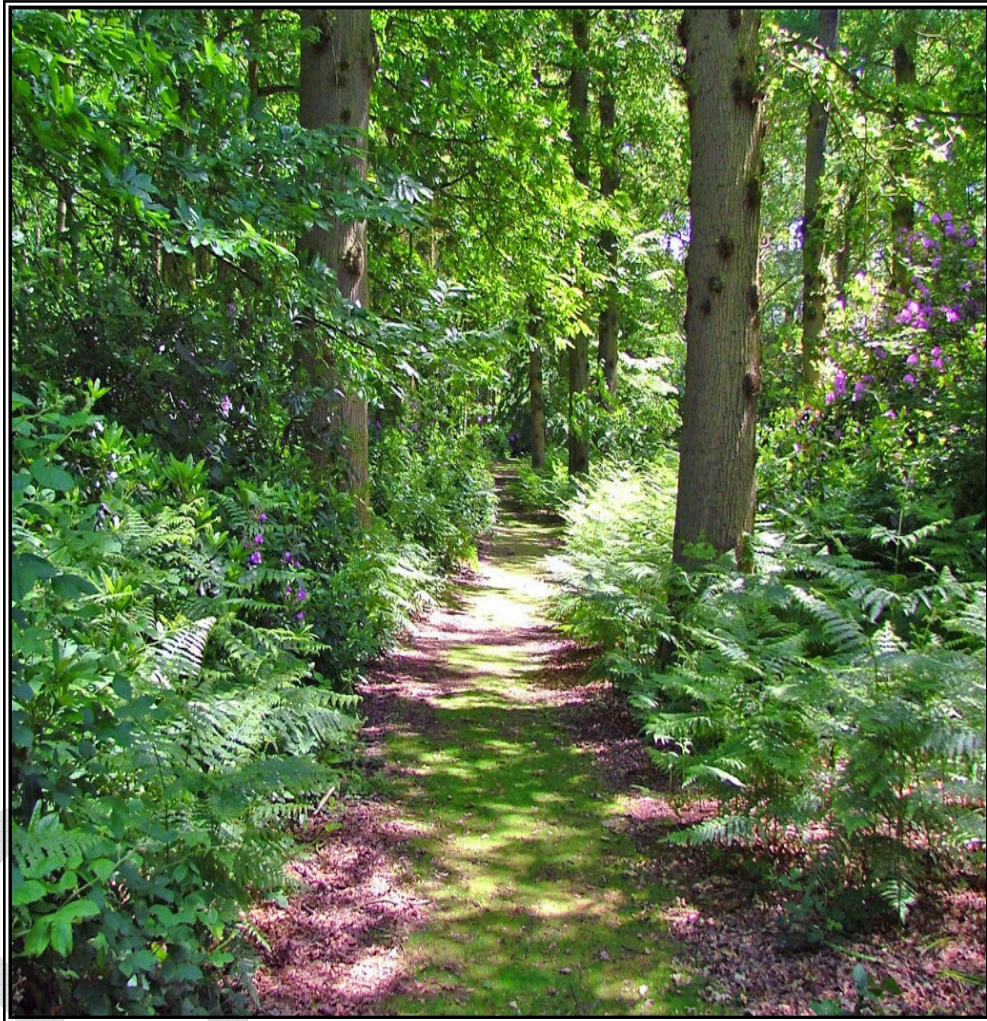


Wyre Forest District Council Tree and Woodland Management Plan 2010-2020



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November 2009**



Wyre Forest District Council

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A major constituent part of the natural world and the basis of many ecosystems and natural processes are the trees, woodlands and forests. Therefore trees and woodlands are vitally important for the survival of many species on the planet including human beings.

The following list highlights some of the vitally important services that trees perform in rural and urban environments:

- Add colour to the urban scene, softening the harsh lines of buildings, screen unsightly views,
- providing privacy and a sense of solitude and security, while contributing to the general character and sense of place in communities.
- perform important functions that protect and enhance our health and property.
- clean the air by absorbing air pollutants and releasing oxygen.
- reduce rainfall runoff and erosion;
- moderate the extremes of climatic change;
- help us to save energy and produce a carbon neutral source of energy themselves;
- create wildlife habitat;
- contribute to a community's economy and way of life.

Wyre Forest District Council's Park Section and Countryside Ranger Service are responsible for 70 sites within the District that incorporate individual trees and areas of woodlands, to ensure that the Council manage this resource in line with current best practise there are two elements that need to be considered.

