

# Wiltshire Council Highway Tree Inspection Policy



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# Wiltshire Council Highways Trees Inspection Policy

## Introduction and background

There are over 3,000 miles of road which are the responsibility of Wiltshire Council, and many of these roads have trees or woodlands close to the carriageway. The ecological value of these trees is recognised as being important, and they make a significant contribution to the landscape and the appearance of the county and our towns and villages.

Trees are living organisms that are affected by external factors such as the weather and, unlike man-made structures, it is entirely normal and natural for parts to break and fall from trees, especially in high winds and storms. These types of occurrences are natural and, in rare instances, can pose a risk to the public and property.

## Aims of Policy

This policy seeks to find a balance between managing the risks associated with highway trees where the Council has responsibility, whilst preserving arboricultural resources. This is achieved by maximising the utilisation of the resources that are needed to manage the trees through efficient systems and processes.

The primary objectives of the policy are to:

- Increase public safety.
- Establish objectives and policy for council members and officers for trees owned or managed by the county as part of its highway maintenance obligations.
- Establish an inspection regime using a risk-based approach to minimise the risk of personal injury or damage to property arising from the presence of any tree on highway land.
- Conserve, protect and maintain the county's tree resources

## Risk Management

With an extensive highway network and countless trees, it is not feasible to carry out frequent detailed inspections and assessments of every tree. The Council therefore carries out a programme of targeted highway tree maintenance work, taking a risk based approach.

Hazards associated with trees include structural defects that may cause the tree, or portion of the tree, to fail. A tree may also be a hazard by damaging property through the action of its roots or branches. Other risks include trip hazards through exposed raised roots, slip hazards from falling leaves, pedestrian injury from low branches, damage to vehicles from branches overhanging carriageways or from ingestion of poisonous fruits for children/animals who may not be aware of the danger.

A defective tree in the middle of the woods or in an open field, away from paths or public use areas, does not necessarily have to be considered a hazard. In order for a tree to become a hazard, there has to be a target that can be affected by the hazard, which could be an object, structure, or person.

Tree risk management involves the process of inspecting and assessing trees for their potential to cause injury or damage to property. The criteria to define tree risk zones is primarily based on public use and occupancy patterns, but it is also important to take account of tree characteristics, for instance areas in a moderate hazard category may need a higher inspection rate if it has a high density of problem tree species as the likelihood of incidents increases.

The Council's Highway Tree Risks are defined as:

Risk	Definition
<b>High</b>	Public and pedestrian areas of town/city centres with individual trees with high risk characteristics, such as standing dead trees or those with poor condition ratings, severely storm damaged trees, trees that visually obstruct traffic signs or signals, tree roots causing severe pavement buckling. Stretches of road network where there is a high density of large diameter, mature or problem tree species.
<b>Moderate</b>	Strategic high volume traffic routes or pedestrian areas where the potential for falling branches could cause injury/harm or major network disruption; including bus routes where height clearance is an issue.
<b>Low</b>	Low use roads and public footpaths where the potential for injury/harm or disruption is minimal Areas without larger diameter, mature or problem trees

## Tree Inspections

A programme of highway tree inspections will be undertaken based on an assessment of the risk. Trees with higher risks will be inspected using professionally trained arboriculturalist staff. These inspections will assess the condition of the trees and identify any potential faults, diseases or other problems. Where these are discovered, their effect on the trees health and stability will be evaluated, and if deemed necessary, remedial work will be undertaken.

Trees in moderate and low risk zones will be routinely inspected by highway staff as part of the Council's Highway Safety Inspection regime. These inspections will constitute a 'basic' or layman inspection scanning the trees for obvious hazards, which will be reported to the qualified arboriculturalist for further investigation.

Sites with identified problems will be treated as priorities, especially those where buses are affected by low branches or where there is damage to windscreens and wing mirrors. Treatment of sites can include removing dead, dying, dangerous and insecure trees, with pruning and felling as necessary.

<b>Risk</b>		<b>Inspection Frequency</b>	<b>Inspection by</b>	<b>Method</b>
<b>High</b>	Public and pedestrian areas of town/city centres with individual trees with high risk characteristics	Every 3 years (Annually or more frequent in sites with identified problems)	Qualified Arboriculturist or suitably experienced landscape engineer.	Rapid but thorough searches for clear defects, especially in crown and around base of tree. Binoculars, or specialist processes will be used where necessary to assess tree health.
<b>Moderate</b>	Strategic high volume traffic routes or pedestrian areas including bus routes	Every 5 years	Arboriculturalist, suitably experienced landscape engineer, or trained inspector	Slow driven or walked inspections searching for overhead height clearances, overhanging or leaning trees and clear crown or branch defects.
<b>Low</b>	Whole network	Basic Annual minimum	Trained Highway Safety Inspector as part of normal highway safety inspection	Rapid driven inspections looking for highway safety defects; searching for overhead height clearances, overhanging or leaning trees that may fall on the highway.

Whilst tree inspections have the potential to identify and address observable defects and foreseeable hazards, some tree failures may not be observable and cannot be

predicted. Therefore no tree can be guaranteed completely safe, however the implementation of the tree inspection and maintenance programme should reduce risks to reasonable levels.

It is sometimes not possible to complete all inspections exactly to program, therefore the maximum period between inspections will be:

- High risk – 3 years – 1200 calendar days
- Moderate risk – 5 years – 2000 calendar days
- Low risk – 12 months – 400 calendar days

In addition to the inspections by highways staff the public also report issues with trees by using the MyWiltshire app, which will be assessed in accordance with this policy.

### Work to Trees

Under normal circumstances established trees require little in the way of routine maintenance, however, there may be situations where minor pruning, pollarding or even removal are necessary to prevent encroachment of branches onto buildings or to provide adequate clearance over a road or footpath, or to reduce the risk of falling branches. Trees may need to be pruned to remove obstructions to street lights, signs and overhead cables.

Where safety issues are identified this work will be treated as a priority.

People may feel apprehensive about the size or position of a particular tree and consider it dangerous, however, these factors do not make a tree dangerous and the council would not sanction or support the unnecessary removal of trees. Such action would only be allowed if it were clearly demonstrated that a tree poses an unacceptable risk to property or persons.

Where fallen trees obstruct highways these will be removed as soon as possible. In the event of serious storm damage it may take some time to clear all roads, and priority is given to the main roads and busier routes.

All work on trees is carried out taking into account environmental and seasonal restrictions, and any tree preservation orders. Work is carried out by suitably qualified or experienced staff in a safe manner.