

Subject:	Woodland Management in the Valley	Status:	Cabinet
Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	18 th October 2023
Report of:	Head of Environmental Services	Lead Member:	Environment and Corporate Services
Key Decision:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required: No	Attached:	No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment:	Required: No	Attached:	No
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1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that the Council introduces a Tree Inspection programme for maintained parks, cemeteries and other open spaces (detailed in para 5a) as follows;
 - Parks and Cemeteries – 2 yearly
 - Other Green Spaces – 4 yearly
- It is recommended that Unmaintained Woodland areas are not inspected under a formal inspection programme. The Unmaintained estate should remain as a responsive service, where Property Services obtain inspections / remedial works as required.
- It is recommended that the Council acknowledges the scale of Ash Dieback in the Maintained land and seeks to identify resources for a programme of removal.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 There is currently no formal Tree Risk Assessment Process and Maintenance Plan in place for the Council, this predominantly being an ad hoc, responsive service following falling trees, or at risk trees. Given Ash Dieback and other incidents in relating to falling trees, a formal risk assessment schedule is now required and resources identified to deal with at risk trees. The key areas for decision-making are as follows:

- The approach for managing the Ash Dieback situation in the Borough and the level of resource allocated towards this contract.
- The approach for managing tree work on the unmaintained estate in terms of funding and co-ordination of the work.

2.2 In order to implement a more proactive approach to tree management, it is proposed that an inspection programme is introduced with reference to the Council's maintained land in addition to the current reactive approach to maintained and unmaintained land.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Green Spaces Team operations cover the maintained estate of the Council. This includes parks and cemeteries, play areas, amenity grass and sports pitches. The trees within these sites are maintained by the Green Spaces Tree Team, which consists of a Charge Hand (Sports Turf and Arboriculture) and two Arborist Gardeners. The team are qualified to maintain and remove trees as necessary, including ground and aerial work. They function as the tree

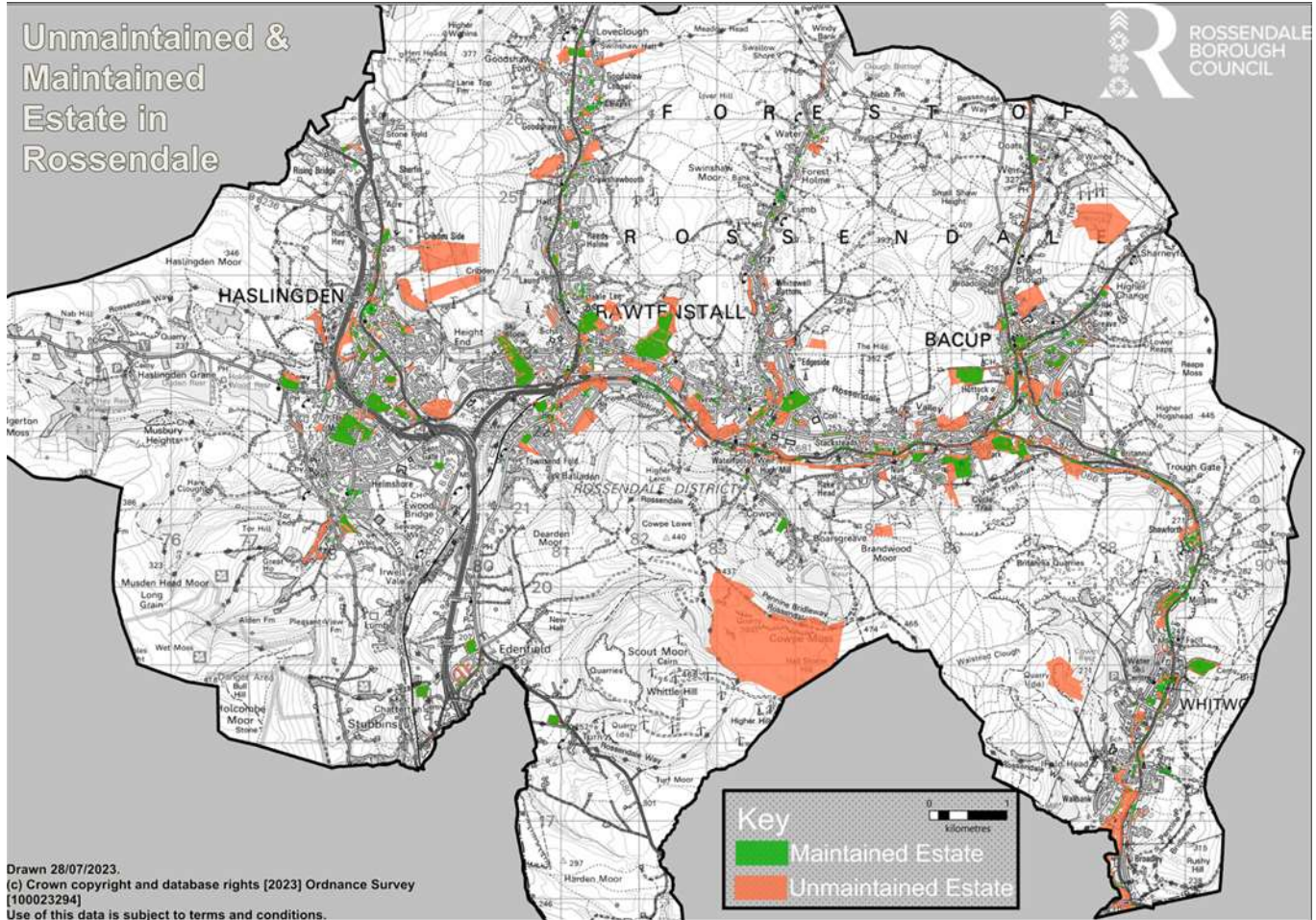
team from October to April, and then perform mowing tasks through the spring, and summer months. As a result, any tree work that is required in the summer has an impact on the Green Spaces mowing operations.