Firstly that the Council are adhering to **The Occupiers Liability Act 1957 and 1984** and the **Health and Safety at Work Etc Act 1974**, so that the risk posed by trees to the health and safety of the people of and visitors to, the District of

Wyre Forest are minimised to an acceptable level of risk, thus reducing the likelihood of prosecution under the aforementioned acts.

The other element is ensuring that the amenity and the environmental benefits of the tree and woodland resource is managed in a sustainable way, so that the actions of the Council don't have a detrimental affect on the urban forest for future generations.

For these objectives to be realised there needs to be a change from the **reactive** approach that the Council currently uses to manage its tree resource to a **proactive** approach.

This report sets clear management objectives for the management of the tree population within Wyre Forest District Council ownership for the next 10 years, so that the objective to change the management of the trees and woodlands to a proactive service can come into fruition.

It does this by evaluating the current resources, procedures and the condition of the tree resource and sets out clear tasks in the form of **Action Point Recommendations** (below) for the Arboricultural Officer to carry out over the next 10 years to make the vision transpire.

1. **Assess the condition of all trees in high or medium risk zones every year on all sites managed by the Parks Section (See Para. 2.1, Page 7).**
2. **Give training to Grounds Maintenance Supervisors on how to carrying out a basic level 1 tree hazard risk assessment (See Para. 2.1, Page 7).**
3. **Assist the Countryside Ranger staff with annual inspections of trees and woodlands within medium and high risk areas on all Nature Reserves in Council ownership (See Para. 2.1, Page 8).**
4. **Meet with Countryside Ranger staff on site to carryout detailed tree inspections when requested (See Para. 2.1, Page 8).**

- 5. Take an active part in the procurement process of selecting a Total Operation Management System (TOMS) (See Para. 2.2, Page 10).**
- 6. Ensure that the chosen package has the required functionality required for the management of the Council's tree and woodland resource (See Para. 2.2, Page 10).**
- 7. Carry out a full inventory and produce a 10 year tree and woodland management plan for all sites managed by the Parks Section (Para. 2.3, Page 12).**
- 8. Investigate internal and external funding for the long term management of the trees and woodlands (Para. 2.3, Page 12).**
- 9. Investigate possibilities of starting new Friends Groups and becoming involved with existing Friends Groups (Para. 2.3, Page 12).**
- 10. Investigate ways in which to promote the tree and woodland resource on existing Council Literature, such as at the bottom of Council notices or on Council Payslips and add information to the existing Council website to promote the tree and woodland resource (Para. 2.4, Page 13).**
- 11. Find out the dates of local country shows within the district and investigate the possibility of having a stall to promote the service (Para. 2.4, Page 13).**
- 12. Liaise with local schools and community groups with a view to get local people involved with outreach activities during National Tree Week (Para. 2.4, Page 13).**

It is hoped that this report will raise the profile of the urban forest resource within the District Council's ownership and as a result increase the availability of funds to improve its management, which as highlighted on page 2, is vital in so many ways.

2

Tree and Woodland Management

The management of the tree and woodland resource within the Parks Section is currently reactive. Although attempts have been made by previous Arboricultural Officers to carry out regular surveys and change to a more proactive approach, until March 2008 very few sites had been subject to a formal survey. This has been mainly due to the split in the responsibilities of the Arboricultural Officer's post between Parks and Planning and the pressures of the planning workload, resulting in very little work being carried out for the Parks Section and a lack of clear management objectives in the form of a management plan.

Due to a lack of resources there is also very little long term management of the trees and woodlands within the nature reserves. However there have been regular tree hazard assessments carried out on the nature reserve sites and remedial work takes place regularly.

For the future management of the Council's trees and woodlands resource to be more proactive a long term management plan needs to be put in place that is a realistic use of resources and officer time.

2.1 Tree Hazard Management

There are two main legislations that require tree and woodland managers to ensure their tree stock is in a safe condition, these are:

- i.) The Occupiers Liability Act 1957 and 1984
- ii.) Health and Safety at Work Etc Act 1974.

Under the two Acts it is the duty of the Local Authority to do all that is reasonably practicable to ensure that people are not exposed to risk to their health and safety. This means that trees within the Council's ownership need to be in a safe condition so that they don't pose a threat to people or property.

Failure to comply with the legislations will result in the Council being liable should a tree fail and cause serious injury or death.

A well know case where a Council did not discharge its responsibilities happened in Birmingham where a mature ash tree fell across a highway and killed three people. Birmingham City Council was prosecuted under the Health and Safety at Work Etc Act and fined £1.5 million plus costs.

