



# GREAT YARMOUTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Approved v 2 EMT 31 October 2011  
Previous Version approved Dec 2006

## Tree Inspection Policy

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Great Yarmouth Borough Council has a statutory duty of care to members of the public and staff who must not be put at risk because of any failure by the Great Yarmouth Borough Council to take all reasonable precautions to ensure their safety.

Like all living organisms, trees are subject to decline, senescence and collapse and they can be damaged physically or invaded by pathogenic organisms. As trees deteriorate so they are increasingly likely to shed limbs or fall in strong winds and the potential to cause harm increases.

Ancient and decaying trees are often beautiful and uniquely valuable as habitat for wildlife and, however poor the physical condition of a tree, remedial action is only necessary where there is a clearly perceptible risk to life or property. This might mean removing part of the tree or reducing the level of public access in the vicinity.

### 2. POLICY

Great Yarmouth Borough Council recognized that trees are an important conservation and amenity resource to the area, but that they can present risk to the public if they are not managed properly. This policy seeks to manage the risks associated with trees, while persevering its arboricultural resources, using a risk-based approach which requires the inspection of trees belonging to the Council in or near public places, or adjacent to buildings or working areas to assess whether they represent a risk to life or property, and to take remedial action as appropriate.

This policy sets out minimum standards of inspection, competence and record keeping.

### 3. THE TREE INSPECTION PROGRAMME

The Service Unit Manager (SUM) or the Acting Manager, responsible for any areas of the Council where trees are present, must ensure:

- a competent person, able discharge the responsibilities for ensuring that tree inspection procedures are in place, and
- tree inspections are undertaken only by staff or others who meet the requirements of competence set out in section 8.

The tree inspection programme has three stages;

- an assessment of level of risk;
- an assessment of hazard;
- a prescription for remedial action.

These need not all be undertaken by the same person.

### 4. ASSESSING THE LEVEL OF RISK

The level of risk is undertaken by or under the authority of the each SUM with trees on the properties/land that they manage..

For a programme of tree inspections to be manageable, most resources need to be directed to areas where there is potentially most risk to people and property. This is initiated by designating each part of a property/site to one of three Risk Zones.

These should be clearly documented.

<b>Risk Level</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>High Risk</b>	e.g.close to main public areas, work yards, buildings, roads, car parks, major footpaths, picnic areas etc.
<b>Medium Risk</b>	e.g. other footpaths, bridle ways etc in regular but not intensive public use, quieter areas of parks and gardens etc
<b>Low Risk</b>	e.g. farmland and woodland away from paths or only lightly used etc.

These zones will reflect normal usage but must be kept under review. The level of risk changes over time. For example, plans to hold an event involving many people in a medium risk zone will change its status to high risk for the duration of the event; new facilities or activities on a property may more permanently change the patterns of public usage and therefore necessitate a review of the designated risk zone.

The designation of Risk Zones is a matter of informed judgment and periodic review. It is the responsibility of the appropriate SUMs to ensure that the risks are periodically reviewed, realistically assessed and decisions documented.

## 5. ASSESSING HAZARD

This is undertaken by a member of staff or contractor (the Inspector) nominated by the appropriate SUM.

It is the responsibility of the inspector to ensure that hazard(s) are assessed to the best of his/her ability and recorded accurately.

Many trees are potentially hazardous but only the conditions most likely to lead to injury or damage to people or property can reasonably be addressed by inspectors. These are physical or physiological conditions which might lead to a break up or collapse of the tree. They are identified and recorded during a programme of inspection.

In practice only visible defects are likely to be identified. Techniques available to assess the structural integrity of standing trees, such as electronic sensors and hand operated borers, will not be used as a matter of course. Rather they will be used only where it is necessary to assess the extent of decay in particularly important trees already showing visible symptoms of decline.

Knowledge of the propensity of some species to break up or decay more rapidly than others is necessary but most property based staff who routinely work with trees would be competent to undertake this inspection after receiving basic introductory training.

The frequency and method of inspection will reflect the designated Risk Zones, see Section 4 above:

<b>Risk Zone</b>	<b>Inspect</b>	<b>Method</b>
High Risk	Annually in Autumn	Rapid but careful search for clear defects especially in the crown and around the base of the tree. Binoculars and probe required.
Retained trees in High Risk Zone showing Significant defects	At least six monthly and after storms	Thorough inspection, monitoring rate of decline. Probe and ladder may be required.
Medium Risk	At least every two years	Rapid but careful search for clear defects.

Low Risk	During normal routine visits	No formal inspection, just observation and awareness of the general condition of the trees.
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## **6. RECORD OF INSPECTION**

Trees that appear to be sound during formal inspections require no documented record of their condition. Any omission from the record therefore implies that the tree has been judged to represent a negligible hazard.

Trees that are hazardous or potentially hazardous must be documented. The record should be recorded in record book(s)/database(s) to enable individual annual tree records to be viewed simultaneously, providing a means of monitoring changing tree condition.

Records must be retained for at least seven years and include details of any tree preservation orders.

## **7. DETERMINING REMEDIAL ACTION**

The appropriate remedial action must be prescribed by a competent person. The necessary level of competence is defined in section 8.

A record of action proposed and action taken must be maintained using the manual or electronic means described above in Section 6.

The priority for implementing remedial action will depend on both the assessment of risk and hazard.

In a high risk area, trees which show obvious signs of imminent collapse or are otherwise seriously hazardous should be dealt with immediately on the best advice available. Remedial action in the other risk areas must be implemented without unreasonable delay and in accordance with the risk of the likelihood and consequence of any danger to persons or property.

Provision must be made in property budgets for the implementation of tree inspection programmes and necessary remedial action on an annual basis as recurring expenditure.

## **8. COMPETENCE**

Staff or contractors undertaking the initial assessment of hazard should have some experience of tree work and must have received a minimum of one day's

training in the recognition of tree defects. These courses can be arranged by Forestry Advisers

Staff or contractors determining the appropriate remedial action must have good basic forestry or arboricultural experience and, as a minimum, a four day training in tree assessment at an approved Arboricultural Training Establishment.

Consultants should normally be registered as consultants by the Arboricultural Association. A list is published annually.

## **9. COMMISSIONING TREE WORK**

Specialist tree climbers will normally be contracted out or via GYBS on the grounds of cost as well as safety.

Contractors should normally be selected from amongst those listed in the Directory of Approved Contractors published by the Arboricultural Association.

Work must be carefully specified and will be subject to the relevant standard Council contract documentation and job risk assessment(s).