- 3.2 The vast majority of tree work takes place when trees are dormant and birds have left their nests, which is between October and March. However, inspections are most effectively carried out during the growing season (April – September). The Tree Team’s work schedule focuses on trees on the Council’s maintained estate; however, if emergency work is required on unmaintained woodlands then the Tree Team will carry this out.
- 3.3 Other work on the unmaintained estate is generally contracted out.

Current mapping and Tree information

- 3.4 There are a number of limitations of the Council’s current mapping and tree information. The Council’s latest GIS mapping survey was carried out in 2008. The information was solely for the maintained estate and contained no data on the areas/locations of tree cover and little information on the location of individual trees.
- 3.5 The Council’s Property Services department began an asset review in 2021. This involved a methodical survey of the Council’s maintained and unmaintained land identifying boundary issues and assessing land use possibilities. Currently only 2 out of 15 wards have been completed. The Council can currently only estimate the tree cover percentage on the unmaintained estate based on the land already surveyed.
- 3.6 There are over 500 Ash trees following a count of Ash trees in parks and cemeteries that was undertaken in November 2022. The Council holds a combination of paper and digital survey information of the trees maintained or felled and individual trees and particular plots of land where inspections and surveys have been carried out.
- 3.7 Except for the information gleaned from reactive inspections, it is important to note that there is limited information about the condition of trees on the maintained and unmaintained estate within the target areas of public footpaths, highways and private property.

Unmaintained & Maintained Estate in Rossendale



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RBC Estate (Property services figures)	Current responsibility	Inspections	Total area (sq. m)	Tree cover % (Est)	Tree cover area (sq. m)	Number of sites	Number of trees <100mm stem	Number of Ash trees <100mm stem (10% of total)	Estimated number of trees with Ash die back <100mm stem (80%)	Wooded area affecting footpaths, buildings and highways (sq. m)	Trees <100m stem affecting footpaths, buildings and highways (30%)	Ash trees <100mm stem affecting footpaths, buildings and highways
Parks and Cemeteries	Green Spaces	Annual	821590	10	82159	43	6847	685	548	24648	2054	383
Amenity and unmaintained areas	Green Spaces	Bi-annual	683340	10	68334	257	5695	569	456	20500	1708	319
Unmaintained (excluding Cragg Quarry)	Property Services	5 yearly	1380000	60	828000	200	92000	9200	7360	248400	27600	2208
										293548	31362	2910

4. DETAILS

Inspections

- 4.1 Inspections of trees are currently carried out in a reactive manner with any recommended works detailed for the tree team to carry out. If emergency work is detected it is carried out immediately. Otherwise, it forms the winter work programme.
- 4.2 Costs of tree surveys from private contractors varies dependent on the level of inspection and land area requested.

