

Barnsley Council Tree Management Framework 2026



Barnsley – the place
of possibilities.



BARNSLEY
Metropolitan Borough Council

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1. Foreword

Barnsley has a strong and distinctive landscape, shaped by a mix of urban communities, parks, open spaces, rural countryside and an extensive highway network. Trees are a fundamental part of that landscape. They contribute to the character of the borough, support biodiversity, improve air quality, cool urban areas, contribute to environmental resilience, reduce flood risk and provide valued public amenity.

Barnsley is home to an estimated 1.2 million trees across public and private land. Of these, approximately 214,000 are on land owned or managed by the Council. This Framework sets out how Barnsley Council will manage the trees for which it is responsible in a way that is lawful, proportionate, transparent and consistent. It explains how the Council will inspect, maintain and, where necessary, intervene in relation to trees, while seeking to retain and enhance the benefits that trees provide to residents, visitors and future generations.

The Council's approach is based on the principle of balanced risk management. The risk of serious harm from trees is very low, but tree owners are required by law to take reasonable and proportionate steps to inspect trees and manage foreseeable risk. This Framework therefore seeks to balance public safety, biodiversity, amenity, climate resilience and value for money, while helping officers, Members and residents understand how tree-related decisions will be made.

2. Introduction

Trees are long-lived public assets. For Barnsley, they form part of a wider green infrastructure network that supports health and wellbeing, biodiversity, place-making and environmental resilience. They also must be managed responsibly as living structures that can, in some circumstances, present a risk to people, property or infrastructure.

This Framework sets out the Council's policy and risk management approach for trees on Council-owned land and, where relevant, trees affecting Council land or the public highway. It establishes a clear basis for inspection, maintenance and prioritisation of works, and provides a consistent response to common enquiries and complaints about trees.

The Framework is intended to:

- provide a clear and defensible basis for tree risk management;
- support consistent, proportionate and evidence-based decision-making;
- explain how the Council will manage requests for tree work and tree inspection;
- set out the circumstances in which works will and will not normally be undertaken;
- support the retention and long-term improvement of Barnsley's tree canopy and biodiversity, wherever reasonably possible.

3. Policy Context

3.1 Legal duties and responsibilities

Barnsley Council, in common with other landowners, owes a duty of care in relation to trees on land that it owns or manages. The legal and policy context for this Framework includes the following:

- Occupiers' Liability Act 1984 – requiring landowners to take reasonable steps to ensure that users of land and neighbouring property are reasonably safe.
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 – requiring the Council to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that employees and members of the public are not exposed to unreasonable risk from Council property, including trees.
- Highways Act 1980 – including duties and powers in relation to highway obstruction, highway safety and works affecting highway trees.
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 – providing powers in certain circumstances to address dangerous trees in private ownership.
- Town and Country Planning Act 1990 – including controls relating to Tree Preservation Orders and trees in Conservation Areas.

- Forestry Act 1967 – including the need to consider whether a felling licence or exemption applies.
- Environment Act 2021 – including the strengthened biodiversity duty and the statutory duty to consult in relation to the felling of certain non-dangerous highway trees on residential streets.
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations – including legal protections for nesting birds, bats and other protected habitats and species.

3.2 National guidance and best practice

This Framework is informed by national guidance and recognised arboricultural best practice. In particular, Barnsley Council will apply the principles set out in the Health and Safety Executive guidance on the management of risk from falling trees and branches, and in the National Tree Safety Group Guidance Common Sense Risk Management of Trees. These sources support a balanced and proportionate approach based on risk zoning, inspection, recording and prioritised intervention. All tree work will be specified and undertaken in accordance with current arboricultural best practice, including BS3998 Tree Work – Recommendations.

3.3 Local strategic context

The Framework also supports local strategic priorities, including the protection and enhancement of green spaces, the sustainable management of the borough's natural assets, the Local Plan and supplementary planning guidance for trees and hedgerows, and the need to conserve and enhance biodiversity across the borough.

