

Tree Management Policy



This policy is designed to be a policy framework for the management of trees owned and managed by the Connect HA. It sets out the guiding principles for managing our stock, to assist and influence our arboriculture management decisions, particularly in relation to pruning, planting and removal of trees owned by Connect HA.

The policy is a living document that may be subject to change in close liaison with all the relevant stakeholders.

Objectives of the Policy

- (i) To interpret and implement the policy frameworks on trees;
- (ii) To assist with the management of the existing and any future tree resource through best technical practice with the objectives of landscape, biodiversity, conservation, ecology, amenity, and physical environmental benefits;
- (iii) To guide residents, staff, and contractors on the sustainable management principles of our tree-stock;
- (iv) To recommend specific management objectives.

Current Management

The current management approach has arisen from tenants and staff requests and the need to maintain tree-stock in a routine manner, primarily according to health and safety requirements and legal requirements and relates to the extent and amount of trees on the Associations schemes.

Where trees are identified as requiring maintenance, only emergency requests are dealt with immediately. All other requests are added to a list, for maintenance to be carried out twice a year. One visit in March before the growing season and the next around October when the leaves begin to fall. These dates enable the trees to be pruned at a time that is not prejudicial to the health of the tree.

Connect HA's value statement on trees in the urban environment

Trees enhance the quality of life in the urban environment, and form an integral part of its shape, colour and diversity. They are essential to our health and well being, not only in reducing some of the adverse impacts of the urban environment, but enhancing our enjoyment of the street scene.

Health

In urban areas, trees help to modify the climate by providing shade from the sun, reducing wind speeds, and reducing the extremes of temperature. They are an important agent in reducing air pollutants, especially particulates. They absorb carbon dioxide from the air, as well as sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide in the form of dust and smoke. Trees can also help screen harmful ultra-violet rays from the sun, and help to absorb noise.

Attractiveness

Trees form an important component of the urban landscape. They provide form, colour, texture and movement, changing with the seasons. Trees can be important local landmarks giving a sense of continuity and place. They help people orientate themselves and, in a well maintained location, can therefore decrease perceived risk and fear of crime

Local Economy

Trees enhance the character and appearance of areas, and have been shown to enhance property values. They can help provide privacy, frame the appearance of buildings. This creates qualities which encourage businesses to locate and attract people to live, and can help to reinforce a sense of place

Ecology

Trees, particularly indigenous species, can provide valuable support to a range of wildlife. Trees can provide food, shelter, nesting and roosting sites, particularly for invertebrates, birds and bats.

Connect HA Duties in Tree Management:

Duty of care

A principle of English Common and statute Law is that land / tree owners have a duty of care to visitors, residents, passers by and indeed trespassers when on their land.

Safe Highways

Connect HA have duties to maintain a safe highway, which may include pruning, or removing trees for the following reasons:

- (i) Obstruction by trees, i.e. low hanging branches
- (ii) Irreparable damage to highway trees by passing vehicles
- (iii) Dangerous trees near roads and footpaths.

Abatement of nuisance

Tree owners have an obligation under common law to abate nuisance. However, the law has struggled with a simple definition of nuisance. In summary, the definitions of nuisance would include:-

- (i) Dangerous trees or parts of trees.
- (ii) Actual damage to property, such as direct damage by branches or roots.

Inspections of Trees

Although Connect HA, at this point do not regularly inspect trees, our gardening contractor who visits schemes every 3 weeks, are duty bound to report dangerous and obstructive trees along with any signs of fungal growth to the Technical Contract Manager and the Assets Team, Housing Officers, Surveyors, and tenants are also encouraged to report tree defects.

Trees within the cartilage of a single property which are reported as being dangerous by tenant MUST be inspected.

Appropriate work is identified and instructions are given to our contractor to maintain the trees in a safe condition and address the duty to manage overhanging branches and controlling the growth and size of the trees in our ownership.

Other Pruning Requests

Connect HA receive many tree-pruning requests, for a variety of reasons. The following “problems”, which are often the subject of such requests, although not necessarily a legal nuisance can be considered for pruning works:

- (i) Loss of light / reduced light to properties
- (ii) Effects on TV reception (either sky or terrestrial television)
- (iii) Interference with private vegetation
- (iv) Obstruction to CCTV Cameras
- (v) Obstruction of BT / Utility Cables (these are the responsibility of the statutory undertaker)
- (vi) Minor obstruction of street lights.
- (vii) Minor or seasonal 'nuisances' such as:
 - ❖ Honeydew (dripping sap)
 - ❖ Bird droppings
 - ❖ Squirrels gaining access to properties from trees.
 - ❖ Leaf, fruit or flowers fall
 - ❖ Smells generated by trees

Whilst we appreciate these are problems, any approval to prune has to be considered against the many benefits of having trees within an urban environment.

