

Tree Maintenance & Inspection Policy

Adopted by Ruskington Parish Council on 13 January 2026

Minute Ref:8.2., page 3-2026.

Next Review Due: January 2028

Applies to: All trees owned or maintained by Ruskington Parish Council (RPC)

1. Overview:

- RPC inspects all its trees every three years using an independent tree inspector. We also check high use areas after storms for obvious damage.
- If work is needed, we prioritise safety and choose the least intervention approach that meets standards (BS 3998).
- We follow the law on protected trees and wildlife and aim to replace trees we must remove.

2. Purpose

This policy sets out how RPC will manage the safety, health and amenity of trees in its stewardship in a way that is reasonable, proportionate and evidence-based, balancing public safety with the many benefits trees provide (amenity, biodiversity, climate resilience, wellbeing). It reflects the National Tree Safety Group (NTSG) principles that overall risk from trees is extremely low and that owners should take a balanced, proportionate approach.

3. Scope & Ownership

- This policy applies to all trees on land owned, leased or formally maintained by RPC.
- Trees in the public highway are normally the responsibility of Lincolnshire County Council (the local highway authority); RPC will liaise where RPC trees interface with the highway.

4. Objectives

1. **Public Safety:** Keep foreseeable tree-related risks as low as reasonably practicable through proportionate inspection and maintenance.
2. **Amenity & Biodiversity:** Conserve and enhance tree cover while avoiding unnecessary work; integrate habitat considerations into all decisions.
3. **Compliance & Transparency:** Meet legal duties; keep clear records to evidence reasonable, risk-based decisions.

5. Legal and Standards Framework

RPC will “manage” the trees in its stewardship in line with the following:

- **Duty of care** to visitors and the public under the Occupiers’ Liability Acts 1957 & 1984 (take reasonable care to ensure visitors are reasonably safe).

- **H&S at Work etc., Act 1974 (s.3)** duties toward non-employees; HSE guidance on managing risk from falling trees (risk-based checks by competent persons).
- **Planning controls:** Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) & Conservation Areas (CAs—works require consent/notice except limited exemptions).
- **Wildlife:** compliance with the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981—no taking/damaging/destruction of active nests; additional protections for Schedule 1 species. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69/schedule/1>
- **Highways interface:** Duties and powers concerning vegetation overhanging highways (Highways Act 1980 s.154).
- **Felling licences:** Forestry Commission regime & exemptions (e.g., small-volume allowances, dangerous trees, windblown. Felling licenses are only applicable when 5 m³ or more timber is being produced, felling of dangerous trees are exempt from felling licencing
- **Work standards:** All tree work to BS 3998:2010 – Tree work – Recommendations (or subsequent revision).
- **Sector good practice:** National Tree Safety Group guidance on zoning, inspection and proportionality.

6. Inspection Regime

6.1 Three-Yearly External Inspections

- **Frequency: Every 3 years** a full inventory tree survey of all trees owned and maintained by RPC will be conducted by an independent, competent arboriculturist (e.g., LANTRA Professional Tree Inspection qualified, or equivalent experience) or North Kesteven District Council Tree Officer.
- **Scope:** Visual Tree Assessment with risk-based prioritisation; detailed investigations (e.g., decay detection) where indicated.
- **Deliverables:** A survey report and map listing: tree ID, species, condition/defects, risk rating, priority actions with timescales, constraints (e.g., TPO's).

6.2 Reactive Inspections after Severe Weather

Trigger - The MET Office classifies damaging winds starting at Gale Force with wind speeds of 39 – 54 mph. **Therefore, any wind events with wind speeds above 39 mph will trigger a damage survey to all trees under RPC stewardship.**

Actions:

- A Tree Damage Survey should be conducted as soon as practicably possible after the wind event.
- A risk assessment for the surveying work will be carried out by the Environment Caretaker.
- The Environment Caretaker will conduct the survey. It will be ground-based and include but not be limited to visual checks of the crowns of trees, looking for damaged or detached and hanging branches and any weakened unions. Use of binoculars is advantageous.
- A visual check of stems to identify any movement or breaking, i.e. splits, cracks and opening fissures.
- A visual check of the ground around the trees to identify any signs of disturbance from root plate lift.