In 2005 the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) published a document called 'Management of the risk of failing trees (SIM 01/2007/05)' (Appendix 1). The document guides tree managers on what is 'reasonably practicable' and section 10 of the document has an effective 9 point system of managing trees to meet with the current regulations.

The best way to adhere to the HSE guidelines is to use a standardised tree risk assessments systems. The current most popular is the Quantified Tree Risk Assessment system (QTRA) that is based around the five steps of risk assessment and has direct links to the 9 point system of managing trees in SIM 01/2007/05 (Appendix 1, para 10).

Details on how the QTRA system works is found in appendix 2. However to summarize, the system is based around a target approach to tree management. This basically means that trees within high target areas (like next to busy A and B roads or property) and medium target areas (like C roads and infrequently used footpaths) are surveyed regularly and low target areas (like low used roads and footpaths) are surveyed less frequently if at all.

This approach will allow the Council to follow current best practice, however the Council's current policy of all trees in Council ownership being surveyed every 5 years should be refined to say that all trees in high or medium risk zones will be surveyed every year and where necessary low risk areas will be surveyed every 3 to 5 years depending on the targets within the area. Therefore trees in the middle of woodlands, where there is little or no public access, will not need to be surveyed at all.

QTRA is quick, effective and legally sound and considering the limited amount of time available to the Parks Section to undertake this important work, a full walkover survey of all sites can be carried out within 5 to 6 months of every year. This allows the section to fulfil its health and safety responsibilities and allow the Arboricultural Officer to spend more time in carrying out detailed long term tree and woodland management plans for each of the Parks and Open Spaces and move the management of the Council's trees to a proactive approach.

Action Point Recommendation No. 1

Assess the condition of all trees in high or medium risk zones every year on all sites managed by the Parks Section.

In addition to the assessments carried out by the Arboricultural Officer, Grounds Maintenance staff will be required to carry out basic level 1 tree assessments whenever they are on-site and the supervisors will be required to fill out a tree assessment form and pass it onto the Senior Arborist to assess and action the works. The aim of this approach is to adhere to the HSE guidelines (Appendix 1, para 10) and to make use of all available staff to ensure the Council's tree stock is in a safe condition.

Before this approach can be put into place the current Grounds maintenance Supervisors will be required to attend Basic Level 1 tree hazard assessment training. In addition there will be basic training available to all new Supervisors.

Action Point Recommendation No. 2

Give training to Grounds Maintenance Supervisors on how to carrying out a basic level 1 tree hazard risk assessment.

The proactive management of the nature reserve sites is for the Conservation & Countryside Officer and his staff to plan and carryout, however the Arboricultural Officer's role is to assist with walk through tree hazard assessments of these sites. The tree hazard management of the nature reserves will follow the same model as the parks and open spaces, in that a walk through assessments of high and medium risk areas of all sites will be

carried out and trees that pose a threat to people or property will be dealt with accordingly.

The Countryside Ranger staff have undergone basic tree hazard assessment training, so they are well equipped to identify basic tree defects on their regular site investigations. When Rangers identify trees that are causing concern a site meeting with the Arboricultural Officer will be arranged so a detailed inspection can take place.

Action Point Recommendation No. 3

Assist the Countryside Ranger staff with annual inspections of trees and woodlands within medium and high risk areas on all Nature Reserves in Council ownership.

Action Point Recommendation No. 4

Meet with Countryside Ranger staff on site to carryout detailed tree inspections when requested.

These measures will result in a robust system of managing the risk that trees can pose on all parks, open spaces and nature reserves and meet the Council's responsibilities.

2.2 Tree Data Management

There is currently no auditable computerised tree management system in place within the Council. Tree surveys in the past have been carried out using a variety of paper based systems and more recent surveys have been carried out using PocketGIS and Tablet PC.

PocketGIS is an adequate piece of software for data capture, however once the data has been collected on-site the Council's GIS software (GGP) doesn't have the functionality required to manipulate the data, which is a problem when attempting to produce management plans or highlight trees that require urgent works.

The current software and hardware also has the following limitations:

- Ordinance Survey is no longer producing up-to-date Landline data, which PocketGIS requires.
- The Tablet PC is slow in today's standards, has a poor display and will not allow the upgraded version of PocketGIS to be installed.
- PocketGIS is reasonable for collecting data, however there needs to be an integrated auditable desk based database that will allow us to keep all tree information and history in one place.

