

Cover Note

Following up on a survey commissioned by Princes Risborough Town Council (PRTC) in 2015 which resulted in the production of our Tree Risk Management Strategy, a re-survey was undertaken in May 2019 by Wycombe District Council (now Buckinghamshire Council) to assess the tree stock which fell under the jurisdiction of PRTC in May 2019. This identified a variety of urgent, and recommended but non-urgent tree work that was required across the town. In addition, this brought to the attention of the Town Council the importance of developing a strategy to support more active management of our tree stock and enable us to more consistently respond to issues arising around arboreal matters.

PRTC recognises that we have an important role to play with regards to the careful management of trees for which we are responsible. We aim to ensure the benefits that trees give to the town are maximised whilst also ensuring the risk of hazards from trees is kept as low as reasonably possible; managing the interactions between trees and their surrounds in a proportionate way.

In July 2019, PRTC reinforced this commitment by signing up to the Woodland Trust Charter for Woods, Trees and People and becoming a Charter Branch and has adhered to these guiding principles when drafting this strategy. The working group met to review the draft strategy on 23 March 2022 and 08 April 2021 and now wishes to recommend this strategy to PRTC for adoption and implementation.

Cllrs Lee Byrne, Gary Hall, David Knights, Tapashya Murali and Matthew Walsh

Tree Strategy Working Group

Princes Risborough Town Council

Tree Strategy

Recommended April 2021

Review date April 2025



Charter
for Trees, Woods
and People

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The parish of Princes Risborough has over 30,000 trees within it, including over 300 with Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) attached to them. Trees are a key component of the parish landscape and as a major landowner, Princes Risborough Town Council (hereafter referred to as PRTC) have a duty to inspect and maintain all trees on PRTC managed land. Whilst trees provide many benefits to the local community, they may also present hazards and can be a nuisance, therefore the following strategy will detail PRTC's approach to nurturing and developing our tree population for the benefit and safety of all who live, work and visit the parish.

The following strategy outlines PRTC's approach to tree management across the parish of Princes Risborough. The strategy applies primarily to trees located on land over which PRTC has full control (including the land of the Princes and Monks Risborough Parochial Charities) see Appendix A, but the principles extend beyond this. Where possible we will work with landowners to ensure sound decision making with regards to tree management and will support developers of new residential sites across the town to ensure they meet their commitments with regards to new planting and canopy cover as outlined in the Local Plan Supplementary Planning Document for Canopy Cover¹.

For the purposes of this strategy, a tree is defined as '*a woody perennial plant, typically having a single stem or trunk growing to a considerable height and bearing lateral branches at some distance from the ground.*'² Whilst PRTC are also responsible for the management of hedges, shrubs and other vegetation, this strategy focuses specifically on PRTC's approach to tree management. PRTC has a broader commitment to enhancing biodiversity across the parish and further details of this commitment can be found in our Biodiversity Strategy³.

2.0 VISION

PRTC aims to create and nurture a townscape within which local residents, businesses and landowners acknowledge the value of trees in our parish and work with us to promote and appreciate their contribution to our townscape. PRTC will work to plant, protect and manage trees effectively to improve the level of canopy cover across the parish, supporting health and wellbeing, biodiversity and assisting in our steps towards carbon neutrality.

3.0 BENEFITS

PRTC has developed this strategy to maintain a consistent and forward-looking approach to tree management across the formal Parish of Princes Risborough.

Trees are a highly valued feature of our town and they make an enormous contribution to the character and beauty of our landscape; creating and supporting environments rich in biodiversity, whilst helping to capture carbon, control flooding and improve our air quality. Trees also play critical and less apparent roles in absorbing traffic noise, providing shelter, improving thermal regulation, intercepting and capturing rainfall and providing a privacy screen, in addition to the many psychological and health benefits they bring to people⁴. PRTC recognises

¹ <https://www.wycombe.gov.uk/pages/Planning-and-building-control/Planning-policy/SPDs-and-guidance.aspx#SPDs>

² <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/>

³ <http://www.princesrisboroughtowncouncil.gov.uk/UserFiles/Files/Policies/Biodiversity%20Policy.pdf>

⁴ See <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/1807/healthy-trees-healthy-places.pdf> and <https://www.wycombe.gov.uk/uploads/public/documents/Planning/New-local-plan/Tree-canopy-cover-assessment-report.pdf> for a detailed overview of the benefits of trees to urban areas.

the value of trees for both people and nature and is keen to enshrine the benefits of a healthy and sustainable tree population now and into the future, abiding by the principles set out in our Biodiversity Policy and within the Charter for Woods, Trees and People.⁵

We also recognise that although trees are of immense value to the town and local community, they can also be the cause of a range of problems, from being a nuisance or inconvenience to potentially causing serious injury or even death. PRTC have a direct responsibility for ensuring our trees do not pose a danger to the public or property and are managed appropriately. In addition to this, we have a duty to our community to look after our trees and to plan for their future management, planting and replacement. This policy sets out PRTCs approach to tree management, providing guiding principles and a framework for management whilst also identifying priority areas for expenditure.