Removal of Connect HA-owned Trees

Connect HA will not remove trees, unless one of the following reasons exists, or other exceptional circumstances (see below):

- (i) Trees that are considered dead, dying or dangerous. Trees deemed to be in this category, have been professionally assessed, based on a detailed inspection of the biological and / or mechanical condition of the tree(s)
 - ❖ Dead Tree – Tree that has no, or minimal live growth present within in the crown.

- ❖ Dying Tree – Tree that is in the process of irreversible decline.
 - ❖ Dangerous Tree – Biological and / or mechanical defects are noted, and the likelihood of failure is deemed high.
- (ii) Removal of trees to benefit adjacent trees, for example self-sown trees in parks that are being suppressed by adjacent trees.
- (iii) Trees that are proven (beyond reasonable doubt) to be the sole cause of clay shrinkage subsidence.

Exceptional circumstances for individual trees will be reviewed individually

Trees will therefore not be removed for the following reasons:

- (i) To increase light penetration to properties.
- (ii) To allow the implementation of new vehicular crossovers.
- (iii) To improve views.

The need for a Regular Planned Maintenance programme

Although both the tenants and Connect HA often have a common desire to conserve the treescape, the need to regularly prune trees in order to safeguard their long-term health is not always widely understood.

There are considerable cost and aesthetic benefits to be gained from regular planned maintenance, which balances the desire to retain trees whilst restricting their size to appropriate proportion.

Connect HA has established a tree maintenance programme which is pro-active to request but depends on information being gathered by members of staff and tenants, this has evolved over the years in response to tree enquiries, this will be reviewed in light of enquiries, legal duties and any insurance claims.

Planned maintenance can pre-empt complaints and help to satisfy the majority of customer requirements for tree pruning. Tree pruning can then be adjusted to take the number and type of enquiries, and to give priority to areas where the most serious tree problems are being experienced.

The adoption of a regular pruning programme;

- (i) Mitigates the cost of existing claims.
- (ii) Reduces the number of new claims.
- (iii) Allows claims to be contested on the grounds of reasonable care.
- (iv) Reduces the level of other tree problems e.g. light obstruction, obstruction of telephone wires, and so reduces the number of enquiries and complaints.
- (v) Improves efficiency through the more rational and effective use of officers and contractors leading to lower costs.

Maintenance visits by Tree Surgeons

It is the duty of the tree surgeon and their staff to identify and report back to the Technical Contracts Manager any defective, diseased or dead trees that are within the scheme where maintenance works are being carried out. This does not constitute a full report but time must be set aside for this inspection when pricing for the work.

Competencies of staff

Health and Safety law requires Connect HA to employ contractors that are competent and can carry out the duties asked of them in a responsible and safe manner.

Before the letting of any contract and commencement of any work the contractor must supply Connect HA with proof of their ability and requirements under legislation of their competency, insurance, risk assessments, method statements and certification of safe use of plant and equipment.

Tree care and identifying disease

Tree disease devastates all varieties of trees and is usually caused by bacterial, viral or fungal infestation. Knowing what symptoms to look for in your trees can save the tree. Learn to diagnose tree disease to keep your trees healthy.

1. Understand that the methods to diagnose tree disease vary from season to season due to environmental factors.
2. Diagnose the tree as a whole specimen. Carefully examine the roots, branches and leaves and note your findings. Record the trends in weather for the past months, as precipitation (or lack there of) affects tree disease.
3. Know that there are three basic categories of tree disease: bacteria, virus and fungus. Fungal disease in trees is the most common and if caught early, are controlled using fungicides that contain copper.
4. Inspect leaves for discoloration or wilting. Check the tree trunk for dead bark or growths called "cankers" that are caused by fungi. If you suspect that your tree is diseased, call a professional arborist to inspect the tree. The professional can take a sample of the tree to a lab to confirm or deny suspected disease.
5. Prevent root rot disease, the most common tree disease. Preventing root rot is the only way to avoid it as there is no cure. Inspect the soil for fungus before planting new trees. Avoid root damage from over-watering or pests. Keep the lower half of the tree trunk protected from damage.

Where trees are found to be in poor condition tests should be carried out by specialists before a decision is made to remove the tree, Tomography can be used and is helpful in making the final decision.