

TOPIC PAPER 1 ASSET MANAGEMENT

Version 5

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Purpose

This paper explains how Cambridge City Council manages its tree stock as living assets while meeting its duty of care.

It covers inspection regimes, risk-benefit assessment processes, cyclical maintenance, consultation, and the challenges of managing trees across different landholdings, including housing and its commercial estate land. The approach follows the principles of the [National Tree Safety Group \(2024\)](#)¹ and the Council's Urban Forest Strategy, ensuring that trees are managed as valuable assets that provide multiple benefits, while risks to public safety are kept as low as reasonably practicable (ALARP).

Policy alignment

The paper supports implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy under the following policies.

- M1-M5: Policies relating to the management, resourcing and governance of the Council's tree asset, including risk management, pests and diseases, subsidence, and landholdings.
- P2: The Council will resist the removal of/or excessive works to trees without robust and evidenced justification.
- PL1 (Aspirational): The Council will encourage and continue to seek new opportunities for tree planting in appropriate locations. This will include ensuring and encouraging a diversity of tree species, targeting areas that currently lack tree cover, and prioritising the planting of large-canopy and long-lived trees.
- E1: Through public and partnership engagement the Council will facilitate sustainable and proactive management of trees.
- E2 (Aspirational): The Council will seek to encourage joined-up approaches to tree management through partnerships with other Council services, managers of private trees, and by working with local communities and businesses.

Associated Topic Papers

Topic Paper 1 is part of a series, underpinning the delivery of the Urban Forest Strategy and can be read in conjunction with the following papers.

- Topic Paper 2 Tree Planting, Work and Third-Party Guidance

¹ <https://ntsgroup.org.uk/> (last accessed 18/09/25)

- Topic Paper 3 Biodiversity and Habitat Connectivity
- Topic Paper 4 Trees, Subsidence and Structural Damage
- Topic Paper 11 Tree Protection, Damage and Compensation which together provide a comprehensive framework for tree asset management.

Together these papers provide a comprehensive framework for tree asset management.

Introduction

Cambridge City Council's (CCC) legal obligations include a duty of care to maintain its trees in a safe condition. The demand on any service area can vary from year to year in response to environmental changes, storm damage, altered growing conditions and rises in pests and diseases, resulting in localised rises in tree work. Increases in demand in one area of the service can affect the ability to deliver in other areas.

CCC will prioritise its legal obligations first, ensuring that risks to people and property are managed proportionately in line with National Tree Safety Group guidance. This means balancing public safety with the wide range of benefits that trees provide, including amenity, biodiversity, climate regulation, community well-being, and avoiding unnecessary loss of healthy trees. Its second priority will be to sustain its asset through non-safety related tree care practices and planting. Lastly, it will prioritise its engagement aspirations.

Public Tree Assets

CCC has a team of three full-time qualified arboriculturists to administer and advise on matters related to trees in the public domain, which can be divided into the below five categories. The Tree Team directly manages 1-4.

1. Parks and Open Spaces

Trees located in Cambridge's:

- Parks
- Recreation grounds
- Commons
- Closed churchyards

- Play areas
- Nature reserves and other areas of high biodiversity value
- Other open spaces, including cross-boundary sites such as Byron's Pool, Nine Wells and St Albans Recreation Ground

2. Highways

Street trees growing in pavements and verges are the assets of Cambridgeshire County Council. CCC has managed these trees on the County's behalf since before 1994. Although the formal service agreement expired in 2014, the arrangement has continued by custom and practice.

Under this arrangement, CCC maintains and plants highway trees, with costs recouped annually from the County. Overall liability for the tree stock remains with Cambridgeshire County Council, and objections raised through consultation are resolved by County officers. In line with the 2016 Tree Strategy, responsibility for funding and long-term strategic management rests with the County. CCC will continue to seek clarity on future arrangements to ensure the sustainability of the service.

In fulfilling this role, CCC also discharges the statutory duty introduced by the Environment Act 2021 (now contained in the Highways Act 1980) to consult on the felling of street trees, ensuring transparency and public involvement in decision-making.

3. Housing

The responsibility of City Homes, trees on communal housing land are those found in the publicly accessible open space areas in and around housing estates. The Tree Team inspects and advises on these trees, to ensure a consistent balance between safety, amenity and resident engagement.

4. Residual sites

These are special areas sometimes with limited public access:

- Highfield Avenue tree belt
- Walpole Road woods
- West Pit woods
- Histon Road Cemetery

5. Other managed land

In addition to direct responsibility, the Tree Team also advises on the management of trees on all other Council-owned land, including:

- Council car parks
- Tenanted housing land
- Newmarket Road Cemetery and the Crematorium (S. Cambs)
- Property services lands (including commercial leases)
- Riparian land
- Other leased or service-managed land where tree safety responsibilities remain with the Council.

Direct management by the Tree Team

Set out below is CCC's general maintenance regime. Most Highway, Housing Estate and Parks and Open spaces trees are managed by the Tree Team, inspected and maintained under a 3-year cycle.

The cycle is based on the city being split into three geographic ward-based areas. Each area is given a three-year priority in turn, and trees in the priority area are proactively inspected and managed. Only emergency, zone 2 or special zone works are completed outside the priority area.

This division of the city makes best use of resources while adhering to government guidance and the National Tree Safety Group principle of proportionate risk management ensuring that risk is controlled to a level that is as low as reasonably practicable (ALARP).

Trees in closed churchyards are also managed by the Tree Team using the same inspection principles, but recommended works remain subject to Diocesan approval. All other council-owned trees (e.g. cemeteries, car parks, and tenanted land) are inspected and maintained either through cyclical programmes or on request from the appropriate managing service, in line with the council's duty of care.

Inspection and risk management

As trees are essential assets to the urban environment, but conflicts can occur with their surroundings, CCC follows the National Tree Safety Group's *Common sense risk management of trees* as the basis for its approach. This guidance stresses that

risks should be kept *as low as reasonably practicable (ALARP)*, while recognising the wide benefits that trees provide. The five key principles are:

1. Trees provide a wide variety of benefits to society.
2. Trees are living organisms and they naturally lose branches or fall.
3. The overall risk to public safety is extremely low.
4. Tree owners have a legal duty of care; and
5. Tree owners should take a balanced and proportionate approach to tree risk management.

Tree inspections are undertaken by suitably qualified staff or contractors who hold relevant training and experience. Inspectors are expected not only to observe potential hazards, but also to apply professional judgement in balancing risks with benefits.

While whole-tree or partial failures can have serious consequences, other issues such as low branches obstructing access or sightlines to traffic signals can also present significant risks. To manage this effectively across a large and varied estate, the Council uses a ward-based, three-year inspection cycle as the baseline. This provides an efficient and transparent system that allows resources to be distributed evenly and residents to be informed and consulted in a consistent way.

Where circumstances present a higher level of risk, for example trees in high use areas, inspections are carried out more frequently (see Special zones). Practical examples include the annual epicormic growth removal programme for busy lime lined streets, the London planes on Jesus Green and heritage limes on Parkers and Christ's Pieces. This blended approach ensures proportionate risk management in line with National Tree Safety Group guidance and demonstrates that the council manages tree safety risks to a level that is as low as reasonably practicable (ALARP), while retaining the wide benefits of the urban forest.

It should be noted that risks relating to building damage (e.g. subsidence or root-related structural issues) fall outside the scope of the National Tree Safety Group safety framework. These are addressed separately under Topic Paper 4 (Trees, Subsidence and Structural Damage), which sets out CCC's approach to balancing property risks with the wider benefits of the urban forest.

Proactive inspections and maintenance

Depending on the circumstances one of four levels of inspection will be employed:

1. Walkabout/drive-by - A rapid visual assessment of a site looking for significant visually prominent tree related hazards.
2. Basic - A visual assessment of individual trees which shall evaluate tree related hazards including the structural integrity of a tree, relying primarily on observations from ground level (possibly using binoculars, mallet and probe).
3. Detailed - A systematic and diagnostic process of visual inspection to gain sufficient understanding of a tree's structural condition, to inform, where appropriate, re-inspection interval and management recommendations; and
4. Advanced - A specialised examination identified as being necessary during a basic or detailed inspection involving the use of specialised (e.g. decay mapping) equipment.

Inspection data is recorded on the council's proprietary tree management software (Ezytreev®). Advanced inspections will be recorded with a full report saved on the shared network in an appropriate format, such as Word, PDF or Excel. The detail recorded will vary with the level of inspection. Any observations giving rise to concern over tree safety will be recorded. Basic inspections will be the default level of inspection.

Occasionally there are trees, particularly veteran or ancient specimens of exceptional amenity, biodiversity or cultural value that display significant defects. In such cases, in line with National Tree Safety Group guidance, the Council may choose to retain the tree where risks can be reasonably managed, for example by restricting access, selective works, or increased monitoring. This reflects the principle that higher levels of risk may be tolerated when justified by higher levels of benefit.

Where a significant defect is suspected and failure could result in serious harm or damage, inspections will be undertaken to fully assess the extent of the defect and level of any associated risk. This will inform site-specific management recommendations.

For basic inspections the minimum data recorded will be:

- date of inspection.
- name of person undertaking the inspection.
- trees inspected/site inspected.
- any significant defects observed.
- any limitations preventing inspection to the required level e.g. ivy, shrubs

- tree species; and
- action recommended (where relevant).

Trees not found to have significant defects, and/or not directly threatening an identified target, need not be individually recorded during a site inspection, providing that the date of inspection and the site inspected are recorded. It will be assumed, for the purposes of record-keeping, that all trees present within the site have been inspected to the extent reasonably practicable. This method of recording may be employed during proactive inspections where large numbers of trees are involved and the practicalities of recording each tree inspection are unrealistic.

For detailed and advanced inspections, the minimum data recorded should be:

- date of inspection
- name of person undertaking the inspection
- tree inspected
- species name
- age class
- specific defects present assessed as being a potentially significant risk
- any limitations preventing systematic inspection
- action recommended (where relevant).
- risk assessment e.g. [Quantified Tree Risk Assessment](#)²
- condition assessment

Walkabout/drive-by inspections will only be undertaken in special circumstances, e.g. after a storm, where there are resource issues or prior to some events. For walkabout/drive-by inspections, the minimum data recorded should be:

- date of inspection
- name of person(s) undertaking the inspection
- site inspected
- defects present assessed as being a potentially significant risk
- action recommended (where relevant).

Basic tree inspections should be employed both reactively and proactively. Detailed and advanced inspections will be employed in response to basic inspection findings.

² <https://qtra.co.uk/> (last accessed 18/09/25)

In applying this inspection system, CCC will ensure that decisions are transparent, proportionate, and where appropriate involve consultation with stakeholders. This reflects the National Tree Safety Group's emphasis on maintaining public trust and confidence, while managing tree risks in a way that retains the broadest possible range of benefits.

Maintenance follows from inspections or from the application of pre-defined standards, such as the Cambridge City Council Combined Proactive Specification³. Trees on the city's streets and in communal housing areas are managed as a single unit, reflecting their shared role in the streetscape, typically lining either side of a footpath. On their scheduled three-year cycle, these trees are brought up to the Combined Proactive Specification baseline, after which inspections identify any additional tree care needs. Trees on other landholdings, such as parks and open spaces, are inspected first and works are then recommended in line with the specific use and character of each site. The inspecting officer is responsible for procuring, consulting on, and overseeing the works they have recommended, ensuring these are delivered in a timely manner. With few exceptions, all works are carried out by the Council's approved framework contractors.

Zoning and Inspection Framework

In line with HSE guidance ([SIM 01/2007/05](#))⁴, the Council applies a simple two-zone framework for managing tree safety risks:

- **Zone 1** - Trees directly managed by the Tree Team, including those on streets, communal housing land, parks, and open spaces. These trees are subject to the baseline three-year inspection cycle.
- **Zone 2** - Trees where the Tree Team does not have sole responsibility, including those on tenanted housing land (where tenants share responsibilities under tenancy agreements) and service-managed landholdings. In these cases, the Tree Team provides advice to landowners and service managers, who are expected to integrate tree safety into their wider responsibilities.
- **Special zones** - Certain high-profile or distinctive sites require tailored management regimes outside the standard three-year cycle. These zones are

³ The Combined Proactive Specification is the standard set of arboricultural operations applied to the city's tree stock during each management cycle. Its purpose is to bring trees up to a consistent baseline condition that ensures safety, accessibility, and functionality across the urban forest before additional needs are identified through inspection

⁴ https://www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/sims/ag_food/010705.htm last accessed 17/09/25

defined by the nature of the trees, the risks involved, or specific management objectives. Current examples include:

- Annual epicormic removal - Predominantly highway limes, where programmed clearance is required each year to maintain sightlines and safe access.
- Trees with particular characteristics - Examples include Christ's Pieces, Jesus Green, Midsummer Common, and Long Road, where the species, form, and condition of the trees warrant more frequent inspection than the baseline cycle.
- Ash-dominated woodlands - Areas such as Walpole Road Woods and West Pit, where ash dieback significantly affects stand condition and requires periodic site-level monitoring and management.
- Subsidence risk abatement areas - Locations such as Alexandra Gardens, Maids Causeway, and Newmarket Road, where management is shaped by engineered root management and regular interventions to reduce the risk of property damage.

These tailored regimes may result in inspection intervals that are generally shorter than the baseline three-year cycle. This approach ensures that risks remain ALARP while sustaining the amenity, biodiversity, and heritage value of Cambridge's most prominent and sensitive tree populations.

In addition to programmed inspections, operational staff working in parks, streets, and open spaces are encouraged to report obvious tree defects. This supports the formal inspection system and ensures that reactive checks supplement proactive cycles.

Ivy and Shrub Obstructions

The presence of ivy or dense shrub growth can sometimes restrict the ability to carry out a full basic inspection of a tree. Where this occurs, inspectors will record the limitation and note whether additional action is required.

In line with National Tree Safety Group guidance on proportionate risk management:

- If the tree shows no other signs of immediate concern, inspection will be recorded as limited but no intervention will be made.
- If defects are suspected but obscured, inspectors may recommend selective clearance of ivy or shrubs to allow a closer inspection.
- Where ivy or shrubs provide biodiversity or amenity value, clearance will be kept to the minimum necessary to confirm tree safety.

This approach ensures that risks are identified and managed while avoiding unnecessary loss of habitat or cover.

Geographic Management Areas

The Council divides the city into three broad management areas, based on ward boundaries. This enables a systematic three-year inspection and maintenance cycle, ensuring resources are applied consistently to all areas.

Inspection and Maintenance Cycle

Management Area	Inspection and Maintenance Years
A (including Byron's Pool, Nine Wells)	2025/26 · 2028/29 · 2031/32 · 2034/35
B	2026/27 · 2029/30 · 2032/33 · 2035/36
C (including St Albans Recreation Ground)	2027/28 · 2030/31 · 2033/34 · 2036/37

Table 1 Inspection and maintenance cycles

Note: Years are shown as the starting year of the cycle. Each cycle includes inspection, maintenance and recording within that financial year.

Tree Planting and Establishment Cycle

Tree planting and establishment follows a similar cycle to maintenance but begins in the year following maintenance.

Management Area	Planting and Establishment Years
A (including Byron's Pool, Nine Wells)	2026/27 · 2029/30 · 2032/33 · 2035/36
B	2027/28 · 2030/31 · 2033/34 · 2036/37
C (including St Albans Recreation Ground)	2028/29 · 2031/32 · 2034/35 · 2037/38

Table 2 Tree planting and establishment cycle

Ward by management area

Ward	Streets and communal Housing	Parks, open and enclosed spaces
Abbey	C	B
Arbury	A	C
Castle	B	C
Cherry Hinton	C	B
Coleridge	B	A
East Chesterton	A	C
Kings Hedges	A	C
Market	B	A
Newnham	B	C
Petersfield	B	C
Queen Ediths	C	A
Romsey	B	B
Trumpington	B	A
West Chesterton	C	C

Table 3 Management areas by ward

Inspection and maintenance cycles may be adjusted where site-specific risks, events or operational constraints require a more frequent or responsive approach.

Subsidence risk abatement

Where the Tree Team has established that a tree poses a higher risk of subsidence damage, it may be placed on an annual or biannual cycle. Examples include the London planes on Newmarket Road, Maids Causeway and Alexandra Gardens.

Annual Epicormic Removal Programme

Epicormic growth at the base of mature lime trees can obstruct access and visibility. Growth is currently removed on an annual basis in the following example streets:

- Bentley Road; Belvoir Road; Blinco Grove; Chesterton Road; Hamilton Road; Humberstone Road; Kendal Way; Magrath Avenue; Mill Road; Mortimer Road; Mowbray Road; Queen's Road; St Andrew's Road; St Paul's Road.

Reactive Management

Reactive inspections are not systematic but are carried out in response to an event or enquiry. Typical triggers include storm damage, visible defects, or public reports of safety concerns. Requests are prioritised according to risk and inspected by a qualified officer.

Where immediate response is required and recording cannot be completed at the time, inspections may not always be entered into Ezytreev® immediately. The Tree Team will seek to update records where practicable, recognising that in urgent cases the priority is to address the risk.

Where there is an immediate risk of harm or damage, works are instructed straight away to reduce the risk to an acceptable level so that the tree can continue to be maintained safely within the baseline system.

Where safety concerns do not require immediate action but cannot wait until the next programmed inspection, they are collated and issued to contractors monthly.

Emergencies

If a tree on council-owned land poses an immediate danger, phone the Council's Customer Service Centre and provide details.

We will need to know:

- the location - a house number, road name or number, and a description. [What3Words](https://what3words.com/)⁵ is a useful tool for identifying exact locations
- the extent of problem, when it happened and the current situation
- your name and telephone number so we can contact you if we need more information

If you can provide any photographs of the tree, it can help us deal with the problem more quickly.

⁵ <https://what3words.com/> last accessed 5/1/26

Out of hours calls go through to an Emergency Duty Officer and will be passed directly to the Council's emergency contractor and Arboricultural Officers if necessary.

In line with National Tree Safety Group guidance, emergency response prioritises the protection of people and property. Where possible, proportionate measures will be used to mitigate risk (for example, restricting access, temporarily closing paths or parks during severe weather) before resorting to tree removal.

Managing Trees on Housing and Estate Land

CCC's responsibilities for trees on housing estate land are shared with City Homes (CH) and the Repairs & Compliance Team (RCT). The Tree Team provides professional arboricultural advice, while CH and RCT hold responsibility for instructing and funding most works. Responsibilities differ depending on whether the trees are in communal housing open space, communal gardens, or tenanted gardens.

Communal Housing Open Space

These are publicly accessible open spaces within or surrounding housing estates. Trees in these areas are treated as part of CCC's wider public tree stock. They are inspected and maintained by the Tree Team on the programmed cycle, with works delivered by approved contractors under the arboricultural framework. Significant works are subject to public consultation protocols, with CH consulted as part of the process. The Tree Team will proactively identify and deliver planting schemes in these areas, including opportunities for community-led planting.

Communal Gardens

These are enclosed gardens in CCC ownership for the exclusive use of specific residents (e.g. blocks of flats). Trees in communal gardens are primarily managed by CH or RCT. The Tree Team supports CH/RCT with advice and inspection on request and must be consulted before works that would adversely affect visual amenity. Works delivery and costs are the responsibility of CH/RCT. Consultation with residents is recommended, but these works are not part of the public consultation protocols due to their private, enclosed nature. The Tree Team may advise on and facilitate planting, in collaboration with CH or RCT, subject to resident consultation.

Tenanted Gardens

Privately demised gardens forming part of individual tenancies. Primary responsibility for tree management lies with the tenant. Tenants raise concerns with their Housing Officer, who seeks advice from the Tree Team. Recommendations are passed back via the Housing Officer. CH may, in some cases, assist tenants with works. Tree removals always require CH consent. Tree works in tenanted gardens are not subject to the Council's public consultation protocols. CCC is committed to enhancing tree cover in tenanted gardens through refurbishment programmes, and to ensuring long-term protection of significant trees via Tree Preservation Orders (where justified) or covenants.

Priorities for Advice and Works

When advising CH and RCT, the Tree Team will prioritise issues as follows:

1. Health and safety - must be acted on within the recommended timescale
2. Social reasons - discretionary, to be considered by Housing Officers
3. Arboricultural reasons - long-term issues not yet posing a risk; discretionary

Works to trees on ex-Council tenanted properties

Trees on tenanted properties that have been sold may be protected by a covenant on the deeds. Owners may be required to seek approval before removing such trees. The process for approval is the owner will request approval from City Homes, who will seek advice from the Tree Team and the Legal Team before making a final decision.

Individual Trees and Woodlands

CCC's tree stock includes both individual trees and groups or blocks of woodland. While all are part of the city's urban forest, the way they are managed and inspected reflects their different characteristics and risks.

