



Tree Management Policy

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Tree Management Policy

1. Introduction

Trees are a highly valued feature of Highworth. They have an ecological and environmental value. Trees contribute to their environment by providing oxygen, improving air quality, climate amelioration, conserving water, preserving soil, and supporting wildlife. During the process of photosynthesis, trees take in carbon dioxide and produce the oxygen we breathe. Trees are also important in urban landscapes not only visually but enhance the environment by improving air quality by filtering airborne dust, smoke and fumes. Trees absorb traffic noise in built-up areas and can help to limit noise pollution. They reduce temperature extremes by providing shelter in hot weather. They can act as a screen, increasing privacy in residential road and gardens and provide food and habitat for birds and other wildlife thus supporting nature conservation value and biodiversity.

Research has shown that trees also provide many psychological and health benefits and have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing, reducing stress and encouraging outdoor exercise.

2. Trees within Highworth

Highworth Town Council has discretionary power to maintain trees in open spaces as per the deed, hand tools only from the ground where applicable under an agreement with Swindon Borough Council (SBC) which is the authority responsible for trees within the borough. Highworth Town Council has a responsibility to maintain trees on our land to ensure they are in a safe condition and not causing an unreasonable danger or actionable nuisance. Highworth Town Council carries out an annual tree inspection on our trees. Highworth Town Council also reports any tree issues that come to our notice on those that we are not responsible for.

Highworth Town Council can undertake work at ground level and up to head height if they so wish anything outside of this falls to Swindon Borough Council. Trees growing on land which forms part of the adopted highway are the responsibility of the Highways Authority, Swindon Borough Council.

Trees are generally maintained as part of Swindon Borough Councils continuous programme of work.

Trees along the main roads	Inspected annually
Street trees	Pruned on a cyclical basis every 1,3 or 5 years depending on species and location
Parks and green space trees	Pruned on an ad-hoc basis

Any problems reported are assessed by Swindon Borough Councils expert Tree Officer and any remedial work is determined on a priority basis depending on the nature of the request.

All enquiries regarding trees in Highworth should be directed to Swindon Borough Council on 01793 445500 www.swindon.gov.uk

3. Highworth Town Council – responding to complaints

Obstructing/Overhanging Tree Branches

Tree branches can cause obstruction to public footpaths, roadways, signs, streetlighting and open spaces. Highworth Town Council will respond to reports where work can be undertaken at ground level by the Grounds Team who will eliminate hazards caused by obstructive branches.

Shading and loss of light

Trees are often perceived to block light to nearby properties. However, pruning or removal of trees will often have a negligible impact on the amount of light reaching a house or garden. Therefore, tree works to improve light levels will not normally be considered.

Loss of view

Trees will only be pruned or removed to restore views when necessary to retain important public viewpoints or there is a potential to bring about significant public benefit and/or enhance the local landscape or townscape. Pruning of trees for highway sight-line requirements will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

Trees affecting reception (Television, satellite or solar panels)

Pruning in the short term may help improve television reception, however in the long term the flush of quick extra growth associated with pruning can exacerbate the problem. In most cases the problem can be resolved by relocating the aerial or satellite dish or using a booster. Residents are advised to contact their satellite or tv provider for specialist advice. Removal or pruning of trees will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Overhead cables/telephone wires

Utility companies have certain legal rights to carry out works to public or privately owned trees to address health and safety problems, to maintain a clearance between trees and their apparatus to ensure continuity of supply. This may sometimes involve the loss of trees. Where works to trees are necessary as a result of proximity or conflict, we will encourage utility operators to adopt the most appropriate long-term solution, giving consideration to tree health, local tree cover and visual amenity.

Highworth Town Council will not prune a tree within our maintenance work in order to prevent or reduce interference with telephone wires. We would recommend contacting the telephone service provider.

General/Minor Nuisances

Highworth Town Council will not prune trees solely to alleviate problems caused by natural and/or seasonal phenomena, which are largely outside our control. There are a variety of potential nuisances associated with trees, most of which are minor or seasonal and considered to be normal and acceptable consequences of living near trees.

