

# St Albans Tree and Woodland Strategy 2024 to 2029

## **St Albans Trees and Woodland Strategy – Structure and Development**

### **1. Executive Summary**

The government has set itself the target of increasing England's woodland cover to 12% by 2060. To achieve this the government has pledged to a tree planting target of 30,000 hectares annually from 2023 until 2050.

This will help contribute to net zero greenhouse gas emissions, improve biodiversity, and encourage nature recovery. This will also help create a new economy of woodland establishment and manage and support rural communities.

Following Hertfordshire County Councils (HCC) declaration of a climate emergency they developed a Sustainable Hertfordshire Strategy. This sets out their policies and strategies needed to embed sustainability and highlights the need to develop a detailed strategy to manage the county's trees and woodlands.

HCC's Tree and Woodland Strategy sets out ambitions for Hertfordshire's treescape until 2030. This includes planting 1.2 million trees consisting of 100 new trees on the County Council's highway estate in each urban ward.

St Albans City and District Council understands the importance of an updated robust Tree Strategy. It provides a framework for developing the district's treescape whilst managing it in a safe and sustainable manner that will encourage biodiversity and nature recovery. This strategy details how St Albans Council will manage the trees it owns. HCC determine the policies and procedures for the highway trees which St Albans Council manage on their behalf.

This document will emphasise the importance of trees and the value they bring to the local population and environment. This will help justify and provide access to budget to help develop and maintain St Albans districts trees and woodlands.

Due to the ever-changing climate and environment this strategy will require regular review and update.

## 2. Vision

St Albans City and District lies within the southwest of the county of Hertfordshire and covers an area of 161 square km. The south of the district is more heavily populated while the central and northern areas are more rural, with over 81% of the district being covered by the Metropolitan Green Belt. The district is 20 miles north of London. The largest settlements are St Albans and Harpenden, followed in size by London Colney, then the two large, historic villages of Redbourn and Wheathampstead, and numerous smaller villages and hamlets. The historic environment is an important aspect of the district, with 19 conservation areas and over 800 statutory listed buildings. The remains of the Roman town of Verulamium and St Albans Cathedral are particularly notable historic features that draw visitors to the area. The green infrastructure of the district is well established with numerous parks, green spaces, and woodlands. The districts trees and woodlands must be managed to enhance and complement this local environment.

St Albans City and District Council's vision for the future treescape in the district is to increase canopy cover in line with, and where possible beyond, Government and Hertfordshire County Councils aspirations. This will include urban and parkland tree planting as well as woodland expansion and creation.

Both the Woodland Trust and Tree Council's planting aspirations go beyond those of central government and Hertfordshire County Council. Should external funding and land availability allow for a more ambitious planting program, then increased tree canopy cover targets maybe achievable. The Council will look to work with partner organisations and investigate alternative resource pathways to help deliver our ambitions.

The Council is committed to these objectives as it appreciates the important values trees have including:

- Providing clean air as well as controlling and storing carbon and other pollutants. They absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and some species are particularly good at controlling particulate pollutants.
- Controlling ground water levels and helping prevent and manage flood water. The development of their root structures also assists stabilising loose soil and prevents landslip.
- Providing habitat and numerous other ecological benefits. The more diverse our treescape is then the more varied the niche habitats it provides are, this will help develop a diverse ecological environment.
- Providing significant health benefits to the local population including mental health and spiritual benefits. Therefore, trees have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing on St Albans residents.
- They provide aesthetic and landscape benefits and help soften the built environment. Trees manage the microclimates of our cities including helping to cool them during hot summer weather, making our living environment more enjoyable.

Trees do bring significant and essential benefits to our district, but they also have several negative impacts, some of which need to be managed. These are detailed below:

- Part or all the tree(s) structure can fail, which can present significant risk to both people, including serious injury and death, and property damage. St Albans Council has comprehensive policies and procedures to manage this risk. These will be detailed in the “Tree Risk Management Framework”.
- Due to the extraction of water from a shrinkable sub-soil (when present), trees can cause subsidence and heave damage to property. Where this is identified and can be proven beyond the balance of probability, then the council will take appropriate action, including felling implicated trees, to alleviate the highlighted damage.
- Cause shading and interfere with telecommunication signals. The Council does not undertake work for this reason and expects homeowners to seek solutions to these issues.
- They drop leaves and other debris which can be perceived as a nuisance. Again, the Council will not undertake tree work activities to alleviate this issue. However, homeowners can exercise their Common Law right to prune back to their boundary line. Where the trees are protected, then an application to the Local Planning Authority will be required.
- Trees provide habitat for birds and other perceived unwanted species. All species play an important role in the global eco-system. Therefore, the Council will not undertake work for these reasons except where public health is an issue.