Individual trees

Individual trees are those growing in isolation or as part of small groups within parks, streets, gardens, and open spaces. They are recorded as discrete assets in the Council's Ezytreev® inventory. These trees are inspected individually on a three-year cycle under the Zone 1 framework, with additional visits where higher levels of risk are present (Special zones). Individual trees in Zone 2 landholdings (such as tenanted housing land) are not inspected routinely but may receive advice or inspections where requested. Reactive inspections supplement the cycle where faults are reported or events such as storms occur.

Woodlands

Woodlands are areas dominated by tree cover, often self-seeded or semi-natural, managed as a collective habitat rather than a set of individual assets. Examples include West Pit and Walpole Road Woods. These areas are not recorded tree-by-tree in Ezytreev® but are instead managed through site-level woodland plans and habitat management regimes, where they are available. Tree inspections focus on public safety along paths, entrances, and high-use edges (Zone 1). Woodland visits are often linked to wider biodiversity or site management visits.

Approach

- All individual trees under direct Tree Team management are inspected on a three-year cycle, with higher-frequency visits where justified.
- Woodlands are inspected on a site basis, prioritising high-use areas and boundary trees where risks are most likely to affect the public.
- Reactive inspections and public reports provide an additional safeguard for both categories.

This approach ensures proportionate risk management in line with National Tree Safety Group and HSE guidance, balancing public safety with the wider amenity, biodiversity, and heritage value of Cambridge's urban forest.

Community Orchards

CCC supports several community orchards, which are managed in conjunction with local community groups and volunteers. These orchards provide valuable opportunities for food growing, education, biodiversity, and social activity, while also contributing to the wider urban forest.

Inspection

As public tree assets, many community orchards fall under Zone 1 inspection framework. Trees are inspected by the Tree Team on a three-year cycle, with additional checks where higher levels of risk are present.

Maintenance

Day-to-day maintenance activities, such as fruit collection, light pruning for fruiting purposes, and general ground care, are the responsibility of the local community group managing the orchard. CCC retains responsibility for tree safety and major arboricultural interventions identified through inspection.

New community orchards

Any new community orchards established on council land will be subject to a formal agreement between CCC and the managing group. This agreement will set out roles and responsibilities, covering inspections, maintenance, insurance, and public use, to ensure the orchard is managed safely and sustainably.

Areas of High Biodiversity Value

Some parts of the city's tree estate, including Local Nature Reserves, CCC and County Wildlife sites, Protected Road Verge, Local Geographical Sites, watercourses and veteran or ancient trees, are managed first and foremost for their biodiversity and habitat value. These sites contribute disproportionately to the ecological network of the city and are therefore subject to more tailored approaches of inspection and maintenance.

Veteran and ancient trees

Veteran trees are recognised as irreplaceable habitats and form a key part of Cambridge's natural heritage. While they may present structural weaknesses, they are managed in line with national good practice which seeks to retain them for as long as safely possible. Inspections focus on proportional risk control for example, restricting access, halo thinning, or sensitive pruning rather than removal, unless no practical alternative is available.

Local Nature Reserves and designated wildlife and other sites

Trees within nature reserves and other high-value habitats are managed at site level to balance public safety with conservation objectives. Routine safety inspections in accordance with the zoning protocols prioritise paths, entrances, and high-use edges. The Biodiversity Team are responsible for assessing habitat condition and management is based on management plans where available. Tree safety interventions are minimised and designed to preserve standing deadwood and natural features wherever possible.

Approach

- Safety of people remains the priority, but risk management in biodiversity areas will emphasise proportionate and non-intrusive interventions.
- Where risk can be managed through access controls or habitat management, these will be preferred to heavy pruning or felling.
- Detailed biodiversity considerations, including the role of the urban forest in ecological connectivity, are set out in Topic Paper 3 (Biodiversity and Habitat Connectivity), which this section should be read alongside.

This ensures CCC fulfils its duty of care while sustaining the ecological integrity of Cambridge's most sensitive and valuable tree habitats.

The management of shrubs and self-sets⁶

Woody shrubs and self-set trees under 10cm in diameter do not usually require specialist arboricultural expertise to manage. Outside of local nature reserves and woodlands all shrubs and self-set trees are for City Services Operations Team to manage in the first instance.

Where management may affect trees protected by a TPO or Conservation Area designation or are growing in areas of high nature conservation value the Tree Team and the Biodiversity Team will provide advice and oversight.

⁶ Shrubs and self-sets are woody plants that do not usually fall under the Tree Team's management unless they mature into tree form (or are protected by legislation). Shrubs are typically planted as part of landscaping schemes and remain smaller, multi-stemmed plants, while self-sets are naturally seeded trees that establish without deliberate planting. In early stages they are treated as ground or shrub vegetation and managed by City Services Operations, but once they reach a stem diameter of around 10 cm at 1.5 m above ground level they are considered trees and may then come under the Tree Team's inspection and management responsibilities.

Commercial and Property Services trees

CCC's responsibilities for trees on Property Services land are the responsibility of Property Services. The Tree Team provides professional arboricultural advice, while Property Services holds responsibility for instructing and funding most works.

Riparian Land

Tree management may be needed to ensure watercourses are kept free flowing. Works will be carried out in accordance with the Watercourse Maintenance Contract. The Tree Team provides professional arboricultural advice regarding trees with a stem diameter greater than 75mm on request from Drainage Services. Where there is an immediate risk of harm or damage, works are instructed straight away to reduce the risk to an acceptable level.

Consultation

Tree works associated with projects not run by the Tree Team, or with trees growing on land not directly administered by the Tree Team, will follow the consultation protocols of the relevant service. This ensures that the justification for works is clearly set out within the context of the project or landholding concerned.

All tree works instructed by the Tree Team will be published on the [Planned tree works](#)⁷ web page for a minimum of 20 days. Ward councillors and relevant service leads will be notified at the same time.

Health and safety works: Decisions are delegated to the Tree Officer, to ensure that necessary control measures can be implemented without delay.

Other works: Where objections are received that cannot be resolved by the Tree Officer, the matter will be referred to the Executive Councillor for determination. In reaching a final decision, the Executive Councillor will apply the established criteria:

1. The amenity value of the tree(s) and the likely impact of the proposed works on the character of the area; and

⁷ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/comment-on-our-planned-tree-works> Last accessed 12/09/25

2. Whether the proposal is justified, having regard to the reasons put forward both in support of and against it

Street trees: In addition, CCC fulfils the statutory duty introduced by the Environment Act 2021 (now contained within the Highways Act 1980) to consult on the felling of street trees. This requires the publication of proposed works and consideration of representations before removal, except where works are urgently required for health and safety.

This streamlined process ensures consultation remains transparent and accountable while being proportionate in line with National Tree Safety Group guidance: urgent health and safety risks are addressed promptly, while works with wider amenity implications, including those covered by the new statutory street tree duty, are subject to public scrutiny and democratic decision-making.

How We Manage Protected Council Trees

Some trees managed by CCC are legally protected because they are covered by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) or are growing in a conservation area.

Council Trees with a TPO

In accordance with the Town and Country Planning Act and Regulation 13 of Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation)(England) Regulations 2012, when work is needed on a council-owned tree that has a TPO, we follow the same process as required of others:

- A formal application is made, with details of the proposed work and reasons.
- The application is placed on the public register by the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service, who also manage consultation and make the decision.

This means decisions about Council TPO trees are open to public comment and scrutiny.

In urgent cases such as if a tree is dead or poses an immediate risk of serious harm, Regulation 14 allows us to act quickly, with short written notice instead of a full application.

Council Trees in Conservation Areas

With reference to Regulation 15, if a Council-owned tree is in a conservation area but not protected by a TPO, the Council is not required to notify the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service before works commence. However, the standard consultation process will be followed.

Damage and Compensation

Tree-related damage and compensation issues are addressed through two complementary strands of policy and practice.

Damage caused by trees

Cases of alleged subsidence or structural damage are managed in accordance with Policy M3 (Trees, Damage and Subsidence) and the approach set out in Topic Paper 4 (Trees, Subsidence and Structural Damage). CCC follows a clear mitigation hierarchy, giving priority to retaining trees wherever possible. Alternatives such as pruning, root barriers or engineering solutions are considered before removal. Claims are assessed using robust evidence and in collaboration with insurers, engineers, arborists and residents, ensuring outcomes balance property, environmental, reputational and financial risks.

Damage to trees

Where council-owned trees are damaged, whether through unauthorised works, vandalism or third-party actions, CCC applies Policy P6 (Protecting Public Tree Assets) and the framework described in Topic Paper 11 (Tree Protection, Damage and Compensation). Enforcement action will be pursued where appropriate, and compensation sought to reflect both amenity and asset value. Valuation tools such as [Capital Asset Valuation of Amenity Trees](#) (CAVAT)⁸ will normally be used to establish fair and transparent compensation. The Council will work with legal services and partner agencies to ensure deterrence and recovery of costs, reinforcing the principle that public trees are community assets.

⁸ <https://ltoa.org.uk/resources/cavat> last accessed 18/09/25

Adopted land and newly transferred trees

CCC periodically adopts land that includes trees, most commonly as part of major development sites, regeneration projects, or infrastructure schemes delivered by partners such as the Greater Cambridge Partnership. In some cases, CCC itself may create new landscapes which later fall into the Tree Team's management.

Where trees are to be transferred into CCC's direct management and incorporated into the baseline inspection and maintenance cycle, it is the responsibility of the relevant project officer or service lead to ensure that the Urban Forest Manager is provided with:

- Accurate information on tree species and locations;
- Planting specifications and establishment requirements; and
- Details of any associated maintenance funding or commuted sums to support long-term management.

All newly adopted or transferred trees must be added to the Ezytreev® inventory before they can be managed as part of the three-year inspection cycle. This ensures that records are complete and accurate, enabling the Tree Team to maintain consistent inspection, risk management, and accountability across the city's public tree stock.

Standards for planting and establishment on adopted land should follow the guidance set out in Topic Paper 2 (Tree Planting, Work and Third-Party Guidance), ensuring new trees are integrated to CCC specifications.

This Topic Paper is intended to explain how the Council manages its tree asset in practice. It should be read alongside the Urban Forest Strategy and other topic papers, which together set the strategic direction, technical standards and governance framework for urban forest management in Cambridge.

END

TOPIC PAPER 2 TREE PLANTING, WORK AND THIRD-PARTY GUIDANCE

Version 5

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PURPOSE

Setting trees up to thrive for generations requires careful planning and sound practice. This paper sets out Cambridge City Council's (CCC) approach to tree planting and tree work, and also provides wider guidance applicable to private landowners, developers, utility companies and other third parties. It covers species selection, structural planting, and engineered tree pits, together with considerations for non-native and climate-adapted species. The paper also explains good practice in tree work, including pruning and removals, and sets out the processes for third-party interactions such as dropped kerb applications, pruning requests, and utility works. In this way both the council and external partners can help maximise tree survival, minimise conflict, and support a resilient urban forest.

POLICY ALIGNMENT

This paper supports implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy under the following policies.

- PL1-PL4: Advancing Plant More policies through guidance on species selection, structural planting, climate-adapted trees and tree pits, as well as principles for establishment and replacement planting.
- M1-M5: Contributing to Manage More policies by setting out good practice in pruning, explaining reasons for works, and clarifying processes such as third-party permits and dropped kerb applications.
- P1-P6: Underpinning Protect More policies through its guidance on resisting unnecessary removals, setting expectations for utilities, and highlighting statutory protections and council powers.
- E1-E4: Reinforcing Engage more policies by extending guidance to private landowners, encouraging responsible management, and providing clear pathways for community participation in tree care and planting.

ASSOCIATED TOPIC PAPERS

The paper is part of a series, underpinning the delivery of the Urban Forest Strategy and can be read in conjunction with the following papers.

- Topic Paper 1 Tree Asset Management and Risk
- Topic Paper 3 Biodiversity and Habitat Connectivity,
- Topic Paper 4 Trees, Subsidence and Structural Damage
- Topic Paper 11 Tree Protection, Damage and Compensation

Together these papers provide a comprehensive framework for tree asset management.

INTRODUCTION

For the most part trees develop in balance with their surroundings, both above and below ground. However, conflicts with people and property can result from natural processes, the effects of human activity, or poor species choice. These conflicts are more likely in urban areas where densification results in closer proximity and harsher rooting environments. Severe conflicts can have serious implications for the health and welfare of trees and/or the safety of people and property, necessitating tree work or removal. As trees are vital to the health and resilience of our urban areas, it is essential to adopt practices that maximise tree survival while minimising conflict.

TREE PLANTING

Species Selection

Choosing the right tree for a location is essential to successful planting schemes, whether undertaken by CCC or by private landowners. The above- and below-ground constraints of any site should inform the species choice, and suitable space should be provided for species that will make a meaningful contribution to the wider urban forest.

Rather than providing a fixed list of species (which can be limiting in terms of biodiversity), site-specific assessments of potential planting locations are recommended, along with expert advice on species choice.

Site constraint assessments need to consider:

- Tree health -soil type, light levels, ground cover
- Conflict -available rooting volume, access requirements, proximity to hard standing and structures
- Potential nuisance/inconvenience -leaf litter, fruit/nut fall, excessive shading, bird roosting
- Maintenance needs -watering, access for pruning, weeding, mulching

Structural Planting

Trees should be designed into developments and landscapes from the outset to maximise planting opportunities and optimise establishment and vigorous growth. On new developments this means that, in addition to ornamental planting, space should be provided for sustainable, structural planting. For private landowners, this means allowing adequate space on their property for trees to mature safely. Large and long-lived trees provide the greatest ecosystem services and are enormously beneficial to the urban forest. However, without forward planning, increased densification reduces the space available for these essential assets. Furthermore, the life of many new developments is relatively short compared with the life expectancy of a large tree. If trees are not located in sustainable positions they will inevitably be removed before their potential is realised, whether by redevelopment pressures or avoidable conflicts.

This guidance does not introduce new planning requirements, but explains good practice where opportunities arise through design and layout.

Non-Native and Climate Adaptive Species

Native trees provide essential ecological benefits by supporting native wildlife through the provision of food and shelter. Adapted to local conditions, they often require less maintenance to establish and may have a greater potential for survival. However, diversity is a key element of a resilient urban forest. Pests and diseases can devastate single-species populations, and climate changes are occurring too rapidly for some species to adapt. Both CCC and private landowners can broaden planting palettes to include species that are beneficial to local wildlife and more tolerant of extreme drought or waterlogging. This approach increases overall success rates and helps secure resilience against future risks.

Tree Pits

Tree pits provide the necessary soil and root growth conditions to allow new trees to establish. They can be simple or engineered depending on required additional functions such as root management, stormwater management, urban cooling, and carbon sequestration. They can be soft or hard surfaced and decorative, but they must always allow for water, nutrient and air access, and root growth without conflict with surroundings. Effective tree pits are site specific and should be designed to maximise establishment and aid long-term tree health by ensuring a sufficient volume of uncompacted material to support a strong root system. This applies to

both new plantings in the public realm and to private landowners creating new planting spaces on their own land.

Design considerations

Tree pits should:

- Be of sufficient size to allow healthy establishment. If designed to prevent breakout, the pit should allow sufficient rooting volume for the species chosen.
- Be designed to capture surface water. If designed to avoid breakout, the pit must allow for overflow/discharge to underdrain.
- Contain rooting material sufficient to aid healthy growth and provide ground structure if required.
- Consider future root growth and methods to direct or contain it.
- Provide removable grates or similar, if used.

The Council's Tree Planting Programme

CCC's tree planting and establishment programme includes planting, watering and young tree maintenance. It follows programmed works and begins in a geographical management area in the year following the tree maintenance and inspection cycle. Private landowners may also find these principles helpful when planning their own tree planting projects, particularly in terms of timing, replacement priorities and establishment care.

For council planting, consideration of locations for planting in any single year will be prioritised in the following order:

1. Replacement planting -within the current planting management area.
2. Public and member replacement planting requests.
3. New planting locations -within the current planting management area.
4. Replacement planting -in other management areas.

When the decision is taken to remove a council-owned tree, CCC prioritises replacement planting, considering whether it is appropriate to replant. Wherever possible, the site will be considered as a whole, reflecting its history, character, available space, use and local interests. In some situations, planting opportunities after a tree has been removed are significantly more expensive and difficult, as a new tree pit may have to be engineered and contend with underground services,

aerial competition from streetlamps, traffic signs and vehicle sightlines. Replacement plantings in these types of situations may take longer and be the subject of specific funding bids.

Establishment

Newly planted trees require monitoring and regular maintenance input to ensure that they successfully establish. For both CCC plantings and privately planted trees, this may include weeding (either by herbicide or mulching), watering, and adjustment or removal of tree ties or guards. In most cases, a three-year establishment period of aftercare is recommended as a minimum, subject to funding, ownership and maintenance responsibilities.

Community support can help with [Watering new trees - Cambridge City Council](#) ¹.

TREE WORK

To minimise negative impacts of pruning it is essential to consider the tools and techniques used, the situation in which the tree grows, the desired outcome, and how best to achieve it. A common assumption is that reducing the overall size of a tree will solve many conflicts; however, often the converse is true.

Unlike grasses, trees and shrubs are apically dominant, meaning that they grow from the tip. Removing the tip results in chemical reactions aimed at recovering lost leaf area as efficiently as possible. The tree therefore focuses on new shoot and leaf growth, with shoots often more prolific than those removed and leaves often larger. This can result in a denser, unnatural form and a canopy that conflicts with its surroundings. An alternative solution may be to remove lower branches (crown lift). This allows the tree canopy to occupy previously unusable space and increases light under the canopy while maintaining a natural, aesthetically pleasing form.

All tree work should be carried out in accordance with [British Standard 3998:2010](#)² and by a suitably qualified operative. This applies equally to council trees and privately owned trees.

¹ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/watering-new-trees> last accessed 5/1/26

²

<https://landingpage.bsigroup.com/LandingPage/Standard?UPI=0000000003008996>
[0](#) last accessed 5/1/26

Reasons for Tree Works

CCC recognises that, in some situations, trees can cause residents significant problems and that the wrong type of tree may be growing in the wrong place. In these situations, the tree team will act reasonably and responsibly and work to ensure an appropriate balance is reached between the interests of the individual, the community and its legal obligations. Private landowners are also encouraged to weigh these same factors when considering tree works.

Works likely to be opposed (without robust, evidenced justification):

1. Interference with satellite TV reception or telephone wires
2. Improving light to solar panels
3. Perception that the tree is too large
4. Obstruction of view or natural light
5. Seasonal nuisance (leaf fall, fruit/berries/nuts, insects, birds, or honeydew)
6. Medical/allergy concerns
7. Perception that the tree will cause damage in the future
8. To replace a healthy mature tree to create space for new planting
9. Remedy issues with drains
10. Removal of overhang for convenience
11. Dropped kerbs (see also "Highway Trees and Dropped Kerb Applications" below)

Works likely to be supported:

1. Tree, or part of it, found by a qualified arborist to be in unreasonable condition in its context
2. Tree missed from a cyclical maintenance programme
3. Work to create or maintain reasonable access
4. Work to create or maintain reasonable clearance
5. Maintain sightlines
6. Remove obstruction

Special Circumstances and Exceptional Response

While CCC applies consistent criteria to tree maintenance and pruning to ensure fair and transparent management across the city, it recognises that in rare and

exceptional cases, the standard approach may not adequately address the impacts experienced by individuals or households.

An exceptional response may be considered where:

- The impact on residential use or enjoyment significantly exceeds what is typical for an urban setting
- The tree's proximity or species characteristics create disproportionate effects on health or wellbeing
- A clear and credible link is established between the tree and a health-related impact, supported by appropriate evidence
- The structural condition of the tree increases the likelihood of future failure, even if it does not present an immediate safety risk
- The cumulative effect of several factors materially compromises the safe or reasonable use of private space

Where such circumstances apply, the Council may consider a departure from standard practice, which could include:

- A heavier crown reduction than normally permitted
- Management as a high pollard
- Tree removal with compensatory planting
- Where appropriate, additional planting elsewhere may be considered to offset the impact

All decisions will be based on arboricultural assessment, consideration of the tree's wider public value, and consultation with the public and ward councillors where necessary. Methods such as the [Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees](#)³ (CAVAT) may be used to support decision-making.

Exceptional responses will be recorded and justified in writing. They will not set precedent, but serve as proportionate, site-specific responses that reflect the Council's duty to balance individual impact with the wider benefits of its urban forest.

³ <https://www.ltoa.org.uk/documents-1/capital-asset-value-for-amenity-trees-cavat>
last accessed 5/1/26

Common Pruning Practices

Provided below are descriptions of some of the more common and useful pruning practices. These apply equally to council-managed trees and to those on private land.

