

NEWS RELEASE



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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BRANCHING OUT FOR FEEDBACK ON PLAN TO PROTECT OUR TREES

Residents' views are being sought on proposals to clearly outline how existing trees are cared for, and new ones are planted, across Wokingham borough.

Wokingham Borough Council is consulting on its tree strategy, which it is drawing up to protect the local environment and biodiversity as well as the health of everyone who lives, works or studies in the area.

The proposals, which were shaped by feedback from outside experts and the authority's officers, cover all trees from saplings to mature, ancient and veteran trees or hedgerows, orchards and woodlands.

Topics include better co-ordination of how the council's trees are managed and maintained, developers' responsibilities towards planting and measures to protect trees with historic or community value.

The strategy sets short, medium and long-term goals to be met over the next 10 years, which include reaching the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations' Tree City of the World standards.

Protecting habitats, natural beauty and the environment

The proposals support the council's drive to increase planting on public and private land, in line with its climate emergency action plan, to offset carbon emissions and a recent decline in individual trees.

This is set to receive another boost as the planting season begins, with individuals, businesses and community groups about to collect their trees under the council's Garden Forest Scheme. More information about this, along with details of how to get involved, will be published soon.

By aiming to increase tree numbers and protect them, with some programmes receiving Government funding, the council will ensure there are plenty of diverse wildlife habitats across the borough.

The strategy will also help the authority meet its pledge to do all it can to help the borough become a net-zero carbon producer by 2030, as trees naturally absorb carbon dioxide and produce oxygen.

It is part of a broader range of measures to cut carbon emissions, like reducing car journeys by making sustainable alternatives more accessible, making council buildings more energy efficient and enabling homeowners to do the same.

Some trees absorb other harmful pollutants from vehicle emissions, so the strategy will improve air quality too. Additionally, preserving treasured trees for future generations will directly improve everyone's health as contact with nature has proven mental and emotional benefits.

Improving on a firm commitment to our greenery

The council has policies on how trees are maintained, but this strategy will bring them together and make the process clearer for everyone - whether the council's officers acting to protect them or the public reporting issues.

For example, it will outline how trees can be nominated for protected status, or how the council will act when protected trees are threatened by disease or the breach of a preservation order.

Additionally, surveys have been carried out to give the authority a clear understanding of the number, quality and value of trees both on its land and in the borough as a whole. These outline precisely how many there are and how they help to absorb carbon or prevent water run-off.

The strategy will guide developers on how trees should be included in new housing schemes or other projects, and help keep the public safe by improving the council's inspection programmes.

Although there is no Government requirement to produce this document, it is strongly encouraged by bodies like the Woodland Trust and the authority is pleased to be going the extra mile.

Why trees matter to people and our landscape

According to surveys, the borough's trees absorb more than 12 kilotons of carbon a year - the amount produced driving 29,784,000 miles in a family car, which would cost about £3 million to offset.

Tree cover in the borough makes up at least 22 per cent of the land, which is above the national average of 16 per cent. This prevents more than 985 million litres of rainwater run-off per year, the equivalent to 394 Olympic swimming pools - saving water companies more than £1.5 million annually.

Several trees are thought to have grown in the early modern or Tudor period and areas like Hazleton's copse, an ancient protected woodland in Arborfield, were documented as far back as 1607.

Much of the borough was once part of Windsor Great Park so many of the straight roads to the south are former forest rides, with ornamental trees planted in the reigns of Queen Anne (1702-1714) and King George III (1760-1820). Wellingtonia Avenue, in Finchampstead, is lined with 111 giant sequoias in memory of the Duke of Wellington.

Other trees were planted to honour monarchs like the 60 oaks, including one in the grounds of the council's Shute End offices, that mark Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee in 2012.

Looking after a valued asset that looks after us

Cllr Ian Shenton, executive member for environment, sport and leisure, said: "Despite their enormous value to people and the world around them, it's easy to take the trees we walk past daily for granted.

"However, our quality of life would be so much poorer if we failed to look after them. They silently make our community and environment a better place year after year, so we have a duty of care to them.

"By spelling out clearly how we plan to do this in a single document, it will be easier for our teams to work together towards this important goal – and for you to understand how you can help us.

"As residents of this beautiful borough, you are our eyes and ears - so please take the time to read our draft strategy and let us know if you would change anything."

Plenty of time to have your say

The draft tree strategy may be viewed on the council's Engage Wokingham Borough platform, and a survey taken, until 22 January. The consultation has been extended to run for eight weeks, two weeks beyond the required minimum, so everyone can respond over the festive period.

Visitors can view and rate specific proposals and leave their own comments, which will be taken into account before the final document is published later next year.

For help completing the survey, or to view and respond in other formats like paper or electronic (PDF), call the council on 0118 974 6000 or visit one of the borough's libraries.

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Further information:

1. More from Cllr Ian Shenton, executive member for environment, sport and leisure, at ian.shenton@wokingham.gov.uk