

APPENDIX L: HIGHWAY TREE POLICY

1.0 Introduction and History

This Strategy sets out how Coventry's roads and street have been planted with trees and how the City Council proposes to maintain them in the future. The aim of the strategy is to protect, promote the benefits of and enhance our highway trees and to recognise the beneficial contribution that these trees make towards the character and appearance of the City. The Council has the responsibility for nearly 14,000 trees associated specifically with its highways and a detailed survey is currently underway to collect position, species, age, dimensions, condition and to collect this important data in an appropriate software package. This work is scheduled to be complete in July 2009 and will assist tree maintenance immeasurably.

1.1 The History of Coventry' Highway Trees

The name of Coventry comes from the pre 1000 AD name of Cofa's Tree, given to the area cleared by the Britons in what would become known as the Forest of Arden in order to establish an agricultural settlement. Tradition maintains that Cofa's Tree stood in what is now known as Broadgate.

Due largely to our predecessors, we in Coventry enjoy a city which has a considerable number of trees associated with the highways. The Victorians planted many roads and streets with trees from the very short species list that they had available to them like Lime, London Plane and Chestnut. During the inter war period and post war period many new roads and streets were planted with trees to make Coventry one of the most tree-populated cities in the country.

When the Lime and London Plane trees became too large they were managed by pollarding. This practice was, however, discontinued in the mid 1970's and growth was left more or less unchecked until the early 1990's. In October 1992 a regime of maintenance was adopted by the Transportation and Highways Committee to bring the majority of highway trees under stricter control in order to reduce the high numbers of damage claims being received, to improve peoples living environment by allowing more light into properties and to permit high sided vehicles to pass more freely.

2.0 The Benefits of Street Trees in cities

2.1 Benefits

The benefits of trees have long been acknowledged. But in the last decade there has been very significant reinforcement of the need for action on a worldwide scale to protect and conserve trees. In 1994 "Sustainable Development: The UK Strategy" was published as Britain's response to the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, the "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro. An important recommendation of this meeting was that individual countries should prepare strategies and action plans to implement the agreements. Local Agenda 21 was an outcome of the Summit and states as one of it's objectives "...to encourage authorities to develop long-term strategies for the management and care of trees in their ownership. These strategies should plan for the eventual replacement of old trees; enable authorities to take advantage of new opportunities for tree planting provided by other urban improvement measures...and integrate awareness of the contribution which trees can make to the quality of life in urban areas into the full range of local authorities activities"

The value of trees in towns has been known throughout the world since earliest times. Towns and cities everywhere bear testament to the value of the municipal tree.

Research in the late 20th century increasingly has shown a clear and positive correlation between a person's view of trees and recovery from illness and maintenance of general health.

2.11 Urban Trees and Pollution

Since concern about the effects of acid rain became widespread, a great deal of research has been undertaken worldwide into trees and pollution. Trees absorb carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, and carbon dioxide and, of course produce oxygen. By reducing levels of pollutants in the air we breathe, trees have a positive effect on the environment and human health. Trees also intercept large amounts of particulates that are a bi-product of combustion and increasingly implicated in the current asthma epidemic. Small particles which may be most damaging to people, are most effectively contained by trees. Studies in the U.S. show that an urban forest of 49 hectares will intercept between 48 and 170 pounds of particulates per day.

2.12 Trees in the Urban Landscape

Trees are amongst the most important landscape features in our towns and cities. Carefully located, a single tree can have a major impact on a street scene or view. Trees can define and give character to spaces, frame views, lead the eye to important landmarks and screen unsightly features. They can soften the appearance of large structures or barren areas and provide interesting colour, texture and movement that change with the seasons.

2.13 Noise reduction

Trees and other vegetation can play an important role in attenuating noise through reflecting and absorbing sound energy. One estimate suggests that 7db noise reduction is achieved for every 33m of forest whilst other reported field tests show apparent loudness reduced by 50% by wide belts of trees and soft ground.

3.0 Value of Council owned Trees

3.1 Actual value of trees

Many different ways of valuing trees have been developed to meet different needs and the City Services Arboriculture Team apply the most appropriate method of identifying the relevant value of a tree or group of trees. These include The Council for Tree and Landscape Appraisers method, the Helliwell method and the Council's own tree asset valuation method that is used in the HAMP asset valuations.