- Crown lift -removal of lower branches to raise the height of the crown's base.
- Crown reduce -pruning the outer parts of the canopy to lessen overall size; excessive reduction should be avoided.
- Crown thin - removal of a percentage of smaller branches, usually in the outer crown, to produce a lighter, more uniform canopy.
- Pollard -pruning method where branches are regularly cut back to a framework of specified height/width.

All works should be carried out in accordance with BS 3998:2010 and by a suitably qualified person with appropriate insurance.

HIGHWAY TREES AND DROPPED KERB APPLICATIONS

Dropped kerb applications are administered by Cambridgeshire County Council⁴ as the highway authority. CCC provides arboricultural advice to inform decisions where existing street trees may be affected.

CCC, through the highway authority decision-making process, will normally resist the removal of highway trees where they are well established and in good condition. Trees are an integral part of the street scene and their benefits, including shade, amenity, and contributions to biodiversity, are considered to outweigh the convenience of additional vehicle access in most cases.

Where removal is accepted as unavoidable, the applicant is required to meet the cost of replacement planting and establishment. The current (2025) estimated cost is £500 per tree, which covers planting, aftercare, and establishment. Replacement planting will be sought as close as practicable to the original location to maintain canopy cover and continuity of the street's character.

⁴ <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/roads-and-pathways/dropped-kerbs-and-access-protection-markings> last accessed 5/1/26

THIRD PARTY PRUNING REQUESTS AND PERMIT TO WORK

In some situations, third parties, including residents, developers or other organisations may request pruning of council-owned trees where the CCC itself would not normally undertake the work. This may arise where the request is not related to safety, or where the applicant wishes for works to be completed within timescales quicker than the service can achieve through its programmed operations.

In such cases the CCC operates a permit to work system. This allows third parties to apply for permission to prune council-owned trees at their own expense, subject to conditions. Applications are considered on a case-by-case basis to ensure that any proposed works are reasonable, proportionate, and will not harm the long-term health or structure of the tree. Permissions are granted at the CCC's discretion and do not create a precedent for future requests.

Further information, including application details, can be found on the CCC website [Apply for a permit to prune Council trees](#)⁵.

UTILITY COMPANIES AND NJUG GUIDELINES

Utility companies working adjacent to or within the root or canopy zones of trees are expected to follow nationally recognised guidance, including the [NJUG Guidelines for the Planning, Installation and Maintenance of Utility Apparatus in Proximity to Trees \(Volume 4\)](#)⁶, and other applicable arboricultural and highway standards.

Expectations:

- Early Planning & Consultation -Utilities should undertake site surveys at the design stage to identify trees, root protection areas and canopy spread, and consult with the local authority tree officer to avoid conflicts.

⁵ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/apply-for-a-permit-to-prune-council-trees> last accessed 5/1/26

⁶ <https://streetworks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/V4-Trees-Issue-2-16-11-2007.pdf> last accessed 5/1/26

- Respecting Tree Protection Zones -Prohibited, Precautionary and Permitted Zones (as defined in NJUG4) must be followed to minimise excavation and disturbance near trees.
- Methods to Avoid Damage -Works near trees should use appropriate techniques to reduce root loss, prevent soil compaction, and protect exposed roots.
- Above-Ground Clearances -Where overhead lines or other above-ground apparatus are installed, clearance distances must be maintained, and any necessary pruning must be in line with BS 3998:2010
- Protection of Legally Protected Trees -Trees subject to Tree Preservation Orders, Conservation Area controls, or planning conditions require full compliance with relevant legal procedures.
- Repair and Reinstatement -Where utility operations cause damage to trees, utilities are expected to provide suitable reinstatement, including replacement planting or remedial works, in consultation with the local authority.

RIGHTS, PROTECTIONS AND LEGAL POWERS

In addition to tree planting and tree work guidance, it is important to set out the rights and responsibilities of private landowners, and the legal powers available to councils. The following sections summarise how common law rights, statutory protections, and specific legislation apply to trees in Cambridge, whether they are in public or private ownership.

Abatement

It is long established that branches of trees overhanging another's land may be cut back to the boundary by the landowner or their tenant without the permission of the tree owner. Notice should be provided to the tree owner if access to the tree or the land from which it grows is required, and any arising material (including fruit/nuts) should be offered back.

CCC recommends caution when exercising this right. Consultation with the tree owner is recommended before works are carried out and only the minimum work necessary to resolve the nuisance should be completed.

Rights and Responsibilities for Private Landowners

Private landowners play a vital role in the health and resilience of the city's urban forest. The majority of trees in Cambridge are in private ownership, and the way they

are managed has a direct impact on community well-being, biodiversity and climate resilience.

Rights:

- Ownership rights -Landowners own the trees growing on their land and have the right to enjoy their benefits.
- Abatement -As outlined above, landowners may prune branches that overhang their property back to the boundary, provided this does not breach legal protections.
- Reasonable enjoyment -Landowners can carry out tree works on their own land, subject to planning and conservation legislation.

Responsibilities:

- Duty of care -Landowners have a legal duty of care to ensure their trees do not pose an unacceptable risk to people or property.
- Compliance with protections -Works must not be carried out on trees subject to a Tree Preservation Order, Conservation Area controls, or planning conditions without formal consent.
- Good practice -Tree works should follow British Standard 3998:2010 and be undertaken by a suitably qualified and insured arborist.
- Sustainability -When removing trees, landowners are encouraged to replant where space allows, to sustain the contribution to the wider urban forest.
- Neighbour relations -Before undertaking works that might affect neighbours, consultation is encouraged to maintain good relations and avoid disputes.

By recognising both their rights and their responsibilities, private landowners can ensure that their trees create minimal inconvenience, remain safe, healthy, and valuable, while contributing positively to Cambridge's shared urban forest.

Legal Protection

Notwithstanding the above, no works to any trees should be carried out before ascertaining any legal restrictions. Trees may be protected by a [Tree Preservation](#)

[Order, Conservation Area designation](#)⁷, Planning Condition or Covenant. This applies equally to council-owned and privately owned trees. Carrying out unauthorised works can result in enforcement action and significant penalties.

Miscellaneous Provisions

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976⁸ empowers councils to make a tree safe where it poses an imminent danger. While disputes about trees between private parties are normally for those parties to resolve, a council may intervene where:

- a dangerous tree presents a risk to the public, and
- the owner is uncontactable, refuses, or ignores requests to make the tree safe.

In such cases the council may take appropriate steps under the Act to remove the danger and may seek to recover reasonable costs.

This Topic Paper provides practical guidance to support good outcomes for trees across Cambridge. It should be read alongside the Urban Forest Strategy and other topic papers, which together set the strategic direction, technical context and governance framework for urban forest management.

END

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tree-preservation-orders-and-trees-in-conservation-areas> last accessed 5/1/26

⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1976/57> last accessed 16/10/25

TOPIC PAPER 3 BIODIVERSITY AND HABITAT CONNECTIVITY

Version 5

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POLICY ALIGNMENT

This Topic Paper supports delivery of the Urban Forest Strategy through the following policies

- M2: The Council will follow Government and best practice advice regarding the control of pests and diseases.
- P2: The Council will resist the removal of/or excessive works to trees without robust and evidenced justification.
- PL1 (Aspirational): The Council will encourage and continue to seek new opportunities for tree planting in appropriate locations. This will include ensuring and encouraging a diversity of tree species, targeting areas that currently lack tree cover and prioritising the planting of large-canopy and long-lived trees.
- E1: Through public and partnership engagement the Council will facilitate sustainable and proactive management of trees.
- E2 (Aspirational): The Council will seek to encourage joined-up approaches to tree management through partnerships with other Council services, managers of private trees and by working with local communities and businesses.

ASSOCIATED TOPIC PAPERS

The paper is part of a series, underpinning the delivery of the Urban Forest Strategy and can be read in conjunction with the following papers.

- Topic Paper 1 Asset Management
- Topic Paper 2 Tree Planting, Work and Third-Party Guidance
- Topic Paper 7 Climate Change and Resilience

Together these papers set out how the Urban Forest Strategy is contributing to biodiversity and climate change crises mitigation and adaptation.

PURPOSE

Urban trees form vital habitats and ecological corridors. This paper describes how Cambridge City Council (CCC) manages trees to support and enhance biodiversity, including veteran tree care, species diversity and contributions to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Biodiversity Net Gain. CCC will seek to maintain high standards of biosecurity to reduce the introduction and spread of pests and diseases, ensuring a resilient treescape for the future.

INTRODUCTION

Biodiversity is the variety of all life, encompassing different species, genetic variations and the diverse ecosystems they inhabit. This complex web of life provides essential ecosystem services, such as clean air and water, food, medicine and climate regulation, that are essential to the health and well-being of Cambridge.

Trees and woodlands are crucial for biodiversity, providing complex habitats for species ranging from fungi and lichens to birds and mammals, as well as supporting ecosystems through soil protection, climate regulation and nutrient cycling. A single oak tree can support hundreds of associated species, with some estimates suggesting over 2,000 species across its lifetime and the diversity of tree species in an area directly contributes to overall biodiversity and ecosystem resilience. Protecting and planting trees that provide benefits to native flora and fauna is therefore a key strategy for addressing the biodiversity crisis.

SPECIES DIVERSITY

The UK is ranked 189 out of 218 for countries in terms of nature depletion ¹ with almost 15% of all species at risk of extinction. The primary causes include agriculture, urbanisation, inappropriate woodland management, invasive species, hydrological change and climate change. Climate change is thought to be responsible for the significant decline of some species and the rapid population growth of others, creating imbalances in ecosystems.

In Cambridge there are some of the lowest proportions of Priority Habitats and land designated for nature conservation. With approximately 13% forest cover in 2015, the UK is one of the least densely forested countries in Europe. This compares with 38% for the EU as a whole and 31% worldwide.²

The necessary drive for innovation and economic growth has resulted in urban expansion. In a denser larger city, balancing the needs of both wildlife and people is challenging but, as it is essential for strengthening the city's resilience, we must work together to make space for nature in urban communities and the surrounding countryside.

Species diversity is key to the stability and resilience of an ecosystem. More diverse ecosystems are better able to withstand stresses such as drought or invading species.

Changes in climate from steady rises in temperature to acute weather events can significantly impact tree health. This creates the need to diversify planting palettes, introducing more species tolerant of drought, waterlogging, extremes of temperature and pests and diseases. However, as sudden changes in habitat can have devastating impacts on the flora and fauna reliant on them, it is essential to consider the benefit of non-native tree species to native wildlife.

CCC continues to diversify its planting palette through trial and research while ensuring the use of native and, where possible, locally sourced tree stock.

¹ [Biodiversity Strategy - Cambridge City Council](#) last accessed 16/10/25

² <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/publications/forestry-statistics/forestry-statistics-2017/international-forestry-6/forest-cover-international-comparisons-3/> last accessed 16/10/25

We use national guidance and tools, such as TDAG's *Tree Species Selection* guide³ and the *Right Trees for a Changing Climate* tool⁴, to help choose species that will thrive in Cambridge's future climate.

The management of tree populations and natural regeneration is also essential for enhancing species diversity. This includes the removal of trees to benefit grassland and riparian habitat as well as maximizing habitat types within woodland areas.

HABITAT CONNECTIVITY

Healthy ecosystems depend not only on the diversity of species but also on the connections between habitats. Isolated green spaces can limit the movement and survival of wildlife, while connected networks of trees, hedgerows, riversides and woodlands allow species to move, feed and adapt to changing conditions.

In Cambridge, the background matrix of trees created by the distribution of the urban forest plays a vital supporting role. It underpins areas of higher biodiversity value by creating ecological corridors, providing habitat for more common species and buffering sensitive habitats. At the same time, it delivers wider ecosystem services, including air pollution amelioration, urban cooling and the interception of stormwater run-off that protect these more sensitive areas.

Through careful tree protection, planting, management and engagement, the council seeks to strengthen these ecological connections across the city, linking parks, gardens, watercourses and the wider countryside. This approach supports the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy, ensuring that the urban forest functions as part of a joined-up, resilient network of habitats.

VETERAN TREE CARE

Veteran trees are some of the most valuable trees in the landscape. In addition to providing a sense of history and contributing to aesthetic appeal they are a significant resource providing unique habitats, for a wide range of fungal, plant and animal life.

³ <https://www.tdag.org.uk/tree-species-selection-for-green-infrastructure.html> last accessed 12/09/25

⁴ <http://www.righttrees4cc.org.uk/> last accessed 12/09/25

The importance of veteran trees is not widely understood and a desire for uniformity and overconcern for risk has resulted in the premature loss of these living ecosystems and the significant biodiversity benefits they provide. While veteran trees may exhibit structural weaknesses due to their age and natural decay processes, these features are not automatically considered defects. Instead, they are assessed with an informed understanding of the tree's adaptive capacity and ecological value. Management is guided by best practice, including the principles outlined in *Veteran Trees: A Guide to Good Management*, with a focus on retention over removal, wherever it is safe and feasible to do so. The removal of ancient and veteran trees would represent not just an aesthetic loss but the disappearance of entire ecosystems centuries in the making. Removal is, therefore, considered only as a last resort, where no reasonable alternative exists.

In 2004 a survey was commissioned by CCC to establish the presence, location and species of veteran trees in Cambridge⁵.

In 2018 a further survey was commissioned to assess the number, location and value of ancient and veteran trees on Sheep's Green and Coe Fen.⁶ The survey established that of the 390 trees on Sheep's Green and Coe Fen 50 are ancient and/or veteran and 17 are advanced candidate veteran trees. A further 53 premature candidate veteran trees were identified for proactive management, helping ensure a continuing population of these biodiversity assets⁷.

Risk from ancient and veteran trees is managed proportionally using methods that favour the tree's longevity and habitat function, like restricting public access to reduce risk of harm, halo thinning to reduce competition and sympathetic, staged pruning to mimic natural aging while improving structural stability.

Through this approach, Cambridge seeks to honour and protect its veteran trees, not simply as biological specimens, but as living witnesses to the city's past and guardians of its ecological future.

⁵ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/7447/veteran-trees-in-cambridge-booklet-2004-red.pdf> last accessed 12/09/25

⁶ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/7446/180831-12-sg-veteran-tree-report-reduced.pdf> last accessed 12/09/25

⁷ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/veteran-tree-management-on-sheeps-green-and-coe-fen> last accessed 12/09/25

BIOSECURITY

Tree pests and diseases pose a significant impact on tree populations and the habitats they provide. Following a significant increase in non-native tree pests and diseases introduced into the United Kingdom since the early 2000s, it is essential that we reduce the risk of introducing and spreading tree pests and diseases by applying simple biosecurity measures.

Everyone can help by:

- Avoiding driving or parking on natural surfaces when visiting park, gardens and woodlands.
- Cleaning footwear, pets, bikes and prams.
- Not bringing plant material from abroad.

In addition to the above, CCC encourages its staff and contractors to regularly clean all kit, vehicles and machinery.

CCC will continue to source planting stock responsibly, prioritising pest-and disease-free areas and nurseries that follow recognised national standards or robust biosecurity policies. Wherever possible, stock will be obtained from suppliers accredited under the Plant Healthy Certification Scheme⁸, which provides independent assurance of high standards in plant health and biosecurity management.

RISK FROM PESTS AND DISEASES

Tree pests and diseases represent one of the most significant and growing risks to biodiversity, canopy cover and habitat connectivity within Cambridge's urban forest. Increased global trade, the movement of plants and wood products and a warming climate have created new pathways for harmful organisms to establish and spread. The effects extend far beyond the loss of individual trees, impacting the species that depend on them and reducing the ecological resilience of the city's treescape.

Several pests and pathogens already affect Cambridge's trees, while others pose emerging threats.

Ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) is now widespread across Cambridgeshire and substantial loss of common ash is expected over the coming decade. CCC has monitored a representative sample of ash trees under its control

⁸ [Certification - Plant Healthy](#) last accessed 12/09/25

since 2017 to record and understand the progression and impact of the disease on the city's canopy.⁹

Horse chestnut leaf miner (*Cameraria ohridella*) is endemic, causing annual premature leaf browning and visual decline, though rarely resulting in tree death.

Plane anthracnose (*Marssonina platani*) causes leaf blotching, shoot dieback and premature defoliation in London planes but not considered fatal. Severe or repeated infection can weaken young wood, occasionally leading to branch drop and loss of crown structure. The disease is widespread across southern and eastern England, including Cambridge.

Other pests are approaching from neighbouring regions.

Oak processionary moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*), which defoliates oaks and poses a public health risk through its urticating hairs, has expanded northwards from London and is now approximately 40–50 kilometres from Cambridge.

Acute oak decline, a complex bacterial disorder, has been recorded in parts of eastern England and could impact the city's native oak population if established.

Plane lace bug (*Corythucha ciliata*), which causes leaf stippling and bronzing, has recently been detected in south-east England and is expected to reach Cambridge within the next few years, potentially affecting the city's prominent London plane avenues.

Elm zigzag sawfly (*Aproceros leucopoda*), recently recorded across southern England, while not currently considered to cause widespread mortality it does present a moderate risk to the city's recovering elm population, with repeated defoliation that may weaken trees over time.

A number of serious exotic threats are also of increasing concern.

Plane wilt (*Ceratocystis platani*), **bronze birch borer** (*Agrilus anxius*) and **beech leaf disease** have not yet reached the United Kingdom but are spreading across continental Europe and would have severe impacts on key species if introduced. **Sweet chestnut blight** (*Cryphonectria parasitica*) is already present in southern England and could spread further north but will have little impact on Cambridge with its low numbers of this species, while **oak lace bug** (*Corythucha arcuata*) poses a potential additional stress to native oak populations.

⁹ See <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/tree-data> for survey results. Last accessed 16/10/25

Climate change is expected to exacerbate many of these risks by extending the suitable range and survival of pest species, while drought and heat stress reduce trees' natural defences. To build resilience, CCC will continue to monitor emerging threats, follow Forest Research's advice and national surveillance schemes, such as Observatree¹⁰, and promote early detection and reporting. Species diversification remains central to this approach, ensuring no single genus dominates and that future canopy composition can better withstand pest and disease pressures.

Through vigilant monitoring, responsible sourcing and adaptive management, CCC aims to protect the biodiversity value of the city's trees and sustain a healthy, resilient canopy for future generations.

COLLABORATION

The Urban Forest Strategy supports and aligns with the Biodiversity Strategy but is subordinate to it. Where objectives overlap, biodiversity policy direction takes precedence, subject to statutory safety duties. In practice, this means that in areas of high biodiversity value tree management decisions will be taken, with safety as the first priority and biodiversity value considered second, in close collaboration with the Biodiversity Team. This ensures that statutory duties are met while protecting and enhancing ecological value wherever possible.

The Urban Forest Strategy has been developed alongside the Biodiversity Strategy mid-period review and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

CCC collaborates with partners including Cambridgeshire County Council, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning, Natural England, the Wildlife Trust (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire), local universities and community groups. These partnerships integrate urban forestry with wider conservation efforts, improve ecological connectivity and provide opportunities for community involvement. Through this collaborative approach, CCC will ensure that its urban forest contributes fully to statutory biodiversity duties and regional nature recovery.

¹⁰ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/observatree/> last accessed 13/3/26

This Topic Paper should be read alongside the Urban Forest Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy, which together set the strategic framework for protecting and enhancing Cambridge's natural environment

END

TOPIC PAPER 4: SUBSIDENCE AND STRUCTURAL DAMAGE

Version 5

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Policy alignment

This paper supports implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy under the following policies.

- M1, M3 and M4: Supporting the **Manage More** policies relating to legal obligations, damage control and mitigation and capacity and resourcing
- P2: Underpinning the **Protect More** policy regarding planning controls
- PL1-PL4: Advancing the **Plant More** policies relating to planting, establishment, innovation and diversity
- E1-E4: Reinforcing **Engage more** policies by extending guidance to private landowners, encouraging responsible management and providing clear pathways for community participation in tree care and planting.

Associated Topic Papers

The paper is part of a series, underpinning the delivery of the Urban Forest Strategy and can be read in conjunction with the following papers.

- Topic Paper 1 Tree Asset Management and Risk
- Topic Paper 2 Tree Planting, Work and Third-Party Guidance
- Topic Paper 6 Governance and Resourcing
- Topic Paper 9 Statutory Responsibilities and Planning Control
- Topic Paper 11 Tree Protection, Damage and Compensation

Purpose

Subsidence and other structural damage caused by trees can be complex and contentious. This paper sets out the evidential standards required, Cambridge City Council's (CCC) mitigation hierarchy and the legal and policy context guiding decisions. It explains how the CCC works with insurers, engineers and residents to resolve cases fairly.

This approach protects Cambridge's urban forest, safeguards public amenity and ensures that limited resources are spent effectively while meeting legal duties of care and liability.

