

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council



# URBAN FORESTRY STRATEGY

## 2004-2009

FOR FREE TREE ADVICE CONTACT  
THE COUNCIL'S TREE OFFICERS  
ON 0121 704 8000

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## **Introducing the Strategy**

### **Aim**

To protect, promote, sustain and enhance our urban forest and to recognise its contribution towards the character and appearance of the Borough for the benefit of all those who live, work and visit Solihull.

### **The Measures**

The strategy will cover the following areas:

- Why A Strategy
- The Importance of Trees
- Tree Problems
- Council Owned Trees & Their Management
- New Tree Planting and Maintenance
- Trees in Development Sites
- Private Trees
- Protection of the Urban Forest
- Promotion of the Urban Forest Solihull

## **Purpose of the Urban Forestry Strategy**

- To perpetuate the existing trees as long as is practicable or desirable in accordance with sound arboricultural practices.
- To create a diverse population of trees of mixed age and species.
- To encourage partnerships with local communities, businesses and voluntary organisations to ensure the aims of the strategy.
- Develop pro-active maintenance regimes for the Borough street trees.
- Utilise Risk Assessment techniques to form part of tree inspections to measure potential health & safety issues and perform the necessary works to alleviate high risk situations.
- Promote the benefits of Solihull's Urban Forest to the community.
- To protect the Urban Forest.
- To enhance and protect the borough's biodiversity, landscape character and local distinctiveness.

## **The Benefits**

The strategy will deliver the following benefits for Solihull:

- Pro-active management of the Borough's tree stocks, ensuring a diversity of age range and species of tree population.
- Preservation of Solihull's existing 'leafy-character' and reputation as a pleasant place to live and work.
- Increased sense of well-being and better health for the Solihull community.
- Increased public awareness of the value of the Urban Forest.
- Free advisory service to the residents of the Borough.
- Increase the number of trees protected, established and cared for within the community of Solihull.
- Contribution towards the communities life-long learning.
- Increase the number and diversity of community residents informed and involved in urban and community forestry endeavours.

- Environmental improvements and the survival of urban wildlife associated with trees for future generations to enjoy.
- Contribute to national and regional targets regarding tree cover in Britain.

## **CONTEXT and ISSUES**

The Borough has a ‘leafy character’ synonymous with its treescape, providing an attractive pleasant environment in which to live and work. Many of these trees are remnants of the Ancient Arden Landscape, characteristic of the Midland Plateau.

Policy C8 landscape quality Solihull lies in the Arden character area for which a character description is included in the Countryside Agency’s ‘Countryside Character-West Midlands Woodlands Volume’. Landscape guidelines for Arden have been produced by Warwickshire CC and the Countryside Agency and are adopted by the Council. Policy C8 reflects the Council wish to protect and enhance the landscape and historic character and quality of the countryside in the Borough.

The Council currently has an accepted policy of not removing trees unless they are dead, dying, diseased or dangerous.

Solihull has over 33,000 street trees and 77 hectares of woodland under the ownership of the Council and many more thousands within the public open spaces of the Borough. However, the vast majority of Solihull’s Urban Forest is privately owned represented by trees in gardens and hedgerows.

The Council has completed a survey of all the street trees under our ownership, inputting their location, species, approximate age and condition onto a computer management system. The same process has started to be completed upon land designated as public open space beginning with the major parks. We are also pursuing native woodland plans in liaison with the Forestry Commission for the Council owned woodland.

Solihull MBC has a responsibility to protect the treescape of the Borough through the process of Tree Preservation Orders (TPO’s) and over 600 individual and group tree preservation orders are currently in place.

The Council will continue to make TPO’s where necessary to safeguard important trees and woodlands that contribute to the quality of the built and rural environment and will protect important hedgerows under the hedgerow regulations.

## **Policy Background**

### **Solihull's Unitary Development Plan**

#### **Policy ENV15/Proposal ENV15/2**

Policy ENV15 of the Solihull Unitary Development Plan Review provides protection for important trees, hedgerows and woodlands in the Borough and encourages new planting. A commitment to prepare an Urban Tree Strategy is included in Proposal ENV 15/2.

#### **Environment Strategy**

The Council's Environment Strategy (1998-2003) was developed to act as a framework and focus for emerging strategies, which impact upon the environment of the Borough. The Council's aim through the Environment Strategy **is to work towards balanced development.... in a manner which has due regard to environmental sustainability and quality of life seeking to safeguard the heritage and environment of the Borough.**

The Urban Forestry Strategy is a document with much relevance towards the environment and is also integral to the objectives of the strategies listed below:

- Environment Strategy
- Woodland Strategy
- Nature Conservation Strategy
- Parks Strategy
- Local Agenda 21 Plan
- Countryside Strategy
- Community Strategy

#### **Local Agenda 21**

Local Agenda 21 was an outcome from the Rio Summit of 1992, where "sustainable development" has become a key objective in the policy and work of both national and local government in the UK. The two main emphases of Local Agenda 21 is the requirement for communities to work in partnership towards a more sustainable environment and improved quality of life and to maintain and enhance the Biodiversity. In relation to the urban forestry the objective for a sustainable framework is summarised below:

" to encourage local authorities to develop long-term strategies for the management and care of trees in their ownership. These strategies should plan for the eventual replacement of old trees; enable authorities to take advantage of new opportunities for tree planting provided by other urban improvement measures.... And integrate awareness of the contribution which trees can make to the quality of life in urban areas into the full range of local authorities activities."

