology. The Council considers it particularly important to maintain mature trees and conditions will be attached to planning permissions to protect existing trees during and after site works. Where appropriate regard will be paid to the impact of landscaping on important views. Care should be taken to ensure that new planting will not impair visibility at access points or obstruct footpaths and cycle ways.

7.2 Any development that impacts on trees should be guided by British Standards 5837:1991 Trees in Relation to Construction (and its subsequent revisions) as well as the Councils Supplementary Planning Guidance currently in preparation. Following is a brief summary of this.

7.3 Pre-Application

Discussions, if necessary a meeting, are encouraged at this stage.

Site Survey

Should show all existing features and levels.

Tree Survey

- Species
- Dimensions
- Vigour
- Age
- Amenity Value
- Indicate Retention/Removal

Site Layout

When laying out the development at its initial stages there should be adequate provision for retaining existing trees and hedgerows and replacement planting following agreed tree removal. Exclusion zones around trees should be identified. Predictions of the mature height and spread of trees, and their impact on the design should be made e.g. are the gardens big enough, will the trees affect the sunlight in the future, will the trees need to be continually pruned. Access and service routes should be designed so as not to impact on trees. Planting of new trees should be considered in order to maximise their future benefits and minimise future problems e.g. shading and root problems. Choice of species and planting position should be made with care. Trees on adjacent sites should be considered.

Planning Permission

All tree details should be submitted with completed application.

Pre-Construction

All agreed tree removal and surgery should be carried out at this point. Protective fences should be installed and agreed on site with the Arboricultural Officer.

Construction

Care should be taken through this phase that no fences are moved and there are no machinery mishaps regarding trees.

Post Construction and Landscaping

Once the protective fences have been removed, care should be taken that no trenching or soil dumping takes place within the formerly protected area. Driving vehicles and storage of such items as fuels and other toxic substances should also be avoided. Fires should be no closer than 20m to retained trees.

Actions

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.

8.0 Community Involvement

Within the Vale there are 65 Parish Councils and 3 Town Councils most of which the District Council deals with on a variety of tree based enquiries.

8.1 Tree Wardens

It would be beneficial to the District Council and to Parish Councils to establish a Tree Warden Scheme. Tree Wardens are volunteers, appointed by the Parish Council, who gather information about their local trees, get involved in local tree matters and encourage local practical projects to do with trees and woods. Tree Wardens need not be experts but they need to be enthusiastic. Gathering information and doing surveys, liaising with the community, informing the District Council of threats to local trees and working with schools etc are just some of the tasks of this post.

The Tree Council/National Grid Scheme is the best model to use at present. This scheme provides a ready made framework to use and also allows for training days and gives national and regional support in the form of 13 years experience with around 7,000 wardens already in place.

8.2 Partnership Working

The Council also has links with the public through other organisations it is in partnership with.

8.2a Oxfordshire Woodland Project

The Oxfordshire Woodland Project was jointly set up in 1991 by the 4 District Councils and the Oxfordshire County Council to provide advice to woodland owners. Small woodlands are an important element within landscapes and many were not being maintained. The Woodland Project Office provides advice to landowners. In 1999 the Vale purchased Besselsleigh Wood ancient woodland for public benefit. The Woodland Project Office provides management advice on the wood and organises events to promote the wood.

8.2b Great Western Community Forest

The Western end of the Vale comes into the area covered by the Great Western Community Forest. The Council works in partnership with the Forest Team at Watchfield on projects such as Folly Park at Faringdon and schemes in the Shrivenham area. The Community Forest also offers improved grant aid for tree planting and advice on stewardship both within and beyond its current boundaries.

The Council also links with the Forestry Authority directly on new planting and felling proposals and indirectly through the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Woodland Forum.

Actions

1. The Council will investigate with the Parish Councils the feasibility of a Tree Warden Scheme, and should support be forthcoming implement such a scheme;

2. Notification of nearby residents regarding significant tree works will be encouraged;

3. The Council will continue to support and work with our partners, the Oxfordshire Woodland project and the Great Western Community Forest.