4. Barnsley's Strategy for Trees and Woodland

The Council's vision is to secure a sustainable, growing and healthy tree population for the benefit of residents and communities. To achieve this, Barnsley Council will seek to manage its tree stock in a way that is proportionate, professionally informed and supportive of wider environmental objectives.

The priority themes for delivery of this Framework are to:

- establish and maintain a defensible risk-based inspection regime focused on the areas of greatest use and potential consequence;
- maintain a suitably trained and competent arboricultural inspection and maintenance function;
- use digital systems and records to support inspection evidence, work prioritisation and audit trails;
- prioritise works according to public safety, tree condition and legal obligations;
- retain trees wherever reasonably possible and treat removal as a last resort;
- protect and enhance biodiversity, canopy cover and the wider environmental value of the Council's tree stock;
- support future tree planting based on the principle of the right tree in the right place for the right reason.

5. Scope and Objectives of this Framework

This Framework applies to trees on land owned or managed by Barnsley Council, including trees in parks, open spaces, cemeteries, highways land and other Council landholdings. It also applies, where relevant, to trees in housing land and communal areas managed in conjunction with Berneslai Homes, and to trees that affect Council land or the public highway where the Council has a legal duty, statutory power or other responsibility to act.

The Framework does not seek to provide a comprehensive tree management service for private tree owners. Private trees remain the responsibility of the landowner, except where the Council has a duty or power to act in the interests of public safety or highway safety.

The objectives of the Framework are to:

- provide a practical policy and risk management framework for Council-owned trees;
- clarify how reactive enquiries and inspection requests will be assessed and triaged;
- identify the circumstances in which pruning, felling or other intervention may be justified;
- set out the Council's approach to common tree-related complaints and non-actionable nuisance;
- support consistency, fairness and transparency in tree-related decisions;
- protect public amenity, biodiversity and the public purse.

6. Communications and Engagement

The Council will take a proportionate and discretionary approach to communication and engagement in relation to tree management activities. Communication methods will be selected having regard to the nature, scale and potential impact of works, with statutory consultation undertaken where required. The Council will seek to provide clear and consistent information to support understanding of decisions, while recognising that residents, Members and stakeholders may provide information, local knowledge and feedback that assists decision-making. Communication and engagement will be proportionate to the circumstances and managed in a way that supports transparency, understanding and appropriate expectations.

6.1 Communication principles

- Communication will be managed in a way that seeks to be clear, timely and proportionate to the circumstances.
- Information may be provided to residents, Members and relevant stakeholders where the Council considers it appropriate, having regard to the nature and impact of the works.
- The Council will seek to listen to and consider relevant information, observations or concerns raised by residents, Members and stakeholders where these may assist understanding of local circumstances or inform decision-making.
- Decisions will be explained, where necessary, by reference to arboricultural assessment, legal requirements, public safety and this Framework.
- The Council will seek to avoid creating unreasonable expectations that every request, concern or representation will result in an inspection, consultation exercise or work being carried out.

6.2 Notification and information sharing

The Council will determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether communication or notification is necessary, having regard to the nature, scale and potential impact of the works. Where considered appropriate, this may include website updates, direct correspondence, on-site signage, local notices or engagement with relevant stakeholders. The extent of communication undertaken will be proportionate to the circumstances and potential impact of the proposed works.

6.3 Consultation

Where legislation requires consultation, including for certain highway street tree removals on residential streets, the Council will comply with the statutory process. In other cases, the Council may undertake consultation or engagement where it considers this to be appropriate, having regard to the nature, scale and potential impact of the works. Information obtained through consultation or engagement will be considered alongside professional assessment, legal duties, public safety considerations and wider public benefit. Any engagement undertaken does not displace the Council's responsibility to make lawful decisions based on professional evidence, safety considerations and its statutory responsibilities.

6.4 Digital Information and Website Alignment

The Council's website provides the primary public-facing source of information in relation to tree management, service requests and customer responsibilities. The information published online reflects and is underpinned by the principles, policies and thresholds set out in this Framework, whilst being presented in a clear and accessible format for residents and service users.