Solihull Council's Environment Strategy states “ **The Council recognises the high quality of the Solihull environment and wishes to protect and enhance the special character of the Borough which is a significant asset to the West Midlands Region.**”

## **England Forestry Strategy & Regional Forestry Framework**

The Government is seeking a significant increase in woodland cover across England and has published a National Forestry Strategy ‘ A new Focus for England's Woodlands’. To encourage tree planting for visual amenity, environmental, commercial and recreational benefits.

### **Why a Strategy?**

The Urban Forestry Strategy aims to provide the way forward for the management of Solihull's tree stocks following the guiding principles of our adopted Environment Strategy.

As a result of the study ‘Trees in Towns’ the Department of the Environment recommended that Local Authorities produce a framework for taking a strategic overview of the status and condition of trees in their area by the formulation of tree strategies.

The National Urban Forestry Unit was created in 1995, a charitable organisation working to raise awareness of the positive contribution that trees can make to the quality of life in towns. The National Urban Forestry Unit was established in the West Midlands and this area is known as the centre of the country's urban forest. Many of the organisations aims are synonymous with that of Solihull and are represented below:

- To increase awareness, understanding and popular support for trees in towns.
- To encourage a strategic approach to the development of urban forestry.

The aim of the Urban Tree Strategy is ‘sustainable amenity’ for the benefit of people who live, work or visit Solihull. To achieve this will require a tree stock that has a wide variation of species and age taking account of the Forest of Arden guidelines where applicable. In this way the effects of slow decline through a large percentage of trees reaching over maturity at the same time or being subject to threats of disease will be avoided.

It is anticipated that the actions arising from the Urban Forestry Strategy will contribute to the broader initiatives being undertaken by the Council towards meeting the objectives of Local Agenda 21.

### **What is Solihull's Urban Forest?**

The Urban Forest is a term used to encompass all the trees in an urban environment, whether they be garden, street or parks trees. It involves the planting and management

of all trees within towns or cities. It is generally accepted that woodland within town areas also comes under the heading of Urban Forestry. Solihull MBC has a specific strategy for the management of woodlands and they are therefore not included within this definition for the purposes of this document. However, special recognition to trees in the vicinity of these woodlands will be recognised in this strategy.

It is important to recognise that the tree outside our front door or in our garden is not seen in isolation but as part of a more significant whole, because just as the rain forest of the Amazon is under threat so is our Urban Forest but without the publicity.

Solihull's Urban Forest contributes significantly to Solihull's reputation as being an attractive place to live, work and visit. The Borough is renowned for its leafy character and the treescape helps to soften our urban environment and acts as the conditioner filtering particulate pollution, making our surroundings a healthier place.

Our Urban Forest is under threat from development, highway improvement schemes, pollution, underground services, cable laying and simply from the pressures of being in proximity to people's homes and work places.

### **The Importance of Trees**

Trees are essential to life and their value cannot be overstated. Trees:

- Contribute as part of the landscape character, setting local distinctiveness, or particularly in their own right in an urban setting adding to people's quality of life and sense of well being.
- provide summer shade and winter shelter enabling the saving of energy
- provide links with the countryside
- Biodiversity
- improve urban living by encouraging wildlife and making important landmarks
- enable greener towns which are more attractive to new business
- intercept rainfall, filter air and absorb pollutants
- provide carbon dioxide absorption and oxygen production
- reduce noise levels
- To screen unsightly development
- reduce everyday stress
- positively affect property values

There is increasing public awareness of these benefits and the need for trees. People are beginning to place a higher priority on the environment in which they live. In urban areas this invariably means that there should be accessible recreational open space and pleasant tree lined streets. English Nature recognise the importance of access; one of their strategy objectives states that ‘ *Greenspace/Nature should be accessible within 500m of an urban area*’.

### **Managing Conflicting Interests**

Today in Solihull we are fortunate to have a significant amount of mature tree cover across many parts of the Borough providing character and the environmental benefits which have previously been referred to. A conflict of interest exists though, because those very same trees that makes Solihull a pleasant town to live and work, are for many residents a source of frustration.

The dilemma often occurs when the tree makes an important contribution to the local environment and landscape character but also causes inconvenience to those living nearby. Urban trees by their nature are located close to peoples dwellings and common sources of complaint include blocking of light, overhanging branches, leaf fall, obstruction and physical damage.

