

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust



TREE SAFETY MANAGEMENT POLICY ON NOTTINGHAMSHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST RESERVES

POLICY & GENERAL RULES

1. Background

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust (NWT) has been inspecting the trees on its reserves on an ad-hoc basis for many years. This policy document serves to set out a more detailed inspection regime which is properly documented in order to provide an audit trail. NWT has a legal duty under the **Occupiers Liability Act 1957 and 1984** to take such care as is reasonable to ensure that bona fide visitors shall be safe from harm. This extends to unlawful trespassers, but only in so far as risks of which the occupier is aware. Section 3 of **The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974** places general duties upon employers to those other than employees to ensure that they are not exposed to risks to their health or safety. It should be noted that trees provide an important ecosystem service to society, and as such the presence of trees is beneficial to people and some level of risk is acceptable to society. This is recognised by the recent report from the National Tree Safety Working Group available at [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/PDF/FCMS025.pdf/\\$FILE/FCMS025.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/PDF/FCMS025.pdf/$FILE/FCMS025.pdf) However it is important that NWT takes its responsibilities seriously by conducting inspections and **recording** the results.

2. Policy

In line with general Health and Safety management, tree safety should be considered in terms of hazard and risk. All large trees pose a potential hazard, but they only need to be considered if there is a risk of injury or damage from the tree failing. It should also be considered that many defects are features of conservation interest, and NWT may wish to retain these features if at all possible. Therefore in order to set out this policy it is necessary to clarify that 'a hazardous tree only presents a risk if there is a target', i.e. if it is likely to cause harm. This means if it is adjacent to a potential target it should be assessed on a scale of frequency of use dependent on the likelihood of there being a target within the area the tree would fail into.

It is also important to consider the part of the tree which contains the defect likely to cause a failure. A fungal root infection causing rot at the base of the tree may cause the whole tree to fail, with the potential to cause damage at a distance equal to the height of the tree. Deadwood or damage within the crown of the tree may cause material to drop out of the tree, but only within the width of the canopy. A weak fork will be likely to cause damage between these distances, but the direction of failure may be able to be determined indicating whether it will cause damage if it fails. This informs the part of the tree requiring inspection in consideration of the proximity of the hazard.

As indicated above, tree safety inspections are both technically challenging and important in terms of the potential injury and damage which can be caused, as well as the potential to harm the reputation of the organisation in the process. As such NWT Estates Team staff will receive training and updates on this activity on a regular basis.

NWT sites are assessed and mapped on a scale of frequency of use. Below is guidance on levels of frequency of inspection, with 1 being high and 3 low. It should be borne in mind that visual tree inspection techniques will be used; a quick look at the tree to note defects, with a closer look if defects are noted.

1) High to constant use ie Highways and Public Rights of Way

All trees within falling distance of a road (especially a major road or a junction), Public Right of Way (PRoW) or trees with a permanent target such as a building must be inspected on an annual basis, with any defects noted and dealt with as appropriate. Major roads and junctions may require more frequent inspection, especially after a storm event. Where sites are being used by specific groups of users, and especially if NWT is encouraging the activity, it may involve the group spending large amounts of time under the canopy of tree/trees. Therefore it will be necessary for these trees to be inspected annually and after storm events, regardless of their proximity to PRoW or permissive footpaths i.e. for instance, anglers along a river bank, or education groups using a particular area. These areas should be defined and limited in area, and marked on the reserve map.

2) Moderate use i.e. Permissive footpaths and unclassified roads.

All trees with defects which may affect a permissive footpath (those shown on NWT maps) or an unclassified road which is regularly used should be inspected on a biannual basis.

3) Low use i.e. Routes used for management access purposes or not marked on NWT maps, individual trees within a management unit.

Trees which are not regularly walked under, i.e. isolated trees in pasture, or trees away from footpaths within woodland, are not considered to be high risk, and should therefore be inspected every five years.

Boundary Trees

Boundary trees should be assessed according to the frequency there are targets below them. Trees on the boundary of gardens may need inspection annually while trees next to arable fields with no paths may need assessing every five years. Neighbouring properties do not have the right to insist that trees are removed for any reason other than safety, i.e. they do not have a right to light or TV/satellite reception. However, in the interest of being a good neighbour, NWT will be willing to talk to all its neighbours, and if the work complements the vision for the site, there may be instances where NWT will facilitate tree work. NWT Officers will engage positively with neighbours on this basis and should be willing to help co-ordinate tree works to ensure this is done to the benefit of the tree, for example pruning the branch at the branch collar as opposed to being lopped at random points along their length.

As a general rule NWT will look to maintain a graded boundary with shrubs which may be coppiced periodically on the boundary with taller trees further back due to the conservation benefit this has in keeping the wood "warmer". However there are occasions when this will not be possible due for example the narrowness of the woodland or due to specific feature trees.

3. Implementation

Mapping

Each site will be mapped to show areas of high, medium and low public use corresponding to inspections every 1, 2 or 5 years. Following the mapping exercise each site will then be inspected. When considering the risk of a tree defect adjacent to PRoW or footpaths, NWT only needs to look at the portion of the tree which may fall onto the path. Whilst NWT expect high risk areas to be inspected on an annual basis, this may fall in a 10-14 month period in order for trees to be re-inspected at different stages in their life-cycle i.e. when in full leaf, or in winter.

Recording

NWT will maintain a central database of tree records by site, enabling the condition of individual trees to be monitored over time to help determine if work is required. This should include works which are scheduled to be carried out, including a note of trees felled for these purposes. NWT Reserve Officers will be responsible for maintaining this record for their individual sites. The database will be checked annually by the Head of Estates to ensure records are up to date and identify any areas that are missing. A database is currently being developed, and a trial use will

inform the process for a review at the July 2012 Team Meeting which will be a joint site meeting to look at the operation of this policy.

Training

Officers with responsibility for nature reserves will be formally trained to Lantra or similar standards in tree safety. Once per year staff will have the opportunity of a training / mentoring session with other staff and usually a Local Authority partner Tree Officer. NWT will consider specialist advice on tree safety matters if an Officer requires assistance with determining a tree safety issue.

Tree Works

Once a tree has been identified as requiring work, this should be planned in within a reasonable timescale. It may be that this can be planned for a period in the future (preferably outside the bird breeding season), and this should be the aim where possible. There will be occasions when emergency action will be needed, but this should be the exception. Because features which are tree hazards are often also features of conservation interest the aim should be to retain as much of the tree as possible. However this may be seen in the context of how important the features of this tree are in the surrounding area, i.e. a tree with a potential bat roost site may be isolated and hence very important, or potentially in a wood full of similar trees making it less important.

Ideally survey of important conservation features should be carried out in advance of works, but due to the nature of tree safety works this may not be possible or the work may need carrying out regardless of the results of the survey. In all cases a precautionary approach should be taken, lowering material to the ground, retaining it on site with fissures open to allow egress of any animals inside the timber. Advice from bat workers and other specialists may be required and should be taken into consideration.

4. Resources

The Head of Estate Management and Chief Executive will look to ensure funds are available within the budgetary process for training and tree safety works when required. This is a difficult issue to budget for, but a request for funds for safety works should be considered as a priority for action.

5. Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure that it is fit for purpose and takes account of changes in legislation, policy and partners' requirements.

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