



Tree Policies & Action Plan

2024 to 2029

INTRODUCTION

The first Tree Strategy for St Albans City and District was published in 2004 and reviewed in 2010 and 2016. Since that time there have been several changes in legislation including the introduction of the Environment Act 2021. Changes to national planning policy has also impacted the management and protection of trees.

St Albans City and District Council has re-entered into a service level agreement with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) to undertake the management of Highways trees, in the urban environment. St Albans Council is only responsible for managing the health and safety risks presented by HCC's trees.

A key element of the Tree Strategy is the Action Plan, which sets out clearly the Council's priorities over the next five years. The Action plan has been reviewed to ensure that the strategy meets the challenges which the districts treescape may encounter over the next five years.

The challenges which our trees may face over the next five years will include environmental factors such as Climate Change, an increase in sustainability targets and an ever-increasing threat from pests and disease.

The role and importance of trees in addressing our changing environment and climate is becoming more widely understood. There is also a growth requirement to increase the built environment. The Council has an increased financial constraint influencing how it manages the current tree stock and plans for future planting and development of the districts treescape. The following policies and action plan help St Albans City and District Council deliver on its management objectives and tree canopy cover to increase targets.

2024/29 POLICIES

Policies for the Management of all Trees on District Council property

Policy 1:

The Council will seek to create a varied and sustainable tree population. Its development and expansion will be encouraged by new planting of amenity trees including native pollinator friendly species resilient to climate change where appropriate. The average canopy cover across all wards is at approximately 22% and the Council will seek to increase average canopy cover by 4% by 2040.

Any trees removed shall be replaced, unless there are special circumstances preventing this. Where the location of the original tree was not ideal a more suitable location, as close as possible to the original tree will be identified. The most appropriate species for the location will be selected, with native species, species resilient to climate change and those which will maximise wildlife benefit.

Where possible natural regeneration of trees will also be encouraged.

Policy 2:

Using the St Alban's Council Website the Council will encourage and enable better understanding of the management of trees to promote greater community ownership and awareness of the districts treescape. This will include making more information available to residents about the Council's management activities including the Council's policy on replacement planting.

Policy 3:

The Council will maintain the highest possible standards of tree care and management by:

- Surveying the tree stock on an up to 3-year cycle & and more frequently when appropriate. Robust survey records are maintained.
- Ensuring that all recommended tree works are completed within the recommended time frame to protect both people and property.
- Working to standards set within BS 3998 (2010) and subsequent revisions.
- Adopting best practice according to all relevant legislation and research.
- Avoiding work that results in the unnecessary loss of wildlife habitat. This will include working outside of the bird nesting season where practically possible.
- Discouraging practices by other agencies that threaten the establishment of new trees as well as existing trees.
- Ensuring that all tree work activities are undertaken by appropriately qualified and audited contractors and operatives. Where possible local contractors will be used.

Policy 4:

Following inspection, a priority will be given for the recommended works, this will enable the Council to organise a balanced schedule of works. The Council will maintain a rolling programme of cyclical works highlighted by the Tree Team. This rolling programme of recommended works will be the minimum to abate the issues identified. Recommended works may include:

- Tree removal which may include removing the stump.
- Coppicing.
- Pollarding and re-pollarding.
- Crown reduction.
- Crown thinning including the removal of crossing, weak or competitive branches.
- Crown lifting.

Contractors will be instructed to undertake any of the above works for the following reasons:

- When a survey had determined that a tree or part of a tree has identifiable hazards which then presents a foreseeable risk to people or property.
- After inspection by one of the Tree Officer's following an enquiry by a member of the public concerned about a tree.
- When technical evidence can demonstrate beyond the balance of probability that a tree is causing indirect property damage, subsidence.
- When a tree's relationship to nearby property causes excessive problems.
- When a tree or part of a tree, including epicormic growth, is obstructing footpaths or driveways or is restricting vehicle sightlines and creating safety issues.
- In compliance with any Act of Law including as the Highways Act 1980.
- In accordance with good arboricultural management when the removal of tree(s) may be undertaken to benefit the long-term development of adjacent better-quality trees

The Council will not normally undertake work to trees for the following reason:

- Blocking light and causing shade.
- Issues created by a tree dropping seasonal debris, including leaf and fruit fall.
- Loss of television or satellite signal.
- Unproven allegations of subsidence or other direct property damage.
- Construction of drop kerbs or new driveways.
- Residents do not like the tree.
- Perceived threat because of a tree's size.
- Because of bird droppings or aphids.
- Because the tree is causing perceived medical issues.
- To facilitate the erection of fences, walls, play areas and sports pitches.

There may be other solutions to a number of these issues. The public may also be able to resolve or reduce the issues by exercising their Common Law Rights.

Policy 5:

The removal of trees, or heavy pruning, will be resisted unless there are sound arboriculture or other reasons, (e.g., disease, structural damage, or a clearly identified threat to an ancient monument).