St Albans Council will consider all the positives and negatives the treescape brings. All planting operations will be specific and focused, and we will select appropriate species, planting stock and locations to ensure that the district’s trees and woodlands deliver on our environmental and ecological aspiration. Our trees and woodlands will then demonstrate long term sustainability and be resilient to climate change and the increase in pests and diseases that threaten them. Largely, this will involve planting broadleaf native species including those that benefit insect pollinators.

Increase in canopy cover can also be enhanced by encouraging natural regeneration, where this appropriate.

### **3. The Strategy**

This strategy, policies and action plan will outline how St Albans City and District Council will manage and develop the treescape throughout the district. The strategy will detail all management and planting activities to help ensure that we have a resilient, safe, and robust tree stock, which provides significant

benefit to the local population, helps combat climate change and enhances the local environment.

The trees and woodlands strategy must enforce and enhance the green infrastructure policies detailed in the Local Plan. This will help ensure that development within the St Albans district is undertaken in a way that promotes and encourages the environment and ecology of the district and adds to the local landscape by softening the impact of the built environment. The trees and woodlands strategy must remain current irrespective of the progress of the local plan so that the strategy reflects the policies within the Local Plan.

The Local plan includes policies relating to trees, the landscape, and the local ecology these can be viewed within the Local Plan which can be accessed by the link below:

[Current local plan](#)

### **Tree planting to increase canopy cover**

Average tree canopy across the whole of the United Kingdom is at approximately 16%. St Albans district canopy cover, across all wards, is at approximately 22%. St Albans City and District Council is still committed to further increasing the district's canopy cover with the aim of an increase by approximately 4% by 2040. To achieve this, we aim to increase canopy cover by 1%+ every five years. This strategy does not state specific tree planting numbers as canopy cover can be increased in several ways including species with larger canopies and natural regeneration.

This increase in canopy cover will provide all the environmental, social, and economic benefits as detailed earlier in this document.

The Council will focus on planting appropriate species in suitable locations and will try to achieve a more even spread of urban trees across the district. To achieve this, we will engage with businesses and partner organisations.

Locations will include woodlands, parks as well as other open spaces. In most situations selected planting sites will have limited vehicle and pedestrian footfall so that the "target area" in which they grow is limited, this will help reduce future management costs.

Highways tree planting locations will be determined by Hertfordshire County Council.

The number of trees planted will be determined through consultation with Councillors, the available financial resource, and can be adjusted to reflect perceived need and available resource.

The choice of species selected will be determined by the proposed location, the local environmental conditions, predicted effects of climate change and the current and expected threats from pest and disease. However, most trees species used, will be selected from the species list included within the appendix of this document. This list will be changed if the environmental

conditions or pest and disease threats change and will be reviewed on an annual basis.

The size of the planting stock used will be dependent on the location, the desired impact, and the available budget.

The district's residents will be able to request that trees are planted in particular locations and suggest species choice. However, Council Officers will be responsible for all planting activities and any requests will be subject to the Council's approval. All chosen locations will be selected to deliver the objectives outlined within this strategy.

Further increase in canopy cover can be achieved by encouraging natural regeneration, which incurs no financial cost and helps ensure that trees which become established are ideally suited to the environment in which they are growing.

The Council will also support public tree giveaway schemes similar to that operated by Hertfordshire County Council as well as encourage third party, both individual and corporate tree planting plans. This will include maintaining and further developing the tree sponsorship scheme.

### **Tree planting to replace existing trees that have been removed**

The Council will commit to replacing every tree that is removed and, where budget and suitable available space allows, additional trees may be planted. This will be at the discretion of the Council. Increased numbers may be achieved by planting smaller stock, which in most situations establishes faster than larger trees. Planting smaller stock is also more carbon efficient and means newly planted trees will achieve a quicker carbon neutral position.

