

ODS Parks and Open Spaces Service – Tree Service Overview

At a scrutiny meeting in September 2021 the Committee asked for a briefing on the state of tree management in ODS. The following areas were asked to be covered:

- 1) The state of tree management at the moment: how many trees are ODS looking after,
- 2) How many staff ODS have to look after them,
- 3) Current service levels regarding tree works, capacity to absorb additional tree planting and management,
- 4) What would be required to support additional tree planting in terms of staff, equipment and money.

This paper seeks to provide answers to the above points raised.

The purpose of the Tree Service is to:

- Carry out the cyclical tree inspection programme on Oxford City Council owned trees (circa 100,000 trees).
- Survey the County Council's trees under the S42/S42+ agreement.
- Ensure tree works that have been recommended as a result of the cyclical survey are carried out.
- Generate external income such as tree works and surveys.
- Respond to tree related queries in line with the Oxford City Council Tree Management Policy. Please note there are tree surveyors in the City Council's Planning Department that deal with planning related enquiries including Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and Conservation Areas.
- Provide an out of hours call out e.g. during storms.
- Planting and aftercare of trees.

The Oxford City Council Tree Management Policy specifies the current service level ODS's Tree Service operates to. The Tree Policy has been in place since 2008 and is periodically reviewed in consultation with members and is approved through the scrutiny process.

The overall aim of the Tree Management Policy is to ensure that Oxford's tree stock is retained, enhanced and increased in the most proactive manner whilst ensuring the health, safety and well-being of the public and property.

The Council's stock is inspected on a cyclical inspection regime. Trees are surveyed once every three years. The inspection is designed to assess the tree's condition and health. The inspection highlights any work that may be required on a risk basis to ensure that the trees are retained in the best possible condition.

Following an inspection a priority is given to recommended works. This enables the Service to organise a balanced schedule of works. All tree works are carried out according to the British Standard BS3998: 2010 Tree Work – Recommendations. Works include, crown lifting over footpaths, removal of dead branches etc.

The Tree Service consists of:

- 1) Tree Contracts Supervisor (Grade 6)
- 2) Tree Team Supervisor (Grade 6) – currently on secondment to City Council
- 3) Tree Surveyor (Grade 5)

The surveyors are qualified and experienced in the arboricultural profession. Additional support for admin such as procurement comes from the wider Parks Service.

During the spring/summer months a seasonal worker undertakes the watering of newly planted trees.

These three posts are directly line managed by the ODS Parks and Open Spaces Service Manager.

Tree Planting

As part of the cyclical inspection programme the surveyors identify potential planting locations for trees across all City Council owned sites. The Service on average plants 90 trees a year across all site types from the budget that is delegated by the City Council.

In line with the policy every tree felled would be replaced to ensure that over the years the City retains its tree stock for future generations. Although it is recognised that it is not always practical or prudent to replace a tree in the same location or with the same species that was previously planted.

During the autumn/winter the wider Parks Service undertakes the planting of new trees. As previously mentioned a seasonal worker from April – September waters the newly planted trees once a week. In line with best practice newly planted trees are watered for the first three years to help with root establishment. In addition to watering the seasonal worker also carries out:

- mulching,
- formative pruning and
- checking/ removal of stakes and ties.

The question of what resources would be required if tree planting is increased is difficult to answer without the number of additional trees we would be required to plant. For guidance:

- 1) The cost per tree is £661 +vat. This covers the planting and 3 years of aftercare. Please note that trees planted along roads have the additional cost of excavating a tree pit. The UK average is £4-5k per pit. Tree pits need to be excavated to avoid disturbing underground utilities and the surrounding pavement.
- 2) The current seasonal worker is at capacity with the watering so a significant increase in tree planting would require financial investment in additional staff and equipment such as a towable water bowser.