4.0 OBJECTIVES

Four overarching objectives will underpin PRTCs approach to tree management within our parish:

- We will aim to manage our trees to ensure that the risks they present are kept as low as reasonably possible.
- We will seek to increase tree canopy cover across the parish in support of the Local Plan stipulations for new developments¹, with a focus on securing trees where they can deliver the greatest benefits to both the town and our residents.
- We will work towards a tree stock which is balanced in age and species to ensure it is resilient over time to threats from pests, disease, changing climate and natural succession.
- We will respond to requests from the public in a balanced and timely way, taking account of our policies and overall objectives for tree management.

5.0 GENERAL APPROACH

This policy defines PRTC's approach to tree management on its land. It is intended to be a point of reference for the Public, Councillors and Officers to ensure a consistent and structured approach to the management of PRTC's trees. This strategy sets out a proactive and systematic method of management that will both conserve and enhance our tree population and the amenity value of our land. For any sites of special character, such as the ragpit or for sites that have trees of particular significance, this general policy will be supplemented with a management plan for the site's particular needs.

We aim to inspect our tree stock at an appropriate rolling frequency, with a full stock assessment at least every four years, but with more frequent inspections depending upon the zoning of the trees as defined in the Princes Risborough Tree Risk Management Strategy⁶, commissioned by PRTC and undertaken by Wycombe District Council in May 2015. Following inspection, the trees will be assigned a risk classification which will inform their prioritisation for maintenance works in accordance with the Tree Risk Management Strategy (2015).

⁵ <https://treecharter.uk/>

⁶ http://www.princesrisboroughtowncouncil.gov.uk/Policies_and_Procedures_19053.aspx

6.0 TREE INSPECTIONS

PRTC has a duty of care for its trees and will inspect trees in high-risk areas by a recognised arboriculturist as required. High risk areas will include such areas as those adjacent to the public highway, major footpaths and other areas of high use such as play areas, as outlined in the zoning criteria detailed in our Tree Risk Management Strategy (p19). PRTC recognises the importance of mature and ancient trees and will balance safety with our duty to protect the environment. Higher levels of risk will be acceptable in areas of lower footfall (e.g. the middle of a woodland site) as opposed to highly visited areas (e.g. play areas). This will allow PRTC to keep veteran trees to encourage biodiversity without creating undue risk. Low risk areas will therefore still be inspected at regular intervals, albeit less frequently.

PRTC will also conduct regular pest and disease inspections to look for early signs of bacterial infection, as well as considering requests to conduct tree work on the land that we maintain from members of the public or via the Volunteer Tree Warden(s) (see section 7.0). Should there be a concern regarding one of our trees, this should be reported to the Town Clerk by calling the PRTC office or e-mailing details of the tree, preferably with accompanying photographs and an outline of the issue identified. In all cases, the member of the public will be informed of PRTC's inspection policy and will be informed of any action to be taken resulting from the inspection.

PRTC will also consider the use of complementary tree survey software such as iTree⁷ to help study and better understand the level of canopy cover and diversity of tree stock across the parish. It is anticipated that this would be a community led activity and would involve volunteers conducting surveys and recording findings on iTree to help inform PRTC's decision making with regards to tree planting and maintenance.

7.0 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In order to help PRTC effectively maintain and care for our trees, we will work to promote the importance of vigilance within our community so that local people are able to raise tree related issues to ensure that appropriate action can be taken in accordance with the categorisation outlined below in section 8.0. Where possible, PRTC will work in accordance with the principles and practices for community involvement outlined in Britt and Johnston (2008) *Trees in Towns II*, pp. 516-526⁸.

In addition, PRTC will look to recruit community volunteers in the form of Volunteer Tree Wardens as recommended by the Tree Council⁹. These volunteers will take responsibility for championing trees, helping raise awareness of their importance to the town as well as monitoring the condition of trees across the town and reporting back to PRTC. This will help to identify issues with our trees at the earliest opportunity so that appropriate action can be taken. Volunteer Tree Wardens may also be called upon to join PRTC working groups to discuss future planting and maintenance issues.

In order to enhance canopy cover across the parish, PRTC will also support and encourage residents to plant trees in their own gardens and will actively look for sources of funding from Buckinghamshire Council that PRTC or local community groups may be able to make use of to

⁷ <https://www.itreetools.org/>

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262857090_Trees_in_Towns_II_A_new_survey_of_urban_trees_in_England_and_their_condition_and_management

⁹ <https://treecouncil.org.uk/take-action/tree-wardens/>

further such activity. As a Charter Branch, PRTC will also aim to take the annual opportunity provided by Tree Charter Day and National Tree Week to promote trees to our community, expand awareness and engagement and supplement tree coverage across the town.