Replacement trees should be planted as close as reasonably possible to the location of the original tree. However, where the location is not suitable for tree planting a more suitable location will be identified. Reasons for a location not being suitable may include proximity to property, utilities, or potential for planting pits to damage archaeology and the historic environment or are near the highway or other high value targets.

Choice of species for replacement trees will be appropriate for the location. This will help prevent future issues as well as provide an opportunity to improve the current situation. Where an inappropriate smaller ornamental tree has been removed, a larger more resilient species could be chosen, which could be more resilient to climate change and new pest and disease, as well as potentially increase canopy cover. Most trees will be chosen from the species list included in the appendices.

All planting and subsequent maintenance activities will be done in compliance with *British Standard 8545:2014 Trees from the Nursery to Independence in the Landscape*. This should help ensure that reasonable survival rates can be achieved. Grass cutting activities, including strimming, must be undertaken in

such a way as to ensure trees are not damaged. This requirement is included within the grounds maintenance contract but must be robustly enforced.

### **Procurement and biosecurity**

Further establish plant procurement protocols which ensure good biosecurity. These must be maintained to minimise the risk of introducing pests and diseases. This prioritises securing stock which has been propagated and grown in the UK, either from domestic seed or seed which has been imported in line with best practice biosecurity controls. Where possible, we will use nurseries accredited by the Woodland Trusts UK and Ireland Sourced and Grown Assurance scheme (UKISG).

The Council would also support any organisation that wished to establish and run a Community Tree Nursery, which would help ensure true local provenance of any trees planted.

When UK sown and grown trees are not available and alternative selections are not possible, we will ensure that trees are sourced from nurseries operating a best practice approach to quarantine and supply chain management. The plant health certification scheme can be used to help identify suitable nurseries. Nurseries will be required to have plant passports for any imported trees.

All contractors involved in tree planting must adhere to agreed procurement and biosecurity measures.

Debris from diseased trees, where applicable, should be disposed of as directed by the Forestry Commission.

By maintaining good biosecurity measures emerging pests and diseases can be prevented from entering the country and threatening the UK's tree stock.

### **Tree management**

The Council's tree stock will be managed in a safe and sustainable manner to ensure that the Council's Duty of Care to maintain reasonably safe trees is fulfilled and so discharge our legal obligations.

To do this, our trees will be inspected on a three-year rolling inspection process, or more frequently where required. Inspection will be undertaken by a competent person, holding as a minimum a level three arboricultural qualification. The Council's arboricultural officers will ensure that the inspection process is delivered on time, to the quality required and maintain a records of these inspections.

Where works are recommended for health and safety reasons or to mitigate property damage or actionable nuisance, then officers will engage contractors to undertake work. This will be done in compliance with procurement protocols in order to achieve "best value" for the Council.

Only contractors who satisfy the Council's procurement policies and procedures will be offered the opportunity to tender for any work. These

contractors will have demonstrated that they are competent and qualified to undertake work on behalf of the Council. Where possible local contractors will be used to support the local economy and a carbon neutral agenda.

Council officers will continue to undertake checks to ensure contractors operate in compliance with all health and safety legislation and work is completed to the required standard, in line with industry best practice.

All necessary works will be undertaken, to limit the impact on the local environment and ecology. This will include not undertaking work within the bird nesting season, between March and August. However, there are situations where work within the bird nesting season is unavoidable:

- Where the tree is considered to be in such poor condition that delaying the work would jeopardise the safety of people or property.
- Where the site may become waterlogged during the winter months as this would prevent contractor access or where driving across waterlogged ground could cause damage to Scheduled Ancient Monuments.
- Other exceptional circumstances outside the control of the Council's tree team.

In these situations, the contractors will be required to undertake a thorough documented inspection prior to undertaking the work. If bird nests or other protected species are identified, then the contractor will notify the Council's Tree Team who will make the appropriate arrangements and undertake any necessary communications.

To help facilitate work being undertaken outside of the bird nesting season the cyclical inspection process of St Albans Council's trees will be scheduled to allow work to take place outside of the bird nesting season.

