

London Borough of Wandsworth Tree Policy

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FINAL

1 Introduction

Wandsworth is one of London's greenest boroughs, boasting significant numbers of parks, open spaces, commons and tree-lined streets. The Council places great importance upon these features and in particular the value, and many benefits, of trees.

This policy not only acknowledges the value of the Borough's trees but identifies key responsibilities which determine a consistent approach towards tree management. The approach is presented as a number of components designed to give clear guidance to all stakeholders.

It is not only important to consider policy at a local level but to consider national and regional policies that will influence our approach to tree management. Such policies include the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF); Government White Paper 'The Natural Choice' (Defra 2011); The London Plan (GLA 2011), Green Infrastructure and Open Environments; and The Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy – Connecting with London's Nature. Whilst existing relevant local policy includes the Adopted Local Plan 2016, Local Development Framework, this policy will become a supplementary planning guidance to the Council's new Local Plan.

A key aim of this policy is to draw attention to the key factors regarding the way trees are managed in Wandsworth and to establish how the Council will support the long-term protection of trees, including the enhancement of tree stocks. Preserving the many benefits that trees provide to the borough is essential, how they can directly benefit the physical environment along with an important contribution to tackling climate change.

2 Why are trees important in Wandsworth?

To enable Wandsworth to protect and maximise the benefits that trees provide, an understanding of the many benefits of its tree resource is essential.

2.1 Environment

Trees contribute significantly to a range of environmental pressures, such as:

- Reducing the risk of flooding by intercepting rainwater
- Absorbing carbon dioxide and other harmful gases, enhancing carbon capture
- Filtering wind-blown dust and gaseous pollutants
- Tree canopies providing shade and creating cooler spaces, combating the effect of urban heat island

These contributions respond to the actions of the Wandsworth Environment and Sustainability Strategy (WESS).

2.2 Health

Trees possess numerous qualities which both directly and indirectly have a positive impact on the physical and emotional health of residents and visitors to the borough including:

- Providing a connection to the natural world
- Providing a sense of history and permanency with living plants
- Offering valuable shade, privacy, and screening
- Providing visible evidence of the changing seasons
- Reducing the severity of asthma and breathing problems through cleaning of the air
- Creating a positive impact to physical health by accelerating recovery from illness
- Enhancing mood and reduction of stress, directly improving sleep and reducing blood pressure

2.3 Aesthetic and Economic

Trees play a significant role in enhancing the visual landscape, especially in urban environments:

- Create formal avenues and focal points, thereby adding to the sense of place
- Softening areas of extensive development
- Older more mature trees offer a valuable link to the past and can be used as an educational tool
- Trees can emphasize the character of older buildings and conservation areas
- Trees are green 'capital assets', their presence can increase desirability of spaces for investment purposes
- Tree lined streets often increase the value of property

2.4 Biodiversity

Trees provide a significant contribution towards the borough's biodiversity:

- Trees create valuable habitats for a range of species, including bats, birds, and insects
- Mature trees can be managed to contain cavities and dead wood, further supporting a mix of species
- Street trees provide linear green links and wildlife corridors between existing open spaces

3 Management of Trees

To ensure the value and benefit of existing trees in the borough, the Council will work towards the retention of this provision by:

3.1 Understanding what we have

In order to measure required improvements, plan future tree planting and make decisions on addressing minority species, the Council will complete an assessment of the existing Council owned tree stock throughout the borough and review this regularly. We currently look after more than 60,000 trees in our parks, commons and open spaces, while around 16,000 grow in residential streets and on the borough's housing estates.

The borough's trees will be managed using appropriate digital systems which accurately record location, species, size, and condition, and where possible contain information about the historical management of each tree.

The value of any individual tree will be assessed and categorised by appropriate industry relevant methods, which will assist with informing decisions relating to development or tree removal.

Through data analysis, the Council will identify the species mix contained within the borough's tree stock. This will inform future decisions on selecting appropriate new planting and supporting diverse populations of trees which in turn will contribute to biodiversity at a local and regional level.