8.0 TREE MANAGEMENT

PRTC will take a proactive, pragmatic and risk-based approach to tree maintenance and will adhere to the recommendations outlined in the Tree Risk Management Strategy (2015) with regards to inspection frequency, categorisation/zoning and inspection type. Subsequent work arising from these inspections will be scheduled accordingly, being guided by the risk rating allocated to the works based on appendix 4 of the Tree Risk Management Strategy (2015) p20.

8.1 YOUNG TREE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE

Due care will be taken by PRTC to ensure that newly planted and young trees are given the best possible chance to become established. Regular mulching or wood chipping will be laid at the base of newly planted trees (less than five years old) that are managed by PRTC in order to suppress grasses and help young trees to retain moisture to ensure they continue to thrive. We will also work to ensure that damage to trees by mowing and strimming is prevented, with all maintenance staff having appropriate training, qualifications and licenses.

Protection will be provided for newly planted or young trees where appropriate, such as stakes, strimmer guards or animal deterrent fencing where necessary. Once the tree has become established, PRTC will look to remove any stakes, ties, guards, and any other redundant items to help ensure the continued vitality of our trees.

If required, more advanced tree work will only be undertaken by a qualified contractor to reduce the risk of accidental damage to trees, both young and mature. Once an initial assessment has been made by PRTC, appropriate internal procedures will be followed to procure such services and ensure work is undertaken in a timely manner (see section 10).

8.2 GENERAL TREE MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE

PRTC will undertake tree work and conduct maintenance according to identified hazards and risks to ensure the safety of our trees and our community. After investigation and inspection, PRTC will produce a programme of works within the available budgets, which will be agreed annually as part of the estimates process. Emphasis will be on planned, rather than reactive, tree maintenance, but this does not preclude tree work being undertaken where there is an urgent need identified by PRTC, our Volunteer Tree Wardens or our residents.

The following categories will therefore be used to categorise each of our tree works:

Risk Category	Description	Timescale for action
Very High	Dangerous trees requiring immediate attention.	As soon as practicable – examined and escalated same day or next day wherever possible
High	Essential works to mitigate a hazard.	Within 8 weeks of identification
Moderate	Desirable works, e.g. to improve tree health, loosening/removing tree ties as trees grow.	Within 6 months of identification

Low / Very Low	Non-essential aesthetic works, e.g. thinning out, formative pruning and canopy tidying.	At the discretion of PRTC
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Basic tree maintenance will ordinarily be conducted by a member of the PRTC maintenance team. Where more specialist works are required, PRTC will seek to appoint a suitably qualified arboriculturist or appropriate contractor using agreed local government procurement processes. In case of emergency tree work, PRTC will involve the necessary emergency services in order to make the site safe. All tree works will be conducted to comply with British Standards 3998 2010 Recommendations¹⁰ for Tree Work.

8.3 TREE WORKS

8.3a TREE PRUNING

Tree pruning will be carried out on trees belonging to PRTC, when deemed necessary following an assessment. Pruning will be carried out by PRTC in the following circumstances:

- for health and safety reasons e.g. to remove some of the lower branches of a tree located near a road or public footpath to enable traffic to pass safely
- where it benefits the health of the tree e.g. pollarding will be conducted regularly on certain species where it extends the lifespan of the tree and prevents splitting
- to allow additional space and light for newly planted trees
- where it is in-line with site-specific conservation and management plans

There may be times when the tree maintenance PRTC conduct does not meet the expectations of members of the public. In this situation, members of the public are advised to follow our Complaints Policy and Procedure¹¹.

There are occasions when PRTC will not undertake tree pruning or removal maintenance and a sample of such circumstances are given below:

- in response to natural occurrences that do not pose a health and safety risk, such as falling nuts, fruit, bird droppings, falling leaves, or sap exudation
- where trees have a negative impact on television reception, where the canopy is blocking lighting (with the exception of street lighting), where the tree is blocking views from a residence
- where the tree is not owned or maintained by PRTC and is therefore not our responsibility
- during the nesting season (March to August), unless the work is for urgent health and safety reasons and in which case it has been certified that there is no birdlife present. Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)¹², it is an offence to intentionally damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built; therefore delaying tree works will avoid this
- if a tree contains roosting bats (it is a criminal offence to recklessly or intentionally disturb bats, or to damage or destroy a roost under the Conservation of Habitats and

¹⁰ <https://www.trees.org.uk/Help-Advice/Public/A-brief-guide-to-tree-work-terminology-and-definit>

¹¹ http://www.princesrisboroughtowncouncil.gov.uk/Policies_and_Procedures_19053.aspx

¹² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69>

Species Regulations (2017))¹³. If work is required for health and safety reasons, the advice of Natural England will be sought