Introduction

This paper is based on the understanding that trees provide numerous benefits to the health and liveability of Cambridge, while recognising that damage caused to property by trees can have financial implications and affect a householder's quality of life. It is essential therefore to balance the many benefits that trees provide against the physical and financial impact of trees causing damage to buildings.

Structural damage to properties by trees can be caused both directly and indirectly. Direct damage results from annual growth and/or root activity, or indirect damage, such as subsidence, can result from the extraction of moisture from shrinkable soil by fibrous tree roots or the washing away of fines from soil under foundations from leaking drains.

Most trees co-exist with buildings with minimal conflict and when damage does occur it is not necessarily a result of tree root activity, even if there are trees present and in proximity. Indeed, even in the most high-risk area for subsidence damage, no tree has a greater than 5% chance of causing damage to a property. Furthermore, if trees are implicated in damage, alternatives to pruning or felling may solve the issue. The value of trees to the public varies, from limited amenity value, through some amenity value, to special or outstanding amenity value. Accordingly, the greater the amenity value of a tree, the more compelling and comprehensive the evidence must be before works to mitigate alleged damage will be supported. Conversely, trees with limited amenity value, for example because they have a short safe useful life, will require less evidence. This principle helps facilitate timely decision-making and avoid unnecessary delays.

Direct Damage

The physical expansion of woody roots as trees increase in size can affect light structures (e.g. boundary walls, porches, driveways and pavements). Direct damage can also be caused by the stem or branches through direct pressure resulting from annual growth or movement in the wind.

Evidence of Direct Damage

Where direct damage is alleged, the claimant or their agent must provide evidence sufficient to demonstrate, on the balance of probabilities, that the tree is the effective cause of that damage. Evidence should include:

- A clear description of the damage, including its nature, extent and location.
- Photographs showing both the damage and the tree alleged to be responsible.

- A plan or sketch identifying the position of the tree(s) relative to the affected structure.
- Where drains or services are implicated, a CCTV drain survey or other relevant investigation showing root ingress or obstruction.
- An engineer's or surveyor's report setting out causation, with consideration of alternative causes (e.g. defective construction, ground movement, wear and tear).

Drain Damage

It is important to distinguish between tree roots causing direct damage to drains and tree roots exploiting existing defects. In many cases roots are opportunistic, they are attracted to moisture and enter drains through pre-existing cracks or faulty joints. In such cases the tree is not the primary cause of the damage to the drain and the appropriate remedy is to repair or replace the defective drain. Only where robust evidence demonstrates that root pressure has directly fractured or displaced an otherwise sound drain will tree works be considered. In practice, it can be very difficult to determine whether the tree roots were attracted by already leaking water from a fractured drain or whether the roots themselves have caused the fracture.

Cost Assessment

For transparency, mitigation requests and claims relating to direct damage should also include a breakdown of estimated costs under different scenarios. This should set out:

- the estimated costs of repairing or rebuilding the affected structure while retaining the tree;
- the estimated costs of tree removal, including replacement planting, ongoing monitoring and any associated engineering works; and
- the comparative financial, amenity and environmental implications of each option.

Reports should distinguish between works that are directly related to tree management and those that arise from building condition, foundation design, drainage defects, soil characteristics or wider climatic influences. The Council does not expect a numerical apportionment of overall costs between contributory causes where this cannot be robustly demonstrated. However, costs must not be attributed to tree influence without clear technical justification and the presence of other material factors must be expressly acknowledged. These costs should be presented in a transparent, itemised format so that decision makers can fully weigh the options and ensure that any decision to remove or retain a tree is evidence-based, proportionate and defensible.

Avoidance of Direct Damage

Most direct damage in relation to future properties can be avoided if best practice is followed at the design and construction stage. Compliance with *BS 5837:2012 - Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction* is essential. This standard sets out the requirements for surveying existing trees, establishing root protection areas, and designing foundations, surfacing and underground services to avoid future conflict. The Council expects developers, contractors and landowners to follow BS 5837 guidance wherever construction or excavation is proposed in the vicinity of trees. Failure to do so may increase the likelihood of avoidable damage and limit options for later resolution.

Indirect Damage (Subsidence)

Trees cause subsidence when they remove moisture from a dynamic soil beneath foundation depth. Concern about the risk of subsidence and proximity of trees to buildings can lead to their unnecessary felling or pruning.

If tree root activity is evidenced to be the cause of or a contributing factor to subsidence it is not always necessary to fell the tree as alternative solutions might be appropriate to stabilise a property and stop ongoing subsidence movement. Typically, however, alternative solutions are significantly more costly; therefore, it may be necessary to balance the amenity value of the tree(s) and the availability of funding against the cost of alternative solutions.

Current Council Practice

In areas of known high risk, CCC already undertakes preventative management to mitigate the potential for tree-related subsidence. This includes biennial or triennial crown reductions of certain tree populations to maintain them at a smaller size than they would reach at full maturity. Examples include the London plane at Alexandra Gardens, Maids Causeway and Newmarket Road. This cyclical management helps reduce water demand from trees in shrinkable soils while retaining their public amenity and environmental value.

CCC does not, however, proactively assess individual trees for subsidence risk. Each case is dealt with as it arises, based on the evidence provided. This is because there are too many unknowns to allow for meaningful proactive assessment without detailed site-specific investigations, which cannot be undertaken at scale for reasons of cost, resourcing and lack of access to private property. Factors such as whether

roots extend beneath foundations, the type and depth of foundations, and the nature of soils beneath individual buildings can only be established through intrusive investigations carried out by claimants or their agents.

Proactively removing trees without clear evidence of risk is disproportionate and would also be unsustainable and counterproductive. It would result in unnecessary loss of canopy cover, reduce resilience to climate change, diminish biodiversity and contribute to local “urban desertification” through loss of shading and evaporative cooling. For these reasons, CCC requires robust, case-by-case evidence before supporting tree removal on subsidence grounds.

Evidence

Protected Trees - Statutory Requirements

Government guidance is clear that where structural damage from subsidence is alleged to have been caused by protected trees, applications for tree work must be accompanied by detailed technical evidence. For Tree Preservation Order (TPO) applications this evidence is mandatory: applications without it are invalid and will be returned. For Conservation Area notifications, while the same evidence is not a statutory requirement, CCC will normally resist removal of or significant works to healthy trees unless robust evidence of this type is provided. Protected trees may be in either public or private ownership.

Council-Owned Trees - Alignment with Protected Tree Standards

Council-owned trees are public assets. They are not generally protected by TPOs, since their management is already controlled by the council as landowner. However, because they are typically located in public places, they usually provide a higher baseline of amenity value than privately owned trees.

For this reason, CCC requires that the same evidential standards are applied when assessing mitigation requests relating to its own trees as would apply to protected trees. This approach ensures that community assets are only removed or reduced where robust and transparent evidence demonstrates it is necessary, and that decisions are proportionate, defensible, and consistent with the statutory framework.

In exercising its functions in relation to tree management, subsidence mitigation and structural damage, Cambridge City Council acts as a public authority for the purposes of the Environment Act 2021. The Council is therefore required to have due regard to the environmental principles set out in the Government’s Environmental Principles Policy Statement, including the prevention of environmental harm, proportionality and integration of environmental protection into decision-making.

Where decisions relating to tree management may have a material effect on the natural environment or public amenity, the Council will also ensure that appropriate consultation and engagement is undertaken in line with its statutory duties, adopted strategies and engagement policies. This includes providing clear information to affected parties, considering representations received and demonstrating how environmental considerations have been taken into account alongside engineering, legal and financial factors.

This approach supports transparent, lawful and proportionate decision-making and reinforces the Council's commitment to managing conflict between trees and buildings in a way that protects the urban forest while addressing legitimate concerns about property damage.

Clarification on Evidence Standards

The requirement to provide technical evidence is mandatory where works are sought to TPO protected trees because of alleged subsidence or direct structural damage. Government guidance prescribes the categories of evidence that must be supplied with a TPO application linked to subsidence damage (for example monitoring data, foundation depth, soil analysis, root identification, costings). However, the level of detail within each category is not defined in statute. CCC therefore interprets these requirements to ensure that evidence is complete, transparent and robust. Where evidence submissions fall short of the categories, they will be refused or returned as invalid. Where submissions provide the required categories but lack sufficient clarity or detail, further information will be requested before reaching a decision.

The requirement to provide technical evidence where works are sought to trees in CCC's ownership does not have to align to statutory standards. Where CCC is the tree owner the Claimant's duty is to provide a reasonable level of evidence to show, on the balance of probabilities, that the tree is the cause of the nuisance and subsidence damage is occurring.

Amenity Value Categories

Although Article 5 certificates were removed from legislation, the DETR Guide (2000, paras 6.69-6.70) provided useful definitions of the terms *special* and *outstanding amenity value*. While no longer part of current statutory guidance, these definitions

remain relevant as a practical way of distinguishing levels of amenity. Trees of outstanding amenity value were described as typically dominant features in the landscape, while trees of special amenity value were defined as those performing a particular function in their setting, such as screening development.

CCC continues to apply these distinctions as part of its assessment of mitigation requests or claims, using them to calibrate the evidential standard required in proportion to the level of amenity value at stake. Accordingly, the framework applied is:

- **Trees of limited amenity value** (for example, young trees, those with structural defects, or those nearing the end of their safe useful life) will require less detailed evidence to justify intervention.
- **Trees of some amenity value** (for example, healthy street or garden trees making a positive but not distinctive contribution to the local environment) will require a reasonable level of evidence, including monitoring and engineering reports, before removal or significant works will be considered.
- **Trees of special amenity value** will require robust evidence that clearly demonstrates the causal link between the tree and the alleged damage, alongside an assessment of alternatives.
- **Trees of outstanding amenity value** will require the most rigorous and comprehensive evidence before removal or significant works will be considered.

This tiered approach facilitates decision-making, ensures proportionality and avoids delays by making expectations clear from the outset.

Subsidence reports

Reports should be provided by a structural engineer or a chartered surveyor and be supported by technical analysis from other experts (for example for root and soil analysis). The sequence of investigation is important:

- Site investigations and level/crack monitoring should first be completed to establish the pattern and likely causes of movement.
- An engineer's report should then assess this data to determine whether there is a probable causal link between soil behaviour, building movement and nearby trees.
- Only once such a causal link is established should an arboricultural report be commissioned to consider whether tree management or removal is an appropriate response.

These reports must include the following information:

- A description of the property, including a description of the damage and the crack pattern, the date that the damage first occurred/was noted, details of any previous underpinning or building work and the geological strata for the site identified from the geological map.

- Details of vegetation in the vicinity and its management since discovery of the damage. Include a plan showing the vegetation and affected building.
- Measurement of the extent and distribution of vertical movement using level monitoring. Where level monitoring is not possible, state why and provide crack-monitoring data. Data provided must be sufficient to show a pattern of movement consistent with the presence of the implicated tree(s).
- A profile of a trial/bore hole dug to identify foundation type and depth and soil characteristics, with explicit confirmation where shallow foundations are present, as these are particularly vulnerable to soil shrinkage and tree root influence.
- The sub-soil characteristics including soil type (particularly that on which the foundations rest), liquid limit, plastic limit and plasticity index.
- The location and identification of roots found. Where identification is inconclusive, DNA testing should be carried out.
- Proposals and estimated costs of options to repair the damage, presented in a transparent, itemised format.

Claimants must demonstrate what proportion of the estimated costs is directly attributable to the tree, and what proportion arises from other factors. Reports should distinguish between works that are directly related to tree management and those that arise from building condition, foundation design, drainage defects, soil characteristics or wider climatic influences. The Council does not expect a numerical apportionment of overall costs between contributory causes where this cannot be robustly demonstrated. However, costs must not be attributed to tree influence without clear technical justification, and the presence of other material factors must be expressly acknowledged.

In addition, a report from an arboriculturist must be included to support the tree work proposals, setting out arboricultural options for avoidance or remediation of indirect tree-related damage. Where tree removal is recommended the report must provide clear reasons why lesser works (such as pruning, cyclical management or installation of barriers) are not considered appropriate or sufficient.

Other Structural Damage - Required Reports

Technical evidence in respect of other structural damage (e.g. garden walls, drains, paving, drive surfaces) should be provided by a relevant engineer, building/drainage surveyor or other appropriate expert.

Heave Risk

When trees are removed from shrinkable clay soils there is a risk of ground heave, upward movement caused by the rehydration and swelling of soils that have previously been desiccated by tree roots.

For this reason, technical reports must explicitly consider the potential for heave as part of any remediation assessment. CCC will require evidence that the risk of heave has been assessed and factored into proposals. Where a significant risk is identified, tree removal may not be supported unless appropriate engineering or alternative solutions are demonstrated.

Shallow Foundations

Shallow or otherwise vulnerable foundations are a recognised risk factor for building movement on shrinkable clay soils and may increase a property's sensitivity to seasonal soil moisture changes.

The presence of shallow foundations does not, of itself, preclude a finding that tree root activity is a material or effective cause of damage, nor does it absolve CCC (as tree owner) of responsibility where such causation is established. At the mitigation stage, the Council therefore requires foundation depth and adequacy to be identified and taken into account when considering the appropriateness and proportionality of proposed mitigation measures. This ensures that tree removal is not relied upon as a default response to underlying structural vulnerability, while recognising that, where tree influence is shown to be a material cause of damage, reasonable steps to abate that influence may still be required.

The relevance of foundation vulnerability will be considered alongside other factors, including soil conditions, climate effects and engineering evidence, and does not determine liability in isolation should a matter proceed to a claim.

Climate Change Considerations

Climate change is projected to increase the frequency and intensity of summer droughts, leading to deeper and more prolonged soil moisture deficits in shrinkable clay soils. These conditions increase the likelihood of seasonal ground movement, particularly where foundations are shallow or otherwise vulnerable. As a result, buildings that may historically have remained stable may become more sensitive to environmental stress over time.

In this context, tree root activity may interact with wider climatic and ground conditions rather than operate in isolation. CCC therefore requires structural and engineering reports to address explicitly the potential influence of climate change on soil behaviour and foundation performance, to explain how these factors have been taken into account when assessing the nature of the movement observed and the suitability of proposed mitigation measures.

By requiring climate-related factors to be considered as part of a holistic assessment, the Council seeks to ensure that decisions on tree management or removal are evidence-based, proportionate and resilient to future environmental conditions. This approach avoids treating tree removal as a default response to building movement where wider environmental or structural vulnerabilities may be contributing factors, while recognising that vegetation influence may still require abatement where supported by robust evidence.

Avoidance of Subsidence Damage

Most tree-related subsidence can be avoided through appropriate planning, design and management of both trees and buildings. CCC therefore promotes the following preventative measures:

- **Foundation design** - ensure foundations are constructed to a depth and specification appropriate to local soil type and the anticipated mature size of nearby trees.
- **Avoid shallow foundations** - where new buildings or extensions are proposed on shrinkable clay soils, shallow foundations should be avoided as they are particularly prone to seasonal movement and tree-related subsidence.
- **Species selection and planting distance** - avoid planting high water-demand species too close to buildings or structures, particularly on shrinkable clay soils. Tree planting plans should consider the ultimate size and rooting potential of the species.
- **Diversity and resilience** - planting a diverse range of tree species helps to avoid over-reliance on species that may pose higher subsidence risks on sensitive soils.
- **Water management** - sustainable drainage systems, rain gardens and permeable surfacing can help stabilise soil moisture levels and reduce differential drying beneath foundations.
- **Design compliance** - developers, contractors and designers should follow the principles set out in *NHBC Standards Chapter 4.2 - Building near trees* and relevant British Standards.
- **Ongoing monitoring** - residents and property owners are encouraged to maintain buildings, drains and gutters in good condition, reducing opportunities for water ingress or ground instability that may be wrongly attributed to trees.

By promoting preventative measures, the council seeks to reduce the likelihood of conflict between trees and buildings, protect public tree assets, and minimise the financial burden of subsidence claims on both residents and the public purse.

Mitigation Hierarchy

When trees are implicated in subsidence or structural damage, a clear mitigation hierarchy will be applied to ensure that tree removal is considered only as a last resort:

1. **Do nothing** - monitor to establish whether movement is progressive or seasonal and self-limiting.
2. **Engineering solutions** - underpinning, drain repair, or other building-focused interventions to resolve damage without tree works.
3. **Tree management** - cyclical crown reduction or root pruning, carried out with arboricultural advice, to reduce water demand or alleviate direct pressure.
4. **Tree removal and replacement** - considered only if all other reasonable options are unviable or disproportionate, and where the balance of evidence shows that removal is necessary to prevent further damage.

In all cases the council will explore the available options, but the final decision must weigh the public amenity value of the tree against both (a) the direct financial cost of mitigation and (b) the wider impact on council budgets and services.

Legal Context on Liability and Compensation

Decisions on tree-related damage must reflect not only arboricultural and amenity considerations but also the legal framework governing liability and compensation.

Common Law Duties

At common law, tree owners may be liable in nuisance where their trees cause actual damage to neighbouring land or structures. Liability can arise if, on the balance of probabilities, the tree is the effective cause of the damage and the type of damage that was caused to the property was reasonably foreseeable by the tree owner prior to the damage occurring. Once notified of a problem and provided with evidence in support of the legal nuisance, the tree owner has a duty to take reasonable steps to abate that nuisance.

Compensation under TPO Law

Under section 202E of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, if the council refuses consent for works to a tree protected by a Tree Preservation Order (or grants consent subject to conditions), and as a result of that refusal the Claimant has to carry out alternative stabilisation work to the property, the council may be liable to pay compensation for the cost of those additional works. Such liability is limited to losses that were reasonably foreseeable at the time of the refusal and providing the claim is notified to the Council within 12 months of the refusal notice being issued.

Implications for Evidence and Decision-Making

This legal framework underlines the importance of requiring robust and transparent evidence before making decisions on mitigation requests or protected tree applications. CCC's amenity-based tiers of evidence ensure proportionality in decision-making. However, once robust causation is established, the council cannot disregard the duty to abate nuisance, even for trees of high amenity value. In such cases, the balance of options will consider whether less destructive, reasonable alternatives (such as engineering solutions) are available before tree removal is contemplated.

Note that whilst causation is the primary consideration at mitigation stage, if a claim goes on to become a legal claim for the recovery of damages, the Claimant has to succeed in satisfying other parts of the law of nuisance test before damages become payable. The stages of the legal test in nuisance are:

- 1 The tree owner owed the Claimant a duty of care
- 2 The duty of care was breached and foreseeable damage was caused
- 3 The evidence links the tree to the damage as the primary cause
- 4 The repair works carried out were reasonable in scope and cost.

END

TOPIC PAPER 5. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

Version 5

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PURPOSE

The urban forest belongs to everyone, and its future depends on shared stewardship. Less than 25% of land in Cambridge is directly owned or managed by Cambridge City Council (CCC), making collaboration with residents, businesses, schools and partner organisations essential. Engagement is therefore not an optional extra but a core delivery mechanism of the Urban Forest Strategy.

POLICY ALIGNMENT

This paper supports implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy under the following policies.

- Policy E1: Through public and partnership engagement the Council will facilitate sustainable and proactive management of trees.
- Policy E2: Encourage joined-up approaches across services, communities, and businesses through donations and sponsorship.
- Policy E3: Quantify the benefits of Cambridge's urban forest with opportunities for community participation.
- Policy E4: Provide clear, accessible information about tree management and planting through web platforms and consultation processes.

These policies also contribute to corporate priorities: tackling climate and biodiversity emergencies, addressing inequality by focusing on underserved wards and modernising the Council through evidence-led engagement.

ASSOCIATED TOPIC PAPERS

The paper is part of a series, underpinning the delivery of the Urban Forest Strategy and can be read in conjunction with the following papers.

- Topic Paper 6 Governance and resourcing
- Topic Paper 8 Achievements

Together these papers set out how strong leadership and shared stewardship help to maintain a healthy and resilient urban forest.

BACKGROUND

CCC has built a strong track record of community engagement through flagship projects such as the Cambridge Canopy Project (2019-2023) and the ongoing work of the Biodiversity Project Officer, supported by legacy funding. These programmes, detailed below, have combined planting, education, citizen science and cultural activities to increase awareness of the value of trees and involve the community in their care.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES AND INITIATIVES

Free Trees for Babies

A legacy scheme offering a commemorative tree to mark the birth of a child, planting the urban forest into residents' gardens. Between 2016/17 and 2023/24, a total of 1,843 trees were distributed.

[Trees for Babies scheme - Cambridge City Council](#)

Trees for Streets Sponsorship

Cambridge was the first council to partner with this national charity in 2019. Residents and businesses can sponsor new street trees, covering planting and establishment costs, and directly contributing to canopy growth.

[Sponsoring new trees - Cambridge City Council](#)

Watering New Trees

Community involvement is vital to establishment. CCC encourages residents to help water newly planted street and park trees during dry periods.