Insurance companies and mortgage agencies continue to highlight trees as the first contributing factor towards subsidence claims. Reports are received from various sources stating the need for the removal or large scale pruning of the nearest Council owned tree.

However, the vast majority of trees near buildings cause no structural damage at all. Certain soil conditions have to be prevalent for tree roots to be implicated in subsidence claims, which are uncommon in Solihull.

Current national planning policy guidance is seeking to increase density of development in urban areas which puts pressure on existing trees and the ability to plant new trees.

Careful pruning can alleviate some of these problems but sometimes these problems can be attributed to inappropriate species selection with regards to their location or pruning methods in the past. Consequently, it is to be accepted that responsible management of Solihull’s trees will involve situations that are impossible to resolve in all parties favour.

## **The Strategy**

The vision of this strategy is exemplified by the belief that the trees in our gardens, parks, highways and outside our front doors should not be viewed individually but as our very own Urban Forest.

This strategy is aimed at providing a way forward that allows Solihull to manage our treescape and provide tree cover for future generations, whilst recognising the difficulties experienced by residents today.

The Urban Forestry Strategy is a plan for the overall management of all trees within Solihull, both those on public and private land within the responsibility of Solihull MBC. It is also intended to give guidance to the management practices for all other parties involved with the management of Solihull's treescape.

This strategy has been formulated and aligned with the concept of providing Best Value to the Solihull community.

It is anticipated that the actions recommended by this strategy will help to resolve the problems we are experiencing now and ensure a healthy tree stock for future generations.

## **Council Owned Trees and their Management**

This section of the strategy details the Council's approach to the management of the trees for which it is directly responsible.

The Council's treescape falls under the following categories:

*Street Trees – These are the trees planted in footpaths or highway grass verges along the roads of our Borough.*

*Trees in Parks and Public Open Spaces – Solihull has a diverse range of formal and informal parkland areas all with significant numbers of trees which contribute to the make-up of our urban forest.*

*Housing Area Trees – These are the trees to be found in and around our housing estates, they comprise of specimens planted during the development phase of the housing areas with many mature trees retained for their aesthetic value.*

*Woodlands – Solihull Council is responsible for managing a wide variety of woodland including many areas of ancient woodland. Solihull has a specific strategy for managing council owned woodlands and guidance to private landowners.*

*Education/Corporate Land – Trees in school grounds and other education facilities and Corporate Land owned by the Authority.*

## **Tree Management**

In the past trees were ‘lopped’ and ‘topped’ with insufficient regard for their future health, safety and appearance. Topping is the removal of the main branches of a mature tree by a half or more of their length. It is now known that during such practices the cut surfaces allow rot to enter the tree, which threatens the stability of the new growth, stimulated by the initial cut. Arboriculture is a relatively new discipline and the latest research has illustrated the importance of what is termed target pruning.

Therefore, the Council will not carry out topping of trees but will utilise the target techniques for pruning highlighted within British Standards B.S. 3998 and The European Tree Pruning Guide. The terminology and description of these pruning techniques are described below:

**Crown Lifting:** This is the removal of lower branches back to a secondary branch of main trunk to provide a clear height from the ground.

**Crown Reduction:** This is the removal of a specified percentage of branches from the edge of the crown all around the tree, back to secondary growth.

**Crown Thinning:** This is the removal of a specified percentage of branches throughout the crown, back to a secondary branch or the main trunk.

It may be necessary to organise works beyond this scope either to remove a health and safety concern or to undertake work to maintain a tree previously ‘topped’ in the past. Tree Officers will utilise Risk Assessment procedures to determine the extent of work required.

## **Tree Inspections (Risk Assessments)**

Tree inspections following the principles of risk assessment will form the basis of pro-active maintenance regimes for the Council owned treescape.

In 1996 the Council undertook a detailed survey of all its street trees. The trees were inspected their details catalogued and recorded onto a Geographic Information System called Arbortrack.

Arbortrack has recently been developed to include a risk assessment procedure for trees that together with arboricultural knowledge, provides a recognised, generic formula for rating the potential risk of the tree. A scoring system is utilised to recommend the future tree work operations to ensure any risk is adequately managed.

