

OAKLEY PARISH COUNCIL TREE POLICY

The Tree Policy was adopted by Oakley Parish Council at its Meeting held on 2nd March 2021 and revised at its Meeting held on 12th July 2022.

To be reviewed November 2022

GENERAL POLICY

This policy defines the Council's approach to tree management on its land. It is intended to be a point of reference for the Public, Councillors and Officers to ensure a consistent and structured approach to the management of the Council's trees.

The Policy is a recognition of the importance that trees have in our efforts to reverse Climate Change and the extremely serious issue of Biodiversity Loss that impacts us all.

It sets out a proactive and systematic method of management that will both conserve and enhance our tree population and the amenity value of our land.

For sites of special character, or that have trees of particular significance, this general policy will be supplemented with the site's particular management needs – Linch Furlong, Community Orchard & Riverside Meadow and Island

TREE PROTECTION

Due care will be taken by the Council to ensure that damage to trees by mowing and strimming is prevented. Longer grass margins around trees may be left. Protection will be provided for newly planted or young trees where appropriate, e.g. timber-sided planting boxes and strimmer guards.

TREE INSPECTIONS

The Council has a duty of care for its trees and will inspect trees in high risk areas by a recognised tree surgeon annually. High risk areas will include such areas as adjacent to the public highway, major footpaths and other areas of high use such as the Council's play areas.

The Council will also consider requests to conduct tree work on the Council's land from members of the public. If the request concerns a potentially dangerous tree, the tree will be inspected as soon as practically possible. If the request is of a non-urgent nature, an inspection will be undertaken within 30 days. In all cases, the member of the public will be informed of this inspection policy and will be informed of any action to be taken resulting from the inspection.

The Council recognises the importance of mature and ancient trees and will balance safety with a duty to protect and enhance the environment. Higher levels of risk will be acceptable in areas of lower footfall (e.g. the middle of a woodland site) as opposed to highly visited areas (e.g. play areas). This will allow the Council to keep veteran trees to encourage biodiversity without creating undue risk.

TREE FELLING

The Council will avoid felling trees unless it is necessary. This will usually be for health and safety purposes, or to prevent the spread of serious tree diseases and pests. However, the Council reserve the right to fell trees to prevent overcrowding, to improve habitats or restore landscapes in line with site management or where a tree is inappropriate to its location and has a significantly detrimental impact on the appearance or amenity of a site.

Where necessary the Bedford Borough Council Tree Officer will be consulted for advice.

WOODY DEBRIS

Subject to a safety assessment and if appropriate to the specific site, large woody debris will be left in situ for the creation of wildlife habitats. Where possible, the trunks will be left standing, or lying on the ground in habitat piles. Tree stumps will also be left in situ where it is safe to do so as they provide a valuable wildlife habitat whilst they rot down.

HEDGES

Hedges are an attractive feature of our village, lining most of the access roads and providing a rural look and feel which is recognised in our Neighbourhood Plan. Hedges provide an important habitat for a wide range of species, offering food, shelter, protection from predators, wintering and nesting sites, and act as transit corridors. It is recognised that trimming hedges too severely can have a detrimental impact on their wildlife value. Where there is no negative impact on health and safety (e.g. visibility for motorists), the Council aims to have taller, bushier hedges. However, the Council will ensure that hedge growth does not impair the safety of highway users nor impede their access. Unless for urgent health and safety reasons, hedge cutting will not be conducted between March and August.

MAINTENANCE

Tree work will be prioritised and carried out according to identified hazard and risk. After investigation and inspection, the Council will produce a programme of works within the available budgets. The emphasis will be on planned, rather than reactive, tree maintenance.

The following categories will be used to categorise our tree works:

- **Emergency:** Dangerous trees requiring immediate attention

Timescale for works: Same day or next day wherever possible

- **Category One:** Essential works to mitigate hazard

Target timescale for works: Within 12 weeks of identification

- **Category Two:** Desirable works, e.g. to improve tree health, loosening/removing tree ties as the trees grow

Target timescale for works: Within 6 months of identification

- **Category Three:** Non-essential works, e.g. thinning out, formative pruning

Target timescale for works: Within 12 months of identification

Tree maintenance will be conducted by suitably qualified contractors subject to the nature of the work. All tree works will be conducted to comply with BS 3998: 2010 Tree Works - Recommendations.