A review of Waste Management, Street Scene, Parks and Open Spaces, Trees and Car Parks processes has recently been carried out with a view to procuring an all-in-one computerized package that will service all five sections and link with all of the Council's existing software systems.

The name of the procurement process has been called Total Operation Management System (TOMS) and will streamline the Services and allow the Council to fulfil its I.T. policy of supporting the transformation and improvement of Council services for the benefit of customers and stakeholders and enable the delivery of savings and efficiencies.

For the software system that TOMS selects to be adequate for the management of the Council's urban forest the package will need to meet two main requirements. Firstly to be an asset management tool, so that all the information, on Council owned trees, in the following list can be collected on site and stored in an auditable system that will be accessible to other parks staff and operatives of the Worcestershire Hub:

- Record Work history
- Tree lists
- Computer mapping
- Creating work records
- Graphical creation
- Cost tracking
- Creating a Tree Inventory
- Record Tree Health and Condition

- Tree Risk management using Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA);
- Assist with new tree planting.

The other requirement for TOMS is for the information collected within the asset management section of the software, can then be used to create regular tree and woodland maintenance and inspection rounds, which is vital for the objective to change the management approach to one that is proactive.

Having a computerized management package will allow the service to become proactive, which will improve the ways in which the tree resource is managed and allow for efficiencies within the service, such as preventing double handling for data collection and improved future planning of works operations.

Action Point Recommendation No.5

Take an active part in the procurement process of selecting a Total Operation Management System (TOMS).

Action Point Recommendation No.6

Ensure that the chosen package has the required functionality required for the management of the Council's tree and woodland resource.

2.3 Proactive management of the Park Sections Tree and Woodland Resource.

The urban tree and woodland resource is now seen as a vitally important resource by local people, businesses, Councils and legislative authorities. This is highlighted by a number Laws, Legislations, Government Strategies and Corporate Plans at National, Local and Council level that require tree and woodland owners and managers to enhance and improve the tree and woodland resource.

One of the themes in the Council's own Sustainable Community Strategy is to have 'a better environment for today and tomorrow' and Parks and Green spaces are part of the Council's corporate aims for a 'Sustainable

Environment'. To illustrate how the action points within this document are related to the laws, legislations and strategies and the enhancement of the tree and woodland resource, a table of the action points and how they relate to the relevant regulations and policies can be found in appendix 3.

For the Parks Section to fulfil these requirements it needs to move from a reactive approach of managing its trees and woodlands to a proactive approach. To achieve this aim, long term management plans are needed for all sites.

Before a long term management plan for each site can be produced a full computerized inventory needs to take place to assess the size, age, species and condition using whichever software procured by the TOMS process.

The data collected by the IT package will allow for a full inventory to take place for each site and will inform the section on whether the trees in the parks and open spaces are an aging population or if there are specific species that are in abundance and the overall condition of the tree stock.

The inventory information can then allow the section to produce 10 year management plans, which will designate the inspections, felling, pruning, woodland management and planting works necessary over that time. This information can be collated into the rounds and managed using the IT package.

Managing trees is a long term commitment so updating the reports every 10 years allows for a realistic approach to tree and woodland management.

The management report for each site will also look into Friends groups (new or existing), funding opportunities and local school and community group's involvement.

The order of the sites for the inventory has been informed by the first tree hazard assessment for each site that was carried out between March and July

2008 (Appendix 4). Sites that have been identified as having high rated targets, large mature trees and provide high amenity value will be the priority and will be surveyed within the next 4 years.

Action Point Recommendation No. 7

Carryout a full inventory and produce a 10 year tree and woodland management plan for all sites managed by the Parks Section.

Action Point Recommendation No. 8

Investigate internal and external funding for the long term management of the trees and woodlands.

Action Point Recommendation No. 9

Investigate possibilities of starting new Friends Groups and becoming involved with existing Friends Groups.

2.4 Education and Outreach

Climate Change, Sustainability and Biodiversity are key words that are constantly in the media, therefore educating people to the importance of trees and woodlands may not seem necessary. However, the link between the degradation of habitats within the developing world and the trees and woodlands on our own doorstep is not always grasped. As a result the importance of trees and woodlands within an urban setting is not fully appreciated and if this vital resource is to be valued within the Council and the wider community the Parks Section need to promote the resource and the efforts that are taken to preserve and enhance it.

There are many initiatives that could be used to educate people to the importance of trees and woodlands, however time and money are a deciding factor as to what actions can take place.

Leaflets, a website and demonstrations at local events are all good ways to get the message out to local people. These will not take up an excessive amount of time, however could prove expensive.