The above approach, in combination with the proposed increase in canopy cover will provide more than adequate protection for birds and be compliant with Wildlife Protection Legislation. It will also provide an increase in potential habitat which will help increase wild bird numbers over time.

### **Trees and the planning process**

St Albans City and District Council, as the Local Planning Authority has a duty to ensure that trees are given due consideration when assessing planning applications and granting planning permission, by protecting appropriate trees and use of planning conditions.

Where there are trees associated with a planning application, the applicant must submit an arboricultural report in compliance of BS5837:2012 (Trees in relation to design, demolition, and construction). This should highlight the trees which should be retained and how they will be protected throughout the development process. This report will be scrutinised by an appropriate person as determined by the planning case officer.

Biodiversity net gain legislation places a statutory duty on the local planning authority to ensure that there is a minimum of at least a 10% increase in tree cover when trees are removed. This will help ensure that tree canopy cover will increase when granting planning permission.

A landscape report and plans must also be submitted detailing any potential tree planting associated with the planning application. This report and plan will again be scrutinised by an appropriate person who will also ensure that development site tree planting requirements detailed in the local plan are delivered.

On completion of a development, officers will ensure that all landscape and tree planting conditions have been discharged to the appropriate standard.

Trees of appropriate quality and visual amenity, as described in The Town and Country Planning Act 1990, which are not already under statute protection and have the potential to be adversely affected by a change of land use may be protected by serving a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). Location of all protected trees will be visible on the Council's Geographical Information System (G.I.S).

When assessing trees for the potential of serving a TPO, the Council will not only assess their individual visual amenity but also their collective visual amenity. The Council will then decide which trees are appropriate to protect and the best TPO designation to protect those trees (individual, group, woodland, or area).

In line with government guidance, TPO's will not be served just to prevent development and only trees with significant visual amenity will be protected.

Applications to undertake work to protected trees will be assessed by Council Officers, to ensure that all work undertaken to protected trees is appropriate. Where removal is approved, in most instances, replacement trees will be conditioned when TPO trees are affected.

Where illegal tree work is undertaken, if appropriate, St Albans Council will seek to prosecute the perpetrator. This will help deter illegal tree work.

### **Trees and climate change**

As we become more aware of the detrimental effects that climate change has on our local and global environment, governments are taking action to stop this and where possible reverse this environmental decline.

St Albans City and District Council has a Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy, which details priorities and actions the Council will deliver to achieve net zero by 2030, across all buildings, services, and operations.

All operations undertaken to deliver on the development and management of our tree stock will be undertaken in compliance with the Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy. This provides the potential for the Councils tree stock



to contribute to combating climate change and hopefully build in resilience to the detrimental effects climate change may bring to our trees and woodlands.

Our tree stock must be resilient to the changing weather patterns brought by global warming, which include more drought periods and an increase in volatile storm events.

With the change in our climate there has been a significant increase in the number of pests and disease which threaten the UK's tree stock. The strategy aims to map out a path to manage and combat this threat.

### **Trees and ecology**

Our trees and woodlands play an important part in supporting the local ecology, by providing habitat and a food source. Therefore, it is vital that we maintain a tree stock that not only supports our local ecology but also helps create a diverse and increasing species mix. This will help support both national and local nature recovery strategies, including Hertfordshire County Council Local Nature Recovery Strategy due to be published in autumn 2025.

To achieve this the Council must strive to increase tree cover in our towns and parks, as well as develop our current woodlands and create more. This must be done using appropriate tree species and planting locations.

Where possible tree corridors will be created to join existing woodland areas. This can only be achieved where St Albans City and District Council own appropriate land, or in partnership with private landowners and other stakeholders.

Species choice should include native broadleaf trees and those that benefit insect pollinators. This should help support endangered and protected species, again this will encourage a diverse ecological environment.

There is a conflict between retention of deadwood and our legal responsibility to maintain reasonably safe trees. However, where possible we should maintain both standing and fallen deadwood, as this is of huge ecological value. Our mature and veteran trees are also of extreme ecological importance and must be managed to help ensure their retention. This will include ensuring that all our ancient and veteran trees are given the legal protection they deserve and considered in line with all national and local planning policy.