[Watering new trees - Cambridge City Council](#)

Neighbourhood Canopy Campaign

Targeted planting in areas of need, supported by residents and community groups, often themed to local priorities such as pollinators or climate resilience.

[Neighbourhood Canopy Campaign - Cambridge City Council](#)

Volunteer Planting in Parks

Planting events in parks and open spaces, delivered in partnership with the Community Engagement Team, allow residents and volunteers to actively contribute to canopy expansion while learning about species diversity, aftercare and the wider benefits of trees. These events strengthen local ownership and create lasting links between communities and their green spaces.

Tree Trails and Mapping

Interactive online resources and downloadable trails connect residents with heritage and landmark trees, fostering place-based pride and environmental education

[Tree trails - Cambridge City Council](#)

Tree Data Portal

Open access to tree data (location, species, management status) promotes transparency, supports citizen science and underpins engagement with schools, universities and community researchers.

[Tree data - Cambridge City Council](#)

Comment on Planned Tree Works

CCC encourages residents to take an active role in scrutinising and shaping how trees are managed. Through the planned tree works consultation webpage, residents can review forthcoming maintenance proposals and submit comments or objections before works proceed. This open process enhances transparency, builds trust, and ensures that community views are considered in balancing safety, biodiversity and amenity when making arboricultural decisions.

[Comment on our planned tree works - Cambridge City Council](#)

TRACK RECORD OF PARTNERSHIPS

Cambridge has established a strong record of working with external partners to deliver innovative and impactful urban forestry projects. These collaborations demonstrate the council's ability to leverage external expertise and funding, while engaging communities in shared stewardship of the urban forest:

- **Nature Smart Cities (Interreg 2 Seas) & Cambridge Canopy Project (2019-2023)¹**

Delivered as part of a European climate adaptation programme, the Canopy Project combined canopy cover analysis, priority planting, and community engagement. It secured significant EU funding and showcased the benefits of cross-border collaboration.

- **i-Tree Eco Project (2021)²**

Undertaken in partnership with Anglia Ruskin University, the project trained students as surveyors and quantified Cambridge's canopy in terms of carbon

¹ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/nature-smart-cities-across-the-2-seas-programme>

² <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/i-tree-eco-project>

storage, pollution removal, stormwater regulation and asset value. This established a shared evidence base for policy and public engagement.

- **DiversiTree Project (2023-2026)**³
Part of the River Cam CAN partnership and funded by the National Lottery, this project focuses on veteran and heritage willows along the River Cam. It combines cultural heritage with biodiversity management and community storytelling.
- **Trees for Streets Sponsorship**⁴
A long-term partnership with the national charity Trees for Streets, enabling residents and businesses to sponsor new street trees. Cambridge was the first council in the UK to sign up (2019), helping to establish the model nationally.
- **Earthwatch UK⁵ - Tiny Forest**⁶
In 2023, Cambridge worked with Earthwatch UK to deliver a “Tiny Forest” at Five Trees, Chesterton, involving schools, volunteers, and residents in planting 600 whips. This living classroom demonstrates climate resilience and biodiversity benefits at a community scale.

Delivery of the Strategy depends on strong collaboration:

- **Public sector partners:** Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (statutory tree protection), Cambridgeshire County Council (schools, highways), Greater Cambridge Partnership (infrastructure projects).
- **Charities and networks:** Trees for Streets, Cambridge Nature Network, local wildlife trusts, and community festivals such as the Cambridge Nature Festival.
- **Academia:** Anglia Ruskin University and University of Cambridge contribute through research, monitoring, and student engagement (e.g. i-Tree Eco survey).

³ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/diversitree-project>
webpages last accessed 16/10/25

⁴ <https://www.treesforstreets.org>

⁵ <https://earthwatch.org.uk/>

⁶ <https://earthwatch.org.uk/program/tiny-forest/>

Web pages last access 16/10/25

- **Businesses and residents:** Sponsorship, volunteering, and responsible tree management on private land.

CONCLUSION

Public engagement and partnerships are not peripheral to urban forestry; they are central to delivery. Cambridge's community planting events, sponsorship schemes, education resources, and collaborative projects demonstrate both innovation and capacity to mobilise shared stewardship. Strengthening these initiatives through the Urban Forest Strategy will ensure that every resident, from a new parent receiving a free tree to a local business sponsoring a street tree, could shape and sustain Cambridge's urban forest.

Engagement activity will continue to be targeted, proportionate and responsive to available resources.

END

DRAFT TOPIC PAPER 6: GOVERNANCE AND RESOURCING

Version 5

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PURPOSE

Topic Paper 6 explains how Cambridge’s urban forest is governed and resourced. It sets out the roles of different Council services in relation to trees, how resources are allocated and how governance arrangements ensure transparent, coordinated delivery. It applies to both the Council’s directly managed tree asset and the wider urban forest across Cambridge.

POLICY ALIGNMENT

This paper supports implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy (UFS) under the following policies.

- M4: Underpinning the Manage More policy strengthening the capacity and resourcing needed to deliver the Strategy
- E1-E3: Promoting the Engage More policies recognising that the majority of Cambridge's canopy lies outside Council ownership and must be delivered through shared stewardship.

ASSOCIATED TOPIC PAPERS

The paper is part of a series, underpinning the delivery of the UFS and can be read in conjunction with the following papers.

- Topic Paper 1 Tree Asset Management and Risk
- Topic Paper 2 Tree Planting, Work and Third-Party Guidance
- Topic Paper 4 Trees, Subsidence and Structural Damage
- Topic Paper 5 Public Engagement and Partnership
- Topic Paper 9 Statutory Responsibilities and Planning Control
- Topic Paper 11 Tree Protection, Damage and compensation

Together these papers illustrate the framework for governance, partnership and resourcing needed to build and manage a healthy and resilient urban forest.

INTRODUCTION

The Urban Forest Strategy is a corporate strategy, binding all Council services that involve trees. It establishes the council's vision, aims and policy framework for the urban forest and provides an evidence base (e.g. canopy mapping, amenity valuation, biodiversity priorities) supporting decision-making. While the UFS sets expectations for alignment across all council and partner services it does not override the statutory planning framework or Highway Authority ownership. Its adoption establishes a consistent policy base for decision-making and investment, reducing fragmentation and aligning local action with national policy and best practice.

Less than 25% of land in Cambridge is owned or managed by Cambridge City Council (CCC), meaning most tree canopy lies on private or institutional land. Delivering the Strategy therefore requires not only strong internal governance and resourcing but also wider partnerships across sectors and with residents.

GOVERNANCE WITHIN THE COUNCIL

The Council's Leadership Role in Urban Forestry

Cambridge City Council is not only a manager of its own tree stock but also the body best placed to lead on the governance of the city's wider urban forest. Local authorities are the primary delivery agents of urban forests¹ as they:

- Hold statutory powers to protect trees ([Tree Preservation Orders](#), [Conservation Area designations](#)², and planning policy).
- Manage large areas of public tree canopy, including parks, commons, cemeteries and housing land.
- Integrate tree management into wider agendas such as climate adaptation, biodiversity recovery, flood resilience, public health, and place-making.
- Directly administer statutory consultation duties, including the Environment Act's street tree provisions.
- Are well placed to influence decisions beyond their own estate, ensuring that private, institutional and developer-owned trees contribute to citywide canopy targets.

The Tree Team directly manages around 30,000 trees, of which 10,000 are highway trees maintained on behalf of the County Council, and provides advice across other service areas. Through public-facing programmes and statutory frameworks, CCC acts as both steward of its own asset and strategic coordinator of the wider urban forest, ensuring that all stakeholders contribute to sustaining and expanding Cambridge's canopy.

¹ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/research/what-is-the-urban-forest/> last accessed 5/1/26

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tree-preservation-orders-and-trees-in-conservation-areas> last accessed 6/1/26

Functional Responsibilities

Council responsibilities for trees can be grouped into four functional categories:

1. Tree Asset Managers

Teams with day-to-day responsibility for inspection, maintenance, planting and record-keeping.

Tree Team (City Services - Public Realm):

- Leads delivery of the Strategy.
- Directly manages the corporate tree asset (parks, commons, recreation grounds, nature reserves, closed churchyards, communal housing land).
- Manages highway trees on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council, with costs recouped annually.
- Oversees cyclical inspections, reactive works, planting, consultation and risk management.
- Maintains live asset data on Ezytreev®.

2. Landowners / Service Managers

Services that hold land on which trees grow, responsible for funding or instructing works, with advice from the Tree Team.

Housing (City Homes & Repairs and Compliance Team):

- Trees in communal open space are inspected by the Tree Team.
- Communal gardens and tenanted gardens are managed by Housing, with arboricultural advice provided.

Property Services: Trees on commercial estate and corporate buildings.

Car Parks Team: Trees on Council managed car park land

Bereavement Services: Trees in Newmarket Road Cemetery and the crematorium grounds

Drainage Services: Trees on riparian land.

Operations (Open Spaces): Manage shrubs, self-sets and wider vegetation alongside trees.

3. Support Services

Specialist teams providing enabling expertise to ensure the Strategy is delivered consistently and transparently.

Biodiversity Team: Balance safety with ecological value, integrates trees into the Biodiversity Strategy and Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Climate Team: Ensures urban forest delivery aligns with the Climate Change Strategy and supports carbon reduction, cooling and resilience.

Project Delivery Team: Provides programme and project management skills to deliver environmental improvements, including the design and installation of engineered tree pits, sustainable drainage systems, and other infrastructure requiring technical coordination.

Communications Team: Deliver clear and consistent public communication, press releases, digital news, ensuring residents and stakeholders are informed and engaged in urban forest initiatives. They provide web support and administer the Council's tree webpages.

ICT Teams: Provides digital mapping, interactive canopy maps.

Legal & Finance: Provide advice on statutory duties, liabilities, compensation, procurement and funding bids.

Community Engagement Services: Support public-facing programmes such as [Free Trees for Babies](#)³, Planting in Parks and Neighbourhood Canopy Campaigns⁴.

Customer Services Team: Triage public enquiries, answering straightforward or less technical questions quickly and efficiently, and directing more complex matters to the Tree Team.

³ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/trees-for-babies-scheme> last accessed 6/1/26

⁴ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/neighbourhood-canopy-campaign> last accessed 6/1/26

4. Strategic Alignment and Oversight

Functions that ensure the fulfilment of statutory duties and that trees are embedded into corporate priorities, statutory planning and external partnerships.

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service: Administers TPOs, policies.

The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning service (GCSP) delivers statutory planning functions on behalf of CCC who retains legal responsibility, as the local planning authority. This includes administration and enforcement of tree preservation orders TPOs, conservation area notifications, planning compliance and the application of local plan policies to development proposals.

In matters of development control, the Town and Country Planning Act, National Planning Policy and the Local Plan has primacy. Under the [Town and Country Planning Act 1990 \(Section 197\)](#)⁵ local planning authorities must make adequate provision for the preservation and planting of trees when granting planning permission. This duty underlines national and local plan policies set out in the NPPF Cambridge Local plan and Draft Greater Cambridge Local Plan. Decisions of the Local Planning Authority on planning applications must be taken in accordance with the adopted local plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The urban forest strategy therefore may act as a material consideration, ensuring that planning decisions reflect the city's corporate commitments to canopy growth, climate resilience and environmental justice.

In relation to tree protection, GCSP operates under national legislation Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and tree preservation regulations 2012. It does not have separate planning policies for TPO's but applies its own organisational procedures for administering applications and enforcement. Here, the UFS provides a clear local policy framework to support consistent decision-making, for example, on proactive and strategic TPOs, use of category C TPOs and acceptance of repeat or phased applications, which strengthens the consistency and defensibility of decisions. The relationship between CCC and GCSP is therefore complementary.

While CCC has strategic oversight of the urban forest, sets corporate policy through the UFS and manages its own public tree asset, GCSP delivers the statutory planning functions.

⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/8/section/197> last accessed 6/1/26

By working jointly, and through shared arboricultural expertise, the two services can deliver statutory protection and strategic ambitions together. This includes coordinated TPO reviews, identifying proactive designations and integrating tree and canopy objectives into development management practice.

Executive Councillors and Senior Management: Provide political and corporate oversight, approving strategies and budgets.

Cambridgeshire County Council : -

Cambridgeshire County Council (Highways) is the local highway authority and retains ownership, legal liability, and statutory responsibilities for all highway trees within the public highway across Cambridge. Under [Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980](#)⁶, the County Council has a duty to maintain the highway, including ensuring that vegetation does not endanger users or obstruct visibility, signage, lighting or access.

CCC undertakes day-to-day arboricultural management of highway trees as part of a long-standing working partnership with the County Council. Through this partnership, the Tree Team provides professional advice, inspection, maintenance and planting services to support the County in discharging its statutory duties and to deliver the shared objectives of the UFS. The UFS recognises this shared responsibility and provides an integrated framework for managing highway trees that aligns safety, amenity and climate resilience. Although the County Council remains the legal owner, CCC's operational role means both authorities must work collaboratively to deliver the UFS principles of Climate Resilience, Intergenerational Equity and Environmental Justice.

This working partnership distinguishes ownership and liability from operational delivery.

- Cambridgeshire County Council (Highways)
 - Retains ownership and full legal liability for all highway trees, including any injury or damage arising from their condition or management.
 - Acts as the statutory decision-maker for vehicle crossings, highway alterations, and any works carried out under the [Highways Act 1980](#)⁷.
 - Holds the [statutory duty to consult](#)⁸ the public before felling street trees under the Environment Act 2021, working collaboratively with CCC to meet this obligation.
- Cambridge City Council (Public Realm, Tree team)

⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/section/41> last accessed 6/1/26

⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/contents> last accessed 6/1/26

⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/section/96A?view=plain> last accessed 6/1/26

- Provides professional arboricultural advice, inspection, maintenance, and planting of highway trees on behalf of the County Council.
- Undertakes public consultation on proposed highway tree works and collates responses for consideration.
- Advises on the implications of development proposals and Highways Act applications (including dropped kerbs) for the existing street tree stock.

Where objections are received to proposed highway tree works following consultation, the final decision will be made by a Senior Officer of CCC and in consultation with Cambridgeshire County Council. This ensures that the County's legal liability is recognised, decisions are made in a timely and transparent manner, and the City's professional advice is fully considered.

This collaborative approach provides clear accountability, efficient decision-making, and consistent delivery of both authorities' responsibilities. It also ensures that highway tree management supports the aims of the UFS, maintaining a safe, resilient and expanding street tree network that contributes to Cambridge's environmental quality, public amenity and climate resilience.

Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP): Designs and funds major transport schemes, with significant tree impacts requiring early arboricultural input.

RESOURCING THE STRATEGY

Delivery of the UFS will be prioritised within available resources, recognising that funding and capacity may fluctuate over the lifetime of the UFS.

Core Council Resources

Tree Team capacity: A small team of qualified arboriculturists, supported by approved framework contractors.

Technology and systems: [Ezytreev®](#)⁹, GIS, canopy mapping, [i-Tree Eco](#)¹⁰.

Base budgets: Fund cyclical inspections, consultation, engagement and routine maintenance.

⁹ <https://ra-is.co.uk/ezytreev/> last accessed 6/1/26

¹⁰ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/i-tree-eco-project> last accessed 6/1/26

Innovation and efficiency: Ward-based inspection cycles, digital platforms and data-led prioritisation to maximise the value of limited resources.

External and Supplementary Resources

Grant funding: e.g. Forestry Commission schemes - [Urban Tree Challenge Fund](#)¹¹, [Local Authority Treescapes Fund](#)¹²; National Lottery.

Sponsorship and donations: e.g. [Trees for Streets](#)¹³.

Partnership delivery: e.g. [Cambridge Canopy Project](#)¹⁴; [DiversiTree](#)¹⁵.

Human Resources and Skills

- Maintaining arboricultural and biodiversity expertise within the Council.
- Training, upskilling and succession planning to retain long-term capacity.
- Partnerships with universities, volunteers and contractors to extend delivery capacity.

Transparency and Accountability

- All works are subject to proportionate consultation and recording.
- Annual reporting of tree planting, removals and statutory protection ensures accountability.
- KPIs (e.g. canopy cover change, ecosystem service benefits, statutory protection outcomes) track delivery.
- Topic Papers provide procedural clarity, supporting consistent and transparent governance and together form part of the governance framework that ensures decisions are accountable and defensible.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/urban-tree-challenge-fund> last accessed 6/1/26

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-authority-treescapes-fund> last accessed 6/1/26

¹³ <https://www.treesforstreets.org/> last accessed 6/1/26

¹⁴ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/nature-smart-cities-across-the-2-seas-programme> last accessed 6/1/26

¹⁵ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/diversitree-project> last accessed 6/1/26

- The Communications and ICT teams play a key role in this by publishing information online, hosting interactive maps and supporting consultation platforms

WIDER GOVERNANCE OF THE URBAN FOREST

Beyond the Council, the majority of Cambridge's canopy lies on private land, university and college estates, and other institutional grounds. Effective governance therefore depends on:

University of Cambridge and Colleges: Major landowners and custodians of heritage tree populations.

Cambridgeshire County Council: Owner of highway trees and responsible for trees on land associated with local authority-maintained schools and other County-managed institutions, making them a key partner in sustaining citywide canopy.

Developers and Landowners: Required to integrate trees into design and contribute to canopy growth through planning.

Utility Companies: Expected to follow [NJUG 4](#)¹⁶ and best practice when working near trees.

Voluntary and Community Groups: Friends groups deliver projects and advocacy.

Residents: Manage most of the City's tree canopy in private gardens, representing the largest single opportunity for canopy growth.

This Topic Paper provides clarity on how CCC governs and resources the urban forest, recognising both statutory responsibilities and the need for partnership working. It supports transparent, proportionate and accountable decision-making over the lifetime of the UFS.

END

¹⁶ <https://streetworks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/V4-Trees-Issue-2-16-11-2007.pdf>
last accessed 6/1/26

TOPIC PAPER 7 CLIMATE CHANGE AND RESILIENCE

Version 5

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PURPOSE

Trees are essential to Cambridge’s response to climate change. This paper explores their role in cooling and shading, flood mitigation and soil resilience, referencing strategies for diversifying species to withstand future climate and pest pressures. It links the urban forest directly to The Council’s wider climate goals and provides the evidence base for the policies listed above.

POLICY ALIGNMENT

This paper supports implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy (UFS) under the following policies.

- M1, M2, M3: Underpinning Manage More policies regarding legal obligations, pest and diseases and capacity and resources and their importance to a healthy urban forest that is resilient to climate change
- P1-P4: Supporting planning control policies to improve best practice
- PL1-PL4: Advancing the Plant More policies essential to increasing the urban forest
- E1-E4: Reinforcing Engage More policies by extending guidance to private landowners, encouraging responsible management and community participation in tree planting.

ASSOCIATED TOPIC PAPERS

The paper is part of a series, underpinning the delivery of the UFS and can be read in conjunction with the following papers.

- Topic Paper 1 Tree Asset Management and Risk
- Topic Paper 2 Tree Planting, Work and Third-Party Guidance
- Topic Paper 3 Biodiversity and Habitat Connectivity
- Topic Paper 9 Statutory Responsibilities and Planning Control

Together these papers provide a comprehensive framework for climate change resilience.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is the long-term shift in the planet's average temperatures and weather patterns, primarily driven by human activities, like burning fossil fuels, deforestation, intensive agriculture and the manufacturing of certain goods, since the 1800s. The primary cause is the burning of fossil fuels, which releases greenhouse gases that trap heat in the atmosphere and has resulted in rising global temperatures, warming oceans, melting ice, rising sea levels and more frequent extreme weather events.

The impact of climate change presents significant risks through ecosystem and biodiversity loss, threats to human health, food and water insecurity and poverty and displacement.

Addressing climate change requires systemic transformation including the move to renewable energy, protection and restoration of nature, introducing sustainable agriculture and investing in clean innovation. Individual choices regarding energy use, consumption and diet can contribute to emissions reduction, while governments

must implement strong climate, sustainability and nature policies to actuate necessary change.

MITIGATION, ADAPTATION AND RISKS

Trees in Cambridge play multiple climate-roles: mitigation (reducing the causes of climate change), adaptation (helping people and ecosystems cope with the effects), and they are themselves subject to risks from climate change. Quantifying these helps plan better and the i-Tree Eco study provides essential local data¹.

MITIGATION BENEFITS

Cambridge's trees store about 88,000 tonnes of carbon (valued at ~£22,500) in their biomass. They also sequester about 2,040 tonnes of carbon per year, worth ~£524,000 annually. These functions help reduce greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, contributing directly to mitigation goals and supporting CCC's wider Climate Change Strategy.