Records of all works carried out on trees (particularly street trees) will be retained to ensure sufficient tree 'history' is available, to inform decisions on future management of individual or groups of trees.

3.2 Maintenance and the work of contractors

All trees in Wandsworth will be managed in accordance with the agreed arboricultural contract specification.

The Council will only employ professional arboricultural contractors to work on borough trees, who are registered with the Arboricultural Association.

Tree contractors will be monitored regularly by the Council's greenspace management contractor in terms of performance, with particular regard to accurately carrying out specified tasks within set timeframes.

Where Tree contractors fail to complete works to the required contract standard, or cause damage, the Council will issue financial penalties and seek remedial action to rectify the issues wherever possible.

Regular surveys will be carried out on all borough trees. Trees in parks and open spaces will be assessed at least every 3 years, with street trees being assessed every 2 years.

Ongoing maintenance programmes will be specified by the Council appointed tree officers, with the nature of maintenance works, including pruning, to focus on:

- Maintaining tree health
- Ensuring trees do not pose a danger to public safety with appropriate actions taken
- Avoiding damage to the built environment
- Maximising the benefits of any given tree in any given location

Future arboricultural contract specifications will be reviewed and amended accordingly in order to consider changing requirements of borough residents, industry guidance and the long term aims to support climate resilience.

The Council will not undertake tree work operations which may result in unnecessary damage or injury to trees and will not therefore prune or remove for any of the following reasons:

- Shade prevention
- Interference with television/satellite signals and private CCTV operations
- Contact with overhead telephone lines
- Branches are overhanging neighbouring property
- Prevention of animal and insect droppings or squirrel access
- Because trees are perceived as being large or too big
- Seasonal occurrences such as leaf, flower, seed, and fruit fall

3.3 Utilising the skills of professional arboriculture services

The Council will ensure trees are assessed by suitably trained and qualified arboriculturists, assisting the Council with the decision-making process regarding planning applications, offering guidance and information to residents and businesses.

Any Tree Preservation Orders will be arranged in order to protect relevant trees where required due to their location, quality, value, or species. Applications and notifications for works to protected trees will be processed as per the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, with advice and comments provided to the Planning Department as appropriate.

Protected trees will be treated as such so as to ensure trees of high amenity value are afforded the protection they deserve. Where trees should be considered for protection, due process will be applied in each case and a full assessment of individual trees will be carried out. Advice on replacement tree species, specification and suitability of locations will be sought that is in keeping with both the detail of the order and the history of other trees in the area.

3.4 Working across the Council

Provision and protection of trees is a collective responsibility and needs to be considered by a wider number of Council services through their own plans, policies, and operational responsibilities.

Trees on housing land are also surveyed and managed on a cyclical basis. This ensures appropriate care for the many fine trees to be found on these sites. Trees on housing sites often have greater importance due to their location, with reduced intervention required.

Trees along the road network, specifically those on red routes, are managed by Transport for London. Close liaison exists between the Council and Transport for London's tree management team to ensure the red route trees are managed in a consistent manner to those managed by the Council.

The Council will ensure that close working relationships are maintained between different services, including schools, and landowners to ensure consistency in approach to tree management in the borough. Whilst this policy relates only to Council land, we will continue to work with other major landowners to ensure the value of trees are fully realised across the borough.

4 Planting New Trees

New tree planting is a vital element of managing tree stocks in the borough. Trees are removed due to age, disease, inclement weather conditions, specifically high winds, or in the unfortunate situation of vehicle collision. Ensuring sustainable new planting requires financial investment, as well as forward planning. Whilst the Council supports increased tree planting, it is very much aware that for any new planting to be implemented consideration need to be given to the required planning and lead times, the need to ensure new trees thrive into maturity in order to deliver their full potential in environmental, economic and health benefits. As it is not always possible to plant trees in all locations, the identification and assessment of viable planting sites is a requirement prior to planting.

4.1 Process

Tree planting will be based on clear achievable targets to avoid early failure in young trees.