3.2 Property values

Several studies have analysed the effect of tree cover on the price of residential house sales and have concluded that values of properties in tree lined areas may, on average, be up to 6% greater than in similar areas without trees (Wolf, 1998 (c)).

4.0 Highway Tree Management

4.1 Programmed Maintenance of Street Trees

A Maintenance Strategy for all Council owned trees, including a Risk Analysis section, is being developed by the City Council and will eventually include all the Highway Trees to which this document specifically relates. The Citywide strategy document will define a cyclical regime of inspection for all trees at no greater than 5 year intervals.

4.2 Frequency of Pruning

A large number of Coventry' Street trees are of Lime and London Plane species. Because of their forest type growth they could be considered unsuitable to the modern urban environment. However they are there and until their condition requires them to be removed, they are subjected to regular pruning, termed semi or secondary pollarding, and barrel growth removal. This work will continue with the regularity and at the frequency set by the maintenance programme. Regular review of this programme will ensure that the frequencies are correct for each road or street and that the trees continue to provide a vital amenity value to the area.

4.3 Tree management to ensure healthy growth and development.

Appropriate tree management is needed, particularly in an urban area like Coventry, to ensure that trees are properly cared for through the various stages of their growth and development and to enable trees to thrive in a city environment. As part of that management, maintenance work will need to be undertaken to trees, from time to time to maintain them in a healthy condition and ensure optimum conditions for growth. Younger trees in particular need careful and more intensive management to help them develop into healthy mature trees in future years. Undertaking this work at the correct time of year is important, both for the trees health and for wildlife preservation needs.

We also need to take care of our veteran trees to ensure that they are not removed prematurely and that they pose no danger to the public. All management of veteran trees in the highway will be carried out in line with industry best practice on managing veteran trees.

4.4 Types of Pruning For Trees

There are many different types of pruning undertaken to manage trees. They are listed and described below as acceptable methods and good practice within the industry and the authority. Generally the Council will use the target techniques for pruning set out in BS 3998 and the European Tree Pruning Guide. Tree officers will use Risk Assessment procedures to identify the extent of work needed and these assessments will take into account the Authority's statutory obligations including consideration of protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Where evidence of birds nesting is found no work will be carried out until the nesting season is over.

4.41 Crown Thinning - This reduces the density of the tree's crown without changing the shape and form of the tree. Thinning reduces the amount of foliage and allows more light through the canopy or crown. It is ideal for admitting more light to gardens and windows and allows crossing and rubbing branches to be cleared.

4.42 Crown Lifting - This essentially means pruning off lower limbs close to the trunk to give more clear space below the crown which is essential for street trees and useful for allowing more light into gardens. It also prevents low branches obstructing paths, drives etc.

4.43 Crown Cleaning - Cleaning consists of the removal of all dead, dying and diseased wood and rubbish accumulating in forks. It also includes the removal of objects such as wire, ropes, clamps and

boards where this can be done without inflicting further damage on the tree. Cleaning out may consist of the removal of unwanted climbing plants, such as Ivy or Clematis, from the crown of a tree.

4.44 Crown Reduction - The tree crown is reduced by shortening branches, usually carried out all round the crown or canopy to maintain a balanced shape. It is useful for preventing branches touching buildings, roofs and guttering. It also prevents branches obstructing street signs, lighting and high vehicles.

4.45 Root Pruning - Cutting tree roots is highly undesirable and can affect the health and safety of a tree. Root pruning is a very specialised operation that should only be undertaken with the support and supervision of the Arboriculturalist. Pruning of buttress or other major roots can make the tree unstable. There are strict guidelines relating to severance of tree roots. Severance of more than 30% of a tree's root system is quite likely to cause slow dieback and eventual death of a mature tree.

4.46 Pollarding - This involves pruning all the branches from a tree at a certain height, usually between 2 and 5 metres above ground level. Since ancient times pollarding has been a traditional method for cutting timber and then allowing re-growth. It should normally be commenced when the tree is still young and then repeated at regular intervals through the life of the tree. It is now essentially a method of controlling the growth of the tree and to restrict the size of its crown. Pollarding is traditional in some localities and for certain species but it can be detrimental to the appearance of individual trees. There is a case for pollarding veteran trees to allow them to be retained without compromising public safety. Many ancient trees are in fact pollards, though locally these are rare.

4.47 Coppicing - This is a similar practice to pollarding, but in this method the tree is cut back close to ground level to promote multiple stem re-growth. Whilst this is generally used to promote stem growth for commercial harvesting it can be a useful practice for amenity and for conservation; for example coppicing willows along riverbanks to help bank stabilisation and for wildlife habitat.

4.48 Barrel Growth removal - This work is the removal of small shoots from the trunk or barrel of the tree to improve visibility along the highway, particularly at junctions. The growth is removed to a range of different heights from 3 metres to 6 metres, depending on the tree's proximity to nearby buildings.

4.49 Felling - This operation is the complete removal of a tree down to a stump. It may involve careful dismantling of the branch structure to avoid surrounding features like houses and gardens. Because of the complexity of this operation and the differing equipment required it is sometimes necessary to leave a tree stump and return at another time to remove it. When this happens, stumps will be left 1.5 metres high to remove the possibility of trip hazards. The Council will resist the removal of any established tree unless it is dead, dying or diseased or is identified as needing removal as a result of a Risk Assessment or planning consent. It may also be necessary to allow the felling of a mature tree if it is obstructing a public highway or Right of Way or if it is causing an illegal nuisance to an adjoining property.

5.0 Duties and Responsibilities

5.1 Owners of trees owe a duty of care and are legally obliged to carry out regular inspections to ensure that any foreseeable hazards can be identified and made safe. As a responsible landowner Coventry City Council has introduced a system of regular inspection and monitoring of its Highway trees, which is part of the Risk Management Strategy, mentioned earlier in this document. We will encourage other landowners to do likewise.

5.2 Owners of any trees that are a potential nuisance or danger to the public, or to public property will be asked to carry out remedial work. In the event of failure to carry out work we will use statutory powers to implement essential works and recharge the costs to the owner.

5.3 Coventry City Council has powers under the Highways Act 1980 Section 154, The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 Section 23 & 24 and in common law to ensure that members of the public are not put at risk when using the highway and these powers extend to cover highway trees.

6.0 Assessment of Requests For Pruning.

6.1 These guidelines outline Coventry City Council's approach to street tree management work and describe in broad terms, situations where we are likely to consider pruning, felling or other forms of tree management work for our street trees. Trees do require work from time to time, for example to reduce risk and liability, or to ensure that people are not deprived of a reasonable right of enjoyment of their property. All work to our trees will normally be carried out by specialist Arboricultural teams and will be in accordance with current UK and EEC legislation, guidance, British Standards and Codes of Practice, where they apply.

Guidelines for determining whether or not requests for pruning of Coventry City Council managed trees should lead to action are listed below.

6.2 Safety

Where there is a clear and foreseeable threat to the personal safety of residents or visitors or to property that is directly related to the condition of a tree, action will be taken to minimise that risk.

Unfounded fear of a tree or its threat will not normally result in action to prune the tree.

6.3 Obstruction of the Highway

The Council will seek to ensure that adequate clearance of the highway for the type of traffic using that highway is maintained at all times. Complaints about low branches over the highway will be considered and acted upon promptly.

6.4 Obstruction of street lights and road signs

The Council will endeavour to ensure that trees under their management do not obscure road signs or prevent street lamps from illuminating the highway.

The purpose of street lamps is to illuminate the public highway and where adequate illumination of the highway is present the Council will not normally take action to improve the levels of illumination of private property by pruning trees.

6.5 Daylight Loss

There is no right to light with regard to trees, so action will normally only be considered where the separation between the tree and the window of the nearest habitable room is less than 2 metres from the tree and the exclusion of light is unreasonable.

A 'habitable room' means a dining room, lounge, kitchen, study or bedroom but specifically excludes WCs, bathrooms, utility rooms, landings and hallways.

6.6 Television and other radio equipment

There is no right to good reception of any signal type. The TV licence does not guarantee or grant an adequate signal and in many cases it is possible to resolve issues of poor reception involving trees by finding an engineering solution.

6.7 Leaves, Seeds and Fruit

Leaves and seeds are carried freely on the wind and are largely outside the control of Coventry City Council. Clearing of leaves from gutters and pathways and weeding of self-set seeds are considered to be normal routine seasonal maintenance which property owners are expected to carry out. Pruning will not normally be undertaken to attempt to reduce the fall of leaves, seeds or fruit.