9.0 Monitoring the Policy Document

This is the first policy document regarding the Vale's trees and, as such, it will develop over the next few years.

It should be reviewed every 5 years to account for changes in law and practice but at this initial stage a one year review would be beneficial.

Glossary of Terms

Ancient Woodland Woods in existence since at least 1600 A.D.

Suckers (elm) Prolific re-growth from root systems of large elm trees killed by Dutch Elm Disease in the 1970's.

Pollarding Cyclical removal of re-growth leaving a bare trunk usually between 2m and 4m high.

Crown Reduction Process of reducing the area of the branch structure of a tree usually between 10% and 30%.

Aphids Greenfly and blackfly.

Glacial Drift Material left by melting glaciers which is now part of the soil structure.

Alluvium Material laid down by rivers which is now part of the soil structure.

Whip A small tree usually 1 to 3 years old.

Documents Used in Compiling the Policy

1. Town and Country Planning Act 1990

2. Town and Country Planning (Trees) Regulations 1999

3. Hedgerow Regulations 1997

4. The Forestry Act 1967 and subsequent revisions

5. Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

6. New Road and Streetworks Act 1991

7. Common Law and How it Relates to Trees

8. British Standard 3998 Tree Work

9. British Standard 5837 Trees in Relation to Construction

10. NJUG 10 Guidelines for Utilities

11. Numerous other Local Authority Tree Strategies especially those produced by Aylesbury Vale District Council.

APPENDIX 1

ARBORICULTURAL MAINTENANCE

1. General Requirements

2. Routine Maintenance

3. Tree Pruning

4. Tree Felling/Thinning

5. Non-Routine Tree Works

ARBORICULTURAL MAINTENANCE

1.0 General Requirements

1.1 British Standards

Unless otherwise stated all works shall be carried out to a minimum of British Standards 3998:1998 and subsequent amendments together with all applicable Arboricultural Industry Safety Guides and E.C Member Standards.

1.2 Tree Climbers Safety Equipment

All safety equipment shall be in accordance with Health and Safety Executive (H.S.E) leaflet 401.

Any person who climbs a tree shall at all times use:

a). A safety harness as recommended by the H.S.E consisting of either a sit harness with leg straps (half harness), or a harness with shoulder straps (full harness).

b). Climbing rope with a minimum diameter of 12mm conforming to BS4928. Slings and straps shall be of the same construction and minimum diameter for climbing ropes and any karabiners must have a minimum rating of 23kN with an approved locking gate that requires at least 3 distinct movements to open it.

c). As recommended by the H.S.E the following rescue items must be within easy reach:

1. First Aid Kit conforming to H.S.E leaflet INDG214
2. A climbers harness and rope as defined above
3. Other items of equipment as may be necessary for the individual to climb safely e.g. karabiners and straps.

All equipment should be inspected by the climber before use and should be inspected by a responsible person at least once a month with the inspection being recorded in a suitable book.

1.3 Chainsaw Operators Safety Clothing

a). As recommended by the H.S.E all persons using a chainsaw off the ground **MUST** wear:

1. Chainsaw protective trousers or leggings which should have all round protection to reduce the risk of cutting injuries complying with EN381.5;

2. A suitable helmet conforming to BS5240 with ear and eye protection complying with EN352;

3. Safety boots incorporating chainsaw protection to the upper foot complying with EN345.

The operator may also wear a chainsaw protective jacket and chainsaw gloves complying with EN381-7.

b). Ground staff using chainsaws **MUST** wear:

1. Chainsaw protective trousers or leggings which should have all round protection to reduce the risk of cutting injuries complying with EN381-5;

2. A suitable helmet conforming to BS5240 incorporating ear and eye protection complying with EN397, 1731,352;

3. Safety boots incorporating chainsaw protection to the upper foot complying with EN345-1;

4. Chainsaw protective gloves complying with EN381-7.

Ground staff may also wear a chainsaw protective jacket.

c). Ground staff using wood chipping machinery **MUST** wear:

1. Heavy work gloves and suitable clothing without loose or flapping impediments

2. A suitable helmet conforming to BS5240 incorporating eye and ear protection complying with EN397, 1731,352.

3. Safety boots conforming to EN345-1.

Additional high visibility clothing shall be worn when working on or close to public highways.

