



Policy 26 – Tree Management

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OBJECTIVE

The purpose of the Tree Management Policy is to define Council objectives and obligations in relation to:

- Health and Safety of Council employees and members of the public
- Environmental accountabilities and impacts of tree planting and removal
- The aesthetic effect of Tree Management within Dorset.

POLICY

Dorset Council, herein referred to as Council, recognises the legislative responsibilities which are applicable to Council operations, and the importance of establishing, implementing and maintaining suitable and effective procedures in relation to Tree Management.

Council's Responsible Officer and Executive Management endorse a concept of mutual responsibility within the workforce, for both safety and environmental procedures in relation to Tree Management.

The Tree Management Policy and its underlying procedures provide a practical and balanced approach to managing trees on Council land, with the fundamental objectives being safety, minimised impact on the environment and visually appealing surroundings for Dorset residents.

SCOPE:

This policy applies to all operations of Dorset Council and only applies to trees on Council owned or maintained properties, including parks, playgrounds, footpaths, reserves, Council maintained roads and buildings.

REFERENCES:

- Work Health and Safety Act 2012
- Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012
- Forest Safety Code 2007
- AS 2727-1997 – Chainsaws – Guide to Safe Working Practices
- AS 4373 – Tree Pruning

DEFINITIONS:

- Tree Inventory – a record of identified trees in high risk areas such as playgrounds, recreation grounds, parks and reserves within town boundaries.
- All planting and removal of trees is recorded in the Tree Inventory
- WH&S – Work Health and Safety.

PRINCIPLES:

The principles of Council's Tree Management Policy are:

- Compliance with relevant health, safety and environmental legislation & regulations, standards and codes of practices applicable to Council operations.
- Identification and management of hazards to minimise risks of harm to Council employees, contractors engaged by Council and members of the public.
- Provision of competently trained and experienced resources to develop, implement
- and periodic review policies, procedures, and practices within the Council operations.
- The maintenance of current and correct information on identified trees in high risk areas as held in the Tree Inventory.
- Continued consultation and communication with staff, residents and other stakeholders relating to Tree Management matters.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION – TREE PLANTING AND ESTABLISHMENT

Tree Inventory

Council maintains a Tree Inventory for all trees growing within town boundaries and parks and reserves over six (6) meters in height. Trees listed on the inventory are managed in a risk-based manner in accordance with ISO 31000 – Risk Management. Management is supported with an annual audit of trees that identifies any changing risk factors that require mitigation by Council. The Tree Inventory is a critical component in managing Council tree assets in the interest of public safety.

Areas identified as high risk locations are Council managed playgrounds, recreation grounds, parks, reserves and areas where established trees are in close proximity to footpaths, roads, public buildings and overhead electrical supply lines and other concealed services.

Trees assessed as high risk due to their condition are trees that have identified fungal growths, internal rot, ring barking, vandalism, insufficient growing space, storm damage or any other identified deficiency that has lessened, or has the potential to lessen the trees' structural and physical integrity.

Tree Planting

Tree planting by Council is required to maintain the vibrant natural scenery which is vital to residents and the tourism industry within Dorset.

It is Council's desire to work with community groups and residents to seek their input on street and park beautification, as there is a dividend to Council and the wider community from participation, engagement and pride of place.

The planting of trees within Council controlled areas is an activity that requires considerable investigation, taking into consideration all aspects of future maintenance and safety hazards which may arise in the planting location.

To ensure the best outcome for the community, planting sites, location, species selection and post planting maintenance are issues that need to be considered through systematic risk assessment prior to planting (in conjunction with streetscape planning), during growth, and throughout the life of the tree via annual risk inspections.

Council has developed the following criteria by which it uses to assess species selection and planting location to reduce risk to people, property and public infrastructure.

Selection of Species and Planting Location Criteria

Species destined for planting (new and replacement species) will be selected based on the following criteria:

- Public safety – trees identified as being prone to flaws inherent with the species will not be selected for planting near roads, footpaths or locations deemed high risk through inventory risk assessment. This includes the geographical mapping of high risk areas. Council will risk manage in accordance with ISO31000.
- Environmental conditions – areas which are impacted heavily by weather elements will not be selected for planting, unless the reason for planting is to increase the structural integrity of the land, such as river banks where the bank requires reinforcement
- Noxious Trees and Plants – Species identified by Council to meet the definition of a noxious tree or plant are not permitted to be planted
- Growing space – Species that require large amounts of space to maintain a strong root system or canopy will not be selected for planting in areas of existing condensed trees
- Maintenance – Species requiring excessive maintenance such as pruning and watering will not be selected
- Effect on native fauna – Different species will not be introduced to an area unless sufficient research has been conducted on the species and its potential effects on native fauna has proven that it will not adversely impact on any existing fauna populations
- Existing streetscape or streetscape plans – planting will not occur if there are plans in place to modify or expand an existing streetscape, or if the existing streetscape is not suited for a particular species
- Traffic conditions – species will not be planted alongside public roads or pedestrian footpaths unless the risk assessment of that species identifies it to be suitable
- Submissions from local residents – the decision to plant or not to plant trees of a certain species based on submissions from residents will be made following a full risk assessment, inclusive of the above criteria, which shall be communicated to the residents who made the submission to Council

Planting in Parks

Where a community group or resident requests tree planting in a specific location such as a park, the proposed planting location must be assessed by the Director - Community & Development or Director - Infrastructure. Planting priorities will take into consideration:

- Reasons for requesting the tree planting
- The existing trees in the location
- Level of community interest in the proposed tree planting
- Level of park usage
- Future maintenance

If the tree planting is deemed warranted, and passes all required risk assessment principles, species selection will be in accordance with the Species Selection and Planting Location criteria

Planting of Trees by Residents

Planting of street and park trees conducted by residents must be undertaken in consultation with Council, and the co-operation of Council officers as part of a community planting scheme.

Consultation requires that a proposal be developed, and is subject to broader community consultation and approval by Council. The consultative process gives consideration to:

- All criteria listed in Selection of Species and Planting Location Criteria
- The compatibility of the species with other established trees and plants in the location
- The quality of the specimen planted, and the ability to demonstrate where the specimen was sourced. This is particularly important with species susceptible to fungi and other diseases
- Planting to Council standards in relation to growing room, depth of planting and location for ongoing maintenance through the life of the tree

Trees Planted without Approval

Unauthorised planting of street and park trees is not permitted.

Planted trees not planted by Council will only be permitted to remain if they can meet the requirements of the Selection of Species and Planting Location Criteria. Where a tree does not meet specified criteria, the resident responsible for planting the tree will be asked to remove it. If this request is not complied with, the tree will be removed by Council staff.

Planting of Shrubs and Ground Covers by Residents

Planting of shrubs and ground covers conducted by residents must be undertaken in consultation with Council, and the co-operation of Council officers as part of a community planting scheme.

Consultation requires that a proposal be developed, and is subject to broader community consultation and approval by Council. The proposal must give consideration to ensure that:

- The planting style is compatible with surrounding streetscape

- Plants do not interfere with visibility for road users (shrubs that are likely to exceed 600mm in height when fully grown require approval by Council prior to planting)
- Plants do not interfere with underground services/infrastructure
- Plants do not create a hazard, such as the root system creating a tripping hazard for pedestrian traffic
- Species identified by Council to be weeds are not planted

Ongoing maintenance of the plant is conducted by the resident to a standard approved by Council. The resident accepts that no recourse is available through Council if damage is caused to the plant by Council activities, service authorities, or acts of vandalism

Shrubs and Ground Covers Planted without Approval

Unauthorised planting of shrubs and ground covers is not permitted.

Planted shrubs and ground covers not planted by Council will only be permitted to remain if they can meet the requirements of the Selection of Species and Planting Location Criteria. Where a plant does not meet these criteria, the resident responsible for planting will be asked to remove it. If this request is not complied with, the plant will be removed by Council staff.

Resident Opposition to Tree Planting

Council recognises that establishing and maintaining the Tree Inventory, and progressing streetscape projects in the municipality may require planting trees in nature strips, against the wishes of the resident responsible for maintaining that nature strip. In this situation, Council must make a judgment based on all arguments, but the overall deciding factor in a dispute regarding tree planting in a nature strip will be based on the rights of the wider community, rather than the opinion of an individual resident.

The decision on planting shall be made by the Director - Infrastructure or Town Maintenance Supervisor. The decision will take into account the major factor in the survival of a newly planted tree requires the co-operation of the nearest resident in maintaining the tree, and Council staff involved in the decision will aim to reach an amicable agreement with the resident.

Size of Planting Stock

New trees shall be an appropriate size to promote the health and survival of the specimen, allowing for:

- Quality of the specimen
- Availability
- Site conditions
- Differences in species

Risk Management Inspection Program

Council shall maintain a register of all trees (and includes site maps) on Council property in the urban environment.