- Records kept of trees which have suffered damage and actions taken.

The survey will also include a more detailed check of any trees classed as vulnerable, this may be from age, being in an exposed position, or having had previous storm damage.

Where possible, visual checks on trees that are not on RPC land after a wind event, for instance roadside trees and trees on NKDC/LCC land, will be conducted. If a problem is found, it is to be reported to the relevant authority as soon as possible, by the Environment Caretaker or the Clerk.

RPC recognises that it is not always possible to know when a tree is going to fail as weaknesses are often internal and not visible or involve decayed roots which are underground and not visible. The tree damage survey is not a tool for predicting if a tree will fail; it is to spot failures which have taken place or have started to take place, so that work can be quickly scheduled to remove the risk to the public, contractors and employees of RPC.

Follow-up: If defects are suspected and the assessment cannot be undertaken by the Council's qualified Environment Caretaker, a competent arboriculturist/contractor will assess and make the site safe.

6.3 Ad-hoc & Interim Checks

- The Environment Caretaker will conduct an inspection of all trees in RPC stewardship annually and in autumn when tree structure is more visible.⁷
- The Council Caretakers/staff/contractors conducting routine site visits will remain vigilant and report visible defects (e.g., cracking, fungus, movement, dead/hanging branches) to the Clerk and Environment Caretaker as soon as possible.

7. Wildlife & Ecology

- Nesting Birds: No works that could take, damage or destroy an active nest; if discovered, stop and reschedule until fledging. Extra protections apply to Schedule 1 species (avoid disturbance near nests).
- Timing: Plan non-urgent works outside peak nesting season (approx. March–September) where possible; pre-work checks are required if working within this window.
- Other Protected Species/Habitats: If bats or other protected species/habitats may be affected, seek ecological advice and licensing as required.

8. Planning Controls (TPOs & Conservation Areas)

- Before works, the Clerk (or Environment Caretaker) will check TPO/Conservation Area status and obtain consent/serve notice as required.
- Local processes and contact details for North Kesteven District Council will be used for obtaining advice and submitting applications/Section 211 notices. Email: nk-treeofficers@n-kesteven.gov.uk Phone: 01629 414155.

9. Highways Interface

- Where RPC trees overhang the highway or affect sightlines/signs, RPC will act to maintain safe clearance and comply with Highways Act 1980 s.154 requirements/powers. Typical clearances

are guided locally by highway authorities (e.g., 2.4–2.6 m over footways and 5.05–5.2 m over carriageways).

10. Work Specification & Contractors

- All works will be specified in accordance with BS 3998:2010 and delivered by the qualified Environment Caretaker or a competent, insured arboricultural contractors (with appropriate qualifications.)
- Specifications will consider tree health, structural integrity, habitat value, and amenity, choosing the least-intervention option that achieves risk reduction (e.g., selective pruning instead of removal where appropriate).

11. Record-Keeping

RPC will maintain the following:

- Tree Asset Register & Plan: unique IDs, species, location, risk zone.
- Inspection Reports: dates, inspector, findings, photos, priority actions.
- Work Orders & Completion Records: caretaker, contractor, methods, BS 3998 compliance, waste/arising handling.
- Permissions: TPO/CA consents, ecological screening, felling licence decisions (or documented exemptions).
- Storm/Event Logs: weather trigger, sites checked defects and actions.

12. Public & Resident Enquiries

- The Clerk will acknowledge tree enquiries/complaints within **10 working days**, arrange inspection where appropriate, and respond with findings and planned actions.
- RPC will not normally undertake works solely to address: leaf/fruit/honeydew fall/bird droppings/ minor shading, TV/satellite reception or views—unless linked to safety, statutory duties, or planning consents.