These trees provide a historic connection and a sense of place, and we will log all such trees on the Ancient Tree Inventory (ATI). This will help monitor any threats and plan how to conserve these nationally important trees.

### **Public consultation and community engagement**

Because of the close connection between our trees and woodlands and the local community it is important that we engage with the community in our management and development of our treescape. This engagement will allow us to educate the community with the many values trees bring and the

processes the Council use to manage the often-conflicting issues of our trees and woodlands. We will update and expand the Council's website to help communicate with residents on all issues involving trees. In addition, we will investigate other methods of communication including digital platforms and social media channels.

This will include a process of public consultation when decisions and management activities are going to have a significant impact on the local treescape. This will include major planting schemes, large scale felling and tree work activities. Where trees are highlighted for felling then "tree removal notices" will be attached to the trees concerned and the appropriate Ward Councillors notified. The tree removal notice will include a QR code that will connect to the correct page of the Councils website. This page will detail why individual trees are being removed.

The process of engagement should include a drive to educate the public on the many values and benefits trees bring to the local community. As well as explain why the Council takes some management decisions which are considered by some as controversial. This will help encourage community involvement and a belief that St Albans council are managing the districts tree stock proactively and responsibly.

St Albans district is fortunate to have an active tree warden scheme, initiated by the Tree Council, and this should be maintained and further developed to help support the Council in its management activities.

The Tree Warden scheme would be further developed by recruiting more volunteers and providing education and training to all volunteers to help them in their activities. The Council's tree officers will give appropriate direction so that all tree warden activities are focused and targeted, as well as provide help and support.

The activities which tree wardens become involved in depends on the knowledge and experience of the volunteers and the level of training and support provided. Potentially volunteers could assist in the following areas:

- Organise and help with community tree planting projects.
- Help care for and maintain trees, including watering and monitoring recently planted young trees.
- Undertake basic maintenance activities, such as stake and tree tie removal.
- Basic inspection and monitoring of trees, literally the Councils eyes and ears on the ground.
- Educate the public about the local treescape and perhaps undertake school visits to talk to the local children about trees.
- Organise and undertake fund raising activities to help deliver the Councils ambitious tree planting targets.

The success and degree of involvement of the scheme is largely dependent on the number of volunteers involved, their knowledge and commitment as well as the commitment and skill of those who manage it.

Due to limited council officer time, the Tree Warden scheme would need to be self-managed or managed by an outside partner organisation. This would still need some Officer input to ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach to tree management across the district. This project has been included in the action plan.

The recruitment of wardens is vital, and this will be assisted by use of the Councils website and social media.

The Council's Tree Officers can provide technical training and provide technical support to volunteers.

### [Tree Council Tree Wardens](#)

#### **4. Action Plan and Policies**

Specific policies to deliver the objectives of this tree strategy have been developed, together with a timed actioned plan.

The policies detail what actions will be undertaken to proactively manage the districts tree stock in a sustainable and effective manner.

The action plan will detail who and by what date actions will be completed and the level of resource required.

Both the policies and action plan can be found in the appendices of this document.

#### **5. Monitoring and review process**

To ensure that objectives and actions of the Tree Strategy are delivered there must be a robust monitoring process.

This monitoring process will be undertaken on a six-monthly basis to ensure all policies are being adhered to and all proposed actions are being completed within the designated timeframe. The monitoring process will include assessing performance against selected Key Performance Indicators including:

- Planted tree survival rates.
- Number of trees planted and distributed through initiatives such as the tree give-away scheme.
- Number of Tree Wardens.

The Tree Strategy, Policies and Action Plan should be reviewed and updated in order that it continues to meet the needs of managing and developing the districts treescape. The strategy should be reviewed by 2029.

## 6. **Appendices**

- Tree Policy and Action Plan
- Tree Planting species list

## 7. **References**

- The Woodland Trust Tree Strategy Template
- The Tree Council – Website
- The Arboricultural Association – Website
- The English Tree Strategy Consultation 2020
- Hertfordshire County Councils – Trees and Woodlands Strategy
- British Standard 8545:2014 - Trees from Nursery to Independence in the Landscape
- British Standard 5837:2012 – Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction