

1. Introduction

Bourton on the Water Parish Council (“the Council”) has adopted the following strategy in order to maintain a consistent approach to tree management within the parish.

Trees are a highly valued feature of the parish and contribute enormously to the character and beauty of the local landscape and the natural environment. A large number of local trees are located on land owned by the Council, which places a high value on the human and environmental benefits derived from having a healthy and sustainable tree population.

Whilst trees have a positive value to their community, they come with an inherent risk. Whilst the natural risk of accidents as a direct result of trees is extremely low, it is the duty of a responsible tree owner to assess any risks and to take appropriate action to mitigate these through active management.

This policy sets out the Council’s approach to management of trees on land it owns, as well as for other trees outside its ownership.

2. Scope of policy

This policy applies to all trees on all land owned by the Council; the Council’s primary responsibility derives from the Occupier’s Liability Act 1957 & 1984 and the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974. Additionally, the Council has the discretionary power to provide and maintain trees on open spaces and amenity land under the Open Space Act 1906.

While there is a natural low risk of death caused by trees (1:10 million for trees in public areas) legislation requires an occupier/owner to be able to demonstrate they have taken reasonable steps to assess the risk, and put in place a proportionate and achievable strategy to minimise this risk.

Given the variety of land types and uses on which the Council’s trees are located it has been agreed that these areas will be split into 2 zones – Low Risk and High Usage – which will reflect the relevant footfall in each area.

Responsibility for trees which are on the public highway in Bourton remain the primary responsibility of the Highways Authority, Gloucestershire County Council. This responsibility derives from legislation set out in The Highways Act 1980. They will undertake action to reduce or minimise any risk, only when the tree is deemed to constitute a danger to passing traffic or pedestrians. On occasion, the Council may consider undertaking elective works to trees on public highways when such action is deemed to be in the community interest. However, any such works will be considered on a case by case basis only, and without prejudice or acceptance of permanent responsibility. In all other instances trees on the public highway will remain outside of the scope of this policy.

Responsibility for maintenance of trees on private land remains with the land owner, and any such trees are excluded from the scope of this policy.

3. The natural benefit of trees

Trees are an important feature of the landscape, and are integral to the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. They help to create an attractive environment, making the parish a better place to live, work, and visit. Not only do trees have a visual quality, but they also enhance the environment in other ways:

- they provide food and habitat for birds and other wildlife, thus supporting nature conservation and biodiversity;
- they improve air quality by filtering airborne dust, smoke and fumes;
- they absorb traffic noise in built-up areas and can help limit noise pollution;
- they act as a screen, increasing privacy in residential roads and gardens;
- they convert carbon dioxide to oxygen, increasing the quality of the air locally and helping to reduce the „greenhouse effect“;

4. Long-term objective

The principle aim of the Council's strategy is to maintain a diverse, robust and healthy local tree population whilst maximising amenity, biodiversity and other tree related benefits.

This will be achieved through regular maintenance work and the commissioning of replacement planting, whenever possible. The Council is committed to replanting trees following a tree removal through damage, disease or age. Wherever possible, one replacement tree will be planted for each tree removed, however, where this is not appropriate due to the location or for other reason, the Council will consider planting another tree on land which it owns in the vicinity so the tree population in the local area is not diminished.

5. Management strategy – routine works

The Council will retain the services of a qualified firm of tree surgeons who will be instructed on a 3 year basis to deliver tree inspection services, as well as make recommendations regarding tree maintenance works, and undertake works approved by Council in accordance with this strategy. This appointment will be reviewed every 3 years by the Village Maintenance Committee ("VMC"), and will also be subject to interim review should the company go bankrupt or significantly fail in its duties during the 3 year term.

The Council has commissioned an initial survey to establish a comprehensive tree list which will include the tree type, location (trees will be mapped using GPS location for ease of future reference), works required in the short- and long-term as well as frequency of future inspection. Trees will be allocated to 2 zones which will reflect areas of Low Risk and High Usage. These are as follows:

Zone 1: Low Risk (inspection every 5 years). This zone will include Jubilee Orchard, Baptist Cemetery, St Lawrence's Churchyard.

Zone 2: High Usage Areas (inspection every 2 years). This zone will include the Village and other Greens, Bourton Cemetery, Lansdowne Willows. Most trees in Zone 2 will also be Low Risk, but the frequency of inspection will be greater simply as a result of their location and higher footfall.

Following the initial survey, the Council will commission works identified at the time of inspection, and schedule future inspections in line with the recommended frequency. All works identified at the time of any scheduled inspections will be instructed without delay; a budget will be set aside each year to undertake these routine maintenance works.

6. Management strategy – ad-hoc works

Tree maintenance work will primarily be instructed as a result of information gathered during scheduled tree inspections. However, reactive maintenance will always form a key element of a responsible tree management strategy and would normally originate from the following:

- resident reports;
- reports from utility companies following utility maintenance works;
- vandalism;
- emergency works resulting from e.g high winds, storms or flooding

Any urgent ad-hoc works will be considered by Council as and when they arise so that funding in excess of the annual budget may be approved.

The Council will recruit a volunteer Tree Warden whose role will involve the periodic inspection of Council's trees and a routine inspection following a bad weather event, and will include regular reporting of issues arising to the VMC. Thus, any ad-hoc or emergency works may be identified between scheduled inspections and be instructed and completed without delay. The Tree Warden will attend relevant tree management courses as and when available, and the Council will make provision to fund training courses within its annual tree maintenance budget.