13. Budgeting & Programming

- The Council will set an annual budget for inspections, emergency work and planned maintenance based on the latest 3-year survey.
- A rolling programme will group non-urgent works for efficiency and seasonal suitability (e.g., outside nesting season; appropriate pruning seasons under BS 3998).

14. Training & Competence

- Staff involved in basic post-storm checks and site safety will receive tree hazard awareness appropriate to their role and know when to escalate to the qualified Environment Caretaker or a competent arboriculturist.
- Tree work conducted by the Environment Caretaker must be within their qualifications.

15. Emergency Procedures

- If an RPC tree presents an immediate hazard (e.g., partially failed limb over a path/road, play area), the Environment Caretaker / Council staff member will:
 1. Cordone/close the area if safe to do so;
 2. Engage an emergency contractor to make safe, if outside of the Environment Caretakers ability and qualification.
 3. Notify highways/police if the public highway is affected;
 4. Record the incident, photos, and actions taken.

16. Planting, Replacement & Biodiversity

- Where trees must be removed, RPC will aim (subject to site suitability) to replace with appropriate native species and diversify age/species mix to improve resilience and local amenity/biodiversity. consistent with NTSG's emphasis on conserving benefits.
- Comply with the Council's environment policy.

17. Policy Review

- This policy will be **reviewed every two years** or sooner following significant changes in legislation, guidance or after a major incident.

18. Roles & Responsibilities

- Parish Council: Adopts policy; sets budget; receives annual summary.
- Parish Clerk: Policy owner; commissions surveys; instructs works; ensures records/consents; coordinates storm checks and emergency responses.
- Environment Caretaker (qualified) to undertake routine visual inspections and inspections following storms and high winds and undertake any tree work within their current qualifications.
- External Arboriculturists/ Local Authority Tree Officers Conduct 3-year surveys; provides impartial, risk-based recommendations; supports consent applications.
- Contractors: Deliver works safely to BS 3998, with ecological due diligence and waste management.

Appendices

Appendix A – Post-Storm Inspection Checklist (Rapid Visual)

- Date/time; weather trigger (attach Met Office alert if available)
- Sites walked (focus on public areas with high footfall / known higher-risk trees)
- Observations: fallen limbs, hangers, movement at base, cracks, fungus, utilities conflicts, highway obstruction
- Immediate actions: cordon, inform highways, contractor call-out
- Photos; name/signature

Appendix B – Tree Work Specification Notes (BS 3998)

- Objective, method, extent (% crown reduction/thin/lift with dimensions), pruning cuts, protection of public/structures, arisings, timing (avoid nesting), aftercare/monitoring.

Appendix C – Consent & Licence Triage

1. TPO/Conservation Area? If yes, apply/notify unless clear statutory or safety exemption applies—record basis.
2. Wildlife screen: Active nests/bats? If yes, pause/seek advice.
3. Felling licence needed? Check FC exemptions (small volumes, dangerous/windblown, lopping) or apply to FC. **Please refer to comment above reading felling licenses.** (Felling licenses are only applicable when 5 m³ or more timber is being produced, felling of dangerous trees are exempt from felling licencing. Record decision.

Useful websites

National Tree Safety Group – *Common sense risk management of trees* (2nd ed., 2024).
<https://ntsgroup.org.uk/>

- HSE SIM 01/2007/05 – *Management of the risk from falling trees or branches*.
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/>
- GOV.UK – *Tree Preservation Orders and trees in conservation areas*. <https://www.gov.uk/>
- Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (and Natural England standing advice on wild birds).
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/>
- Forestry Commission - *Tree felling licence: when you need to apply; Tree felling: getting permission* (2025). <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tree-felling-licence-when-you-need-to-apply>
- BS 3998:2010 – *Tree work – Recommendations*.
- Highways Act 1980 s.154 (overhanging vegetation).
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/section/154>
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds <https://www.rspb.org.uk/>
- North Kesteven District Council <https://www.n-kesteven.gov.uk/planning-building/planning/tree-protection-hedges>
- Wildlife & Countryside Act, Schedule 1 protection
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69/schedule/1>