1.4 Training

All tree climbers shall undertake a **'tree climbing/working within trees'** training course that is recognised by the Health and Safety Executive (leaflet 805).

a). Chainsaw Training

No person shall use a chainsaw unless they hold a valid certificate. Under no circumstances shall a person use a chainsaw unless a competent person is within sight of such an operator.

b). Rescue Techniques

It is recommended that training in the rescuing of tree climbers who have sustained injury or have become ill whilst working in a tree, is carried out at least on an annual basis.

1.5 Warning Signs and Safety Zones

Prior to any works taking place, an adequate safety zone shall be established around the working area, cordoned off on the ground and policed by the Contractor to ensure no unauthorised entry. This zone shall include all equipment which may be hazardous to the public e.g. wood chippers, etc.

All signing of highway works must conform to the Code of Practice as outlined in the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. It is the Contractors responsibility to erect and maintain appropriate warning signs and barriers and to ensure the safety of both staff and the general public whilst working adjacent to highways.

1.6 Machinery and Equipment

a). Climbing Irons

The use of climbing irons will not be permitted on a tree except when the tree is being completely felled.

b). Sterilisation of Equipment

All tools shall be sterilised with an approved sterilant after contact with diseased areas of trees and shrubs, or where disease is suspected, to prevent the spread of infection

c). Wound Treatment

Wound sealants shall not be used without the prior approval of the Supervising Officer.

d). Winching Works

See H.S.E Leaflet 310

It is permissible to use existing trees as anchor points for winching equipment provided that the tree to be used has been deemed suitable by the Supervising Officer. Where such a tree is used, it will be protected against damage by the placing of protective materials around the trunk so that the winch cable can not harm the tree.

1.7 Disposal of Timber/Wood Chipped Materials

The Contractor shall be responsible for the disposal of all timber and wood chipped material unless specified by the Supervising Officer. All arisings shall be removed immediately and the area left clean and tidy before the contractor leaves the site. If ground conditions are such that an unacceptable amount of damage will occur to the site the arisings shall be removed as soon as the ground conditions improve. The contractor shall be responsible for informing the Supervising Officer of any delay and for all subsequent re-instatement works.

1.8 Nomenclature/Location

a). Trees shall be described by the current nomenclature e.g. Fagus sylvatica. The location will be indicated by one of the following: a plan, a grid reference or a number affixed to the trunk of the tree. Trees may also be defined as being situated in streets and roads, their location described as being outside or opposite a particular house or on an area adjacent to a definable structure.

b). Tree categories shall be defined as follows:

Street Tree: Defined as a tree which is planted immediately adjacent to a minor highway, cycle path or footpath

Highway Tree: Defined as a tree which is planted immediately adjacent to a major highway or bus route

Estate Tree: Defined as a tree which is planted in a public open space within an estate

Park Tree: Defined as a tree which is planted within parks, country parks and open space etc away from highways and footpaths.

2.0 Routine Maintenance

2.1 Tree Inspections

On request the Contractor shall carry out a ground based visual inspection of specified trees from a schedule supplied by the Supervising Officer. The Contractor shall inspect for any

signs of damage, disease or defective growth to the trunk or branches of the tree as well as for the following conditions:

- Signs of root movement
- Trip hazards (e.g. surface roots)
- Loose or peeling bark
- Dead wood
- Distance from wall or building
- Epicormic growth
- Mower damage
- Crown clearance
- Stake and tie/guard
- Tree details

The inspection shall be recorded on the schedule or on a hand-held computer in a form compatible with the Arbortrack Tree Management System. All records shall be returned to the Supervising Officer on a monthly basis during the inspection period.