Policy 6:

The Council will encourage sustainable practices in tree contracts and aim to maximise the recycling of tree related 'waste' created by its tree management. Maintenance works will make best use of resources by efficient work planning and the recycling of by-product material wherever possible by the following means:

- Brushwood will be chipped and spread in the work area when conditions allow or taken for use elsewhere.
- Cordwood will be left stacked in the work area where conditions allow. This will help encourage biodiversity and promote the local ecology.
- Materials removed from works will be utilised for mulch, biomass, or other appropriate forms of recycling.
- Contractors will undertake a full inspection of a tree prior to undertaking any work to ensure that birds, and other protected species, will not be disturbed by the work. All contractors used by the Council will be audited to ensure they are competent to undertake basic assessments. Contractors are required to complete a site-specific risk assessment to ensure they are completing this process. Should any protected species be identified then the contractor will be required to notify the Council who will take appropriate action to ensure compliance with all wildlife legislation.

Policy 7:

The Council will endeavour to work with statutory undertakers to help prevent damage to Council owned trees through excavation work within the proximity of trees. The Council will also work with residents to help prevent damage to the tree growing environment including damage to verge sides by parked cars.

Policy 8:

The Council will ensure that damage to young trees does not happen when grass cutting, and other grounds maintenance activities are undertaken. Strimming around trees and mowing excessively close to them is not permitted to prevent damage. This will be achieved by working closely with the ground's maintenance contractor.

Policy 9:

As far as possible the Council will ensure that any ancient and veteran trees, for which it is responsible, are retained and protected as special historical, wildlife and

landscape features. Ancient and veteran trees will be logged on the Ancient Tree Inventory.

Policy 10:

Where trees have been implicated to be causing subsidence; before any action is taken a claimant must demonstrate that “beyond the balance of probability” a tree or trees can be implicated in the subsidence damage. When this information has been provided then the recommended work will be assessed and if appropriate undertaken:

- Removal of tree(s) will be carried out if no other measure is effective considering the evidence provided.
- Where trees have a known claims history then these will be managed proactively.
- Trees that grow from seed or root suckers that are more likely to cause future conflict will be removed.
- The most appropriate forms of pruning to trees in high-risk areas will be used including, crown reduction works or pollarding and re-pollarding.

Policies for Street Trees on Hertfordshire County Council property**Policy 11:**

The Council manage Highways trees on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council but only for health and safety reasons. This will include a survey process approved by Hertfordshire County Council. Any recommended tree works will then be issued to appropriately approved contractors and undertaken in compliance with Hertfordshire County Councils procedures and policies. All communication protocols will be maintained as directed by Hertfordshire County Council.

Policy 12:

Hertfordshire County Council will be responsible for the replacement of any removed highways trees. This will include selection of species and planting location.

Policy 13:

The Council will not normally support the removal of trees for vehicle crossovers, unless the tree is of limited life expectancy or is small enough to be relocated elsewhere.

Policy 14:

The Council will support measures that discourage verge parking by road vehicles, and damage to verges caused by adjoining building works where verge side trees maybe adversely affected.

Policies for Woodlands and Wooded Commons

Policy 15:

The Council will ensure its woodlands have up to date management plans and encourage the production of plans for woods outside of Council ownership, in particular those which are County Wildlife Sites.

Policy 16:

The Council will ensure that its woodlands are managed as a long-term sustainable resource for the public, for recreation, education, and nature conservation. This management will be in-line with national and local Biodiversity Action Plans, and consistent with guidelines for safeguarding Protected species as produced by the Forestry Commission.

Policy 17:

The Council will offset, where possible, some of its costs incurred through woodland management by the marketing of timber and other woodland products, grant aid and/or their contracts requiring such offsets.

Policy 18:

The Council will encourage expansion of urban woodland in appropriate locations, ensuring the selection of native species of local provenance and a layout to reflect the local woodland character. Natural regeneration will be supported on appropriate sites.

Policy 19:

The Council will manage woodland to fulfil its obligation as owners to ensure the safety of people and property. Woodlands are natural places, and the level of acceptable risk must reflect this and be proportionate to the location.

Policies for Parks, Open Spaces and Railway Trail Trees for which the Council are responsible.

Policy 20:

The Council will seek to develop long term management plans for trees in parks and open spaces. These management plans must reflect the objectives and actions of other plans for the same site.

Policies for Closed Churchyard and Cemetery Trees for which the Council are responsible

Policy 21:

The Council will seek to develop long term management plans for trees in closed churchyards and cemeteries to identify areas of risk; prevent decline; and guide the planting of new trees in the future.

Policies for Council Housing owned Trees

Policy 22:

Housing trees in residential gardens are to be maintained by tenants as part of their tenancy agreement, except in cases subject to the Housing Department's discretion.

The Council is currently exploring expanding the cyclical tree survey to include Housing trees in residential gardens.