New tree planting will deliver a net balance or increase in tree numbers each year. In 2021/2022, the aim is to plant 650 trees across Council owned land in parks, housing sites and on highways land, as part of an overall borough target of up to 1,000 trees including those planted on private land, community sites and new developments. and school land. Targets are based upon a number of factors including available tree pits, replacement schedules and tree supply.

All new planting will seek to achieve multiple benefits including, but not limited to, species mix, mitigation of poor air quality, provide attractive street scene or ornamental parks cape impacts and support biodiverse habitats and species.

Forward planning for tree planting will consider suitable locations (backed by data), available funding (in particular revenue funding), and the selection of tree species for the longer-term management of an increased borough tree stock.

The Council will ensure all new tree planting is sustainable by providing adequate investment in terms of tree provision and ongoing resources to maintain and manage tree stocks.

4.2 Provision

Selection of species is an important factor requiring careful consideration as there are significant differences between typical trees for parks compared to trees that are more suited to street sites. Species selection will follow the principle of 'right tree, right place' as guided by any locational considerations.

To help mitigate against pests, disease and biosecurity issues, the Council will procure trees from known and trusted sources only.

Tree specifications for procurement purposes (e.g., height, girth) will be considered carefully in regard to the proposed planting location.

Where it is suitable, native species will be given priority.

Newly planted trees will include suitable protection to assist establishment as outlined in the contract specification and will include some or all of the following including, wooden support stakes; rubber tree ties; galvanised metal protective cages; 'gator' watering bags.

4.3 Location

Planting locations will be determined and assessed. It is envisaged that a survey of all footways, parks and open spaces will be undertaken over the next 12 to 18 months (up to end of December 2022) to establish the potential for tree planting. Increased tree planting will increase the canopy cover in the borough and play a key role in tackling and adapting to a changing climate. Trees planted in target areas can be selected to improve air quality through interception of harmful particulates.

Planting street trees will only be possible in some locations. Consideration will be given to immediate surroundings and take account of sub-surface infrastructure, street furniture, local land use constraints (e.g., proximity to property, avoiding blocking sightlines at road junctions) and future impacts when trees achieve maturity.

Suitable sites will be assessed and if necessary, trial planting pits will be excavated to ensure the proposed location is adequate to sustain trees for the long term and identify any sub-surface infrastructure that would otherwise render the site unplantable.

Tree planting should not be undertaken at the detriment to existing or planned improvements to known habitats, valuable biodiverse areas (e.g., managed grasslands), or high demand sports pitches.

Locations known to have higher levels of air pollution will be given priority for suitable planting sites.

Sites that can contribute to strategically linking green spaces or creating wildlife corridors or those that are lacking in canopy cover will be given priority.

4.4 Pests and Disease

A significant challenge in urban tree management is the control of pests and disease, especially through trees imported from outside the UK. The increased trade of plants, timber and general goods and the more favourable conditions for the new pest and diseases are causing some diseases to flourish.

Specific occurrences of Ash Dieback, Oak Processionary Moth, Acute Oak decline, Massaria, leaf miner and bleeding canker of Horse Chestnuts are known in Wandsworth.

In order to promote biosecurity, the Council will:

Ensure the provision of trees brought into the borough for planting on council land are sourced through trusted supply chains.

Provide updated guidance and best practice for residents on planting in private gardens via published literature and via the Council's website.

Carry out regular assessment where known pests/diseases have been identified in order to manage sites appropriately and work with organisations such as the Forestry Commission and LTOA to share information and ensure current industry best practice is followed.

Where necessary, authorisation will be given for the removal of trees subject to pests or disease that may cause a risk to property or the safety of residents.

4.5 Working with local volunteer groups

Over recent years, strong working relationships have been developed with a variety of local stakeholder and community groups who have shown particular interest in the borough's trees.

Good relations with local volunteer groups can lead to significant benefits including a better understanding of management practices, increased knowledge of tree problems and sharing of information with local residents. Local groups often provide valuable information on tree condition and can assist with ongoing monitoring of tree health. This shared understanding can also lead to greater participation and community involvement at planting time as well as raising the profile of the value of trees.

