

# **Tunbridge Wells Commons Conservators:**

## **Tree Management Policy**

Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons are 256 acres, with approximately 80% being woodland cover.

This internal policy describes how trees on the Commons will be managed for safety purposes and in accordance with the Ecological Management Plan it covers:

1. Observation and surveys for safety purposes.
2. Work planning, preparation and contractor selection.
3. Monitoring and evaluation.

The policy follows the underlying ethos, advice and guidance as set out by The National Tree Safety Group. The management of trees on the Commons incorporates the following principles:

- Formal survey in addition to continual observation for safety purposes.
- Prioritisation of any work required to mitigate risk to public and property.
- Where applicable, get comparable quotes or select the appropriate contractor based on specified criteria.
- Plan work, with clear specifications and instructions for contractors.
- Communicate in advance, during and after with the relevant authorities, community and/or other affected/interested parties.
- Supervise contractors or complete the work in-house safely.
- Evaluate and recognise areas for improvement and best practice.

### **1. Tree Observation and Surveys**

#### **Continual observation**

All roadside and path side trees are inspected continually and proactively by the Ranger. This involves inspecting condition of trees every time work is taking place nearby, after every high wind or storm and as they are passed during regular duties on the Commons. Members of the public may also report potential issues. Where issues are identified, further investigation and appropriate action always follows, in line with the formal inspection process.

#### **Formal inspections of roads and major paths**

In addition to continual observation there will be formal inspections of Red Zones (Roads and major paths) at least once per annum, conducted by the Ranger. The outcome of each survey will be recorded on inspection sheets which include date, tree tag number (where applicable), species, What3Word location, comments and recommendations, category code and the date work should be completed.

Trees identified in the survey are given a prioritisation category code 1-4, as follows:

Category 1: Highest priority for mitigation (emergency).

This code means that the tree needs to be removed (or part of a tree, such as a broken limb) as an emergency, as it poses an immediate threat to road or path users. Work is undertaken by the Ranger where possible or by a contractor, as soon as possible after the issue is reported or observed. The Ranger will communicate the details of the required work at the earliest opportunity to the Clerk (see section 2 for further details on work planning, preparation, and communication).

#### Category 2: Urgent

This code means that the tree needs to be removed (or part of a tree, such as a broken limb) as a matter of urgency. Work is undertaken by the Ranger where possible or by a contractor and must be completed within seven days. The Ranger will communicate the details of the required work at the earliest opportunity to the Clerk (see section 2 for further details on work planning, preparation, and communication).

#### Category 3: Relative priority.

An issue has been identified, as part of ad hoc or formal surveys, which represents a potentially medium to high level of risk. In this instance the following actions take place:

- Work is undertaken by the Ranger where possible.
- If a contractor is required to complete the work, the preferred contractor will be invited to attend a site visit, where a mitigation plan will be created, and a quote will be requested. Dependent on the scale of the work, additional contractors may be asked to take part in a site visit, to quote for the work.
- The Ranger will advise and discuss the issue with the Clerk and where applicable permission to proceed/engage with the contractor will be sought from the the Committee/Conservators.
- The selected contractor will then be asked to schedule the work as a high priority. Category 2 trees identified during the Summer should be mitigated against by or before the onset of Winter.

#### Category 4: Further investigation.

The tree needs attention, but further investigation is needed (e.g. - following the cutting of thick ivy or to reinspect fungi in the Autumn). Tree work could potentially wait until the following year, but details of the concerns must be fully documented, and the tree kept under closer supervision.

#### **Ash trees**

The rate of ash dieback varies year on year. The Ranger formally surveys ash trees at two points in the year, in June/July and again in September/October/November to identify any trees which need to be removed or reduced.

#### **Birch trees**

Birch tends to become unstable at maturity and is not a relatively long-lived tree, the Ranger is monitoring and managing this species on the Commons.

### **Lime trees**

This species is a concern on the Commons as it is subject to a fungal disease which can cause sudden and catastrophic collapse and has been planted by paths and roads, historically to accompany a bench. The Ranger is monitoring and managing this species on the Commons, by removing epicormic growth and then surveying for the signs of the fungal issues.

### **High Value Trees**

A small number of “high value” trees have been identified, as shown in Annex A. This list may be amended from time to time with the Conservators’ approval. These trees are generally located in the red zone near roads or paths and are valuable for visual, ecological or historical reasons. These trees must be managed to preserve them for as long as possible, this requires a very high level of expertise to ensure that they remain safe and retain their structural integrity.

## **2. Work planning, and contractor selection**

### **Work planning, preparation and communication**

All tree work, whether for safety purposes or in accordance with the Ecological Management Plan for the Commons, will be clearly specified by the Ranger, taking expert advice where appropriate, prior to contractor selection.