Policy 23:

Trees in communal gardens maintained by the District Council will be managed to ensure they fulfil health and safety requirements, do not pose a risk to people or structures and enhance the quality of the environment.

Policies for the Protection of Trees and Hedgerows on land outside the District Council's control

Policy 24:

The Council will:

- Seek to protect trees of public amenity and environmental value by the serving of Tree Preservation Orders. Assessment of trees suitability will be made by a suitably qualified and experienced Council officer.
- Tree preservation orders will be periodically reviewed to ensure they contain accurate information.
- Promote good standards of tree care and woodland management.
- The Council will ensure that trees are given due consideration when assessing and granting planning permission by imposing planning conditions to protect trees according to BS 5837 (2012) and subsequent revisions where appropriate. The Council will resist development which it considers makes inadequate provision for the retention of trees and woody plants or compensation for the loss of trees and woody plants.

Policy 25:

The Council will give consent for works to a tree or woodland protected by a Tree Preservation Order or conservation area status provided it is satisfied that:

- The long-term health and appearance of the tree or woodland will not be impaired.
- The works will not unjustifiably inhibit or prevent the full and natural development of the tree.
- The work is necessary to its continued retention and consistent with good arboricultural practice.

- In the case of woodland, the proposed work is consistent with the principles of sound woodland management.
- There are sound arboricultural and/or safety reasons for the work.

When consent to remove a tree is given then, in most situations, the planting of a replacement tree will be conditioned.

Policy 26:

Any unauthorised works to protected trees, both above and below ground, will be investigated and enforcement action taken where expedient.

Policy 27:

There will be a presumption against the removal or destruction of any hedgerow that is considered important according to the Hedgerow Regulations 1997.

Any unauthorised works to important hedgerows will be investigated and enforcement action taken where appropriate.

Policy 28:

The Council will normally require new development to contribute to the overall tree population through on-site structural planting and on-going management. Or through planning conditions and 'Section 106 Agreements' dedicated to the planting of trees in the locality.

New woodland planting may be required if the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans proposes urban extensions into the green belt.

Policy 29:

The Council will encourage all major tree owning organisations to adopt best practice in the care of their trees, especially where those trees contribute to the character of the district.

Maintenance and development of the Tree Warden Scheme**Policy 30:**

The Council will look to maintain and further develop the Tree Council's tree warden scheme by the follow initiatives:

- Actively encouraging recruitment of more volunteers.
- Providing advice and training so that volunteers can become more involved in the management of the districts tree stock and the education of residents in tree related issues.
- Look to outside partner organisations to manage the scheme.

Monitoring and review of Tree Strategy**Policy 31:**

The Council will monitor performance against the policies and actions detailed in the strategy every six months to ensure all actions are being undertaken within the time frame stated.

The strategy will be reviewed in 2029 to ensure that it remains current and compliant with all statute legislation.

ACTION PLAN 2024-2029

No	Action	Who	Cost	Target date
1	Develop specific policies for managing key existing pest and disease threats	Trees and woodlands section	Existing staff resource	September 2024
2	Develop an operational "Tree Risk Management Framework".	Trees and woodlands section	Existing staff resource	July 2024
3	Develop plans for managing threats from other pests and diseases which may in future threaten the UK's tree stock	Trees and woodlands section	Existing staff resource	December 2024 ongoing
4	Write biosecurity standards into tree planting specifications	Trees and woodlands section	Existing staff resource	September 2024
5	Write a tree planting strategy to deliver the Council's tree planting aspirations	Tree and woodlands section	Existing staff resource	September 2024
6	Revise the list of local contractors used to undertake work on the Council's behalf. The Council will source all contractors following the Council's procurement policies and protocols	Trees and woodlands section	Existing staff resource	September 2024
7	Review and publish the district's tree safety strategy	Trees and woodlands section with input from	Existing staff resource	December 2025

		legal and finance		
8	Update and publish the tree sponsorship scheme	Trees and woodlands section	Existing staff resource	September 2024
9	Confirm and update the list of Tree Wardens and continue to develop the Tree Warden Scheme including approaching partner organisations to manage the scheme.	Trees and woodlands section	Existing staff resource	July 2024 and ongoing
10	Review procedures for dealing with subsidence claims in line with good practice	Trees and woodlands section	Existing staff resource	March 2025
11	Develop a strategy for consulting local communities for major new planting and tree work activities	Trees and woodlands section	Existing staff resource	September 2024
12	Develop tree management plans for the district's parks and open spaces in conjunction with any existing Greenspace Action Plans	Trees and Woodlands section Parks and Green Spaces section	Existing staff resource	December 2024
13	Develop tree management plans for the district's closed churchyards and cemeteries	Trees and Woodlands section	Existing staff resource	December 2024
14	Update website to highlight community opportunities to become involved in tree planting activities	Trees and woodlands section	Existing staff resource	September 2024