The Council will continue to work closely with local groups wherever possible to encourage education on all aspects of tree management. This includes an active involvement with Wandsworth Tree Wardens, with further ongoing development of their role, support, and profile, in continuing to assist the Council in maintaining the value of trees in the borough. Work will also continue with other volunteer groups and schools to encourage a greater awareness of the value of trees, as well as the benefits of, and consideration, that is required when planting new trees.

5 Trees and Planning

5.1 Privately Owned Trees – Planning Applications

A high proportion of trees in the borough are in private gardens. Through the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the Council has established approximately 450 Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and approximately 50 Conservation Areas. By putting these in place, the Council will protect trees on private land so only trees with Council approval will be pruned or removed.

Applications for consent to work on protected trees are made to the Council via the *Planning Portal*. The Council manages these regulations to ensure that no trees can be illegally pruned or removed. Official written consent is required for any works to trees with Tree Preservation Orders or those located in conservation areas.

A greater emphasis has been placed upon protecting trees to the front of properties as these tend to be more visible to both residents and users of roads and footways alike, and therefore have greater value in adding to street scene quality and sense of place. However, assessment of the suitability of all trees with regards to further protection and overall contribution to the treescape of the urban area should be taken into consideration.

Certain tree species, for example, Sycamore, Birch and Robinia, are adept at establishing themselves by natural regeneration in unsuitable locations. In some instances, this can cause damage to property or infrastructure requiring significant pruning or even removal. In these cases, a fair and balanced judgement on the suitability of retaining a tree based upon the benefits offered against the potential risks it may pose will be made.

5.2 Applications - refusal and appeals

Applications for works to trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders will take 8 weeks to process and notifications for works to trees in Conservation Areas will take up to 6 weeks. If an application for a Tree Preservation Order is deemed inappropriate it may be refused. A thorough understanding of all site-specific information may assist with finding a resolution but failing this, the proposer can go to the Planning Inspectorate of England and Wales (PINS) to lodge an appeal. An Arboricultural Inspector is appointed who will receive written representations from both parties after which a binding recommendation will be made.

You do not need to be the owner of a tree to make an application for consent to carry out works. The owner's consent is required however if access to private property is required to undertake any tree works.

Ensuring a tree is safe and well managed is the responsibility of the owner, who may be found liable should any harm or damage be caused by a tree to property or infrastructure as a direct result from maintenance neglect. The Council will investigate any reports of unsafe trees in private property which are not being adequately maintained and will initiate appropriate action.

5.3 Private Land - Replacement of Trees

In cases of trees covered by Tree Preservation Orders, that are removed illegally, the Council will insist that a replacement tree is planted. However, where trees lie within a Conservation Area the Council can only *request* that a replacement tree is planted.

The Council will require a tree of the same botanical family to be planted as a replacement of an agreed size and specification, at a location as close as possible to that of the original tree. Any variations to this are to be agreed with Planning beforehand. The Council will support all attempts to reach amicable solutions by consensus.

In the event of a tree not being replaced, the Council will pursue the matter through the Planning Enforcement team who are legally equipped to serve a tree replacement notice to ensure the tree is duly replaced.

The Council will seek to maintain the number of trees within private properties, to increase the tree stock in both public and private locations, by providing advice, information, and guidance of how best this can be achieved.

5.4 Protection and Enforcement

As necessary, the Planning Enforcement team will be consulted if action is required on breaches of the Act., with appropriate professional advice utilised.

6 Summary

The Tree Policy is the foundation towards the completion of an Action Plan for Trees in Wandsworth in 2022. To support the demands of a changing climate and the Council commitments within the Wandsworth Environment and Sustainability Strategy (WESS), an Action Plan outlining what specific steps are to be taken to support the aims of this policy will be produced. This will include information about how specific projects follow the principles in this document, provide information regarding measures to protect and promote trees, plans to further the engagement of local communities, and outline guidance and advice for residents on measures they can take to plant, protect, and promote trees in a private setting.