ADAPTATION BENEFITS

Trees are estimated to remove roughly 22.2 tonnes of air pollution each year (valued at ~£990,000) by filtering pollutants, improving human health. They help manage excess rainfall: an estimated 97,600 m³ of stormwater runoff is prevented annually, equivalent to ~£153,000 in avoided drainage costs. Overall tree and shrub cover is about 20.1% of Cambridge, providing cooling, shade and local microclimate regulation. The following sections outline in more detail the key adaptation functions of the urban forest.

Canopy cover

Increasing urban canopy cover can help mitigate the urban heat island effect by providing shade and evaporative cooling. Shade is important for health because it can help block harmful UV radiation and can help prevent heatstroke. Shaded areas encourage greater use of public spaces and therefore contribute to wellbeing.

¹ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/i-tree-eco-project> last accessed 16/10/25

Shaded infrastructure is protected by lower material temperatures and the prevention of premature degradation from UV rays. Shade prolongs the lifespan of building components, outdoor equipment and finishes and improves energy efficiency in buildings by decreasing the need for air conditioning. Additionally, shade helps maintain the aesthetic quality and structural integrity of materials by minimising fading, warping and cracking caused by sun exposure, adding a financial benefit to increasing canopy cover.

Flood mitigation

Following UK-wide flooding in the summer of 2007, a report from Sir Michael Pitt identified that paving over front and rear gardens was a major factor in surface water movement in towns and cities. Around two thirds of all the flooding in 2007 was a result of surface water run-off.²

While changes in policy and surface design, increasing areas of soft landscaping where possible and using porous hard surfaces aid soil infiltration, trees and their roots can help slow the flow of rainwater, which is also beneficial for reducing flood risk. The canopy intercepts rainfall, slowing the flow of water to the ground and allowing water to infiltrate the soil, therefore, reducing surface runoff. The interception of rainfall also allows a percentage of water to evaporate back into the atmosphere before it hits the ground. Root systems help water penetrate deeper into the soil at a faster rate under and around trees, which results in less surface run-off and more storage in the soil. [National standards for sustainable drainage systems \(SuDS\) - GOV.UK](#)

Trees form one component of a wider surface water management approach and should be considered alongside land use planning, drainage design and sustainable drainage systems.

Soil resilience

Healthy soils with high organic matter can act as carbon sinks, helping to mitigate climate change. Tree roots bind the soil together, holding it in place and preventing it and nutrients from being washed away by flowing water. Fallen leaves also provide a protective layer on the ground and, as decaying matter, improve soil structure and nutrition.

² [Pitt-Review-UK-Floods.pdf](#) last accessed 16/10/25

RISKS AND VULNERABILITIES

The urban forest itself is vulnerable to climate change. Some tree species will struggle with prolonged drought and/or waterlogging, while others may not be able to adapt to increasingly extreme temperatures. Climate change enables some pests and pathogens to expand their range into new areas, while milder winters increase the survival rates of existing pests and diseases, accelerating reproductive cycles and allowing more generations per year. At the same time, acute weather events, such as heatwaves, storms, droughts and flooding, stress trees and make them more vulnerable to infestation and decline. Recognising and planning for these vulnerabilities is central to the Strategy's delivery approaches.

STRATEGIES AND GUIDANCE

Strategic tree selection and succession planning is required for long-term conservation and adaptation. With consideration of biodiversity and biosecurity, CCC is committed to increasing canopy cover through its own asset management, planning partnership and public engagement and identifying and planting future-proofed trees to replace those vulnerable to climate change, ensuring the long-term health of the urban forest³.

Equally important is the protection of established trees. Avoiding unnecessary stress from root damage, soil compaction, inappropriate pruning or poorly designed development is critical to maintaining canopy cover and resilience. These issues are addressed through the "Protect More" policies and development control processes. In addition to formal planning controls, many activities that affect trees take place outside the planning system, such as permitted development, statutory utility works or routine maintenance by contractors. Following recognised best practice guidance is strongly advised whenever works are undertaken near trees. This includes avoiding soil compaction, preventing root severance, using appropriate pruning methods and taking professional arboricultural advice where necessary. Utilities, contractors, developers and residents all have a role in ensuring that established trees are not placed under avoidable stress. While there are technical methods to calculate Root Protection Areas (RPAs)⁴ a simple rule of thumb can be applied:

³ See <http://www.righttrees4cc.org.uk/> last accessed 6/1/26

⁴ The minimum area around a tree that must be protected from disturbance if the tree is to be retained successfully, normally calculated as a radius based on the tree's

avoid excavating, storing materials or running heavy vehicles under the canopy of a tree, plus 1 metre, or a radius equal to half the tree's height for tall, narrow trees - whichever is greater. This rule of thumb is indicative only and does not replace site-specific arboricultural assessment where required. Where works are unavoidable, professional arboricultural advice should always be sought to mitigate negative impacts.

This Topic Paper demonstrates how the urban forest contributes to climate mitigation and adaptation while recognising its own vulnerability to climate change. It supports evidence-led, proportionate action that complements wider climate policies and infrastructure-based solutions.

END

stem diameter, in accordance with British Standard BS 5837:2012 "Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction - Recommendations".

TOPIC PAPER: 8 ACHIEVEMENTS

Version 5

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PURPOSE

Cambridge has a strong record of urban forest management and innovation. Over the past decade under the [Citywide Tree Strategy 2016-2026](#)¹, Cambridge City Council (CCC) has delivered major planting programmes, pioneered new approaches to tree asset management and embedded trees within its climate and biodiversity strategies. The achievements, set out below, justify the need for an holistic approach to the management of green infrastructure and provide a solid foundation from which the Urban Forest Strategy 2026-2036 has been developed. The paper highlights what can be achieved and emphasises the need to increase momentum through robust policy based strategy to further improve Cambridge’s Urban Forest and its enjoyment by all.

THE TREE TEAM

CCC’s Tree Team, based within City Services, has been central to the delivery of Cambridge’s urban forestry achievements. The team manages over 30,000 trees on council land, leading on inspections, maintenance, planting and statutory tree protection. It also provides arboricultural advice across the organisation, including to planning and housing services.

Team composition and evolution

- Until 2024, the team comprised:
 - Senior Arboricultural Officer (manager)
 - Arboricultural Planning Lead (statutory and planning casework)
 - 2x Arboricultural Officers (enquiries, operational inspections and maintenance)

¹ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/tree-strategy> last accessed 6/1/26

- Supported by project roles such as the Cambridge Canopy Project Officer (2019-2023) and the Biodiversity Project Officer (2023 - to date).
- In the 2024/25 restructure, the manager's role was retitled Urban Forest Manager, formally recognising the Council's adoption of an urban forestry approach. The Arboricultural Planning Lead post was deleted, with statutory planning functions transferred to the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning service (GCSP) as of 1 May 2025.

The Tree Team remains CCC's centre of expertise on trees, shaping policy, delivering day-to-day management, and securing external investment while working in partnership with contractors, communities and other services.

Two posts have been particularly important in driving forward its urban forestry engagement functions:

- The Cambridge Canopy Project Officer (2019-2023), created through EU funding, which delivered community engagement, planting events and communications.
- The Biodiversity Project Officer (2023 to date), funded as a legacy role, delivering 50% biodiversity projects and 50% urban forest engagement projects to continue and expand on the Canopy Project's work.

ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

Strategic and Policy Framework

Adoption of the 2016 Tree Strategy, establishing the holistic urban forestry approach.

Integration of tree policy into the Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategies, aligning arboriculture with wider environmental priorities.

2024-25 restructure: CCC formally recognised the discipline of Urban Forestry by changing the manager's title from Senior Arboricultural Officer to Urban Forest Manager.

Recognition of Cambridge's leadership in urban forestry includes:

- Cambridge City Council's Excellence in Environmental Responsibility Award (2022)
- Cambridge City Council's Net Zero Award (2024)

- Nomination for APSE’s Best Climate Action or Decarbonisation Initiative (2025) for pioneering use of i-Tree Eco to quantify the climate and ecosystem value of the urban forest.
- Runner up for Cambridge City Council’s Net Zero Award (2025)

Alignment with Wider Council Strategies and Priorities

Cambridge’s urban forestry achievements also contribute directly to wider Council strategies and corporate objectives:

Cambridge Local Plan 2018

- *Strategic Objective 6*: commits to protecting and enhancing the city’s landscape setting, including the Green Belt, green corridors, multifunctional green spaces, and tree canopy cover.
- *Policy 71 (Trees)*: requires development to preserve, protect and enhance existing trees, ensure replacement planting, provide space for trees to mature, and safeguard veteran and ancient trees.

Achievements such as expanded TPO coverage and measurable canopy growth since 2008 directly deliver on these requirements.

Air Quality Action Plan 2018-2023 and Greater Cambridge Air Quality Strategy 2024

- Identify tree planting and green infrastructure as tools to offset emissions and reduce exposure to air pollution.

Cambridge’s planting programmes and canopy expansion, combined with i-Tree Eco findings (~22 tonnes pollutants removed annually, worth ~£990,000), provide measurable estimates to these objectives.

Biodiversity Strategy 2020-2030

- Highlights the role of urban trees as habitats, corridors, and contributors to biodiversity.

Achievements such as the [DiversiTree project](#)², reinstated willow pollards, orchards, stumperies, pollinator habitats and biosecurity measures directly support Strategy objectives.

Climate Change Strategy

- Trees are recognised as key infrastructure for delivering net zero and adapting to a changing climate.

Achievements in planting, canopy expansion, and monitoring ecosystem services (carbon storage, cooling, stormwater) demonstrate this contribution.

Corporate Priorities (2022-2027)

Achievements contribute to all four Council priorities:

1. *Responding to the climate and biodiversity emergencies* - via tree canopy growth, carbon capture, biodiversity projects.
2. *Tackling poverty and inequality* - via equitable canopy gains in deprived wards, community engagement, free tree schemes.
3. *Building new council and affordable homes* - via integrating green infrastructure and tree planting into new developments.
4. *Modernising the council* - via embedding evidence-led, cross-service working and innovation in public service delivery.

Target Operating Model (TOM)

Achievements also align with TOM principles by:

- Enabling cross-service working (e.g. planning advice, housing advice, biodiversity alignment, communications).
- Establishing baseline measurements through canopy data and i-Tree Eco valuations.
- Embedding fairness by addressing tree equity across wards.

² <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/diversitree-project> last accessed 3/9/25

- Ensuring sustainability and resilience through canopy expansion and long-term strategic frameworks.
- Enhancing customer focus with clearer web resources, accessible data and support for residents in engaging with trees.

Cambridge Canopy Project (2019-2023)³

- Delivered: 2,384 standard trees, 250 half-standards and 600 whips.
- 953 “Free Trees for Babies” distributed.
- 193 trees planted through the [Neighbourhood Canopy Campaign⁴](#).
- Delivered Cambridge’s first Tiny Forest in Chesterton (600 whips).

Planting and Canopy Expansion

- Since 2016, over 5,000 new trees have been planted across streets, parks, estates and open spaces.
- Landmark planting events included: 33 trees on Parker’s Piece, species diversity themed planting in all 14 wards, ceremonial maples on Jesus Green and COP26-themed plantings in neighbourhoods.

³ An EU funded project under the parent umbrella climate resilience programme Nature Smart Cities across the 2 Seas <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/nature-smart-cities-across-the-2-seas-programme> (last accessed 3/9/25)

⁴ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/neighbourhood-canopy-campaign> (last accessed 3/9/25)

Tree Planting and Felling Trends

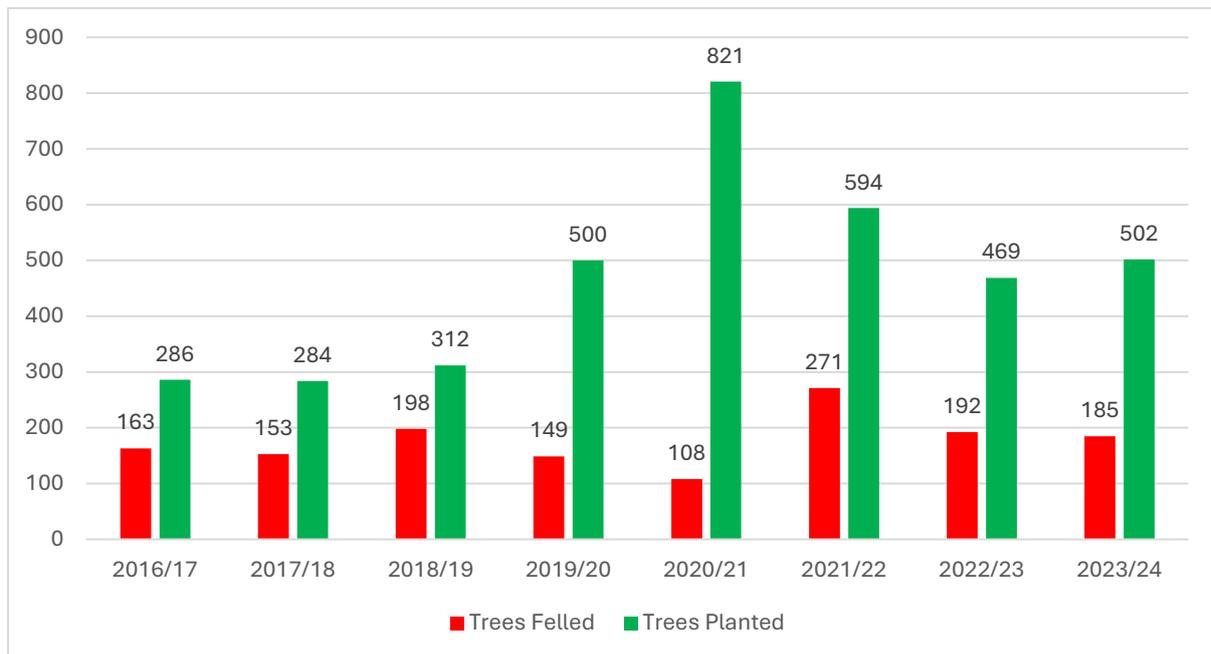


Figure 1 Chart showing the number of Council trees recorded as felled and standards planted

1,419 trees were recorded as felled with 3,768 standard⁵ sized trees planted. A net gain of 2,349 trees between 2016 and 2024, showing planting consistently outpaced felling. These figures reflect recorded Council-managed trees and do not represent total citywide canopy change.

Tree Asset Management

- Maintained an EzyTreev® inventory 30,000+ trees for management.
- Introduced systematic and proactive three-year inspection cycles to parks trees in 2016 to align with streets and communal housing lands.
- Officers inspected over 27,000 during one 3-year cycle (cycle 9: 1/4/21-31/3/24) and contractors visited over 20,000 trees in the same period.
- Delivered successive Arboricultural Frameworks:
 - 2017-2021 Framework
 - 2021-2025 Framework: Introduced a new Planting and Establishment Specification to standardise our tree planting and aftercare works.
 - 2025-2029 Framework (securing capacity through the decade).

⁵ A standard tree is defined as a tree with a single upright trunk that is clear of lower branches for a certain height, typically at least 1.8 meters

Protection

- Pre-2016: TPOs increased from 310 (1995) to ~430 (2016).
- 2016-2024: TPOs rose to 742 (73% growth since 2016).
- Tree Work Applications (TWAs): 186 in 1995 to 657 in 2023.
- 2009-2022: 388 new TPOs served, alongside multiple conservation area extensions¹.
- 2024-25 restructure: Arboricultural Planning Lead post deleted; statutory tree functions now delivered by Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSP), with Tree Team retaining strategic interest.

Biodiversity and Veteran Trees

- [2018 Veteran willow survey and management plan commissioned to inform the sustainable management these valuable trees.](#)⁶
- 2021 - Reinstated pollarding of riverside willows, supporting habitat and heritage landscapes, funded by the Green Recovery Fund
- DiversiTree project (2023-2026), funded by the National Lottery, celebrating and managing veteran and heritage trees.
- Expanded pollinator habitats, orchards, bee banks and stumperies.

Engagement, Communications and Web Resources

Cambridge Canopy Project

- Established a strong urban forestry brand, through projects and planting events.

Biodiversity Project Officer (started 2023)

- Delivered resilient species planting, mulch initiatives, watering support, pollinator and cultural projects and citizen science programmes.
- Founded the Cambridge Nature Festival, produced interpretation boards and engaged in multiple city festivals.

⁶ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/veteran-tree-management-on-sheeps-green-and-coe-fen> (last accessed 3/9/25)

Tree for Streets

- 2019 Cambridge City Council became the first Council to sign up to the national charity [Trees for Streets](#)⁷ to engage communities to help manage tree sponsorships.

Free Trees for Babies

- The [Free Trees for Babies](#)⁸ scheme is a long-running legacy initiative, offering a free tree to commemorate the birth of a child and securing planting in residents' gardens. Between 2016/17 and 2023/24, a total of 1,843 trees were distributed, ensuring that every new child could be celebrated with a lasting contribution to Cambridge's canopy.

Digital Accessibility

- 2017 - Created dedicated and [accessible tree webpages](#)⁹, covering protected treesⁱⁱ, works consultation, tree data, and tree projects.

External funding and Investment (2019-2025)

Cambridge secured over £1.28 million in external funding.

- LATF (Local Authority Treescapes Fund) - £237,499
- UTCF (Urban Tree Challenge Fund) - £230,061
- Green Recovery Fund - ~£14,500
- National Lottery (DiversiTree) - £84,180
- CLHF (Nuns Way Microwood) - £13,875 (1,000+ whips planted)
- NSCiti2S (EU Interreg) - ~£635,000 (Cambridge Canopy Project)
- Trees for Streets - ~£68,400+

⁷ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sponsoring-new-trees> last accessed 6/1/26

⁸ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/trees-for-babies-scheme> last accessed 6/1/26

⁹ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/trees> last accessed 6/1/26

2008-2018 Canopy Change Study¹⁰

- Citywide canopy rose from 17.1% to 17.6% (+20 ha).
- 11 of 14 wards saw increases; Castle and Newnham declined.
- Deprived wards (Abbey, King's Hedges, East Chesterton) recorded the strongest gains, narrowing equity gaps.
- Gardens and protected open spaces contributed disproportionately to canopy.
- Provided Cambridge with its first robust citywide canopy changes baseline.

Canopy Cover and Ecosystem Services¹¹

- 2021 i-Tree Eco estimated canopy at 20.1% (including shrubs). This figure is not directly comparable with Proximitree canopy change studies, as it uses a different methodology
- Estimated annual benefits (i-Tree Eco):
 - 2,040 t carbon captured (£524k)
 - 88,000 t carbon stored (£22.5k)
 - 22.2 t pollutants removed (£990k)
 - 97,600 m³ stormwater runoff attenuated (£153k)
- Estimated asset valuation: ~£1.03 billion amenity value; ~£172m replacement cost.

Evidence and Data Innovation

- Live EzyTreev® inventory of 30,000+ trees.
- Proximitree datasets (2008 - 2018), enabling ward-level analysis.
- i-Tree Eco studies (2021) valuing carbon, pollution, and stormwater services.
- Ward-level canopy and land-use overlays for equity-based planting.
- DiversiTree veteran willow database along a 10km stretch of the River Cam.

Ash Dieback Monitoring (2017-2024)

- Annual monitoring survey (99 trees), started 2017.
- Recorded increasing defoliation and deadwood; two trees removed as dead.
- 2024 inventory recorded ~1,500 ash trees under management.

¹⁰ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/4uvksm30/tree-canopy-cover-in-cambridge-between-2008-and-2018.pdf> last accessed 6/1/26

¹¹ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/i-tree-eco-project> last accessed 6/1/26

Conclusion

From 2016 to 2026, Cambridge has:

- Delivered net canopy gains with planting far exceeding felling.
- Expanded protections, with TPO growth accelerating after 2016.
- Modernised management with successive frameworks and EzyTreev®.
- Protected biodiversity and veterans.
- Engaged communities through high-profile programmes and digital resources.
- Secured £1.28m+ external funding, including the planting of 1,000+ whips at Nuns Way Microwood.
- Monitored long-term threats such as ash dieback.
- Built a robust evidence base showing measurable progress.
- Aligned achievements with the Local Plan, AQAP, Biodiversity Strategy, Climate Change Strategy, Corporate Priorities and TOM.

END

TOPIC PAPER 9 STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITIES AND PLANNING CONTROL

Version 5

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PURPOSE

Trees in Cambridge benefit from a robust framework of legal protections administered by Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP). This paper explains statutory responsibilities in relation to Tree Preservation Orders, Conservation Areas and Tree Work Applications. It also sets out how GCSP responds to planning applications, tree work applications and enforces compliance to safeguard Cambridge's urban forest and its most valuable trees.

POLICY ALIGNMENT

This paper supports implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy (UFS) under the following policies.

- P1-P4: Supporting Protect More policies through planning control to improve best practice
- PL1-PL4: Advancing the Plant More policies essential to increasing the urban forest
- E1-E4: Reinforcing Engage More policies by extending guidance to private landowners, encouraging responsible management and community participation

ASSOCIATED TOPIC PAPERS

The paper is part of a series, underpinning the delivery of the UFS and can be read in conjunction with the following papers.

