

North Yorkshire Council

Executive

16 June 2026

Tree and Woodland Policy

Report of the Corporate Director – Environment

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval to adopt a Tree and Woodland Policy for North Yorkshire Council (NYC). This will draw on best practice in the sector to ensure consistent, safe, and the sustainable management of trees across the county.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As a landowner, the Council has a duty of care to ensure that members of the public and staff are not put at risk because of any failure by the Council to take reasonable precautions to ensure their safety. There is a need to keep records and regularly survey the council's tree asset, to assess trees in or near public spaces, whether they represent a foreseeable risk to persons or property, and to take remedial action as appropriate.
- 2.2 NYC does not currently have a unified Tree and Woodland Policy that may result in inconsistent practices and potential legal and safety risks. This report recommends adopting a harmonised countywide approach to improve governance, public engagement, and environmental stewardship.

3.0 DEVELOPMENT OF A TREE AND WOODLAND POLICY

- 3.1 The proposed NYC Tree and Woodland Policy will provide a comprehensive framework for managing trees on council-owned land and in responding to public concerns. It will include structured survey regimes, risk management aligned with ISO 31000 (guidelines for managing risks in organisations) and guidance on tree-related issues such as diseases, nuisance complaints, insurance claims and development pressures.
- 3.2 North Yorkshire Council recognises the human and environmental importance of trees and identifies standards for their management. Trees are vital assets that contribute positively to biodiversity, climate resilience, public health and landscape character. Therefore, the NYC policy will cover:
- Benefits of trees: environmental, social, and economic.
 - Threats: disease (e.g. ash dieback, ramorum disease and acute oak decline), development pressures, insurance claims, vandalism).
 - Legal duties: duty of care, common law responsibilities, and statutory obligations.
 - Risk management: adoption of the VALID approach [Tree Risk-Benefit Management & Assessment](#) which is a robust tree risk evaluation method, and ISO 31000 standards.
 - Public engagement: transparent processes for tree works, complaints, and insurance claims.
- 3.3 The adoption of a Tree and Woodland Policy is anticipated to positively contribute to achieving the ambitions in the Council Plan around place, health and living well. Good tree policy and management can support the Council's ambitions around carbon reduction

through the protection and increased canopy cover of trees through our partnerships on woodland creation, whilst helping to mitigate climate impacts such as flooding and excessive heat as outlined in our Climate Change Strategy 2023-30.

- 3.4 In preparation of a draft policy the Tree and Woodland team have undertaken extensive internal engagement within NYC via a number of management team briefings, follow up meetings and direct service input into policy drafting.

4.0 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN AND RESPONSES

- 4.1 Members of the Transport, Economy, Environment and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee (TEE&E O&S) were appraised of the approach to policy development at their meeting on 17 October 2024 and the full draft policy was reviewed at their meeting on 29 April 2026. Feedback from TEE&E O&S as set out below has been reflected in the final draft of the Policy.
- 4.2 Members broadly welcomed the policy, recognising it as a robust framework to improve consistency in tree management following local government reorganisation. The discussion focused on the need for stronger planning controls, particularly in relation to development sites, retention of existing trees and hedgerows, and clearer articulation of amenity value and enforcement through Tree Preservation Orders.
- 4.3 The valuation of trees as assets was also discussed, including use of monetary and ecosystem service values (e.g. carbon, cooling, wellbeing) to support negotiations with developers, investment decisions and climate objectives, while noting accounting and balance sheet considerations.
- 4.4 Clarification was provided on hedges, ancient woodland and species choice, including the legal definitions and limitations of protection. On hedges in particular, officers acknowledged this gap in the draft policy, noting that hedges fall under a more limited regulatory framework, but agreed to consider how the issue could be strengthened, particularly through planning processes and the subsequent Tree Planting Strategy.
- 4.5 Committee members raised concerns about tree equity, urban tree cover, and the importance of targeting tree planting in areas of deprivation. In response, it was noted that these issues would be addressed as part of a future Tree Planting Strategy, which will set out future delivery plans, performance measures and the need to align with other service areas.

5.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 The option to not develop a new policy and to retain legacy policy and guidance in relation to tree management was considered. It is recommended that this option is rejected as the opportunity and benefits of a harmonised approach for the whole of North Yorkshire would be missed.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The policy will assist Officers and Members in taking a cost effective and risk-based approach when dealing with casework and assessing potential tree works.
- 6.2 Adopting the tree and woodland policy gives rise to no additional financial commitments for the Council, rather it provides a framework for the delivery of the service. The delivery of the policy objectives is to be carried out within the existing net budget of £544k in 2026/27 for the Tree & Woodland service as set out in the table below. Work is ongoing to address the previous year's budget pressure with ongoing discussions with Highways,

Housing and Property Services regarding the cost to them for managing the tree assets associated with their service areas.

Item	Description	Expenditure
		£
Staffing	Pay and associated oncosts	503,600
Transport	Fuel / oil, car allowances, transport	9,000
Equipment	Equipment purchase and general expenses	3,800
Contractors	Non-Structural maintenance – contractors and consultants fees	38,200
Income	Donations	-600
		554,000

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Preparation of the Policy and procedures is part of the Council’s statutory functions.
- 7.2 The Town & Country Planning Act 1990 sets out the powers and duties local planning authorities have to manage and control development and which includes considering trees potentially affected by that development, or subject to tree protection. This includes legal protection for trees through Tree Preservation Orders as well as consideration of works within Conservation Areas and works requiring planning permission.
- 7.3 The Highways Act 1980 (HA 1980) provides the statutory framework for the Highway Authority in dealing with legal issues arising from trees within or affecting the highway. Highway trees are managed in accordance with the Highway Authority’s policy for maintenance and inspections of highway trees.
- 7.4 The Policy document section 2 provides further detail about legislation impacting on trees. The Tree and Woodland Policy is intended to be for information only and is not a comprehensive guide to the relevant legislation and does not provide legal advice.
- 7.5 Proper consideration as outlined in section 8.0 is being given to equalities issues that are pertinent to the policy.

8.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 In preparing the policy the Council has had regard to its duties pursuant to the Equalities Act 2010. An initial equality impact assessment screening form has been completed and identified no adverse equality impacts.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The tree and woodland policy provides a clear framework for service delivery while delivering significant climate change and environmental benefits. Trees help mitigate climate change by absorbing carbon, improving air quality, and regulating local temperatures through shading and shelter. The policy supports biodiversity, strengthens habitats, and improves resilience to climate impacts such as surface water runoff and flooding. Trees also enhance landscape character, urban environments, historic settings, privacy, and improve amenity value, with management guided by recognised environmental best practice.

10.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 10.1 Existing local authority sector policies, such as the recently published example by Durham County Council, have demonstrated the value of having a structured, proactive approach to tree care. NYC will benefit from a similar policy to:

- Ensure legal compliance and reduce liability.
- Improve public confidence and transparency.
- Support climate and ecological goals.
- Enable consistent responses to service requests and complaints.
- Manage risks from disease and the aging tree stock.

11.0 RECOMMENDATION

11.1 That Executive approves adoption of the Tree and Woodland Policy as set out in Appendix A to this report.

Appendices:

Appendix A – NYC Tree & Woodland Policy (May 2026)

Appendix B – Equalities Impact Assessment

Appendix C – Climate Change Risk Assessment

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

[Development of a Tree & Woodland Policy, NYC, Oct 2024](#)

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