Tree Maintenance Work in Parks, Cemeteries and Green Spaces

- 4.3 Tree work on maintained sites is carried out by the Tree Team, from November to March, who then revert to mowing in the growing season. The work schedule is largely formed through service requests from the public. The subsequent site visits then form a programme of work for the team to work through. Additional tasks in parks are added by the team and involve proactive maintenance, but the large amount of work is reactive.
- 4.4 The Tree Team also assist Community Groups on the sites that they maintain by carrying out minor maintenance work when possible.

Tree Maintenance Work on the Unmaintained Estate

- 4.5 Any tree work on the unmaintained estate is the responsibility of Property Services. If work is required, this is either dealt with by the Green Spaces team or contracted out.

Ash Dieback

- 4.6 Ash Dieback first appeared in the UK in 2012 and is slowly spreading across the entirety. It is expected that approximately 80% of ash trees will be affected by it. This can affect them in varying degrees of severity and at differing rates. In that respect, it is still a bit of an unknown quantity.
- 4.7 The Green Spaces Team carried out a survey in 2022 of Ash trees in maintained sites. This came to over 500 identified in all of the sites. As the trees were not in leaf when this began, it is uncertain how many of this number are affected. As these sites are areas used by the public on a daily basis, there should be an acknowledgement of this from the Council in the form of resources to address the situation.

5. OPTIONS

a) No changes -

i) Maintained estate

The maintained estate is made up of the boroughs parks and cemeteries, play areas, amenity grass and sports pitches. With no changes, the Green Spaces team will continue to be reactive to tree service requests and enlist the assistance of the tree Charge Hand or external organisations where greater knowledge and experience is required to make effective decisions. There is potential for decisions to be inaccurate or delayed using this procedure given the limited tree experience and knowledge of the office based team and the time constraints of the Charge Hand.

There is currently no formal framework of tree inspections. When staff work on sites they have a duty to report any defects they see, however there are no written reports from these visits. As a result, this would not provide a robust defence for damage or

incidents involving fallen trees or limbs. The Green Spaces tree team will continue to undertake reactive, urgent tree work at all times of year. During the winter, the team will work through a list of trees from most urgent to least urgent. A cherry picker will be hired for works on Ash suffering from Dieback that are unsafe to climb using standard methods. Any work remaining at the end of winter will remain as 'work to be done' for the following winter season.

There will continue to be no formal tree management plan in place for trees. Ash trees will continue to be assessed and monitored on an ad-hoc basis when resources allow and service requests are followed up.

Trees that have not been assessed or monitored on well-used sites such as parks and cemeteries, will remain an increasing potential to cause injury and damage to buildings, highways and the public. The Council is vulnerable to trees failing and falling due to lack of proactive inspections, and a defence is limited in the case of any accidents.

ii) Unmaintained estate

The Green Spaces tree team will continue to undertake ad hoc and reactive urgent work on trees on the unmaintained estate when there is capacity. Green Spaces will continue to assist Property Services in their procurement of tree works from an external contractor where required.

It is important to note that officer and operational time will continue to be removed from managing and developing the maintained part of the Council's estate which the Green Spaces team have responsibility for.

There will be no proactive tree inspections, monitoring or data records for trees, including Ash with Dieback, on the unmaintained estate. Without information about tree stocks there will continue to be no formal strategic tree management plan in place to reduce the risks to the public, infrastructure and highways and reduce the legal, financial and reputational risks to the Council.

b) Outsourcing Tree Inspections

Costs of tree surveys from private contractors varies dependent on the level of inspection and land area requested and the detail required. The costs for outsourcing for individual surveys are costed at around £400 per day.