A good time to promote trees and woodlands is during the Tree Council's National Tree Week, which takes place for a week during every autumn.

Activities such as tree planting, tree climbing and chainsaw demonstrations with local schools and community groups during this week would be ideal to promote the tree and woodland resource and service.

Action Point Recommendation No. 10

Investigate ways in which to promote the tree and woodland resource on existing Council Literature, such as at the bottom of Council notices or on Council Payslips and add information to the existing Council website to promote the tree and woodland resource.

Action Point Recommendation No. 11

Find out the dates of local country shows within the district and investigate the possibility of having a stall.

Action Point Recommendation No. 12

Liaise with local schools and community groups with a view to get local people involved with outreach activities during National Tree Week.

3

Completion of Initial Audit of the Parks Section's sites

From investigations regarding the history of tree surveys on the Parks and Open Spaces sites it became apparent that a number of sites had not been formally surveyed, so a quick assessment, known as a walk through survey, was carried out from March to July 2008, to establish the general condition of the tree population and to ensure any unknown defects were picked up as quickly as possible. The exercise allowed for the prioritisation of each site for the full tree and woodlands inventory that will take place on a 5 to 10 year rotation.

This part of the report will include the results of the initial site assessment of the parks and open space sites and the proposed timetable for the full inventory for each site.

3.1 Parks and Open Spaces Site Assessment

The site assessment results include the site name, date of assessment and a short summary of the size of site, age and condition of the tree population and any other relevant results.

The results also include a target rating and probability of a major failure.

These two areas are given a value of 1 to 6, 1 being the highest and 6 being the lowest, to denote the level of risk of tree failure on each site.

High target ratings are given to sites next to busy roads and footpaths or close to property and high failure rates are for large mature trees that have significant defects present that have a high potential to fail. The results of this assessment can be found in appendix 4.

3.2 Schedule for full Tree Inventory

Using the results from the parks and open spaces assessment a timetable for when each site will have a full tree inventory carried out has been created (Appendix 5). The table includes the name of the site, estimated number of

hours and weeks to undertake the survey (based on 2 days per week) and the year that the site will be surveyed. The timetable also includes a column for the size classification (Large, Medium or Small) of the site and a priority rating (1 to 6) for each site that has been taken from the target and failure rate in the site assessment results.

In addition to the inventory timetable in appendix 5 using the current staffing levels a table has also been created to illustrate the amount of time it would take for the full inventory and 10 year management plans to be undertaken if a consultant was employed to carry this out as in the recommendation to the Cabinet report (November 2009).

4

Conclusion and Recommendations

The tree and woodland resource within the district of Wyre Forest contributes an enormous amount to the character of the landscape and a substantial amount of the resource is within the ownership of Wyre Forest District Council.

For this resource to be managed and enhanced in a long term and sustainable way, the current reactive approach needs to be replaced with a proactive approach.

The first step needed to change the approach in which the tree and woodlands are managed is for a full tree inventory to take place. The timeframe for the inventory is illustrated in the Full Tree Inventory Timetable (Table 1, Appendix 5). This table clearly indicates the length of time it will take to complete the inventory for all the sites with the current resources that are available.

Having no long term tree and woodland management plan for a number of sites for 5 years will no doubt be a frustration to Ward Members, Town and Parish Councils, Local Friends Groups and Local People. If finances can be found to fund a consultant to assist with the work, the process will then be complete in just 2 years highlighted in table 2 of appendix 5.

The management of these sites will remain reactive until the inventory has taken place, with management of the tree and woodland resource on a first come first serve or priority basis, which results in an uncoordinated approach which compromises the Council's health and safety responsibilities.

The lack of resources also has an implication on the way the inventory is carried out and how the data is captured and stored. Using the system procured by the TOMS process will allow the person surveying the trees to record the data extremely quickly and cuts out the need to double handle the data. The system also allow for the data recorded on site to be stored on a database that can not be changed once it's transferred into the system; this

can be vitally important in legal cases where trees fail and cause harm to people or damage property as it shows a clear chain of events that leads back to the decision about the trees condition.

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Appendix 1
Management of the risk of falling trees
Health and Safety Executive SM 01/2007/05

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Appendix 2
Quantified Tree Risk Assessment
Practise Note.
Quantified Tree Risk Assessment Ltd. 04/2007

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Appendix 3

Policy Framework for Action Points

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Appendix 4

Parks and Open Spaces Site Assessment

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Appendix 5

Schedule for Full Tree Inventory

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