## **What The Council will do**

- The Council will utilise, tree officers knowledge and a risk assessment procedure that takes account of the health of the tree and its effects on the local environment to provide the basis for management of Council Trees.
- The Council will resist the removal of any tree unless it is:
  - i) dead, dying, or diseased
  - ii) identified for removal following a risk assessment procedure or planning consent.
  - iii) a tree causing an obstruction to a public highway, public right of way, where the obstruction cannot be removed by pruning the tree or other reasonable measures.
  - iv) a tree causing a legal nuisance to an adjoining property, where pruning would not address the problem. *Felling would only be acceptable when the nuisance is severe and where pruning would not remedy the problem.*
  - v) Circumstances where pruning has been undertaken to remedy a severe problem and proved not to be successful.
  - vi) Thinning out young and developing trees following principles of best arboricultural practice.
- The Council will resist unnecessary pruning of the Borough's tree stocks, whilst ensuring resources are allocated to remedy health & safety concerns.
- Pruning works undertaken by the Council will follow best arboricultural practice and where possible be scheduled, so as not to be detrimental to the various tree species.
- Inspections will cover the protected species under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 and any evidence of bats will be investigated. Where evidence of birds nesting is found no work will be carried out until the nesting season is over.

- The Council will respond to enquires from the public within ten working days and emergency calls as soon as is practicable.
- Develop a risk management programme to ensure council owned trees are subject to regular health and safety inspections.
- The Council will utilise internal resources to complete risk assessments of the street trees on 30 targeted roads annually and continue with the ongoing survey of trees in the Council's public open spaces and parks.
- All identified works necessary to alleviate health & safety concerns will be undertaken following risk assessment inspections.

## Street Trees

Solihull MBC has the responsibility for all trees in the highway. The road side environment provides extremely difficult conditions for trees to survive. There is often intense pressure on the trees local environment from underground cables, utility company's plant & equipment, traffic, buildings, new road signs and footpath refurbishment. Street trees also fall foul of traffic pollution, road salts, other pollutants and vandalism. Despite all of these factors trees do survive albeit with a reduced life expectancy and with varying degrees of success.

Solihull has a large number of attractive mature tree-lined roads in the Borough. In many of these roads past maintenance of the trees was of a basic nature and involved 'topping' the trees to drastically reduce their crowns.

Forty years on Solihull has thousands of trees with re-growth stimulated by the 'topping' regime, which have now once again developed into full crowns. However, although these trees look attractive and no different from a naturally grown tree their branches do not have the same strength and stability when formed through this accelerated growth.

Current maintenance regimes have largely involved the thinning of these trees crowns in response to residents requests concerning blocking light and lifting of the branches to meet highway regulations.

The Council will endeavour to ensure the safety of the previously 'topped' trees and aid the establishment of a diverse age range of trees with a species choice appropriate to its setting within its ownership.

It should be clear that these issues do not relate to the many trees the Council has, which have been left to develop naturally without the substantial pruning of the past. However, many of our most notable tree lined streets have tree populations that are mature and were planted at the same time therefore having similar life expectancies.

In planning for the replacement of older forest type trees it is tempting to consider using small short lived ornamental species which do not have the same scale and habit, thereby reducing maintenance costs. However, the substantial contribution that large trees make to the character and the benefits they give to the aesthetic and natural environment must be safeguarded for future generations.

## **Programmed Street Tree Maintenance**

At present the majority of tree works undertaken by the Council are in response to individual tree enquires and as such are undertaken in an ad-hoc manner. Whilst this provides a reactive response to the individual resident the practice reduces the efficient utilisation of the tree maintenance budgets.

Recently 5 roads have been targeted each year to receive a comprehensive inspection and a programme of tree works, enabling a pro-active response to tree management. However, it is clear that this will take many years to cover the entire road infrastructure of the Borough.

As previously stated it is proposed to undertake programmed tree inspections throughout the Borough and from these inspections pro-active maintenance schedules will be developed and instigated. In this way it is anticipated that Tree Officers time can be utilised more effectively towards inspecting many more trees and the resources can be used much more efficiently across the Borough ensuring as many trees as possible are risk assessed and maintained each year.

### **What the Council will do**

- Management of the street trees will be based upon risk assessment inspections with health & safety issues taking priority.
- Develop a programme of tree works to encompass all the Council's mature tree lined roads over a ten year period.
- Utilise the street tree management resources to undertake whole scale maintenance regimes for the tree lined roads.
- To ensure effective use of existing resources the Council will only undertake tree works, outside of programmed works, to alleviate health and safety concerns.
- Phased removal and replanting will be undertaken to ensure the safety of trees and diversity of age and species to encourage future sustainability and biodiversity.
- Trees identified for removal will be re-planted in the following planting season (Nov-March).
- Provide public information in advance of planned tree works.
- Community Liaison Managers will consult with the residents throughout the process. Community involvement will be encouraged with residents consulted upon the choice of tree species for replacement trees.
- Investigate the resource implications of undertaking a 12 monthly inspection of all the Council owned mature tree stocks.

## **Trees in Parks & Public Open Spaces**

Trees are fundamental to the structure of parks and open spaces. The trees in parks and open spaces are not only important to regular visitors, they are very important contributors to the overall environment and landscape character of the area. They are an extremely important resource that require active management to be allowed to prosper to provide the benefits for our current and future visitors to these areas.

The nature of tree populations of different parks and open spaces is as variable as the sites themselves. At one extreme there are the older parks, with a declining mature population of trees including a number of rare and interesting specimens. These parks often contain nationally important veteran trees potentially supporting rare and varied wildlife and holding historic value.

At the other extreme are the newer parks with a developing tree population. For this reason the management of trees within parks and open spaces has to be planned on a site by site basis, seeking a balanced tree population and a character for each.

A number of Solihull's major parks have recently had the trees surveyed and entered onto the Council's tree management system Arbortrack. All health & safety works were undertaken and the condition of the trees recorded.

In recent years the Parks have taken the brunt of the high winds that have hit the Borough and many large mature specimens have been lost.

### **What the Council will do**

- The Council will continue with the ongoing survey of the Trees within Parks & Open Spaces and undertake any Health & Safety works deemed necessary.
- The survey of the trees will include a risk assessment following the same guidelines as the street trees.
- The Council will seek to create a varied and sustainable tree population in Council Parks.
- The Council will undertake extensive planting programmes of new trees to replace those lost to recent storms in line with the Park Development Plans.
- Replacement trees will be of a variety to ensure diversity and sustainability. Where health & safety conditions allow the Council will retain deadwood in park trees to benefit local wildlife.
- The Council will endeavour to work with Local Park Action groups and other community groups to ensure their involvement in future management plans for Parks trees.

- The Council will follow the same guidelines and principles identified within the ‘Council Managed Trees’ section of this document with regard to the management of those trees within our Parks & Public Open Spaces.

### **Community Housing Trees**

A large proportion of the public housing sector was built in line with the new town concept, extensive planting of both trees and shrubs was carried out. These were in garden areas and on public open space within the estates using a wide range of species.

Much of the new development was within previously wooded areas and the planners ensured that many mature specimen trees were retained adjacent to the proposed housing. Also many trees were planted close to houses, either without consideration of the future growth potential or with the intention of them being removed in thinning operations at a relatively early stage. This thinning work was never carried out on the scale required.

Present management deals with the issues arising out of complaints from residents forwarded by Housing Officers. These complaints generally stem from the large number of trees planted within a restricted area, adjacent to properties.

### **What the Council will do**

- The Council will undertake a survey of all the housing trees within the Borough.
- The Council will utilise its risk assessment procedure to form the basis of any tree inspections.
- The Council will endeavour to fulfil its obligation to ensure the safety of people and property.
- The Council will endeavour to consult residents on the regular pro-active tree management where appropriate.
- The Council will remove trees identified as being the wrong species in the wrong location that should have previously been the subject of thinning works.
- Replacement species will be re-planted with suitable species for the site and conditions.
- The Council will follow the same guidelines and principles identified within the ‘Council Managed Trees’ section of this document with regard to the management of those trees within our Housing Areas.

## **Woodland Trees**

Solihull MBC has developed a specific strategy and produced Native Woodland Plans for the management of its woodland which illustrates the Council's aims and objectives in this area.

## **Mortgage/Insurance Claims**

Each year Council owned trees are being implicated in increasing numbers of insurance claims or mortgage enquires relating to possible or actual subsidence of properties. Often insurance companies simply look for the nearest Council tree and either request that it is felled or simply begin a claim against the Council.

A number of factors are involved when determining the cause of subsidence to a building, the location of trees being just one factor. Monitoring of the subsidence, by recognised experts, is required over a number of months to ascertain the true reason for the problem. Trees become an easy target to blame, especially those in Council ownership.

In some cases removal of trees can cause 'heave', the opposite of subsidence, resulting in a much greater problem.

## **What the Council will do**

- Upon receipt of insurance enquires from residents Council officers will do their best to clarify the technical issues relating to subsidence issues.
- Continue to react quickly to insurance enquires and request the relevant reports and monitoring information to ensure the determination of the problem.
- Officers from the insurance section, tree & woodland section and our structural engineers will work closely to resolve any issues in an expedient manner.
- Develop a procedure for the timely resolution to insurance enquires involving Council owned trees.
- Ensure Officers of the Council receive adequate and up to date training necessary to resolve tree insurance enquires.

## **New Tree Planting and Maintenance**

New tree planting is the most important element of this strategy if the tree cover of Solihull is to be maintained for future generations. Trees take decades to mature, so the loss of older trees will have a significant impact upon Solihull.

Throughout the Borough we are now enjoying the foresight of previous generations public spirited tree planting. The trees that are now dominating and shaping the character of Solihull are legacies left to us by Victorian, Edwardian and pre-war designers.

To ensure Solihull retains its existing levels of tree coverage re-planting needs to constantly take place throughout the Borough. It is recognised that newly planted trees require specific maintenance during their initial establishment period.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to establish new trees in the highway verges due to the range of underground services competing for limited space, salt spray pollution, insurance claims, highway safety audits and vandalism.

Where trees have been removed from the highway then it is important they are replaced the following planting season in order to continue our tree heritage. New planting will take account of its future impact upon the local and wider environment.

Young tree maintenance is not only crucial to a trees survival it ensure future problems are remedied before they become high cost maintenance issues or health & safety concerns.

Therefore the Council has recently reached an agreement with its existing contractor for young tree maintenance to be undertaken on a pro-active daily basis. The contractor simply undertakes the necessary works without the need for works orders or a billing mechanism.

### **What The Council will do**

- Undertake quality new planting to replace trees identified for removal as part of programmed works.
- Assess the success of past planting schemes and ensure best practice is followed in the future.
- Tree stocks in Solihull will be increased utilising native species where appropriate.
- Pro-active young tree maintenance will be continued to assist with the establishment and development of new trees.
- Species will be identified for future planting suitable to their location.

- Where practicable new trees will be derived from local indigenous tree stock.
- Each year more trees will be planted than are felled by the Council.
- An investigation into the feasibility of the establishment of a Council Tree Nursery will be undertaken.
- The Landscape Character of the Borough will be recognised and where appropriate new planting will take account of the Forest of Arden landscape guidelines.
- Tree planting methods will be integrated across the Council to ensure all new planting follows the same best practice principles.
- The Council will trial new planting methods and the procurement of pot grown trees to assess their survival rates.
- Encourage the public to suggest areas where they would like to see more trees planted through increased community consultation and engagement with residents in all parts of the Borough.
- Increase the number of trees in public open spaces and Solihull's parks.
- Encourage sponsors to support planting schemes on Council land.
- Continue to offer a commemorative tree planting service.
- Continue to support the Arden free tree scheme.

## **Trees in Development Sites**

One of the most common threats against trees is the proposed development of land upon which trees are growing. Solihull has a high demand for new development and has areas of high economic growth all increasing the pressure on existing treescape.

It is common for plans to be submitted showing trees retained, which are totally unsuitable for the proposal and new buildings allowing no room for trees future growth. Schemes are frequently amended to ensure that significant trees are retained often through a process of working with the applicant to reach mutually acceptable solutions to conflicts that arise.

Developers are often quick to assume that all trees on a site will have to be retained and consequently often view trees as a problem rather than an asset. It is common for planning applications to fail to provide sufficient information to enable proper consideration of trees on a proposed development site. This usually means that officer's time is spent making detailed assessments of trees and other factors, at the Council's expense.

It is common for tree protection constraints on development sites to be underestimated. In order to ensure a tree will be successfully retained it is vital that the trees root system is properly protected from direct and indirect damage, such as ground compaction. A protected zone should be created around those trees to be retained, large enough to ensure that no disturbance occurs within the crown spread of the tree – as a minimum, in accordance with BS 5837 Trees in Relation to Construction.

Consideration is also required for the protection of trees when applications are submitted for the extending of existing properties.

The Planning Services are responsible for enforcing and monitoring the statutory protection of trees on private land and relies upon the professional and technical support of the Tree Officers and Landscape Architects.

## **What The Council will do**

- Utilise and enforce planning powers to retain and protect trees on development sites and where extensions are permitted to existing properties.
- Monitor and enforce planning powers where necessary.
- Prepare a code of practice for all contractors working on development sites with tree cover and give pre-application guidance for builders/developers etc.
- Require tree planting wherever appropriate, as a condition of planning consents for development sites.

- Instigate procedures to further develop close liaison between the development control and landscape section with regard to the protection of trees in new development areas.
- Investigate the resources needed and current best practice to assess the potential for pro-active Tree Preservation Orders.
- Ensure opportunities for advance planting are investigated prior to the start of new developments.
- In accordance with ENV 15/5 the Council will continue to make TPO's where necessary to safe guard important trees and woodlands that contribute to the quality of the environment.
- ENV 15/6 – the Council will prepare and review guidance to assist developers in safe guarding trees and the landscape on development sites.

## **Private Trees**

The Council has for many years provided a free advisory service for residents of the Borough concerning all matters relating to trees. The service is extremely successful and has enabled many thousands of private trees to be inspected and the relevant advice given.

The greatest proportion of our urban forest is privately owned. The quality of private tree care is variable and ranges from owners who are completely indifferent, through to motivated but poorly advised owners, to those who take great pride in their trees and are anxious to seek the best advice and engage quality contractors to carry out the required work.

Through technical knowledge tree officers have conveyed the benefits of a safe, healthy and functional urban forest as a resource to the community.

## **What The Council will do**

- Continue to offer free advice to residents of Solihull concerning all tree issues.
- Provide a list of private reputable tree surgeons to the residents of the Borough.
- Promote ‘Best Practice’ and the utilisation of tree works that comply with British Standards.
- Protect significant trees and hedgerows not under Council ownership through the instigation of Tree Preservation Orders and hedgerow retention notices.
- Recommend necessary health & safety works where required.
- Provide advice to the public on avoiding unnecessary damage to trees.
- The Council will not accept requests to undertake significant works to trees without a detailed report from a suitably qualified arboriculturist and if required further supporting evidence.
- Council Officers, whilst waiting for Government action, will continue to provide assistance where possible with regard to high hedge disputes.

## **Protection of Trees**

Under the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 the Council has powers to make and enforce Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's) and designate Conservation orders under which trees are given protection.

There are over 600 separate TPO's currently in place within Solihull and 20 Conservation Areas.

The majority of trees that provide amenity value within Solihull are in private ownership. The pressures for development within the Borough necessitate the proactive use of TPO's as a tool to sustain the leafy-character enjoyed by all.

TPO's place a responsibility on the owners of such trees to request permission from the Council prior to undertaking any pruning or felling works. The Council has a duty to respond to such requests within 8 weeks.

Owners of trees living within a Conservation Area have also to request permission from the Council before undertaking any tree works. The Council has a duty to respond within 6 weeks either granting permission for the works or by placing a TPO upon the tree or trees affected.

The Council will ensure the process of placing TPO's upon trees within the Borough is undertaken in a consistent manner with clear explanations provided to those directly affected by the decision.

## **Legal Protection – Wildlife & Countryside Act**

Holes in trees are often used as roosting or breeding sites for bats. Bats are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981(as amended) makes it illegal to intentionally 'kill, injure or take', or 'damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure of place' which supports any Bat species.

Nesting birds are also protected under the Act, making it illegal to 'kill, injure or take any wild bird' or 'take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird intentionally while that nest is in use or being built.

## **What The Council will do**

- Protect private trees of high amenity value with Tree Preservation Orders.
- Enforce TPO's and Conservation controls.
- Utilise planning conditions and technical supervision to ensure a high standard of arboricultural work to protected trees.
- Enforce the planting of replacement trees for felled protected trees.

- Carry out a reappraisal of older TPO's and where necessary revoke out of date orders and serve new ones.
- Produce a leaflet outlining a Code of Practice for contractors when working in the location of protected trees.
- Evaluate current literature sent out to owners of preserved trees to ensure clarification of the TPO procedure.
- Ensure procedures are in place with the Transport & Highways section to enable monitoring of works within Highways affecting street trees to ensure any damage to trees is limited.
- Ensure all Council employees whose work may involve them directly or indirectly with trees are provided with suitable training courses to raise their awareness of tree issues.

### **Promotion of the Urban Forest**

The challenge will be to constantly channel the communities increasing awareness into long-term urban forestry commitment at local level. As Solihull continues to urbanise, this need increases, as does our obligation to enhance the quality of life in our community through healthy and productive urban trees.

Currently, Solihull has a small group of active volunteers trained as Tree Wardens who look after the Council's old tree nursery site. Tree Wardens are volunteers with an enthusiasm for the protection of their environment and work in partnership with Solihull MBC, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and The Tree Council.

The scheme represents an opportunity for The Council and the community to work together to protect and enhance the local environment. In time it is expected that Tree Wardens will act as a contact between the local community and the Council. Tree Wardens can provide information and advice to their respective communities.

Tree Wardens are people appointed by their community group, residents association, parish council or community council to gather information and to encourage practical projects relating to trees in the community.

The Council currently resources an Arden Free Tree Scheme to promote planting of traditional native tree species to safeguard and enhance the 'Arden Landscape'.

### **What The Council will do**

- Continue to support and encourage development of community participation.
- Channel tree wardens towards the protection of young trees, planting schemes, grant applications.
- Continue to promote, train and work with Solihull's Tree Wardens.

- Encourage the development of the Tree Warden Scheme to include new areas of the Borough.
- Work with the Tree Wardens to develop and instigate a management plan for the Council's old tree nursery.
- Produce an advice pack for schools, businesses and local residents with regard to trees and their care.
- Work with local residents to record and monitor veteran trees in Solihull.
- Increase available activities to encompass growing interest of the community.
- Continue to support the Forest of Arden Free Tree Scheme to promote native planting of trees.
- Undertake advertisements each year in local newspapers for new tree wardens.
- Continue with Tree Planting competition for school children and involve the children in tree planting.

### **The Way Forward**

The Council is committed to the protection of trees within the Solihull Borough and recognises the benefits received by the community as a whole through living and working in a 'leafy-environment'.

The nature of our Urban Forest inevitably means that situations will arise where people and trees come into conflict. The Council will endeavour to ensure that where at all practicable trees are retained for future generations whilst recognising that this strategy has to allow the flexibility for today's residents to enjoy their own well-being.

### **What the Council will Do**

- Develop an action plan to further the aims of the strategy.
- Promote the benefit of trees and work with volunteers and other partners to meet the objectives of the strategy.
- Investigate ways of linking with the community to aid the establishment of newly planted trees.
- Monitor, review and assess the progress of the strategy through the instigation of agreed indicators every five years.

## Urban Tree Strategy – Action List

<b>ACTIONS</b>		<b>Officer</b>	<b>Schedule</b>
1	<p>Develop a programme of tree works to encompass the mature tree line roads.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designate a full list of roads.</li> <li>• Liaise with Highway Inspectors to determine schedule.</li> <li>• Schedule roads into ten year programme during autumn/winter months.</li> <li>• Provide information to the public in advance of programmed tree works.</li> <li>• Consultation with public requesting views re: replacement trees.</li> </ul>	<p>Zone Co-ordinator (Trees &amp; Projects)</p> <p>Tree Officers &amp; Community Liaison Managers.</p>	<p>2004 – 2013</p> <p>Ongoing.</p>
2	Investigate resource implications of undertaking annual inspections of all highway mature trees.	Zone Co-ordinator (Trees & Projects)	2005
3	<p><u>Trees within Parks &amp; Public Open Space</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 parks/pos areas to be surveyed annually.</li> <li>• Health &amp; Safety works scheduled.</li> <li>• Major parks to be assessed for replanting programmes.</li> <li>• Local Park Action groups to be consulted regarding future planting plans.</li> </ul>	<p>Tree Officers</p> <p>Community liaison managers.</p>	Ongoing – annual target.
4	<p><u>Housing Trees</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify costs of undertaking survey of existing housing trees.</li> <li>• Agree process and timescale of undertaking survey.</li> <li>• Identify a programme of works to encompass whole areas.</li> <li>• Consult with residents regarding programmed work.</li> </ul>	<p>Zone Co-ordinator (Trees &amp; Projects)</p> <p>Housing Representatives.</p>	2004 - 2006
5	<p><u>Mortgage/Insurance Claims</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an information leaflet to assist with residents enquires.</li> <li>• Evaluate existing procedure for insurance enquires.</li> </ul>	Zone Co-ordinator (Trees & Projects)	2005

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attend industry training seminars.</li> </ul>		
<b>ACTIONS</b>		<b>Officer</b>	<b>Schedule</b>
6	<u>New Tree Planting &amp; Maintenance</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replace all trees identified for removal.</li> <li>Complete annual assessments of new tree survival rates.</li> <li>Complete investigation of the establishment of a Council Tree Nursery.</li> <li>Develop a standard for tree planting methods across the Council.</li> <li>Trial new planting methods and procurement of pot grown trees.</li> <li>Promote the benefits of new tree planting and liaise with the public to discover suitable locations.</li> <li>Investigate sponsorship opportunities to support planting schemes.</li> <li>Continue to offer a commemorative tree planting service.</li> </ul>	Zone Co-ordinator (Trees & Projects)  Tree Officers  Senior Landscape Architect  Events & Marketing Officer	Annual target  2005  2005  2004 – ongoing  2005  2004 - ongoing
7	<b>Trees in Development Sites</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draft a code of practice for all contractors working on development sites.</li> <li>Develop a project group consisting of officers from the tree section, planning and landscape architects to ensure protection of trees throughout the Borough.</li> </ul>	Senior Landscape Architect Zone Co-ordinator (Trees & Projects) Planning Officers	2005  2005
8	<u>Private Trees</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide free tree advice to residents of the Borough.</li> <li>Monitor the standard of work of the tree contractors on the Council's list.</li> </ul>	Tree Officers	2004 - ongoing

	<b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>Officer</b>	<b>Schedule</b>
9	<p><b>Protection of Trees</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with officers of Development Control to instigate proactive TPO measures.</li> <li>• Place preservation orders on trees of high amenity value.</li> <li>• Ensure replacement trees are replanted when protected trees are removed.</li> <li>• Undertake a reappraisal of older TPO's.</li> <li>• Produce a leaflet outlining a code of practice for contractors when working in the location of protected trees.</li> <li>• Improve procedures between transport &amp; highways officers and tree officers to enable monitoring of works within highways affecting trees.</li> </ul> <p>I</p>	<p>Tree Officers</p> <p>Senior Landscape Architect</p> <p>Zone Co-ordinator (Trees &amp; Projects)</p> <p>Planning Officers</p>	<p>2004</p> <p>2004 – ongoing</p> <p>2004 – ongoing</p> <p>2004 – ongoing</p> <p>2005</p>
10	<p><u>Promotion of the Urban Forest</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue liaising with the Council's Tree Wardens to encourage grant applications and new planting initiatives.</li> <li>• Publicise Tree Warden activity to encourage new members.</li> <li>• Produce an advice pack for schools, businesses and local residents promoting care of trees.</li> <li>• Introduce new activities to encourage interest in trees within the community.</li> </ul>	<p>Tree Officer</p> <p>Zone Co-ordinator (Trees &amp; Projects)</p>	<p>2004 – ongoing</p> <p>2005</p> <p>2004 - ongoing</p>