- Topic Paper 1 Tree Asset Management and Risk
- Topic Paper 2 Tree Planting, Work and Third-Party Guidance
- Topic Paper 4 Trees, Subsidence and Structural Damage
- Topic Paper 6 Governance and Resourcing
- Topic Paper 11 Tree Protection, Damage and Compensation

Together these papers highlight the importance of clear and robust planning control to a resilient urban forest.

INTRODUCTION

The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (The Act) places a general duty on local planning authorities (LPA) to make adequate provision for the preservation and planting of trees in the granting of planning permission. The Act further empowers a LPA to make provision for the preservation of trees or woodlands in the interests of amenity. This protection is provided in the form of a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). The Act also provides a degree of protection for trees located in conservation areas.

This legislation is underlined by [The Town and Country Planning \(Tree Preservation\)\(England\) Regulations 2012](#)¹(The regulations), [National Planning Policy Framework](#)², the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023, which updated the [HM Government's 25 year environment plan](#)³ under the Environment Act 2021) , [Planning Practice Guidance](#)⁴ and [The Cambridge Local Plan 2018](#)⁵.

The [Environment Act 2021](#)⁶ also introduced statutory duties on Local Nature Recovery Strategies (sections 104-106), which provide important context for the Council's responsibilities to protect and enhance trees and habitats through planning decisions. The Council's statutory responsibilities regarding the protection of trees can be separated under five headings.

TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS

Tree Preservation Orders are made by a local planning authority and served to protect specific trees, groups of trees or woodlands in the interests of amenity. A TPO prohibits the;

- cutting down
- topping
- lopping

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/605/contents> last accessed 6/1/26

²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67aafe8f3b41f783cca46251/NPPF_December_2024.pdf last accessed 6/1/26

³ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5ab3a67840f0b65bb584297e/25-year-environment-plan.pdf> last accessed 6/1/26

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance> last accessed 6/1/26

⁵ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/local-plan-2018> last accessed 6/1/26

⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents> last accessed 6/1/26

- uprooting
- wilful damage or
- wilful destruction

of trees and their roots without the local planning authority's written consent. If consent is given, it can be subject to conditions which have to be followed.

A TPO does not alter maintenance responsibilities, which remain with the owners. A TPO does not authorise the LPA to require maintenance work to be carried out. However, GCSP endeavours to encourage good tree management, particularly through engagement when assessing applications for consent under a Tree Preservation Order.

Exceptions

There are exceptions to this prohibition, detailed at [Regulation 14](#)⁷ of The Regulations that include;

- dead trees and branches;
- dangerous trees and branches;
- works to comply with an Act of Parliament;
- works to prevent or abate a nuisance;
- works necessary to implement a planning permission;
- certain works to fruit trees;
- certain works by or for statutory undertakers;
- certain works for highway operations;
- certain works by the Environment Agency and drainage bodies; and
- certain works for national security purposes.

TPOs may be served at anytime, following a section 211 notice, for example, in response to a planning application, including the protection of trees agreed to be planted as part of approved landscaping, following a request from a member of the public or in response to general development pressure.

⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/605/regulation/14> last accessed 6/1/24

Works to Dead or Dangerous Protected Trees: Notification Requirements

Under the *Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation) (England) Regulations 2012*, works to protected trees may be carried out without prior consent if the tree is dead or poses an immediate risk of serious harm. However, tree owners or their agents are required to provide at least five working days' written notice before undertaking such works, except in cases of genuine emergency.

The purpose of this notice is to allow the LPA to:

- Confirm the tree's condition.
- Agree the scope of necessary works.
- Specify any replanting requirements, where appropriate.

In emergency situations where immediate action is unavoidable, the LPA must be notified as soon as practicable after the works, with photographic evidence or arboricultural assessment provided to justify the action taken.

It remains the responsibility of the tree owner to demonstrate that the works were strictly necessary due to the tree being dead or dangerous. Failure to give proper notice or provide sufficient evidence may result in enforcement action.

Exempt Works to Highway Trees: Notification and Good Practice

Under the *Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation) (England) Regulations 2012*, certain works to protected highway trees may be carried out without formal consent, including:

- *Routine nuisance works*: Where branches obstruct the highway, works may proceed to the minimum extent necessary to *abate the nuisance*. This includes maintaining statutory clearances typically 5.2m above carriageways and 2.4m above footways or cycleways.
- *Dead or dangerous trees*: Where a highway tree is dead or poses an immediate risk of serious harm, works are exempt from consent. However, the Council expects at least five working days' written notice, unless the situation is an absolute emergency.

In emergencies, the LPA must be notified as soon as practicable after the works, with supporting evidence of the tree's condition.

The more serious and imminent the risk, the stronger the expectation for timely notification, ensuring urgent safety issues are addressed while maintaining oversight of significant interventions.

Good practice: Notification is encouraged in all cases where exempt works to highway trees are proposed, even when only nuisance is involved. This provides transparency, helps maintain management records and avoids disputes about the justification for works. For predictable maintenance, such as cyclical clearance pruning to maintain highway safety standards, repeat applications may be accepted for a defined period. Applications should specify the retained dimensions or clearances to be maintained. This approach reduces administrative burden for landowners, contractors and local authorities, while ensuring consistent oversight of long-term management of highway trees.

Amenity Assessment.

When assessing tree work applications and the suitability of serving a TPO. The LPA also considers amenity. Amenity value is not defined in The Act and the government has advised authorities to develop their own methods for assessing amenity value taking into consideration visibility, individual, collective and wider impact. Being able to assess trees in relation to the abundance of benefits they offer, not just focusing on the visual benefits, allows for more appropriate value to be attributed to trees so securing the suitable level of protection.

In accordance with Planning Practice Guidance, CCC has developed a method for assessing amenity value and public benefit and the criteria are set out below.

1. Visual

- Trees visible from a public place.
- Trees which provide significant screening between land uses.
- Trees on private land which may not be visible to the general public but significantly enhance the appearance and character internal to a site.
- Trees which are significant to the defined landscape character of an area or are of defined value to the community.

2. Individual, collective and wider impact

- The trees' size and form and suitability to its immediate location.
- The trees' future potential as an amenity.
- The trees' contribution to and relationship with the landscape.

3. Atmospheric

- Trees which are in the immediate vicinity of congested roads, abutting railways or industrial premises with gaseous emissions.
- Trees in high density residential areas where opportunities to grow trees are very limited.

4. Climate change

- Large trees or those with the potential to grow into large trees which make a greater contribution to canopy cover and have a greater impact with regard to climate change adaptation.
- Trees with canopy that cast a level of shade that can be reasonably managed in relation to the use of the site.

5. Biodiversity

- Trees which are a known habitat of a protected species.
- Trees which could be managed as veterans.
- Trees which extend or are an integral part of a city or county wildlife site.
- Trees or areas of trees which it would be appropriate to manage specifically to encourage colonisation by wildlife.

6. Historic or cultural

- Trees which commemorate an event or notable person.
- Trees which are historically part of the setting of a listed building.

7. Botanical

- Trees which are in themselves botanically rare or part of a locally significant botanical collection.

Amenity value needs to be considered in context. A medium-large tree visible to the public, in a well treed area within large gardens might contribute relatively little. However, a small tree in built-up area where canopy is limited will contribute significantly to amenity.

Proactive and strategic TPOs

In addition to responding to individual applications and notifications, the LPA may also serve TPOs proactively and strategically where this is justified to protect canopy cover and secure long-term urban forest resilience. Examples include safeguarding important groups threatened by cumulative or incremental development, protecting

trees identified through canopy mapping as high-value and pre-emptively securing new planting where it contributes to canopy targets. The use of proactive and strategic TPOs will remain subject to statutory tests of amenity and expediency and available resources.

Future trees to be planted

Tree Preservation (England) Regulations 2012, allows TPOs to be applied to trees that are yet to be planted under a planning condition (s197 TCPA 1990). Such trees are identified in the TPO schedule with the letter “C”, and protection takes effect once the tree is planted. This ensures landscaping secured through planning is afforded long-term protection beyond the lifetime of the condition itself.

TPO review programme

CCC and GCSP will operate a rolling programme to review existing TPOs to ensure they remain accurate, enforceable and proportionate. The review will prioritise older and larger Orders, replace “area” Orders with more precise individual, group or woodland designations where appropriate, and work towards a 15-year refresh cycle, subject to resources and priorities.

CONSERVATION AREAS

Trees in a conservation area that are not protected by a TPO are protected by the provisions in section 211 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. These provisions require people to notify the LPA, using a ‘[section 211 notice](#)⁸, 6 weeks before the proposed works is due to be carried out. The notice and the associated 6-week period gives the LPA an opportunity to consider whether the trees, with consideration of works proposed to them, are suitable for TPO.

There are exceptions to this prohibition, detailed at [Regulation 15](#)⁹ of The Regulations.

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tree-preservation-orders-and-trees-in-conservation-areas#Section-211-notices> last accessed 6/1/26

⁹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/605/regulation/15> last accessed 6/1/26

TREE WORK APPLICATIONS

Permission to carry out work to or fell trees protected by a Cambridge TPO or located in a Cambridge conservation area is required to be submitted to [Greater Cambridge Shared Planning \(GCSP\)](#)¹⁰. This should be done via the [Planning Portal](#)¹¹ where guidance is also provided.

Application for permission to carry out works to trees protected by TPO must be submitted on the form published by the Secretary of State and include the information requested on the form, a plan identifying the subject tree(s) and location, information necessary to specify the proposed work, reasons for the proposed work and evidence to support structural damage, tree health or safety concerns, as applicable.

Demonstrating Good Practice in Tree Work Applications

Applications should demonstrate that proposed works follow recognised industry standards, notably BS 3998:2010 Tree Work - Recommendations. Submissions that align with these standards provide assurance of good practice and will normally be expected. Where deviation is proposed, clear and robust justification should be provided.

To support assessment and ensure clarity, applications should:

- Clearly specify the type of work, extent, and retained dimensions (e.g. post-pruning height and spread).
- Include timing and frequency if the work is part of a repeat or phased operation.
- Where possible, provide annotated photographs or diagrams to illustrate the proposed works and their context. This is particularly helpful for complex sites or where visual impact is a consideration.

For guidance on the types of reasons for tree works that are likely to be supported or opposed in principle (and the circumstances in which exceptions may apply),

¹⁰ <https://www.greatercambridgeplanning.org/> last accessed 6/1/26

¹¹ <https://www.planningportal.co.uk/> last accessed 6/1/26

see Topic Paper 2: Tree Planting, Work and Third-Party Guidance (section “Reasons for Tree Works”).

Repeat and phased applications

Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph 071 of the Tree Preservation Orders and trees in conservation areas section) advises that, where appropriate, authorities may encourage single applications covering regularly repeated operations or phased works. CCC considers the following particularly suited:

- Crown reductions to a defined retained size (e.g. canopy dimension of 12m width and 16m height).
- Crown lifting to maintain a defined clearance (e.g. 3m above ground, or 1.5m clearance to adjacent buildings).

Repeat consents will normally be issued for a maximum period of 10 years. Applications must clearly specify the operations, retained dimensions, timing/frequency and an end date. This reduces administrative burden for owners, contractors and the LPA, while giving certainty for long-term management.

Exceptions

There are circumstances where tree work applications are not required and these are listed above in section 1. With reference to dead and dangerous trees, while a full application is not required, a tree owner or their agent must notify the LPA if they are removing or pruning a tree that is dead or dangerous. The onus is on the tree owner to provide the necessary evidence to support tree work or removal under this exception. In the case of work urgently necessary to remove an immediate risk of serious harm, a notice should be submitted as soon as practicable after the works become necessary and in any other case at least five working days prior to the date on which the works are to be commenced. Notices can be served via the [online form](#)¹².

¹²<https://forms.cambridge.gov.uk/APPLYFOREXEMPTIONONPROTECTEDTREE/launch> last accessed 6/1/26

Considerations

Trees are living and therefore dynamic organisms that cannot be retained indefinitely. In addition to natural circumstances that result in tree loss, problems can arise that require tree removal or pruning. The arboricultural landscape is therefore ever changing, albeit slowly, and not protectable in the same way as a listed building for example. Notwithstanding this, and depending on their location, size, age and condition, the value of some trees to amenity is sufficient that the benefits they offer outweigh the desires of landowners.

When considering the merits of a tree work application or section 211 notice, GCSP will balance the amenity value of a tree, the impact the proposed work will have on its amenity value and the justification submitted. Generally, detrimental works to trees of value will be resisted, without sufficient justification. Typically, the lower the amenity value, the lower the justification for works needs to be. The below categories provide useful definitions of amenity value levels.

- **Trees of limited amenity value** (for example, young trees, those with structural defects, or those nearing the end of their safe useful life) will require less detailed evidence to justify intervention.
- **Trees of some amenity value** (for example, healthy street or garden trees making a positive but not distinctive contribution to the local environment) will require a reasonable level of evidence, including monitoring and engineering reports, before removal or significant works will be considered.
- **Trees of special amenity value** will require robust evidence that clearly demonstrates the causal link between the tree and the alleged damage, alongside an assessment of alternatives.
- **Trees of outstanding amenity value** will require the most rigorous and comprehensive evidence before removal or significant works will be considered.

Using this approach ensures consistent decision-making.

GCSP will consider these criteria when assessing both the suitability of protection and/or the prohibition of works in order to balance detriment to the public against the needs or desires of a landowner.

Decision Making

When considering a TPO application, GCSP will assess the impact of the proposal on public amenity and the justification submitted.

An application can be refused, permitted or permitted subject to conditions. Appeals against decisions to refuse consent or impose conditions can be made to the Secretary of State and details on how to do this are provided in decision notices.

Decisions permitting works are valid for 2 years from the date of the decision unless it is agreed that works may be repeated cyclically, in which case the decision will include a description of the repeatable works, the frequency of cycle and an end date. In certain circumstances, [compensation may be payable by the LPA](#)¹³ for loss or damage which results from the authority refusing consent or granting consent with conditions. However, there are strict criteria and limitations on what compensation may be payable.

When considering a section 211 notice, GCSP will again assess the impact of the proposal on public amenity and the justification submitted. However, a council cannot permit or refuse works detailed a section 211 notice. If the works proposed will have detrimental impact on amenity, the suitability of a TPO will be considered. Unless a TPO is warranted and therefore served, works detailed in a section 211 notice may be actioned after 6 weeks or on receipt of a decision providing consent. Work permitted cannot be conditioned but can include Informatives to help maintain and enhance the amenity provided by trees.

While a section 211 notice does not have to take any particular form, it is recommended that they are made in the same way as a TPO application.

A section 211 notice must identify and locate the subject trees, describe, accurately, the work proposed and include the date it is submitted. A plan is not mandatory but is helpful. Evidence is not required to support structural damage, health or safety but without the submission of evidence, the removal of valuable trees will be resisted.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

CCC's planning service is managed by GCSP. In addition to managing TPOs, trees in conservation areas and tree work applications/notifications, GCSP are responsible for processing and determining planning applications for CCC. As part of the process the Built and Natural Environment team is consulted on applications with arboricultural interests.

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tree-preservation-orders-and-trees-in-conservation-areas#Compensating-for-loss-or-damage> last accessed 6/1/26

Any development or redevelopment of a site must consider the value of any trees potentially influenced and, where appropriate, make provision for the sustainable retention of trees of value and space for replacement/new planting on site. Many of the benefits associated with tree canopy are provided local to the trees themselves, mitigating tree losses or making provision for new tree planting therefore is not normally appropriate off site.

An applicant should ensure that tree constraints information is established at an early stage of proposed development to ensure trees of value inform design layouts. Relative to development, trees are very long-lived organisms and if they are to make a meaningful contribution to amenity, they need time to reach maturity. Development that does not respect existing trees of value or prevents replacement trees the time and space needed to reach their potential is not arboriculturally sustainable. For replacement trees to be allowed to reach their potential it is essential that provision is made for strategic planting of large trees in locations that can be protected into the future during future redevelopment of a site.

Arboricultural assessment and submissions should be made in accordance with the recommendations set out BS 5837 2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction- Recommendations (as amended or replaced).

Planning applications should be supported by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment that evaluates the direct and indirect effects of the proposed development and, where necessary, recommends mitigation. The assessment should indicate any tree loss required and any potential for retained trees to be damaged or restricted in the future. Consideration should also be given to buildability and the impact of new access arrangements, utilities, movement around the site, adequate working space and provision for the storage of materials.

Submitted either as part of a planning application or an application to discharge condition, an Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) is a site-specific tree protection methodology for the implementation of any aspect of a development that has the potential to result in the loss of or damage to a tree to be retained. It is comprised of a set of definitive statements, not recommendations, that are not open to interpretation, clearly explaining precisely how trees will be protected and how demolition, deliveries, storage and construction activities will be managed to avoid material damage to trees. It should not allow works/activity not specifically approved. The AMS should be phased in line with the construction timetable and specify the extent of work that is covered. The retained arboriculturalist needs to be provided with all necessary details to allow the completion of an AMS that is fit for purpose and enforceable. Seeking the approval of an AMS or discharge of tree protection conditions should not be pursued without all pertinent construction details and therefore might not be possible without the involvement of main contractors.

PLANNING COMPLIANCE

The removal of, or works to trees protected by TPO, conservation area or planning condition, without the required permission, is a breach of planning control. Any breach of planning control should be reported to the planning compliance team to investigate via the [online form](#)¹⁴.

GCSP will initially aim to resolve breaches, through negotiation, and discussion. However, where unauthorised works have caused significant harm, or where there is evidence of deliberate or repeat offences, formal enforcement action will be pursued. This may include:

- Serving a Tree Replacement Notice (TRN);
- Issuing a Breach of Condition Notice;
- Prosecution through the courts (fines up to £20,000 in Magistrates' Court or unlimited in Crown Court).

Decisions will follow the GCSP's Enforcement Policy, weighing proportionality, harm and public interest.

This Topic Paper explains how statutory tree protections and planning controls are applied in Cambridge to safeguard trees of public value. It supports transparent, proportionate and consistent decision-making, balancing private interests with the long-term public benefits provided by the urban forest.

END

¹⁴ <https://forms.scams.gov.uk/REPORTABREACHOFPLANNINGCONTROL/launch>
last accessed 12/03/26

TOPIC PAPER 10. CAMBRIDGE’S URBAN FOREST - BASELINE AND CHANGE

Version 5

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PURPOSE

Understanding Cambridge’s urban forest today is essential to planning for its future. This paper sets out the current evidence on canopy cover, species composition, age structure, and spatial distribution across the city. It also reviews recent trends and changes, providing the baseline against which future progress will be measured.

POLICY ALIGNMENT

This paper supports implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy (UFS) under the following policies.

- PL1-PL4: Advancing the Plant More policies essential to increasing canopy and species and structural diversity, distributed fairly across the city
- E1-E4: Reinforcing Engage More policies, encouraging private landowner to bolster their contribution to the urban forest

ASSOCIATED TOPIC PAPERS

The paper is part of a series, underpinning the delivery of the UFS and can be read in conjunction with the following papers.

- Topic Paper 2 Tree Planting, Work and Third-Party Guidance
- Topic Paper 5 Public Engagement and Partnerships
- Topic Paper 6 Governance and Resourcing
- Topic Paper 7 Climate Change and Resilience

Together these papers highlight the importance of planning for a future, larger and more resilient urban forest.

INTRODUCTION

Cambridge's urban forest, the trees and shrubs that grow across public and private land, is a vital part of the city's character and environmental resilience. It provides shade and contributes to improved air quality, stored carbon, flood risk mitigation and enhanced biodiversity.

To manage this resource effectively, a clear evidence base is needed. Over the past 15 years, a series of studies have been undertaken, including the ADAS Tree Audit (2013), the Dr T Jackson's 2008-2018 canopy cover analysis and the i-Tree Eco® survey (2020-21). Together with the Council's own analysis of its tree maintenance database (Ezytreev®), these provide a comprehensive baseline of structure, composition, and change.

CANOPY COVER

- 2008: 17.1% baseline [ADAS].
- 2018: 17.6% (slight increase, equivalent to ~20 hectares) [Dr T Jackson].
- 2019 [i-Tree Eco® sample]: 20.1% (trees and shrubs combined). This i-Tree Eco® figure is not directly comparable with the 2008 & 2018 canopy change studies, as it uses a different methodology and includes both trees and shrubs

Ward-level data shows the highest canopy in Newnham (21.2%) and West Chesterton (21.1%), and lowest in Cherry Hinton (13.1%) and Abbey (14.3%) [Dr T Jackson].

