

Sydenham Ward Assembly - Thursday 11th September 2014

Briefing Note – Management of the boroughs street trees

Overview

The Council is responsible for the management of trees on all land that it owns . This includes trees in the boroughs parks, cemeteries, nature reserves, allotments, closed churchyards, highway enclosures, housing estate land and streets.

The Councils Tree Management Team comprises two officers who are part of the Green Scene Service Group. Information on all the boroughs street trees and many of those located in parks and other open spaces are held on a comprehensive tree management database . The information held includes the species, height and most importantly the maintenance requirements of each tree.

The information held on the database is updated continually as inspections take place and is augmented by a borough wide street tree condition survey that takes place every 4 years. All identified tree works resulting from individual inspections or from the stock condition survey's are allocated a priority rating using risk based methodology . For example trees found to be in danger of falling due to disease or decay would be Priority 1 and works would be undertaken immediately.

On the other hand a tree that was in generally good condition and had not outgrown it's site would be allocated a Priority 3 meaning that no works would be scheduled for at least 3 years.

The data base currently holds information on the following ;

Location	Streets	Parks	Housing Estate Grounds	Cemetery and Crematorium Grounds
No of trees	9304	6560*	10067	2471

* In Parks there are also entries for 205 woodland tree groupings meaning that the number of individual trees is significantly more.

Although the council faces a number of tree management challenges at all sites, the main area of concern for both the Council s and the residents is the care and preservation of those trees located on streets/highways. Trees growing in open spaces are less of a concern as they are less likely to cause property damage or nuisance that can ultimately lead to them being felled. Also, unless they are in areas of high footfall, open space trees do not require costly regular pruning.

Challenges

The main challenges the Council faces and the action that is being taken to address them are as follows:

Environmental

The borough has a rich and diverse variety of trees that contribute to the Boroughs' sense of place. Some trees are landmark specimens in their own right, whilst other

trees and avenues frame the urban fabric. It is well documented that trees support our wellbeing and health by providing habitat and access to nature. Street trees play an important role in this but also as habitat for wildlife and by ecologically connecting habitat, providing wildlife corridors and links at the landscape scale. These qualities are important for many wildlife species as their movement is a crucial consideration in respect to climate change. Importantly street trees also help reduce the elevated temperatures characteristic of our urban centres; they provide screening, absorbing traffic noise, filtering airborne dust and pollution and help regulate and control flooding incidents. These features not to mention that they absorb and store carbon from the atmosphere make them extremely valuable green infrastructure which provides an essential ecosystem service.

However the borough, along with the rest of London, sits on London Clay which increases the risk of subsidence and other property damage due to roots growing under shallow foundations and extracting water from the soil which causes a clay based soil to shrink. This can result in the foundations dropping at certain points evidenced by cracking to the fabric of the building This makes our street trees in particularly vulnerable to insurance claims that will often include a demand that any trees felt to be causing damage are felled.

Current action - In order to reduce the number of tree related insurance claims for property damage 1274 street trees are currently pruned every 3 years as part of the Councils core cyclical maintenance programme.

These are generally the large avenues of Plane Trees that, due to their high amenity value, would make felling and replacement very difficult to justify .This regular pruning reduces and controls the amount of water extracted from the soil by the tree roots thereby reducing the likelihood of damage.

Many of our street trees are also over mature specimens that are either in decline or diseased. This makes them susceptible to the six major threats to tree health (See Appendix 1)Two have already been found in the borough (Massaria & Chestnut Bleeding Canker) and two more are likely to be found within the next 12 months (Ash die-back & Oak Processionary Moth). These will inevitably cause additional pressure on the budgets available for all tree works as the Oak Processionary Moth in particular has public health implications.

Officers and our partner organisations are alert to the threats posed by diseases and have attended specialist training events . Information on what to look out for has also been made available to residents and delegates attending the annual Parks and Open Spaces Conference received a detailed presentation on the subject.

Public/resident Concerns

The major area of public concern is the loss of street trees due to the need for the Council to settle insurance claims . Although this only happens when the Council has no realistic alternative option, residents often feel that the Council does not do enough to preserve the tree. Of course the resident whose property is being damaged will be equally concerned at what is perceived as an uncaring attitude towards their situation.

Some residents may also find it difficult to accept that a tree that may have been growing in their area for many years had to be felled as it had become dangerous due to disease or decay. This situation is made worse by the current lack of financial resources to pay for new or replacement trees to be planted; Nevertheless, the

Councils planting versus felling figures show that between 2009 and 2012/13 565 trees were felled due to disease, decay or to settle an insurance claim against the Council.

To mitigate these losses, during the same period, the Council planted 564 trees. This was achieved by working together with residents groups to bid for funding from either their local ward assembly or from London Wide initiatives such as the Mayor For London's street tree

Unfortunately the 2013 stock condition survey identified 251 street trees that needed to be felled as they were either dead or in a dangerous condition. These losses were compounded by the loss of a further 138 as a result of the St Jude storm and subsequent severe weather. The cost of replacing all these trees is estimated to be in the region of £140k

Current action - Officers have continued to work together with community groups and this helped secured funding for 73 new trees that were planted earlier this year. Plans for more trees to be planted in the next planting season (Nov - Feb) are well advanced with funding in place to plant a minimum of 41.

If you have a tree related enquiry and would like to arrange for an inspection of a council managed tree please contact the Customer Service Centre on :020 83147171

The Council also has a Tree Warden Scheme (See Appendix 2 – Scheme Overview) to encourage more residents to become involved in local tree management issues.

Financial

Until recently approximately 60% of the available annual budget was spent on maintaining the trees covered by the Councils core cyclical programme. This left relatively little to spend on maintaining the remaining trees or to plant new or replacement ones

Action - In November 2013 the Executive Director for Customer Services, Head of Audit and Risk, Group Manager of Insurance and Risk and the Group Manager of Green Scene met to discuss how best to improve the management of the risks associated with the boroughs street trees and how best to help preserve them..

Following the meeting a list of additional roads in the borough, where the trees should also be pruned as part of a cyclical programme, was produced.

In producing the additional programme consideration was given to all known insurance hotspots, the age and condition of the trees, their current priority rating and their likelihood to cause property damage if left unmaintained.

Funding for the additional programme (£250k over 3 years) was agreed by the Councils Risk Management Working Party in April 2014.

The programme for this financial year is now well underway with many residents expressing their satisfaction with the work that has taken place, however to some residents, particularly those, living in roads that have seen very little hard pruning in recent years, the work appears excessive and brutal. This is unfortunate, however all the works are carried out by suitably qualified contractors and in accordance with British quality standards for tree works and, as stated earlier, is designed to help preserve the trees not harm them. Following the works the trees recover their former shape and look fairly quickly.

Appendix 1

Briefing Note – Pests and diseases threatening the boroughs tree stock July 2014

There are currently a number of pests and diseases that seriously threaten our tree stock. The purpose of this briefing is to provide an update on the current situation in relation to these threats.

- Ash die-back (Chalara): The most recent serious threat. This disease kills young trees quickly and can also lead to the eventual death of mature trees. There are as yet no known cases in the borough but it seems likely that we will be affected at some stage in the short to medium term.

Action -Continue to investigate suspected cases, follow Forestry Commission Guidance and provide regular updates and briefings.

- Massaria disease of Plane: This disease is of particular concern as it can cause the decay of significant branches on large trees and the symptoms are rarely observable from ground level, as it occurs on the top side of affected limbs. This disease has already been found in the borough

Action - Officers can only remain alert to possible future cases within our high population of large Plane trees. When cases are found the affected tree will be checked and any diseased limbs removed. Any nearby trees will also be inspected for the presence of the disease.

- Oak Processionary Moth: A threat to Oak trees leading to defoliation but also a threat to human health due to the toxins contained in the hairs of the caterpillars which can cause skin irritation/allergic reactions. This pest is spreading from south west London and the most recent outbreaks were in Croydon and Bromley.

Action - Officers to remain alert for information on further outbreaks. If an outbreak is confirmed in the borough it will be reported to the appropriate authorities and any advice and guidance on control measures followed.

- Asian Longhorn Beetle: This pest bores into the wood of a wide range of broadleaved trees and can lead to the death or fracture / failure of mature trees or parts of them. A recent outbreak in Kent appears to have been contained but imported wooden materials could well lead to future outbreaks.

Action - Officers to remain alert for information on further outbreaks. If an outbreak is confirmed it will be reported to appropriate authorities and any advice and guidance on control measures followed.

- Chestnut Bleeding Canker: A bacterial disease that has been around for some time. It can lead to the eventual death of the infected tree, or at the very least significantly weaken it. As Horse Chestnut is also badly affected by the Chestnut Leaf Miner Moth and both these problems are now so widespread, the future of Horse Chestnut in the UK is uncertain.

Action. This depends on the severity of the infection and can range from further observation to crown reduction or even felling in the most serious cases.

- Phytophthora: There are a number of tree species affected by these destructive parasitic fungi and they remain an ongoing threat to trees in Britain. This is a serious problem and requires large scale sanitation to prevent its spread once found. There are currently no known outbreaks in London.

Action - Officers to remain alert for information on further outbreaks. If an outbreak is confirmed in the borough it will be reported to the appropriate authorities and any advice and guidance on control measures followed.

Appendix 2 – Tree Warden Scheme



The Tree Council

The Tree Council was founded in 1974 and is the umbrella body for UK organisations involved in tree planting, care and conservation. Members range from professional specialists and trade organisations, including other conservation charities, to local authorities and government bodies. The Tree Council is responsible for organising National Tree Week which has become the UK's largest annual celebration of trees and woods and they run a variety of initiatives in support of quality tree management.

The Tree Warden Scheme

This is a national initiative to enable people to play an active role in conserving and enhancing their local tree stock. The scheme was founded and is co-ordinated by The Tree Council as part of their ongoing actions to preserve and manage trees for today and future generations. To be most effective, action can be taken by local people who know their own localities intimately and who have most to gain from the protection and enhancement of their immediate environment.

The Tree Warden Scheme provides an effective mechanism for local people to take action to protect and enhance their trees. The Tree Warden Scheme provides:

- a proven method of working with the community

- a cost effective way of consulting the community about trees
- a volunteer force who can become the eyes, ears and hands for trees
- the ability to empower the community to manage their environment
- a method of establishing links with parish councils and other groups
- a network structure that offers regional and national support

Lewisham and the Tree Warden Scheme

The Council is keen to encourage more people to help care for the boroughs trees.

Tree Wardens need not be tree experts, only enthusiasts, who are willing to become involved in some of the following tasks:

- reporting tree related issues to the Council
- gathering information on the condition of local trees
- working with the council to identify and bid for funds for new tree planting projects
- organising volunteers to water and care for newly planted trees
- sharing knowledge and information with other interested local residents

Tree wardens receive regular information bulletins on tree related matters and can attend liaison meetings hosted by the Council to enable local information exchange, discuss future projects and improve networks.

If you are interested in becoming a Lewisham Tree Warden please contact Sarah Foraud

Tel: 020 8314 2047 or email sarah.foraud@lewisham.gov.uk