Tree pruning will be carried out when deemed necessary following an assessment.

Pruning will be carried out:

- For health and safety reasons e.g. to remove some of the lower branches of a tree located near a road to enable traffic to pass safely
- Where it benefits the health of the tree e.g. pollarding will be conducted regularly on certain species where it extends the lifespan of the tree and prevents splitting
- Where it is in-line with site-specific management plans

There may be times when the tree maintenance the Council conducts does not meet the expectations of members of the public requesting works. In this situation, members of the public are advised to follow our Complaints Policy and Procedure.

When the Council will not undertake tree pruning or removal maintenance:

in response to natural occurrences that do not pose a health and safety risk, such as falling nuts, bird droppings, falling leaves, or sap exudation

- Where trees have a negative impact on television reception, where the canopy is blocking lighting, with the exception of street lighting
- Where the tree is blocking views from a residence
- During the nesting season (March to August), unless the work is for urgent health and safety reasons. It is an offence to intentionally damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built; therefore tree works will avoid this
- If a tree contains roosting bats (it is a criminal offence to recklessly or intentionally disturb bats, or to damage or destroy a roost). If work is required for health and safety reasons, the advice of Natural England will be sought
- Removal of dead branches (conduct crown cleaning) from trees located in relatively quiet locations due to their ecological value. However, if the dead or diseased branches pose a health and safety risk, or are felt to be impacting upon the tree's health, crown cleaning will be conducted

TREE PRESERVATION ORDER – Bedford Borough Council responsibility

A Tree Preservation Order (TPO) is a form of planning control that protects trees that make important contribution to their local surroundings. TPOs are made when trees are under threat of being cut down or damaged.

It is illegal to cut down, prune, or damage a tree protected by a TPO without Bedford Borough Council's consent which is obtained through a Planning Application. The unauthorised lopping or felling of a tree is a serious criminal offence and can result in a large fine and a criminal record.

The location of trees with TPOs and details of the planning application process for tree works is available at <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/planning-and-building/historic-environment/protected-trees/>

INCREASING TREE COVER WITHIN OAKLEY PARISH

The Parish Council's wishes to do all it can to combat Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss and to this end would like, where possible, to increase tree cover on the land it owns and manages across the Parish according to the following principles:

- The Parish Council will conduct an audit of the Parish to identify land where additional trees can be planted without adversely impacting nearby properties or facilities
- The types of trees would be selected such that their expected height and spread at maturity would be suitable for the location

- Varieties of trees would be selected to maximise biodiversity
- Owners of any nearby properties will be advised by the Parish Council of the intention to plant trees in the chosen location to allow them to voice any concerns they may have

MEMORIAL TREES

The Parish Council will consider requests for trees in memory of former Oakley residents. These will be considered at a time when new trees are to be planted and the Parish Council will decide on the location and species of memorial trees according to the above principles. The Parish Council reserves the right to refuse a memorial tree should it have any grounds to believe it would be contrary to the wishes of the commemorated person's next of kin.

Trees will be bought by the friends and family and donated to the Parish Council. The tree then becomes the property of the Parish Council and the donor does not retain any right to determine its future management. The Parish Council will nevertheless endeavour to ensure it is properly maintained and cared for. Once planted, the tree cannot be repositioned or removed from the site but if a tree becomes unsafe, the Parish Council reserves the right to remove it immediately in the interest of health and safety. The Parish Council accepts no liability for damage to any memorial trees from vandals or third parties or for replacing a tree at the end of its useful life.

The planting of Memorial trees shall only be carried out between November and March to ensure the most efficient growing conditions.

Plaques will be permitted and should be located at the base of the tree. No plaque may be fixed to a tree itself. Size, specification and wording will need to be approved by the Parish Council before installation and the cost of installation will be borne by the friends and family.

Bedford Borough Council Tree Officer has been consulted on this policy.