Council officers that are trained in Risk Management will undertake the annual inspections and review and update Tree and Street Tree Risk Assessment. Council will ensure there is adequate staffing and training to comply with the intent of this policy.

Trees greater than 6 metres in height shall be inspected annually and against the following criteria:

- Characteristics and Health
- Site Character
- Defects
- Previous Maintenance History

PRACTICAL APPLICATION – TREE MAINTENANCE AND REMOVAL

Tree Maintenance – Pruning

Pruning is the major maintenance necessity of Council tree assets and is an essential component of meeting the safety and environmental standards of the Tree Management Policy, as well as the ongoing visual enhancement objective of the community environment.

As a general rule, the pruning of trees should be as minimal as possible, as all pruning cuts can potentially damage the health of the tree, as well as detract from the natural shape of the tree. Tree pruning shall only be undertaken for the following reasons:

- To maintain public safety by removing structurally flawed limbs
- To maintain the health of the tree through removal of dead or diseased limbs and foliage
- To maintain the prescribed clearances from services such as power lines
- To maintain prescribed clearances over roads, footpaths, driveways and public buildings
- To ensure traffic safety and visibility of street signs for road users
- To reduce future work requirements through the removal of identified potential issues at an earlier, and more manageable stage of the growth

Pruning Programs

Pruning of trees on Council controlled land shall be conducted on a scheduled basis, with each tree being visited and pruned as necessary. Pruning outside of the pruning schedule shall be conducted as necessary in response to resident complaints, fault reports by Council staff, damage reports following severe weather, identification from external authorities, or as identified by the annual tree inspections.

Tree Maintenance – Watering

Watering of Council tree assets shall be conducted in conjunction with scheduled maintenance programs. Species selection will take into consideration the watering schedule that would need to be met for the life of the tree. Planting locations will also be assessed to ensure sufficient natural exposure to rainfall prior to planting being undertaken.

Tree Maintenance in the Vicinity of Electrical Infrastructure

Electrical Energy Service Providers provide details of required line clearances and regulatory considerations with respect to trees and tree maintenance; which is subject to periodic change.

Council officers shall liaise with Energy Providers when tree maintenance is required around electrical infrastructure and shall comply with the current requirements advised by the service provider.

Tree Removal

Prudent tree management requires Council to always assume that every tree scheduled to be removed from a nature strip or park, regardless of its significance, is important to someone within the community. Unfortunately, situations make it necessary for tree removal, such as a problem with the tree itself, safety concerns, to facilitate development, or the installation of infrastructure. The Council takes into consideration the opinions and feelings of Dorset residents, and through the Tree Management Policy, will consult with residents, while continually demonstrating the Council's respect for the importance of trees within the municipality.

Decisions regarding tree removal may be made following approved applications by residents, developers and external authorities, or through the observation and identification of problem trees by Council staff through the annual inspection process.

Council shall proactively give due consideration to the life cycle phases and life span of selected tree species in order to determine the point in time at which major maintenance and/or removal is required.

Any tree removal should be consistent with the relevant provisions of the Dorset Interim Planning Scheme, and will only be conducted by Council staff members that hold current Chainsaw and Fallers Endorsements, or approved contractors. Tree removal may only be undertaken while following the Tree Removal Procedure, in accordance with the Forest Safety Code, and also the completion of a Safe Work Method Statement prior to the removal. Regular audits will be conducted during tree removal operations to ensure compliance with the Tree Management Policy and Removal Procedures.

Upon removal of a tree it is Council's policy to consider replacement with either the same species or an alternative species in the next planting season i.e. during autumn (March to May). The exception is where the location of a tree is likely to have detrimental impact to Council Infrastructure and/or private property.

DISSEMINATION OF POLICY:

The Tree Management Policy, once it has met the all criteria of the approval process, will be kept in the Dorset Council Policy Manual, and provided upon request.

Document Control					
Document ID: Tree Management Policy					
Rev No	Date	Revision Details	Author	Reviewer	Approver
1	08 December 2011	Inclusion of OHS requirements to comply with new draft of OHS Act	C. Sipton	D. Jolly	Council
2	07 December 2012	Inclusion of new Risk Management System Audit Requirements	C. Sipton	D. Jolly	Council
3	7 June 2016	Listed for review in 2015/2016 Annual Plan	C Sipton	D Griffin	Council
4	July 2020	Listed for review in the 2020/2021 Annual Plan	C Sipton	D Griffin	Council