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OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

To:	**Cabinet**
Date:	**12 June 2024**
Report of:	**Executive Director (Development)**
Title of Report:	**Tree Management Policy 2024-2032**

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To seek approval for an updated Tree Management Policy. This sets out the Council's policy regarding management of its tree stock and aligns its approach in this area to current standards and good practice.
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies
Corporate Priority:	Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24

Recommendation: That Cabinet resolves to:
1. **Adopt** the Tree Management Policy 2024-2032 (at Appendix 1); and
2. **Delegate authority** to the Executive Director (Development) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies to make any minor, non-substantive changes to the policy.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Draft Tree Management Policy 2024-2032
Appendix 2	Risk Register
Appendix 3	Equalities Impact Assessment

Introduction and background

1. This Tree Management Policy replaces the Council's 2016 Tree Management Policy. The policy focuses on the management of the trees in the ownership or control of the City Council only. It does not cover the management of trees in the control of third parties, for example private ownership, or the control of other public sector bodies, such as Oxfordshire County Council.

2. The new policy sets out to be a robust and fit for purpose tree management policy, focused on those trees in the ownership or control of the City Council.

3. This policy also does not cover, or indeed supersede, the Council's policies relating to the environmental benefits of trees, which is currently set out in the Oxford Urban Forestry Strategy. Nor so the Council's planning policies where they relate to trees, which are set out in the current Local Plan 2036 and associated documents. However, the Tree Management Policy has been drafted to work alongside both these policy areas.

Proposals

4. The review of the Tree Management policy sought to ensure that the Council has policies and processes which align   with current standards and good practice. It establishes an updated approach to the survey and inspection regimes of trees in the Council's ownership or control. It will act as the basis for the Council's future commissioning of services to support its day-to-day tree management activity.

5. Key changes from the previous policy include:

   ▪ Updating and providing more detail on approach to surveying & assessment intervals and the associated methodology. This includes increasing the survey period for trees in high-risk from 3 years to 18 months.
   ▪ Setting out the benefits of trees in a much more detailed way.
   ▪ Including a section on the Legal Framework in relation to tree safety.
   ▪ Setting out clear aims & objectives that mesh with those of the Oxford Urban Forestry Strategy.
   ▪ Setting out clear policy statements for the various trees within the city from general/overarching general policies, through street trees (where they are in the control of the City Council), trees in parks & open spaces, trees and social housing, woodland, and trees on private land & trees. Each policy deals with trees in specific situations because there are inherent different between approaches to management dependent upon where the trees are growing.
   ▪ Providing a Pest & Disease Contingency plan which is very important in respect of biosecurity.
   ▪ Providing more sources of further information and a larger glossary of terms.

6. There are no alternatives to the proposed option of updating the Council's Tree Management Policy. This update is essential to ensure the Council is operating in line with current standards and good practice.

Consultation and communications

7. The policy and is focused on bringing the Council's position in line with current standards and best practice. As such, no additional consultation has been undertaken on the policy document itself.

8. The policy document does set out how consultation will take place in delivering the policy. This is also set out below for ease of reference.

9. The Council will consult Ward Councillors and appropriate 'Friends Groups' / relevant stakeholders of any major tree works such as pollarding or felling before any work is commenced in their Ward. If there is a large number of trees scheduled to be felled in a single location, the Council may erect notices to consult the public of the proposed works as required by the 'Duty of Consult' at Section 115 of The Environment Act 2021.

10. In the event that emergency safety work is required immediately, after storms for example, the Council will notify Ward Councillors retrospectively as the why the work was necessary.

11. Public safety is paramount and for this reason, the Council will inform ward councillors and inform the public by way of public notice, but there will be no consultation for prior approval.

12. When new tree planting schemes are proposed, the Council will consult with Ward Councillors and relevant stakeholders to obtain their opinions and to inform them of the Council's intentions and the reasons for the planting schemes.

Health and safety

13. Trees can and do present a risk to the public, which is why their on-going management is important. As noted above, the Tree Management Policy sets our new risk-based approach for the management of trees in the City Councils control, which is in line with current guidance and best practice. This is important in ensuring the Council is maintaining a safe environment.

Crime and disorder

14. The Tree Management Policy sets out a framework for the removal of trees or branches to support community safety, for example, where necessary for CCTV coverage.

Sustainability and environment

15. The Tree Management Policy includes a section on the importance of trees and is designed to dovetail, but not supersede, the City Council's broader policy framework in relation to trees and their positive impact on the environment and sustainability, which is set out in both the Oxford Urban Forestry Strategy and the Local Plan.

Financial implications

16. The proposed Tree Management Policy would also commit the Council to an increased level of surveying and improved data management. However, there is no other option if the Council wants to ensure it is operating in line with current standards and good practice, and therefore to carry out its duties. The requirements set out in the policy will inform the current phase of commissioning underway with Oxford Direct Services with a view to making any changes within the existing cost envelope set out for ODS services within the City Council's agreed Medium Term Financial Plan.

17. Any cost implications will need to be worked though via the ongoing review of clienting and commissioning ODS ahead of the next budget, but the expectation is that we stick within the overall cost envelope. An update to this will be provided as part of the budget setting process.

Legal issues

18. There are no direct implications arising from the recommendation of this report though it is best practice to have one and supports the Council in demonstrating compliance with a range of legal obligations upon it.

Level of risk

19. A risk register is included with this report. It highlights to key areas of risk addressed by this policy relate to harm to the public and subsidence claims.

Equalities impact

20. An Equalities Impact Assessment is included with this report.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

21. In 2023/24 the Climate and Environment Scrutiny Panel recommended that the Council, through its policies, explores how it could incentivise, promote and encourage the planting, retention and renewal of trees through those policies – particularly within Planning and Licensing. Cabinet accepted the recommendation and advised that this would be considered as part of the Council's review and updating of its existing Tree Management Policy.

22. The Tree Management Policy seeks to provide a framework for the effective management of all trees within the City Council's ownership and control. As such, it provides a framework to protect and enhance those trees, balanced against the need for effective management and health and safety considerations. The Oxford Urban Forest Strategy and the Local Plan provide the broader and more direct policy direction in relation to the value of trees in relation to Carbon and Environmental considerations.

Report author	Richard Jones
Job title	Business Analyst
Service area or department	Business Improvement
Telephone	01865 252206
e-mail	rjones3@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers: None