Examples of such problems are:

- Falling leaves, sap, blossom, fruit, nuts, bird and insect droppings
- Insects associated the trees (spiders, wasps flies etc)
- Reduction or increase of moisture to gardens
- Suckers or germinating seedlings in gardens
- Leaves falling into gutters, drains or onto flat roofs
- The build-up of algae on fences, paths or other structures

Clearing of leaves from gutters and pathways and weeding of set seeds are considered to be normal routine seasonal maintenance which property owners are expected to carry out.

Falling leaves, sap, blossom, fruit, nuts, bird and insect droppings are not readily controllable by pruning and cleaning of affected surfaces can be considered routine maintenance. Pruning will not normally be considered solely as a way of alleviating problems with these issues alone.

Trees considered too big / too small

Felling trees sits within the remit of Swindon Borough Council.

Damage and tree roots

Many tree conflicts arise because of the presence of tree roots and the perception that they are causing damage. Where damage is alleged, each complaint will be investigated on an individual basis. The following guidance will be used in assessing levels of nuisance and identifying appropriate action.

Root invasion in gardens, tree roots in gardens are a natural occurrence and root presence is unlikely to be affected by tree pruning or removal. Landowners do have a common law right to prune back tree roots to their boundary, providing that this would not lead to tree death and providing that the tree in question is not protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) or situate within a Conservation Area.

All issues relating to tree roots from land maintained by Highworth Town Council should be directed to Swindon Borough Council.

Damage to walls and fences

Any issues where trees are considered to be causing damage to walls or fences should be referred to Swindon Borough Council.

Damage to paths

It is often possible to repair paths to take account of adjacent trees and tree roots, Where roots protrude they can be pruned or the path re-laid around the tree with flexible materials such as asphalt to provide a smooth surface. Where trees are considered to be causing damage to paths and footpaths please contact Swindon Borough Council to address the issue.

Damage to drains or water pipes

There is no evidence to suggest that the tree roots can actively penetrate an intact pipe or drain, but they can find their way into drains by any existing fault and increase damage. In these situations, the owner of the drain should seek to get the drain repaired at their own expense.

Trip Hazards

Highworth Town Council will work with Swindon Borough Council to make safe an unacceptable trip hazard in a street, road or highway which is caused by a tree in our ownership.

4. Other factors constraining work to trees

Birds

Under the Wildlife & Conservation Act 1981 (as amended) it is an offence to kill, injure or take wild birds, their young, their eggs or nests. Non urgent major tree work involving tree removal, reduction in hedge cutting operations should not normally be undertaken during bird nesting and breeding season, which is considered to be from 1st March to 31st July.

Bats

Bats are a European Protected Species and are protected by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Causing damage to a roosting/nesting site is a criminal offence which can lead to imprisonment. Trees displaying signs of roosting bats will be referred to an ecologist before any work commences. Any trees supporting roosting bats will not be worked on until Natural England is consulted.

Restrictive covenants

Occasionally, restrictive covenants attached to the deeds for a property may restrict what work can be undertaken to trees.

Unadopted land

There are areas in Highworth that may not be adopted by Swindon Borough Council and may not have ownership recognised by neighbouring properties. Highworth Town Council does not have the authority or responsibility to maintain private land. Some instances may be considered on a case by case basis as exceptional circumstances.

5. Damage relating to trees

Direct damage to property

Tree roots, stems and branches get thicker each year via a process called secondary thickening. Over time as they increase in size they can disrupt or distort adjacent structures and surfaces. This is generally limited to 'lightly loaded' structures such as low walls, fences and paving. Trees generally deflect around more 'heavily loaded' structures such as houses. Any reports of damage to property needs to be reported to Swindon Borough Council in the first instance.

6. Insurance claims

Where trees are alleged to have caused direct or indirect damage to property and a formal claim is submitted the matter will be referred to Swindon Borough Council.