In particular, the website explains how to report tree-related concerns, clarifies the distinction between actionable issues and non-actionable nuisance, and sets out the respective responsibilities of the Council and private tree owners. It also aims to support understanding of the Council's approach to tree management and help residents and stakeholders access relevant information and guidance.

This Framework remains the Council's definitive operational and decision-making document and, in the event of any ambiguity, decisions will be made in accordance with this Framework, supporting professional assessment and applicable legal requirements.

Maintaining alignment between this Framework and the Council's website is essential to ensure clarity, consistency and transparency in how tree-related enquiries are managed. It also supports effective communication by helping residents, Members and stakeholders understand the Council's approach to tree management, whilst providing appropriate opportunities to raise concerns, share relevant information and engage with the Council where appropriate.

7. The Benefits of Trees

Trees provide a wide range of benefits that go far beyond their physical presence in the landscape. These benefits must be considered when making decisions about inspection, maintenance and intervention.

7.1 Environmental benefits

- capture and store carbon as part of the natural environment;
- improve air quality and help filter pollutants;
- provide cooling and shade in urban environments;
- intercept rainfall and help reduce flood risk;
- protect soils and contribute to wider ecosystem functioning.

7.2 Economic and place-making benefits

- enhance the attractiveness of neighbourhoods, parks and transport corridors;
- contribute to the amenity and value of places;
- help create environments where people want to live, work and visit.

7.3 Social, cultural and wellbeing benefits

- provide opportunities for recreation, education and community engagement;
- support physical and mental wellbeing by improving access to nature;
- contribute to local identity and the historic character of the borough.

7.4 Biodiversity benefits

- provide habitat for birds, bats, invertebrates, fungi and other species;
- create ecological connections and green corridors;
- support deadwood habitats and the wider ecological network when managed appropriately.

8. Trees, Biodiversity, Environmental Resilience and Canopy

Barnsley Council recognises that trees form an important part of the borough's natural environment and green infrastructure. Trees contribute to carbon storage, shade and cooling, water management and environmental resilience. They also help support the Council's biodiversity responsibilities.

Tree canopy cover across the borough is a strategic asset. Barnsley's overall canopy cover has been identified at around 16%, with variation between different parts of the borough. This Framework therefore supports the protection of existing canopy and the planting of new trees where this is considered appropriate. While opportunities to increase canopy cover in lower-canopy areas will be considered, decisions on planting locations will also take account of site suitability, long-term establishment, survivability and the likelihood of successful retention, to ensure that tree planting delivers lasting benefit.

In line with the Environment Act 2021 biodiversity duty, tree management decisions will seek to conserve and, where reasonably possible, enhance biodiversity. In practice, this means that

the Council will seek to retain habitat features, deadwood and veteran characteristics where it is safe and appropriate to do so and will work with biodiversity colleagues where ecological considerations are relevant to inspection or maintenance decisions.

9. Tree-related Problems and Customer Requests

The Council receives a wide range of enquiries about trees. Some requests raise legitimate safety or damage concerns. Others relate to perception, inconvenience or seasonal nuisance. This Framework distinguishes between issues that justify inspection or intervention and those that will not normally result in works.

All requests for service will be assessed and triaged against this Framework. An inspection will be undertaken where there is a credible concern relating to public safety, tree condition or health, structural integrity, actionable nuisance, or where no recent inspection information is available and the circumstances justify further assessment. Requests outside these criteria will normally receive advice, information or a standard response explaining the Council's policy position.

Requests will normally be prioritised in the following order:

- risk to public safety and property;
- tree condition, health and structural integrity, including emerging risk;
- actionable nuisance or substantiated damage concerns;
- all other matters, which will generally be managed through advice and application of policy.

10. Policy Statements

The following policy statements set out the Council's core principles for the management, protection and retention of trees within the scope of this Framework. They should be read alongside the wider sections of this document, which provide the supporting detail, operational approach, decision-making criteria and legal context for how these principles will be applied in practice.

Policy 1 – Managing Trees

Barnsley Council will manage its tree stock proactively through a risk-based and proportionate inspection regime, with resources directed to the areas of greatest use and potential consequence.