Category 3 and 4 tree work will be included in plans, work schedules and budgets which are reviewed by Conservators (or the Committee where it has delegated authority), prior to work being commissioned and commenced. In exceptional circumstances where this is not possible, the Conservators’ approval may be sought via email.

Category 1 and 2 work, not requiring prior authorisation, will be reported at the next appropriate occasion.

The need for communication and consultation with third parties, including neighbours, users of the Commons, Tunbridge Well Borough Council and other authorities will be assessed, and a communication plan agreed. This may include:

- Information on the website.
- Social media posts.
- Letters to residents.
- Signage.
- Site visits.

Before work commences, the Ranger will provide detailed instructions to the selected contractor and ensure that the work will be properly supervised for safety purposes.

### **Contractor selection**

For reference, the Financial Regulations can be viewed here: <https://twcommons.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Financial-Regulations-to-Oct-26.pdf>

In accordance with the Regulations, for contracts that involve work on trees the following procedures shall apply:

<u>Estimated Value of Goods / Services</u>	<u>Action to be taken</u>
< £4,000	Written quotations not required, but wherever possible two quotations should be obtained.  For Category 1 and 2, a single quotation can be accepted*. The Clerk will authorise such work and ensure the Committee is advised accordingly.  *The Ranger to obtain day rates for all contractors to enable a judgement call to be made.
£4,001 - £7,500	Obtain 2 written quotations to be approved by the Committee.
£7,501 - £25,000	Obtain 3 written quotations to be approved by the Committee.
£25,001 and over	Obtain 3 tenders.

Where emergency tree work is required, a single quotation can be accepted for work up to £4,000, but the Clerk will ensure the Conservators are advised where appropriate. However, where it is considered there are valid reasons for departing from the procedures above, the Conservators written approval shall be obtained.

### **Preferred Contractors**

The Ranger and Clerk will maintain a list of preferred suppliers, reported to the Conservators on a quarterly basis. The current list of preferred contractors is included at Annex B.

Arboriculture contractors wishing to be a preferred supplier will be assessed using the following selection criteria,

1. **Health and Safety:** Can they provide up to date public liability insurance, are they able to confirm that they work to HSE guidance, including following their risk assessments, being suitably trained, having the appropriate certificates? Are they observed working safely?
2. **Quality of work:** Can they demonstrate that they can follow a project brief/work instruction. What demonstrable capability do they have for projects that present technical or logistical challenges? Is their work of good quality? Are they tidy and considerate of the surroundings?
3. **Communication:** Do they respond to calls/emails in a timely fashion. Are timely invoices produced? Do they arrive on time? To include an evaluation of the contractor's communication with others e.g. residents, users of the Commons etc.
4. **Availability:** Are the company available to do the work?

5. Cost: Are they competitively priced? Do their quotes match their invoices?
6. Other advantage: e.g. do they have emergency out of hours contacts/availability?

Prior to inclusion on the Preferred Supplier List, contractors will be asked to carry out at least one piece of work on a one-off basis.

### **3. Monitoring and Evaluation**

The Ranger will oversee work as required to ensure that contractors carry out work to the specification agreed, safely and on a timely basis. He will evaluate contractor work against the preferred contractor specification and make changes to Annex B as required.

#### **Annex A: List of trees identified as High Value Trees as of December 2023**

##### **Tunbridge Wells Common:**

1. Queen Anne Oak
2. Horse Chestnut on Lower Cricket Pitch
3. Scots Pine on Junction of Major York's Road and Hungershall Park
4. Lime Tree on Roundabout at top of Major Yorks Road.
5. Small leafed lime Tree with significant lean on Bishops Down
6. Oaks x3 on boundary over path and road to the north of Hungershall Park

##### **Rusthall Common:**

7. Red Chestnut on Rusthall Green
8. Black Poplar Hybrid on Rusthall Road

#### **Annex B: List of Preferred Contractors as of December 2023**

##### **Emergency response:**

1. S Young
2. Bridgland
3. Honnington (except where tree-climbing is required)
4. Gimbles

##### **Day-to-day maintenance:**

Ranger  
S Young  
Honnington

##### **Projects requiring equipment such as cherry pickers:**

Gimbles  
Ben Mason (to be evaluated)  
Living Forest

##### **Roadside work:**

Gimbles  
Honnington

Ben Mason (to be evaluated)  
Living Forest

**Projects requiring significant logistics.**

S Young and S Parsons partnership  
Ben Mason  
Living Forest

**Projects requiring significant (Professional Tree Inspector qualified) arboriculture expertise:**

Living Forest  
Others to be identified.

**Date of last review: January 2024**

**Date of next review: January 2027**