2.2 Sapling Trees

On request the Contractor shall carry out the following works to specified sapling trees.

a). Inspect any tree stakes, guards, ties and blocks for firmness, refirming, straightening, adjusting or replacing if required, to prevent damage to the tree. Any litter present within the guard shall be removed to the Contractor's tip.

b). Inspect the tree for any signs of damage, disease or effective growth and carry out a formative prune on the tree to produce a balanced crown, removing all crowded or crossed branches as well as any dead or diseased wood and any epicormic growth without tearing or leaving snags. The amount of crown removed must not exceed 10% and all arisings shall be removed to the Contractor's tip. Any badly damaged, dead or dying trees shall be reported to the Supervising Officer for replacement.

c). On an instruction from the Supervising Officer, the Contractor shall completely remove a failed or vandalised tree up to Advanced Nursery Stock size, including any stakes or protective guard before reinstating the root hole area with top soil and grass seed, the final surface after consolidation being level with the surrounding area. All arisings shall be removed to the Contractor's tip.

d). On an instruction from the Supervising Officer, the Contractor shall remove any stakes, ties and guard supporting the tree, taking care not to damage the roots, trunk or branches of the tree, filling and firming the hole left by the stake. All arisings shall be removed to the Contractor's tip.

e). On an instruction from the Supervising Officer, the Contractor shall supply and re-stake/tie the tree.

2.3 Street Trees

a). Specified trees shall be inspected by the Contractor during July for epicormic growth and any material growing from the base of the tree and up to a height of 2 metres from ground level, shall be removed to the Contractor's tip.

b). During July, the Contractor shall maintain a clearance of 3 metres under specified trees overhanging pavements, highways and other hard surfaces, the clearance being measured from the ground when the tree is in full leaf. All arisings shall be removed to the Contractor's tip.

2.4 Highways Tree

a). Specified trees shall be inspected by the Contractor during July for epicormic growth and any material growing from the base of the tree and up to a height of 6 metres from ground level, shall be removed to the Contractor's tip.

b). During July, the Contractor shall maintain a clearance of 6 metres under specified trees overhanging pavements, highways and other hard surface areas, the clearance being measured from the ground when the tree is in full leaf. All arisings shall be removed to the Contractor's tip.

2.5 Estate Trees

Specified trees shall be inspected by the Contractor during July for epicormic growth and any material growing from the base of the tree and up to a height of 2 metres from ground level, shall be removed to the Contractor's tip.

2.6 Tree Grilles

In January, the Contractor shall lift the tree grille; loosen the shingle or soil to a depth of 150mm beneath the grille, supplying and applying as necessary, additional shingle or soil approved by the Supervising Officer. Before levelling and replacing the grille. On completion, the grille shall lie flat and level with the surrounding surface, ensuring that the grille is adjusted so that the trunk of the tree is not constricted and that the surrounding area is left in a tidy condition. If the tree trunk size is such that it cannot be replaced without causing damage to the tree, the Contractor shall remove the tree grille to store and inform the Supervising Officer. All arisings shall be removed to the Contractor's tip.

3.0 Tree Pruning

Unless otherwise specified, pruning shall be carried out from November to March inclusive with the exception of certain ornamental species which shall be pruned after flowering during the summer months and other species with special requirements e.g. walnuts.

Where branches are removed they shall be cut back to the branch collar or in the absence of a collar cut back as far as possible without exaggerating the size of the wound. The final cut shall be smooth, in one plane and without tearing the bark or inner tissue. Where branches are reduced, they shall be cut back to positions just above a good growing point or back to the main branch. All arisings to be removed from site for disposal in accordance with Clause 1.7.