Policy 2 – Maintaining Trees and Minimal Removal

There will be a presumption in favour of retaining healthy trees. Removal will be treated as a last resort where reasonable alternatives have been considered and a suitably trained and competent officer determines that there is sound arboricultural, legal, ecological or operational justification.

Policy 3 – Biodiversity, Canopy and Planting

The Council will seek to conserve and, where reasonably possible, enhance biodiversity and canopy cover. Decisions on new and replacement planting will be based on the principle of

the right tree in the right place for the right reason, taking account of site suitability, long-term establishment, and the likelihood of successful retention and management.

Policy 4 – Consistency and Fairness

Requests for inspection and tree work will be assessed consistently against this Framework. The Council will not normally carry out works to address non-actionable nuisance.

Policy 5 – Professional Standards

Tree inspection, specification and maintenance will be undertaken by suitably trained and competent officers and contractors in accordance with current arboricultural best practice.

Policy 6 – Protecting Council-owned Trees

The Council will take a robust approach to unauthorised works, wilful damage and vandalism affecting Council-owned trees, including investigation, recovery of losses and prosecution where appropriate.

Policy 7 – Private Trees

Private tree owners remain responsible for the management of their trees. The Council will use its powers and discharge its duties in relation to private trees only where public safety, highway safety or other statutory considerations justify intervention.

11. Common Law Rights

Under English common law, an owner or occupier of land may prune branches or roots from a neighbouring tree back to the boundary line where they encroach onto their land. However, that right is limited and does not place a duty on the tree owner to carry out such works on request.

Where Council-owned trees overhang neighbouring land, the following principles apply:

- works may only be carried out back to the boundary;
- there is no right to cut beyond the boundary or enter Council land without permission;
- arisings must be lawfully disposed of by the person carrying out the works and must not be thrown back onto Council land;
- works must not make the tree unsafe, unstable or lead to avoidable decline;
- works may require consent if the tree is protected by a Tree Preservation Order or is located within a Conservation Area;
- all works should comply with BS3998 and the Council strongly recommends that professional advice is obtained before any significant pruning or root cutting is undertaken.

Where unauthorised or poor-quality works cause damage to a Council-owned tree, the Council may pursue enforcement action, costs or compensation as appropriate.

12. Risk Management

12.1 Principles of risk management

The purpose of tree risk management is not to eliminate all risk, which is neither possible nor desirable. The Council's approach is to reduce foreseeable risk to a level that is as low as reasonably practicable, while retaining the social, environmental and amenity benefits that trees provide. The Framework therefore follows a balanced and proportionate methodology based on zoning, inspection, recording, assessment and prioritised management.

The key risk management steps are to:

- identify trees and tree populations that have the potential to affect people or property;
- assign inspection zones according to levels of use and potential consequence;
- undertake inspections at frequencies proportionate to the level of use and risk exposure;
- record defects, observations and recommendations in a consistent way;
- assess the likelihood and consequence of failure and determine whether the resulting risk is acceptable;
- prioritise any necessary remedial works according to urgency and risk;
- review inspection intervals where specific defects, site changes or local intelligence justify a different approach.

12.2 Tree inspection hierarchy

The Council will use an inspection hierarchy to ensure that the intensity of inspection is proportionate to the circumstances.

- Level 1 – Routine Tree Inspection: a basic proactive or reactive visual inspection to identify obvious defects, signs of decline or management issues.
- Level 2 – Individual Tree Risk Inspection: a more detailed ground-based inspection of a specific tree where defects are identified or suspected.
- Level 3 – Detailed Tree Inspection: an advanced or specialist assessment used where more detailed information is needed to inform a significant management decision, particularly where a tree has high value or complex defects.

12.3 Inspection zoning and frequency

To direct resources efficiently, Council-owned trees will be managed through a zoned inspection programme based on levels of use and potential consequence. The current inspection frequencies are:

- High use zones – 18 months. Typical examples include busy roads, parks, playgrounds, shopping precincts, schools, dwellings, hospitals and other high occupancy or high target areas.
- Medium use zones – 3 years. Typical examples include moderate use parks, cemeteries, secondary roads, moderate use footpaths and car parks, and main paths in woodlands.
- Low use zones – 5 years. Typical examples include low use roads, low access areas and locations where the level of target occupancy is low.

Inspection frequencies will be kept under review considering experience, available data, significant events and emerging good practice. The existence of a recent inspection may also be considered when assessing whether a new reactive inspection request is required.

12.4 Inspection records and evidence

The Council will maintain records of inspections, observed defects, risk-based recommendations and completed works. Digital systems and audit trails will be used wherever possible to support consistency, service planning and defensibility.

13. Intervention, Prioritisation and Response Times

13.1 General approach

Where an inspection identifies an unacceptable level of risk or another justified need for intervention, the Council will determine the most proportionate response. This may include monitoring, re-inspection, pruning, access management, warning or isolation measures, engineering solutions, or tree removal where no reasonable alternative exists.

13.2 Circumstances in which work may be justified

The Council may undertake or specify tree work where, for example:

- a tree is dead, dying or dangerous and presents a significant risk of harm;
- pruning or other intervention is required to maintain statutory highway clearances, visibility, traffic signals, street lighting or other infrastructure;
- branches are in contact with a building or are likely to make contact within the next two growing seasons;
- works are required as part of an agreed management programme or approved development;
- there is substantiated evidence that a tree is causing actionable nuisance, direct damage or indirect subsidence-related damage and intervention is justified after professional assessment;
- pruning will help prolong the safe life of a tree with compromised structural integrity;
- a suitably trained and competent officer determines, following arboricultural assessment, that a tree is inappropriate for its location and no reasonable alternative management option exists.

13.3 Pruning standards

Pruning will be specified only where there is a sound reason to do so and will be carried out in accordance with good arboricultural practice. Routine or unnecessary pruning will be resisted. Typical reasons for pruning include highway clearances, sight lines, lighting and signage clearance, contact with structures, or measures required to manage substantiated risk.

13.4 Prioritisation and response categories

Tree work will normally be prioritised using the following categories:

- Emergency – responses to trees or branches that are imminently dangerous or obstructing the highway. The aim is for an on-site response within 2 hours, or for the site to be made safe until specialist resources are available.
- High (Red) – dangerous trees or significant defects requiring urgent works, normally to be completed within 10 days, or the site otherwise made safe.
- Medium (Amber) – defects or conditions that are likely to lead to failure or substantiated structural damage concerns that require works within 6 months of inspection.
- Green (Planned) – necessary works that can be programmed and undertaken in a planned way, normally within up to 18 months subject to resources and operational constraints.
- Green (Desirable) – lower-priority improvement works that may be undertaken when resources and budget permit.

13.5 Major incidents and adverse weather

During major storms or other adverse weather events, the Council will operate an emergency response in accordance with emergency planning arrangements and any Tree Works Contingency Plan in force. Incidents will be prioritised by severity, with the highest risk situations made safe first and lower-risk situations isolated or programmed where necessary.

14. Trees in Private Ownership and Other Special Cases

14.1 Trees in private ownership

The Council does not normally inspect or maintain privately owned trees as part of a programmed service. Private tree owners are responsible for inspecting and managing their own trees. The Council may, however, act where a private tree affects the public highway, creates an immediate danger to the public, or where other statutory powers apply. Where the Council undertakes works to private trees in the exercise of those powers, it may seek to recover its reasonable costs from the owner.

14.2 Charging and recovery of costs

The Council will seek to protect the public purse. Where lawful and appropriate, work carried out in relation to non-Council-owned trees – including emergency highway clearance, safety works or other action taken under statutory powers – may be charged to the tree owner or the occupier of the land on which the tree is situated.

14.3 Berneslai Homes trees and communal areas

Trees in gardens and communal spaces associated with Council housing stock make an important contribution to Barnsley's urban forest. Barnsley Council and Berneslai Homes will work together to manage these trees in line with this Framework. Tenants remain responsible for normal garden maintenance, but the Council retains responsibility as tree owner for substantive tree management decisions. Requests from tenants will be screened through Berneslai Homes and referred on where permission, inspection or arboricultural assessment is required.

