



Crawley Borough Council

Tree Planting Strategy

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Foreword

It is my pleasure to introduce Crawley Borough Council's Tree Planting Strategy, to thank everyone who has worked on its production and, of course, everyone who works in some way to look after our trees.

This is an area of environmental stewardship in which the council occupies a position of strength. There are more than 250,000 trees in a variety of species owned by the council, plus tens of thousands more owned by others around the borough. Visitors to Crawley will surely never have imagined a new town this close to London with a globally significant airport could be so leafy. We're also fortunate that our trees are not subjected to a vigorous timber industry. If you look down from space, you'd see them covering more than a quarter of Crawley, far more than the national average, and we're fortunate to have the amenity value of several forests and wooded parks.

This strategy will prevent us from becoming complacent or losing the advantage we already have. We know trees are a vital component of a successful ecosystem and provide us with a raft of economic and social benefits. We also know we need to care for them, but we are fortunate to have a team of tree officers and park staff who intimately know the trees, our soil, climate and environment to manage them effectively over the previous decades. Our focus is on maintaining the coverage we already have and ensuring the species best suited to surviving and thriving in our local environment are selected. This strategy will ensure that we plant trees for the future using organisational expertise which is rooted in our past.

Councillor Bob Noyce

Cabinet Member for Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change

With reference to The England Trees Action Plan 2021 – 2024 Sir William Worsley, Chair of the Forestry Commission states;

“As well as tackling climate change and providing vital habitats, trees and woodlands are a pivotal part of our landscapes, particularly when planted and supported in and around our towns and cities and can provide space for people to connect with nature.

Trees and woodlands also play an increasingly important role in building thriving rural economies, helping to level up the whole of the UK, and supporting a green recovery by stimulating markets for timber and wood products as renewable resources.

Our trees are facing unprecedented environmental challenges and our woodlands need to be resilient to this, including those that we plant over the coming decades.

Alongside planting more trees, we must protect the precious ancient woodlands and veteran trees which have stood for hundreds of years. The oldest tree in England is estimated to be 2,000 to 3,000 years old. By preserving these and planting more to withstand the test of time, trees can form a central part of our vision to leave the environment in a better state than we found it for generations to come.

We must come together to protect, improve, and enhance our trees and woodlands across England which is why we will be providing improved funding options for different types of treescapes and landowners and managers. This includes the new England Woodland Creation Offer which will support landowners and managers with establishing trees and woodlands as we transition into our new Sustainable Farming Incentive, Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery Schemes.

It is not just about funding the trees and woodlands of tomorrow but supporting their long term management and protection. That is why we will develop better guidance, provide more advice, develop platforms and opportunities for innovation and encourage more people into this thriving sector as we create more jobs throughout the whole supply chain.”

Introduction

This strategy sets out how Crawley Borough Council will carry out its responsibilities for

- Urban tree planting
- Diversity of species
- Woodland management
- Communal tree projects

It sets the standards for all tree planting, young tree maintenance and woodland sustainability for Crawley Borough Council trees across the borough. The strategy adheres to the relevant British Standards:

- BS8545 Trees: From nursery to independence in the landscape
- BS5837 Trees in relation to design, demolition, and constructions
- BS3998 Tree work

Aims

Crawley Borough Council aims to:

- Create a sustainable tree planting strategy that supports evidence-based decisions to continue developing and improving urban tree cover
- Increase species diversity across the town (based on the tree survey being carried out) to ensure overall health of the tree stock and improving resistance to current and potential threats
- Replace all council trees which have been removed (excluding self-seeded trees) from amenity land where practicable
- Review practices periodically to improve tree planting and aftercare
- Record progress, maintain the tree database and use the experience and lessons learnt to inform future decision making and strategies

In summary, planting and establishing the right tree in the right place will deliver benefits for people, for wildlife, the climate and the economy.

Benefits

Efficient management of the urban tree cover provides many benefits including:

- Conserving heating and cooling of the environment by providing shelter and shade
- Tree foliage removes and processes pollutants from our environment

- Intercepting rain and water runoff which reduces flooding
- Providing noise barriers
- Creating desirable landscapes and increasing amenity value
- Providing important ecological habitats and wildlife corridors
- Providing health and wellbeing benefits, proven that a walk in the trees reduces stress

Background

The 2016 survey by Forest Research identified that Crawley Borough exceeded the 20% canopy cover recommended by the Urban Forestry and Woodland Advisory Network for inland towns and cities. The national average for canopy cover is 16.4%; Crawley has 26.6 per cent coverage which is 10.2 per cent above the national average.

Canopy cover is defined as the percentage of the ground covered by a tree crowns when viewed from above. The forest survey includes all trees and does not distinguish between public and privately owned trees.

Planting more trees is not the only way to maintain this canopy cover. Good management of the existing trees and woodlands will maximise the current benefits and protect future cover.

Some diseases such as Ash Die Back (ADB) will have a significant detrimental effect on the canopy cover.

CBC's tree database holds valuable information on the council-owned tree stock including existing quality, variety and quantity of canopy coverage. This information directs decisions on planting and maintenance.

CBC current policy and service level determines that work will be undertaken on trees that are reported/inspected and deemed to be dead, dying or dangerous. This policy should deliver a robust tree stock that can withstand impact from the urban environment and environmental conditions.

Reasons for a tree planting strategy

There are an estimated 250,000+ trees across the Borough, approximately 13,000 have been surveyed as they are risk assessed as high interest (trees that are deemed to be likely to strike people or property). The tree survey is still ongoing and it is estimated that it will take a further two years to survey the remaining 7,000 high interest trees.

CBC declared a Climate Emergency in 2019. The subsequent Climate Emergency Action Plan directed the need for a sustainable tree planting strategy to support the council in tackling the effects of climate change. This Tree Planting Strategy has been developed and is presented as a realistic, affordable and sustainable approach.

Crawley by design has always enjoyed a high level of tree cover throughout the town, in its many parks and woodlands as well as within the amenity spaces in the urban environment. The available space to replace trees on a like for like basis is no longer sustainable or viable due to:

- Increasing urbanisation which diminishes suitable space
- Changes to insurance specifications which requires greater distances between buildings and trees
- An increase in the provision of Wi-Fi enabling infrastructure such as posts and underground cables across the Town. Trees cannot be planted on top or near underground services

New and increasing pests and diseases incur additional responsibilities in managing biosecurity to ensure the tree stock is protected e.g., procurement of stock from reputable, disease-free source.

The overarching principal widely supported by industry experts such as The Tree Council, Woodland Trust and Forestry Commission is to have “the right tree in the right place”. This document will set out the strategy for Crawley Borough Council that will support that principal. The process will ensure that pertinent information is considered so that sound, objective and evidence-based decisions are made.

Future Plan

Recording of tree planting and aftercare

The tree database will continue to be used to capture newly planted trees and their aftercare. This will produce a healthier more reliable tree stock in future as essential maintenance will be planned and executed.

It is expected that trees planted as part of new developments will be protected and managed responsibly by developers. If further assurance and safeguarding is required, this could be achieved by amending planning conditions.

Species Diversity

Future planting and selection of species will consider:

- The continuation of existing native species
- Urban compatible species e.g.
 - Not planting fruiting species in areas where it will increase risks of slips and falls, and pests such as wasps.
 - Not planting species with a high water take-up that may affect nearby building foundations.
 - Not planting species that have an invasive root structure which has the potential to damage property e.g., pavements and walls.
 - Not planting species that will obstruct or interfere with overhead or underground services
 - Ensure that the size of the planting area is sufficient to maintain a mature tree.
- Compatible with existing ecology
- Tolerant of predicted future climates. This may involve diversifying the stock as traditional native species are less tolerant to drought e.g., birch trees
- Disease-resistant and disease- tolerant where possible.

Funding

Section 106 funds, provided through the planning application tree mitigation scheme, is sufficient to fund planting for this strategy, including aftercare. The mitigation scheme provides sufficient funding to purchase the tree and one replacement if required along with staff time to plant the tree and maintain it for five years. After that time the tree should be established and will be funded from the normal tree maintenance budget.

Woodland Trust funding can be allocated to other organisations that may wish to plant trees within their land e.g. schools, volunteer organisations or private bodies. As there is sufficient funding

through Section 106 there is no requirement for the council to draw on this, therefore providing opportunity for other organisations that are unable to fund tree planting themselves.

Tree Planting Process

The Councils Tree Officers will assess locations and suitability for tree planting and choose a suitable species, size and age of tree to be planted, taking into account the following factors:

- Trees will only be planted in land owned by the council to avoid liability and maintenance issues
- To prevent property damage and to adhere to insurance specifications, small trees will not be planted within 5m and large trees within 15m of a property
- In most circumstances trees will not be planted over pipes, cables and other services running underground to prevent damage in the future
- Avoid species where the canopy will overhang into highways or obstruct sight lines etc
- The existing tree stocks will not be adversely affected by new planting
- Trees will be procured from a safe and reputable source that can provide plant passport documentation
- To prevent the introduction of pests and diseases that could be detrimental to the Councils tree stock donated trees will not be accepted
- Experienced council staff or approved contractors will plant new trees. Members of the public/volunteers will only be permitted to plant under the supervision of a council Tree Officer to ensure this essential task is completed correctly giving the tree the best chance of survival
- In order to maintain urban tree cover, all felled trees will be considered for replacement (this excludes self-seeded trees and saplings which have established as weeds). However, it may not always be possible to replace on a one for one basis
- Wherever possible re-planting should take place in the same location the tree was removed from. In cases where it is not possible to replace in the same location then a location nearby will be sought
- Where trees are removed due to disease the ground shall be quarantined for two years to allow the disease to disperse before new trees are planted to avoid reinfection.

Tree Pests, Diseases and Risks

Current threats to the tree stock are varied and are being managed within the standard dead, dying or dangerous process. If it is determined that a diseased tree poses a threat to other trees then the tree will be removed to prevent contamination.

New threats such as ADB and oak processionary moth (OPM) are managed following the guidance which has been provided from organisations such as DEFRA or the Forestry Commission. Further details can be found by visiting government websites – www.gov.uk/environment/forest-and-woodland

The council has managed the impact of ADB within its existing policy and budget, however, if this escalates, further resources may be required. In this circumstance it should be noted that replacement of felled diseased trees may not be possible due to sheer numbers.

Volunteers

An area in Tilgate Park has been earmarked for a new Community Woodland as part of the Queens Green Canopy pledge.

Volunteers (and other stakeholders) were offered the opportunity to assist Tree Officers with planting a range and variety of suitable trees to create the Community Woodland (approximately 500 trees). Further volunteer work will take place over a number of years to maintain and establish the woodland.

If successful other woodland schemes in different locations can be considered, in conjunction with ward members, neighbourhood volunteer groups, resident forums, Gatwick Greenspace etc.

Justin Roberts

Neighbourhood Services Support Manager

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