If the Council was to outsource its land and trees to be inspected it would cost in the region of £30k per year in fees to consultants. This figure takes into account the different land classifications and inspection frequencies. It does not take into account the management time for Green Spaces Officers. The figure would solely give the Council a report on the recommended works for the trees inspected. This would then need to be processed internally and prioritised by council officers before being allocated to tree staff. Checking the progress of the work and dealing with issues that arise will also have a time implication for existing officers. If the Council had a Tree Officer, this would form part of their workload.

It is worth noting that these costs may not include data system updates or the integration and coordination of workloads with the GS management and tree team. Similarly, a data management system would need to be implemented to ensure the efficient transfer and extraction of data to ensure the most urgent work is completed as a priority.

A single tree, or small site inspection could take around 3-4 hours to complete and be charged at £150. This could satisfy TPO removals or customer complaints etc. as independent surveys are received with greater confidence than in house assessments. This shows that the costs could rise for outsourcing this type of work and a more economical approach could be to inspect trees using the Council's human resources.

c) Contracting tree works

Tree works are usually costed at around £400 per mature tree. The number of trees requiring removal would be determined by the inspections and categorisation and some of these will be on the maintained estate in close proximity to footpaths, highways and buildings. If one tenth required removal each year for the next 10 years the Green Spaces tree team would only have 10 days per winter to undertake urgent work elsewhere. With over 11,000 mature trees in total on maintained land, and another 3060 located in target zones of priority spaces it highlights the large volume of tree work likely to be needed. Additionally, extra resources would need to deal with the Ash Dieback and other trees on the maintained estate.

There are expected to be circa 2000 Ash trees that need to be assessed on the unmaintained estate, each with the potential to impact highways, buildings and footpaths. Again, the numbers to be removed would be determined by tree inspections. However, if all required removal over the following ten years, and there was a steady decline, then around 200 trees would need removal each year. This would cost property services £88,400 per annum at standard rates. The removal of Ash Dieback could be more expensive than this due to the costs of hiring specialist plant to avoid climbing unsafe trees but these costs could be offset if the work was contracted out.

It is worth noting that there are expected to be an additional 25,392 mature trees near priority target zones. If 1% or 254 trees had serious defects or acquired defects over the next 10 years the costs of removal or maintenance could reach £101,600 or £10k per year.

d) Introduction of Tree Inspection Programme

Having regard to the above, it is proposed to introduce an inspection regime which will see parks and cemeteries being inspected 2 yearly and other Green Spaces inspected 4 yearly. This will complement the ad hoc and reactive inspections and seek to bring forward improved record management in terms of asset maintenance.

The proposed timescales have been determined based on what is reasonable in the circumstances including consideration around the risks to which people may be exposed. This will enable the risks associated with trees to be prioritised and help identify any checks, inspections or works needed in priority and public areas.

Once a tree has been identified as presenting an elevated risk action should be planned and taken to manage the risk and mitigate against any potential action against the Council. Inspection records will be maintained which will again help the Council defend claims brought by third parties.

The Council is not proposing to undertake the same level of inspections on unmaintained land and will continue on a reactive basis. Given the large number of trees in the borough, control measures that involve inspecting and recording every tree would be disproportionate to the risk.

6. RISK

- 6.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:
- Risk to the General Public of falling Trees
 - Liability to the Council of liability for any damage caused by falling trees
 - Risk of Identifying dead trees and not having sufficient resources in place to deal with dangerous trees.

7. FINANCE

- 7.1 The finance implications of implementing this tree inspection programme will only truly be understood once it is implemented. At the time of publishing this report, it is unknown how many trees will require works and therefore actual costs cannot be calculated.
- 7.2 It is important that the programme is managed in a way to mitigate financial risk as much as possible.
- 7.3 Currently tree works are managed within service area budgets for Parks and Property and this would continue under the new inspection programme.
- 7.4 Any enhancement to the inspection programme will require additional resources to be identified.

8. LEGAL

- 8.1 Legal implications are covered in the body of the report. The implementation of a new programme of inspections will assist the Council mitigate against and defend claims. It will be important to ensure that works are carried out in a timely manner once the Council is on notice of tree works or removal needed.

9. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no direct policy or equality implications arising from the body of this report.

10. REASON FOR DECISION

- 10.1 To acknowledge the Council's proposed approach to tree management and inspection within the borough whilst noting the impact of Ash Dieback and the potential resource implications this brings.

No background papers