14.4 Crossover applications and works near trees

Works such as dropped kerbs (vehicular crossovers), excavation and hard surfacing in proximity to Council-owned trees have the potential to cause significant damage to root systems, affecting tree health, stability and long-term retention.

All applications or proposals affecting or encroaching within the root protection area (RPA) of a Council-owned tree will be subject to detailed assessment. In line with Highways requirements, dropped kerb applications within the RPA of Council-owned trees will not normally be permitted.

Notwithstanding this position, all proposals will be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking account of arboricultural evidence, site constraints, highway safety, and the wider public interest. The Council reserves the right to refuse applications where unacceptable impact on tree health, safety, amenity or biodiversity is identified.

The Council may, at its discretion, require redesign, relocation or alternative solutions that avoid conflict with existing trees. Mitigation measures will only be considered where it can be clearly demonstrated that the long-term health, stability and retention of the tree will not be compromised.

Healthy Council-owned trees and their root protection areas will be retained wherever reasonably practicable. Council planning, highway, regeneration and development proposals will be designed around them where possible. Removal will be considered only where reasonable alternatives are not viable and a suitably trained and competent officer determines that the wider public benefit outweighs the environmental, amenity and community value of retention.

14.5 Unauthorised works, vandalism and foreign objects

Unauthorised pruning, felling, topping, pollarding, vandalism and the attachment of foreign objects to Council-owned trees are unacceptable. Such actions can damage tree health, undermine public amenity, create safety risks and may amount to criminal damage or other unlawful activity. The Council will investigate suspected incidents and may seek prosecution, compensation, replacement planting and recovery of costs where appropriate.

14.6 Alleged damage to property

Where it is alleged that a Council-owned tree has caused direct damage or indirect subsidence-related damage, the Council will require clear supporting evidence before any decision on mitigation is made. Claimants will normally be advised to pursue the matter through their insurer and provide relevant professional evidence, which may include structural information, level monitoring, root evidence, photographs, foundation and soil information, and an assessment of causation. Each case will be considered on its own facts.

15. Constraints on Tree Management and Protected Trees

15.1 Protected trees

Trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order or located within a Conservation Area are subject to separate legal controls. All enquiries and applications relating to protected trees will be dealt with through the relevant planning process. The Council will comply with those controls in relation to its own trees, except where emergency exemptions apply.

15.2 Felling licence considerations

Before felling trees, the Council will consider whether a Forestry Act felling licence is required or whether an exemption applies, for example in relation to danger, nuisance, development or statutory functions. Decisions and rationale will be recorded where relevant.

15.3 Birds, bats and ecology

Tree works must comply with wildlife law. The Council will not undertake works where active birds' nests are present, unless an overriding legal exemption applies, and will ensure that trees with bat roost potential or other ecological constraints are assessed appropriately before works proceed. Habitat features, deadwood and veteran characteristics will be retained where it is safe and appropriate to do so.

15.4 Duty to consult on certain highway tree removals

Where the Environment Act 2021 duty to consult applies to the felling of non-dangerous highway trees on residential streets, the Council will follow the statutory consultation process and have regard to public views before making a final decision. The Council will also consider whether engineering or tree management solutions can avoid the need for removal.

16. Monitoring and Review

This Framework will be kept under review to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, reflects legal and policy developments, and supports an effective and proportionate approach to tree management.

The Council will keep under review, where practical and proportionate:

- inspection frequencies and zoning methodology;
- service performance in relation to inspection, prioritisation and delivery of works;
- the number of emergency and planned interventions;
- tree removals, replacement planting opportunities and canopy-related considerations;
- significant incidents, complaints, legal developments and changes in best practice.

The Council will undertake an annual light-touch review of this Framework to confirm that it remains current and fit for purpose. A full formal review will be undertaken every three years, or earlier where required by significant legislative change, updated national guidance, major incidents, audit findings, material service change, emerging tree health risks or other relevant operational need.