- trees overhanging an adjacent property unless it poses a health and safety risk
- removal of dead branches (conduct crown cleaning) from trees located in relatively quiet locations due to their ecological value. However, if the dead or diseased branches pose a health and safety risk, or are felt to be impacting upon the tree's health, crown cleaning will be conducted

8.3b TREE FELLING

PRTC will avoid felling trees unless it is absolutely necessary for good arboricultural management. This will usually be for health and safety purposes, or to prevent the spread of serious diseases and pests. Native species are currently being impacted by many pests and diseases including but not limited to Ash die back, Dutch elm disease and Sooty bark disease, as well as other bacteria¹⁴ and whilst PRTC will do all it can to protect and preserve trees, there are times where this is no longer viable and some trees will need to be felled in a managed way.

In addition, PRTC also reserves the right to fell trees for reasons including but not limited to:

- prevent overcrowding;
- improve habitats or restore landscapes in line with site management;
- where a tree is inappropriate to its location;
- where a tree has a significantly detrimental impact on the appearance or amenity of a site.

When a tree is felled on land managed by PRTC, we will commit to replacing to a ratio of at least 1:1 and with native species (as defined by Woodland Trust)¹⁵ wherever possible.

9.0 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

PRTC review all planning applications that are submitted within the parish boundary and where necessary, feedback comments to Buckinghamshire Council. This includes requests to conduct tree work on residential and commercial land. As a signatory of the Woodland Trust Charter for Woods, Trees and People, PRTC supports the principles of sound maintenance and preservation of all trees across the parish. As with trees on PRTC managed land, we understand that there are times where trees may need to have works carried out to resolve issues, which may in some instances require significant works or even felling (see section 8.3). In such instances, PRTC will refer the matter to the arboriculturist for comment with a recommendation that any felled trees are replaced with a minimum ratio of 1:1. Any new developments will be expected to achieve the canopy cover objectives as set out in Wycombe District Council's Local Plan Policy DM34¹⁶. PRTC will aim to oversee new developments to ensure that canopy cover obligations are met, in partnership with the community and our Volunteer Tree Wardens.

PRTC will also ensure that the Planning Committee make reference to the Tree Strategy in all matters discussed which affect trees and will also use powers as appropriate to call in any planning applications of concern for discussion by elected members of Buckinghamshire Council.

¹³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/1012/contents/made>

¹⁴ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/pest-and-disease-resources/>

¹⁵ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/native-trees/>

¹⁶ <https://www.wycombe.gov.uk/uploads/public/documents/Planning/New-local-plan/Reg-19-Publication-Local-Plan/Wycombe-District-Local-Plan-Publication-Version.pdf>

9.1 PROTECTED TREES AND TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS

A Tree Preservation Order (TPO) is a form of planning control that protects trees which make an important contribution to their local surroundings. TPOs are made when trees are under threat of being cut down or damaged and it is illegal to cut down, lop, prune, uproot or damage a tree protected by a TPO without Buckinghamshire Council's written consent. The unauthorised lopping or felling of a TPO tree is a serious criminal offence and can result in a large fine and a criminal record. A search can be made of local TPOs on the Buckinghamshire Council website and relevant information for the Princes Risborough Parish is included under the Wycombe Area¹⁷. PRTC would always recommend that landowners discuss any proposals for maintenance of TPO trees with Buckinghamshire Council before submitting an application.

Where Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) are in place, any planning applications will always be referred to the arboriculturist for review and their professional recommendation for action.

9.2 WORKING WITH DEVELOPERS

The Princes Risborough area has a very well-defined Local Plan which has now been adopted and it is our expectation that all developers will work within the spirit and the specifications outlined in this, including the Canopy Cover Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and associated SPDs and guidance¹⁸, which offer a strong indication regarding the look and feel of new developments, including required canopy cover and aesthetics regarding tree planting.

PRTC will work proactively with developers and Buckinghamshire Council to provide guidance to developers on planting and maintenance expectations for any new developments, to ensure that any planting is in keeping with local tree stock and the objectives of PRTC and Buckinghamshire Council for the diversity and resilience of our tree population, including working with the best practice urban design principles as promoted by The Trees and Design Action group¹⁹.

Where practicable, PRTC will work with developers to take full ownership of land to ensure PRTC can maintain appropriate oversight of maintenance. Where insufficient canopy cover, planting or species selection is proposed, PRTC will seek to address this.

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¹⁷ <https://www.wycombe.gov.uk/pages/Environment/Trees-wildlife-and-ecology/Trees-and-hedges.aspx>

¹⁸ <https://www.wycombe.gov.uk/pages/Planning-and-building-control/Planning-policy/SPDs-and-guidance.aspx>

¹⁹ <https://www.tdag.org.uk/>

Appendix A – Princes Risborough Parish Map