For consistency, the UFS uses canopy change studies as the primary measure of progress over time

SPECIES COMPOSITION

- ADAS 2013: *Fraxinus* (Ash) over 20% of population; *Rosaceae* (*Prunus*) 28%.
- Ash dieback presents a high risk of mortality, with national projections indicating potential losses of up to 95% ¹
- i-Tree Eco® (2020–21): 105 species, 49 genera. Most common: *Crataegus* (thorn) (12.5%), *Prunus* (cherry, apple, *sorbus*) (11.1%), *Acer* (maple)(10.6%); most common species: hawthorn (11%)
- Council-managed stock differs: *Prunus* (14%), *Acer* (12%), *Tilia*, *Betula*, *Sorbus* (8% each).

AGE AND SIZE STRUCTURE

- ADAS 2013: 75% of trees 2.5-10m tall; <2% over 20m.
- 2018 study: gains from medium trees maturing; losses in Castle due to development.
- i-Tree Eco®: 49.5% of trees 15-45 cm DBH; only 4.2% over 75 cm

¹ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/research/ash-dieback-impact/> last accessed 16/10/25

SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION [DR T JACKSON]

- Higher canopy in the west (Newnham, Castle, West Chesterton).
- Lower canopy in the east (Abbey, Cherry Hinton, Coleridge).
- Canopy ownership: 74.1% private/other, 16.3% Council, 9.6% highways

ECOSYSTEM SERVICES (I-TREE ECO® 2020-21)

- Estimated carbon storage: 88,000 tonnes (£22.5m).
- Estimated carbon sequestration (annual): 2,040 tonnes (£524k).
- Estimated air pollution removal: 22.2 tonnes annually (£990k).
- Estimated avoided runoff: 97,600 m³ annually (£153k).
- Indicative amenity value (CAVAT): £1.03 billion.
- Estimated replacement cost: £172 million.

DISTRIBUTION OF CANOPY BY LAND USE

Residential and Gardens [Dr T Jackson]

- Gardens contribute disproportionately high canopy cover relative to their area.
- Between 2008-2018, even as garden space shrank due to densification, canopy in gardens increased in many wards (notably Romsey).
- This shows private gardens are a key part of the urban forest, especially in wards with low Council land. This reinforces the importance of engagement with private landowners in maintaining and expanding canopy cover.

Institutional / College Land

- ADAS (2013) found the largest trees and highest canopy density concentrated on college and institutional land (often in western Cambridge) .
- i-Tree Eco® confirms that Newnham and Castle, which have substantial college land, still hold the highest canopy cover (~21%).

Council-Managed Land (Parks, Housing, Highways)

[Dr T Jackson]

- Council land makes up only 13.5% of land area but supports 16.3% of canopy cover.
- Parks and protected open spaces contain a significant share of large trees, particularly in lower canopy wards, helping balance inequity.
- Highways support 9.6% of canopy which are crucial for shade and amenity but limited in number compared to private gardens.

Industrial and Commercial Land

- ADAS (2013) highlighted that industrial areas had low tree numbers and canopy, identifying them as priority planting opportunities.
- More recent studies continue to show lower canopy in eastern industrial wards (e.g. Abbey, Cherry Hinton). [Dr T Jackson]

Agricultural / Urban Fringe

- The i-Tree Eco® report recorded 16.3% of the city's land as agricultural, but these areas tend to have low canopy density compared to residential or institutional land
- Hedgerows and shelterbelts contribute, but they are not equivalent to dense canopy. [i-Tree Eco®]
- Large areas of remnant agricultural land have been urbanised.

TRENDS AND CHANGE

- Net increase in canopy since 2008 (17.1% to 17.6%).
- Ward-level variations - Romsey gained canopy; Castle and Newnham lost canopy.
- Equity - canopy increased in deprived areas between 2008 & 2018, reducing disparities.
- Risks - Ash dieback (ash has been estimated at 22% of Cambridge's tree population)[ADAS 2013]; recent temperature extremes highlight climate pressures (In 2019 UK's hottest temperature, 38.7°C, was recorded in

Cambridge but in 2022 that record was broken with 39.9°C recorded at Cambridge University Botanic Gardens².)

IMPLICATIONS

- Based on canopy change studies, canopy cover remains below the 20% target and is unevenly distributed across the city..
- Private land dominates, making engagement essential.
- Species diversity is relatively high, but over reliance on Rosaceae and ash is a risk.
- Few large trees - need to protect and establish future cohorts.
- Ecosystem service valuation underlines the economic and social case for investment.
- Council and protected open space play a disproportionately important role in lower-canopy wards, helping offset the loss of large gardens and equity issues.

This baseline highlights both progress made and structural constraints, reinforcing the need for long-term, partnership-based approaches to growing Cambridge's urban forest

REFERENCES

[Trees - Cambridge City Council](https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/trees) <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/trees> last accessed 6/1/26

[Tree data - Cambridge City Council](https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/tree-data) <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/tree-data> last accessed 6/1/26

Dr T Jackson <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/4uvksm30/tree-canopy-cover-in-cambridge-between-2008-and-2018.pdf> last accessed 6/1/26

ADAS 2013 <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/3257/analysis-and-interpretation-of-tree-audit-data.pdf> last accessed 6/1/26

² <https://www.botanic.cam.ac.uk/how-the-weather-is-recorded-at-cubg/> last accessed 16/10/25

i-Tree Eco <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/to0h50xn/i-tree-eco-project-report.pdf> last accessed 6/1/26

END

TOPIC PAPER 11 TREE DAMAGE AND COMPENSATION

Version 5

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PURPOSE

The urban forest is a public asset and protecting it from harm is a core responsibility of the Council and its partner services. This paper sets out how damage to trees is addressed, including unauthorised works, vandalism and harm caused by third parties. It explains the legal framework for enforcement and prosecution, the use of valuation tools such as [CAVAT](#)¹ to establish compensation and how Cambridge City Council (CCC) and partner services seek to deter damage while recovering costs where appropriate.

The paper deals with damage to trees. Issues relating to damage from trees (such as subsidence and structural impacts) are addressed separately in Topic Paper 4.

¹ <https://ltoa.org.uk/resources/cavat> last accessed 6/1/26

POLICY ALIGNMENT

This paper supports implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy (UFS) under the following policies.

- P1, P3, P6: Supporting Protect More policies through planning control to improve best practice
- E1: Utilising the Engage More policy partnering with other services to achieve reasonable and proportionate outcomes.

ASSOCIATED TOPIC PAPERS

The paper is part of a series, underpinning the delivery of the UFS and can be read in conjunction with the following papers.

- Topic Paper 1 Tree Asset Management and Risk
- Topic Paper 2 Tree Planting, Work and Third-Party Guidance
- Topic Paper 4 Subsidence and Structural Damage
- Topic Paper 9 Statutory Responsibilities and Planning Control

Together these papers provide guidance on good practice, how damage severity is assessed and the options available when breaches occur.

PRIVATE TREES

Trees on private land can be protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), Conservation Area designation and/or planning permission condition, all of which are managed by the Local Planning Authority (LPA). Cambridge City Council (CCC) is the LPA but statutory planning duties are exercised by the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP) service.

A TPO prohibits works to protected trees without written consent from the LPA. In a Conservation Area it is an offence to carry out work to a tree without first notifying the LPA. Planning conditions can also prohibit specific tree works or construction works within the vicinity of trees (see Topic Paper 9).

In order to obtain permission to work on a protected tree, a tree work application must be submitted to GCSP or details of works must be included within a planning application submission. The removal of, or works to, trees protected by a TPO,

Conservation Area, or planning condition without the required permission constitutes a breach of planning control, and the LPA has the power to enforce against such actions.

Damage to trees protected by a planning condition (for example through excavation, compaction, or unauthorised pruning during development) is also considered a breach of planning control. In such cases the LPA may require remedial action or replacement and/or pursue enforcement action including formal notices and fines. Acts of vandalism to private trees not protected by a TPO, Conservation Area or planning conditions are a civil matter; the LPA has no authority to act.

PUBLIC TREES

Trees on public land are the responsibility of CCC or Cambridgeshire County Council. This includes trees on land that is tenanted or leased out (for example tenanted housing gardens, allotments or commercial leased sites). Although the land may be occupied by others, CCC retains ownership of the trees and remains responsible for their long-term management and legal protection.

Tenants and leaseholders are not normally permitted to carry out tree works without consent. Any unauthorised works may be treated as a breach of tenancy or lease conditions in addition to potential enforcement under planning or tree protection legislation.

Unauthorised works to and removal of council-owned trees constitute vandalism and may be treated as criminal damage.

Incidences of vandalism to council-owned trees in Cambridge are rare, but young trees can be vulnerable to anti-social behaviour. Allowing dogs to cause damage to trees may also constitute an act of vandalism. CCC aims to deter vandalism but where it occurs damage will be corrected as soon as practical and, where appropriate, compensation will be sought either through negotiation or prosecution.

DAMAGE

Damage to trees is the act of physical harm that impairs the tree's value. Value can be considered aesthetic, functional or ecological.

Trees can be damaged intentionally, accidentally or through insufficient consideration. Any incident that exposes woody tissue above or below ground is a

form of damage that can be detrimental to a tree in the short or long term. Damage may also allow entry of pathogens or activate latent pathogens or organisms.

While trees can compartmentalise decay, severe or repeated pruning impairs function and structural integrity. Roots are particularly critical; below-ground damage is often more serious than canopy damage because it compromises stability and long-term health.

Indirect damage can also occur through soil compaction, toxic materials or altered water availability. Avoiding material damage is therefore essential to sustaining tree health and a resilient urban forest.

Pruning damage is minimised by adherence to best practice. Where trees are protected, applications allow the LPA to balance need against impact. Pruning work should always be the minimum required to achieve the necessary outcome and carried out in accordance with [BS3998:2010](#)² (as amended) by suitably qualified operatives.

On development sites, consideration is given to the potential for damage through construction activity. Guidance is set out in [BS5837:2012](#)³ (as amended), and where risks are identified an Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) must be submitted and approved, with adherence secured through planning conditions.

Highway trees and private trees close to highways can be damaged by large vehicles, verge compaction from unauthorised parking, service excavations, crossovers and new road layouts. Young trees are more susceptible to vandalism. CCC seeks to reduce risks through cyclical management, planting larger and more resilient stock, installing guards where appropriate, regulating applications to work on Council trees and engagement with the public, partners and utility companies.

CONSIDERATIONS

When assessing unauthorised works or vandalism, CCC and GCSP will consider:

2

<https://landingpage.bsigroup.com/LandingPage/Standard?UPI=00000000003008996>
0 last accessed 6/1/26

3

<https://landingpage.bsigroup.com/LandingPage/Standard?UPI=00000000003021364>
2 last accessed 6/1/26

- **Visibility:** A prominent tree in a front garden or street offers higher amenity than one in a secluded location. Larger trees or those with potential to grow large are more significant.
- **Health:** Tree health affects longevity, amenity, and ecosystem service delivery.
- **Life Expectancy:** Trees with longer expected life spans offer greater cumulative benefit.
- **Impact:** The Council must show that its response is proportionate. Minor works in secluded locations may have little public impact, whereas excavation severing major roots of a prominent street tree may represent a significant loss of amenity.
-

ENFORCEMENT AND PROSECUTION

The removal of, or unauthorised works to, protected trees is a breach of planning control. Unauthorised works to council trees are acts of vandalism and may amount to criminal damage:

- Under section 206 of the [Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#)⁴, landowners have a duty to replace protected trees that are removed or destroyed without consent.
- Sections 207-209 empower the LPA to serve a replacement notice and recover costs if not complied with.
- Section 210 makes contravention of a TPO an offence. Fines are up to £20,000 in magistrates' court or unlimited in Crown Court.
- Breaches of planning conditions (e.g. tree protection measures) may trigger enforcement notices, stop notices, or breach of condition notices, with unlimited fines on conviction.

Wilful or negligent damage to council trees is criminal damage and may be treated as anti-social behaviour.

Formal enforcement action is discretionary. Consideration will be given to legislation, applications/notifications, planning conditions, development plan policies and public interest before proceeding. Each case is assessed on its merits. Persistent or severe vandalism may also be addressed under Anti-Social Behaviour legislation in partnership with enforcement colleagues.

⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/8/contents> last accessed 5/1/26

REPORTING DAMAGE

The effectiveness of enforcement depends on timely and accurate reporting of incidents. Anyone who witnesses or discovers tree damage should report it promptly through the following pathways:

- For protected private trees (Tree Preservation Orders, Conservation Areas, or planning conditions): report to the GCSP Compliance Team, who are responsible for investigating breaches of planning control. Reports can be submitted through the planning enforcement portal.
- For publicly owned trees (in the care of CCC or Cambridgeshire County Council): report via the Cambridge City Council Customer Service Centre (phone, email, or online reporting forms), who will forward details to the Tree Team.
- For cases of criminal damage (wilful vandalism or felling without consent): report to the police as well as the council, as such acts may constitute criminal damage or anti-social behaviour.

Reports should include as much detail as possible. The exact location, a description of the tree, the type of damage, date and time observed and where available, any identifying information about those responsible. Photographs are particularly valuable to support enforcement and compensation claims.

VALUATION AND COST RECOVERY

When unauthorised works or damage occur, the recovery of costs will be sought through a combination of:

Amenity valuation using CAVAT (Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees). This nationally recognised system calculates a tree's asset value in monetary terms. It has two approaches: the Full Method, which provides a detailed valuation for individual high-value specimens, and the Quick Method, which enables consistent valuation of groups of trees. CAVAT is the Council's preferred method of establishing amenity value for the purposes of compensation, but this does not preclude the use of alternative recognised approaches where appropriate.

Recovery may include direct replacement or remedial costs, including the cost of planting a replacement tree of suitable size and species, carrying out remedial works, and the officer time required to investigate, administer and supervise those works.

The rationale for seeking both amenity value (via CAVAT or other recognised systems) and direct costs is that CAVAT reflects the public amenity lost, while replacement and remedial costs ensure the asset can be practically restored and that resources expended are recovered. Together, they provide a fair and proportionate basis for compensation that recognises both community benefit and actual expenditure.

Compensation recovered will be reinvested directly into the urban forest, recharging the costs of remedial work and officer time, planting replacements, and offsetting the lost amenity value of the damaged tree(s). This ensures the community continues to benefit from a healthy, resilient tree stock and that the principle of the polluter pays is applied.

THE POLLUTER PAYS PRINCIPLE

The polluter pays principle is an established principle of environmental law and policy. It is embedded in UK environmental legislation, including the [Environment Act 2021](#)⁵.

In the context of trees, this means that anyone who causes damage to Council-owned or protected trees may be required to:

- Pay compensation reflecting the loss of amenity value (normally assessed using CAVAT or other recognised valuation systems);
- Cover the direct costs of replacement planting or remedial works; and
- Meet the administrative and officer costs involved in enforcement and restoration.

This ensures that the community is not left to bear the cost of tree damage, and that public assets are protected in line with the principle of the polluter pays.

The application of this principle will always be proportionate to the scale and impact of the damage caused.

This Topic Paper sets out a clear, proportionate and transparent approach to addressing damage to trees. It supports deterrence, recovery of costs and

⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents> last accessed 6/1/25

reinvestment in the urban forest, while ensuring that enforcement action remains fair, evidence-based and in the public interest.

END

TOPIC PAPER 12 GROWING CAMBRIDGE'S TREE CANOPY

Version 5

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SUMMARY

- **Why canopy, not tree counts?** What matters is the leafy cover over our streets and spaces. A few big trees can cool and shelter an area more than many small ones.
- **Where we are:** Cambridge's latest mapping point is 17.6% canopy (2018). From 2008 to 2018 we gained 0.5 percentage points¹ (pp) about 20 hectares of extra canopy.
- **Our target:** 20% by 2050 means adding ~+2.4 pp - roughly 98 hectares of new canopy in total (around 140 football pitches²), or about 4 hectares per year.

¹ Percentage points (pp) show the absolute change between two percentages. For example 10% - 12% = +2 pp), while percent (%) shows the relative change (the same change is a +20% increase).

² A standard football pitch is about 0.7 ha

WHAT IS CANOPY COVER AND WHY USE IT?

Canopy cover is the share of land that sits under the spread of tree crowns. It tells us where shade, cooling, rain capture and habitat are happening. Counting trees alone can mislead: one large tree can do the work of many saplings.

Rule of thumb for Cambridge: City area ~ 4,070 ha - 1 percentage point (pp) of canopy ~ 40.7 ha.

WHERE WE ARE NOW

- **2018:** 17.6% canopy (latest consistent mapping point).
- **Change since 2008:** +0.5 pp over ~10 years ~ 20 ha total (about 29 football pitches).

This tells us we can grow canopy, but to meet future goals we need to do a little more, a little faster.

HOW WE MEASURE CANOPY

- **ProximiTree™:** aerial canopy mapping (our headline series) uses high-resolution aerial imagery to map tree cover across the whole city. It gives % canopy by ward and land-use. Latest consistent point, 2018 = 17.6%. We use this to track the target so each update compares like-with-like.
- **i-Tree Eco (2021 field survey):** On the ground sample plots used to estimate the benefits trees provide (cooling, carbon, pollution removal). It produced a higher canopy percentage (~20.1%) because it uses a different, sample-based method. We cite Eco for benefits and not to reset the headline trend.
- **ADAS (2013 analysis and scenarios):** Earlier modelling that used the 2008 baseline to explore how much planting might lift canopy by about 2% (~ 80 ha) over time. It assumed typical planting losses (around a quarter over the long term) and tested where planting would work best (by ward and land-use). Useful for scale of effort, but today we put more weight on protecting big trees and growing existing crowns, not just tree counts.

In short, we track progress with one consistent mapping series; use i-Tree to explain benefits; use ADAS style numbers only as illustrative context or supporting evidence.

WHAT THE 20% BY 2050 TARGET MEANS

From 17.6% - 20% is +2.4 pp. That equals ~97.7 ha of extra canopy citywide. Spread over 25 years, that's ~3.9 ha each year or about 5-6 football pitches of new canopy every year.

WHY NOT 25% BY 2050 OR 20% BY 2030?

- 25% by 2050 would need about 12 ha per year (roughly 18 pitches/year) - a very big step up, and unlikely without major land use changes and large-scale private action.
- 20% by 2030 would need about 19-20 ha per year (around 28 pitches/year) - far beyond what tree growth and delivery capacity can realistically achieve in time.

So, 20% by 2050 is challenging but **achievable**, if we focus on the most effective actions.

THE MOST EFFECTIVE ACTIONS

1. **Protect big trees:** Avoid losing mature trees. One removal can wipe out hundreds of m² of canopy that would take decades to replace.
2. **Help existing trees grow:** Good plant health care and prune with canopy in mind. Small growth on a big crown adds a lot of extra shade.
3. **Mobilise private land:** Around three quarters of the city's canopy is not on Council land. Support homeowners, colleges, schools and businesses to keep trees, let them mature, and plant where space allows.
4. **Plant for canopy, not just numbers:** Fewer, better designed sites beat many poor ones. Where we plant provide enough soil, choose species that can form a large crown, and fund aftercare.
5. **Allow natural regeneration:** In nature reserves, woodlands, isolated areas in our parks, open spaces and river margins, protect promising self-sets so they grow into future trees at low cost.

PLANTING VS. KEEPING WHAT WE'VE GOT

- **Keeping a big tree:** keeps a large, working 'umbrella' over people and places right now.
- **Planting a new tree:** is essential for the future, but it can take 20-40 years before it provides similar shade. That's why we do both, keep the canopy we have and plant smartly for tomorrow.

- For example a mature street or park tree with a crown radius ~8 m, has a crown diameter ~16 m and a height of around 15-22 m and a trunk diameter of ~60-80 cm, shades about 200 m².
- Compared with a young established tree with a crown radius ~1-2 m, with a crown diameter 2-4 m, height of ~4-6 m and trunk diameter ~10-20 cm, shades ~3-12 m². Ten such trees together provide ~30-120 m² and only after several growing seasons.

Numbers vary by species and pruning but the relative difference holds: one large crown usually outperforms many small ones for decades.

Protecting the big one usually gives more benefit, more quickly.

HOW WE WILL TRACK PROGRESS

We will use a consistent mapping method over time, so progress is comparable.

Other surveys (like i-Tree Eco) help describe benefits, but the headline trend will stick to one method (ProximiTree™) for clarity.

We check canopy change every 10 years. This rhythm is practical and affordable for us to deliver and it smooths out small year to year differences. Longer cycle years can slow course correction and would fall outside the strategies lifetime.

10 years is clear enough to guide decisions and deliver within our resources.

WHAT RESIDENTS AND PARTNERS CAN DO

- Keep the trees you have where safe to do so; ask for advice before removing.
- Plant a tree, give it space and care (especially the first three summers).
- Reduce hard surfacing around trees; use mulch where you can.