During pruning operations, the Contractor shall carry out a visual inspection of the tree and report any defects or abnormalities to the Supervising Officer on an approved inspection form.

Pruning operations shall be specified as follows:

3.1 Crown Reduction

a). Light Reduction (10%)

Remove all dead and diseased wood in excess of 15mm diameter, all stumps and reduce crown overall by 10%.

b). Medium Reduction (20%)

Remove all dead and diseased wood in excess of 15mm diameter, all stumps and reduce crown overall by 20%

c). Heavy Reduction (30%)

Remove all dead and diseased wood in excess of 15mm diameter, all stumps and reduce crown overall by 30%

3.2 Crown Reduction (side only)

a). Light Reduction (side only – 10%)

Remove all dead and diseased wood in excess of 15mm diameter, all stumps but with the sides only being reduced by 10%. The overall height of the tree shall not be reduced.

b). Medium Reduction (side only – 20%)

Remove all dead and diseased wood in excess of 15mm diameter, all stumps but with the sides only being reduced by 20%. The overall height of the tree shall not be reduced.

c). Heavy Reduction (side only – 30%)

Remove all dead and diseased wood in excess of 15mm diameter, all stumps but with the sides only being reduced by 30%. The overall height of the tree shall not be reduced.

3.3 Crown Lifting

a). Park/Street Trees

The crown of the tree shall be lifted by the removal of primary and secondary limbs up to a height of 3 metres above ground level, this being measured at the branch tip from the ground when the tree is in full leaf.

b). Highway Trees

The crown of the tree shall be lifted by the removal of primary and secondary limbs up to a height of 6 metres above ground level, this being measured at the branch tip from the ground when the tree is in full leaf.

3.4 Removal of Deadwood

a). Deadwood

Remove dead, diseased and dying branch wood and broken stumps larger than 15mm diameter throughout the crown of the tree. All final cuts shall, where possible, be made into living wood.

b). Major Deadwood

Remove dead, diseased and dying branch wood and broken stumps of 40mm branch diameter and above, only throughout the crown of the tree. All final cuts shall, where possible, be made into living wood.

3.5 Crown Thinning

The crown of the tree shall be thinned by removing up to 20% of secondary and small live branch growth throughout the crown to produce an even density of foliage around a well spaced and balanced crown. Chaffing, weak and damaged branches shall be removed.

3.6 Pollarding

a). Remove all branch growth back to a point at the junction between the trunk and the base of the crown. Remove all epicormic growth.

b). Where a tree has been previously pollarded, remove all branch growth back to the original pollard points. Remove all epicormic growth.

3.7 Bark Wounds

Specific bark damage shall be repaired by paring back to undamaged tissue leaving an oval shaped wound of consistent outline to a maximum size of 500cm².

4.0 Tree Felling/Thinning

4.1 Felling

Where possible, all specified trees shall be clear felled. If this is not possible and unless otherwise instructed by the Supervising Officer, the Contractor shall use their discretion as to the exact method of felling to be used and the direction in which the tree is to be felled.

Unless otherwise stated by the Supervising Officer, all trees shall be felled so as to obtain the maximum economic timber value which shall be used to offset the cost of the work as agreed with the Supervising Officer prior to commencement of work.

The tree shall be felled as close to the ground as possible and that all cuts are made to ensure no splitting of the timber occurs. All felled timber shall be trimmed out so that all branch stumps are flushed off, leaving the bole/trunk in all respects ready for sale or transportation. All buttresses shall be flushed off to leave a round stem base and the hinge portion of the trunk shall be flushed off to leave the trunk base in one plane. The hinge portion remaining on the stump shall also be flushed off and the stump edges rounded off so as to prevent any sharp edges. All arisings to be remove from site for disposal in accordance with Clause 1.7.