6.8 Honeydew

As with leaves, honeydew is not readily controllable by pruning and cleaning of affected surfaces is considered to be routine maintenance. Pruning will not normally be considered solely as a way of alleviating problems with honeydew.

6.9 Subsidence

Tree related subsidence damage is a complex issue and each case will need to be considered on an individual basis. An increasing number of insurance claims and mortgage enquiries relate to possible or actual subsidence of structures and buildings of various kinds. Insurance companies will frequently refer to an adjacent council owned tree and demand its removal or commence a claim against the Authority. Council trees are an easy target for many structural ills in nearby buildings.

Where damage has occurred the Council will require that adequate assessment and monitoring is undertaken to demonstrate that the tree is involved and that such evidence be submitted in support of any request for action. Monitoring of the subsidence or other damage, by expert professionals over an extended period of time is essential to establish the true reason for the problem. It must be remembered that the removal of a large tree can cause 'heave' which is the opposite effect to that which is planned.

Requests for action based on an un-quantified possibility of damage occurring at an unspecified point in the future will not be considered unless there are other overriding reasons to take action.

6.10 Direct Root Damage

As with subsidence, cases of direct root damage will be considered on an individual basis after detailed investigation and confirmation that the roots in question are in fact part of the adjacent council owned tree and not some other plant or tree.

6.11 Drain Blockage

As with subsidence, the council will require that adequate assessment is undertaken to establish that a trees roots are invading a drain. The most appropriate remedial action will be decided upon which has a balance between the nuisance experienced by individuals and the benefits offered by the tree to the wider community.

6.12 Footway crossing applications involving trees.

Where Coventry City Council receives an application for a footway crossing and there is a tree in the footway or verge, considerations will be made as follows.

- Does the property already have the right of access satisfied by another access for example at the rear? If yes, the application will be turned down and the tree will remain. If not, the tree may be removed to allow construction of the footway crossing providing other criteria set out in the Domestic Footway Crossing Policy are satisfied.

- Does the excavation needed to construct the proposed crossing, impinge on the. Root Protection Area as defined in British Standard 5837: 2005 Trees in Relation to Construction Recommendations? If yes, then the individual situation is to be considered by the City Services Arboricultural Officer to establish the extent of potential damage to roots. If no, the footway crossing application can proceed.

7.0 Tree Planting

7.1 New tree planting is at the heart of this strategy. Trees take decades to mature and to contribute fully to the treescape and local environment. The City is now benefiting from the foresight of previous generations and their tree planting policies. Many of Coventry's highway trees date from Victorian times and from between the wars with individual trees from very much earlier periods. Coventry City Council will plant a new tree to replace every tree felled in the highway. The replacement will be in the same location as the tree removed, or as close as possible unless circumstances dictate otherwise. Overall there will be no net loss in tree numbers in the highway and careful maintenance and replacement will ensure an increasing tree population in the future.

7.2 City streets offer a very unnatural environment for trees and they need special care and protection to fulfil their purpose. This can be costly. Streets are where most of our services cables, pipes and overhead wires are found, together with junction boxes, letter and telephone boxes, street lights, signs and access chambers. The presence of this equipment above and below ground makes it difficult to find large enough spaces to plant trees. In residential areas verges have often been surfaced with tarmac and many people now have driveways. Vandalism, traffic pollution, road salt and other pollutants also affect the health and life expectancy of tree species and must be carefully considered in species selection and siting.

7.3 Tree planting and establishment will be carried out in accordance with the City Services Tree Planting Procedure. This adopts good Arboricultural practice and guidance promoted by government agencies and professional institutions. We are committed to achieving a very high standard of workmanship and setting a good example to others.

The challenge will be to constantly increase public awareness of the city's highway trees, their importance and their contribution to the streetscape both aesthetically and environmentally. Consideration must also be given to the continuing development of this strategy document so that it keeps pace with ever changing threats to our trees from continuing urbanisation, increases in road traffic, imported diseases and other factors which are detrimental to the health of the City's trees.

The Authority should consider other medium term policies including the development of a volunteer tree warden scheme, the training of all Council employees who are directly or indirectly associated with trees to increase their awareness of tree issues, the establishment of procedures to protect trees from damage during highways and utilities work and the reappraisal of the use of the recently revised TPO legislation to protect specimen trees.

The Highway Asset Management Plan is intended to support and further the aims of this strategy and the Tree Policy in general.