



Harborough District Council

TREE WORK POLICY

Harborough District Council is geographically one of the largest districts in the county of Leicestershire. It covers some two hundred and fifty square miles, with a population of approximately 84,500 people. Leicestershire is not a well wooded county, and is generally intensively farmed. For this reason one of the most important natural elements of the local environment within the District is trees. Trees, whether appearing as individuals, groups or as woodlands, have a significant effect on our quality of life by providing direct and indirect benefits.

Trees enrich our environment by providing shelter, shade and colour, by filtering pollutants from the air and by absorbing carbon dioxide and producing oxygen. Most people value the trees and shrubs which grow on our parks and green spaces and enjoy the close contact with nature created by trees and their associated wildlife. Trees are living things, they change with the seasons and grow with the years; this is part of their beauty. Sometimes it is necessary to carry out work on a tree to repair damage or make the tree safe. However ongoing work which aims to unnaturally restrict the size and shape of a tree can be counterproductive, resulting in the tree producing more vigorous growth in response.

Harborough District Council receives numerous enquires each year from members of the public requesting works to be carried out on Council owned trees. Most of these requests are to prune or fell trees which the resident considers to be causing a nuisance.

The main concerns associated with trees are;

- dead, dying and dangerous trees
- dangerous branches
- trees causing damage to property
- obstruction of light to houses or gardens
- overhanging branches
- falling leaves or debris and aphid problems
- branches obscuring signs and street lighting columns
- branches affecting telephone lines
- interference with television reception
- Limbs or growth interfering with access/site lines

While we respond positively to tree matters involving safety issues, it is not possible, or desirable, to undertake all the works that the Council are requested. In some cases the work asked for will not resolve the problem and in other cases it will provide only a temporary solution, raising expectations that the work will be repeated whenever requested. Pruning works can also have an affect on the health and amenity value of the tree and most trees do not respond well to attempts to restrict their size by continual pruning.

The following list sets out how the Council will evaluate requests for work to be carried out on Council owned trees.

Dead, Dying and Dangerous Trees

The Council will remove dead, dying and dangerous trees.

Dangerous Branches

A dangerous branch is one which is dead, shows signs of decay or damage, or weak attachment to the tree. Where a dangerous branch is identified it will be removed or reduced to a safe point.

Damage to Property

Where it can be demonstrated that a tree is the primary cause of direct or indirect damage to property the Council will act to rectify the problem. Direct damage may include tree roots lifting paving stones, or trunks or branches damaging garden walls or fences. Indirect damage may include subsidence due to soil shrinkage resulting from water extraction by tree roots. In cases of damage to property it must be clearly demonstrated that the tree is the principal cause of the damage. A protocol has been included at Appendix A which will be used to seek assurance that proper investigations into the causes of subsidence have been undertaken.

Obstruction of Light to Houses or Gardens

It is usually very difficult to prune a tree in order to give a lasting improvement in light levels to a property. Often the extent of pruning required to alleviate light obstruction can be damaging to the tree or destroy its amenity value, and thick re-growth following pruning can make shading problems worse. The Council will therefore resist this course of action except in exceptional circumstances.

Overhanging Branches

The Council has a similar responsibility to a private land owner or neighbour in respect of overhanging branches and will cut them back in circumstances where damage is being caused or the tree is dangerous. Under common law a property owner has a legal right to cut back overhanging branches to their boundary. Ideally this work should be done to a good standard (British Standard 3998:1989

'Recommendations for Treework') by a competent person. Arisings from work by residents to cut back trees to the boundary structure should be disposed of by the resident.

Falling Leaves or Debris and Aphid Problems

The Council is not legally responsible for fallen leaves or other tree debris such as cones, seeds, blossom etc. Pruning of trees is not a solution to this occurrence and we would be extremely unlikely to fell a tree as a result of leaf litter etc. The same criterion applies to trees which host aphids with associated stickiness (honeydew) problems or trees that produce large amounts of fruit.

Branches Obscuring Signs or Street Lighting Columns

Where trees are blocking street lights, road signs etc. and jeopardise public safety the Council will undertake reasonable work that to alleviate the problem while retaining the tree. In extreme cases removal of the tree and replacement with a more suitable species may be appropriate.

Branches Affecting Telephone Lines

Effective use of telephone lines is the responsibility of the service provider.

Television Reception

The Council will not normally carry out works to trees, or remove trees in order to improve television reception. Aerials and satellite dishes should be carefully sited at the time of installation, with consideration being given to how neighbouring trees may grow in the future.

Other Operations

From time to time it may be necessary for the Council to carry out work on trees in response to its development and improvement priorities. Development priorities may include site or neighbourhood redesign, or the redevelopment of parks, gardens and other green spaces. When it is deemed necessary to remove trees for site redesign any statutory obligations will be undertaken to inform the Planning Authority, but the Council will only undertake consultation on the proposed change of use not the removal of specific trees. Where trees are removed, the Council will seek to replace them with species appropriate to the location and site conditions.

Trees in woodlands and other heavily wooded areas may also be thinned out periodically to encourage the growth of the most appropriate specimens and species.

Sponsorship of Tree Works

The Council will not accept offers of sponsorship to carry out tree works which would not be in the interest of the tree. Sponsorship will only be considered where the works would normally form part of the Council's scheduled work programme. No tree works would be considered which did not comply with BS 3998 (see below). In cases

where the Council would consider accepting sponsorship the work to be undertaken would be carried out by Council contractors working under the supervision of Council Officers. Except in the case of overhanging branches (see above) any unauthorised works to Council owned trees carried out by any person would be treated as criminal damage.

Standards

All works to Council trees will be carried out in line with British Standard 3998: 1989 'Recommendations for Treework'. All personnel undertaking these works will wear the appropriate Personal Protective Clothing and be adequately trained.

Tree Inspections

Harborough District Council is carrying out a rolling programme of tree inspections by independent experts in order to ensure that its tree stock is safe and in a healthy condition. The survey will record information on all Council owned trees and identify any tree which may pose a risk to the public or others. In the case of unsafe trees remedial actions will be taken within a time scale recommended by inspectors. Other works will be organised in line with the priorities identified by the inspectors. Works to trees recommended in the survey will only be notified to members of the public if the work is likely to directly affect their property. Appropriate re-inspection dates will be set for all trees dependent on their age, condition, location and species. If the public have any concerns regarding the condition of a particular tree the Grounds Maintenance Team should be contacted on 01858 828282.