The following treatment of the stumps resulting from the felling works described above shall be completed as soon as practical after each felling operation unless otherwise specified by the Supervising Officer.

a). Stumps from trees growing in grass which are less than 350mm in diameter shall be ground out to a depth of 150mm and the ground immediately re-instated to an acceptable standard for mowing.

b). Where specified by the Supervising Officer, stumps shall be killed by cutting a groove in the sapwood around the diameter of the stump and applying a suitable approved brushwood killer such as ammonium sulphamate (Amcide). Within school grounds and certain other specified sites, the treated stump shall be immediately covered with black polythene and secured in place.

Note! The appropriate treatment of the stump resulting from a tree felling operation shall be considered an integral part of that operation and payment for this work shall not be made until both operations are completed to the satisfaction of the Supervising Officer. Similarly, any other grounds maintenance operations which can not be completed as a result of incomplete tree felling works may result in further financial penalties.

4.2 Thinning/Coppicing

The Contractor shall fell individual trees within the woodland as identified by the Supervising Officer, taking care not to damage any of the surrounding trees. Thinning works shall be carried out throughout the year to an agreed programme whilst coppicing works shall only take

place between November and February. All woodland works shall be in accordance with good forestry practices (Forestry Commission Bulletin No 14).

a). Fell Only

Trees shall be cut unless otherwise specified between 50mm and 75mm above ground level so as to avoid cutting into any roots systems. Coppiced stumps shall be left with the hinge portion flushed off and the trunk base in one angled plane. The tree shall then be trimmed out removing all side growth; the resulting brush wood may be left in the immediate vicinity but clear of cut stumps. The resulting trunk shall remain laid on the ground within the woodland, clear of cut stumps topped of at minimum diameter off 40mm.

b). Fell and Clear

Trees shall be cut unless otherwise specified between 50mm and 75mm above ground level so as to avoid cutting into any root systems. Coppiced stumps shall be left with the hinge portion flushed off and the trunk base in one angled plane. All suitable brushwood shall be chipped and spread evenly as a thin layer within the woodland area and all cordwood and other arisings to be removed from the site for disposal in accordance with Clause 1.7.

5.0 Non-Routine Tree Works

5.1 Cabling

All cable shall conform to the appropriate British Standard and shall be of either flexible steel or multi-stranded steel. Splices may be of either wrap type or by the use of steel “bulldog” clips. Thimbles of ether stainless or galvanised steel must be used to secure cables to bolts. The size of cable shall be of sufficient strength to ensure security of the branches to which it is attached. Cable less than 8mm diameter will not be acceptable on mature trees. Stainless or galvanised steel bolts shall be used to attach the cable to the branch. Screw eyes shall not be used except with prior consent of the Supervising Officer.

The bolt shall be fitted with a secure eye on the cable end and a nut and thread on the opposite end. There shall be an oval shaped steel washer fitted between the securing nut and the branch being cabled, a segment of bark matching the size of the oval washer shall be removed prior to the washer being fitted. Steel oval washers shall be made from 6mm metal plates, the short axis being at last 2.5 times the bolt diameter. Spacers shall be fitted to ensure that bolts remain in line with cables. The surplus portion of the bolt shall be cut off approximately 12mm from the securing nut and peened over to prevent the nut unscrewing. On completion the nut washer spacer and splice shall be sealed with an approved waterproofing compound to prevent rust. The Contractor shall ensure that only one cable is attached to one pair of bolts. The Contractor shall ensure that at least two “bulldog” clips per splice are fitted.

Cables shall be fitted so that there is neither slackness in the cable nor undue tension. When the works are being carried out on trees that are in leaf, due allowances shall be made to ensure slackness does not occur when the tree loses its leaf.

5.2 Propping

The Contractor shall supply and install wooden or metal props as specified by the Supervising Officer to support limbs or trunks from below. Props shall be supported at ground level by a foundation sufficient in strength to take the weight of the limb-trunk being propped. The size, type and position of the prop shall be specified in each case by the Supervising Officer.