



Surrey Heath Borough Council

# TREE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2023-33



**April 2023**

Surrey Heath Borough Council  
Knoll Road, Camberley GU15 3HD



## Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Our Vision</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. Background</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4. Trees in Surrey</b>	<b>5</b>
4.1. Trees in Surrey Heath	5
4.2. Surrey County Council	6
4.3. Planning Control and Planning Policy in Relation to Trees	6
<b>5. The Importance of Trees</b>	<b>7</b>
5.1. The Value of Trees and Woodland	7
5.2. Challenges for Trees	9
5.3. The Future of Trees	10
<b>6. Our Responsibilities</b>	<b>11</b>
6.1. Legal Obligations	11
6.2. Protecting Our Trees	11
6.3. Planting Trees in the Right Place	12
6.4. Tree Pruning	13
<b>7. Implementation of the Strategy</b>	<b>14</b>
7.1. Action Plan	14
7.2. Governance and Next Steps	16
<b>8. Useful Links</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>9. References</b>	<b>17</b>



## I. Introduction

This Strategy acknowledges how important trees are to the local community, the benefits they bring, and the way that they help to mitigate for the effects of climate change. The action plan provides direction on how to achieve and maintain high tree coverage within in the borough.

Though no scientific definition exists to separate trees and shrubs, a useful definition for a tree is a woody plant having one erect perennial stem (trunk) at least three inches in diameter at a point 4-1/2 feet above the ground, a definitely formed crown of foliage, and a mature height of at least 13 feet (Kuhns, 2022).

Trees are a valuable resource. They contribute to the quality and character of Surrey Heath's unique environment, and to improving air quality, climate amelioration, conserving water, preserving soil, and supporting wildlife. An estimated 36.1% of Surrey Heath is forested. For these reasons and for their intrinsic value, the Council places great weight on the retention of existing trees wherever possible.

The Tree Strategy and Action Plan are supported by the Climate Change Working Group.

## 2. Our Vision

This Strategy describes how Surrey Heath Borough Council will approach the management of trees and woodland. It is important that the benefits of trees, hedgerows and woodland are considered in relation to the need for development and, that existing trees are safeguarded and opportunities are taken to increase provision.



Proper planning and maintenance creates healthy and robust woodland which is better able to thrive in our changing climate, provide important habitats, and deliver the multitude of benefits we all appreciate. Actions 1 and 2 of the Action plan directly relate to increasing tree planting within the Borough and actions 4 and 5 aim to improve tree maintenance (see pages 14-15).

The aim of this Strategy is to reinforce the Council's role as a responsible tree owner and to encourage residents and partners to be responsible tree owners. It promotes the planting of trees in new developments, provides direction for the increase of canopy cover, and highlights the environmental importance of trees.

### 3. Background

On the 9 of October 2019, the Council declared a Climate Emergency and pledged to become carbon neutral by 2030 across its own estate and operations, including contractors used, and support the actions being taken by Surrey County Council in this area.

To this end, Surrey Heath Borough Council has developed a [Climate Change Action Plan](#) with two key aims:

- 1 To work towards achieving the ambitious net-zero carbon emission target by 2030 as an organisation and contribute to making the Borough net zero by 2050 (with the aspiration for net zero by 2030).
- 2 To ensure that the Council as an organisation is resilient to the impacts of climate change and support the resilience of the Borough to the impacts of climate change.



Part of the Climate Change Action plan is to undertake a tree density assessment of the Borough, giving a clear understanding of tree cover in the borough (ET3), as well as working with partners to facilitate a tree planting and green infrastructure strategy (specific to climate change), taking account of the Borough's biodiversity assets (ET10). Action 9 of the Tree Strategy Action Plan supports the aim of understanding how many trees are in the borough (see page 16).

Surrey Heath is fortunate to have large areas of high quality green space, countryside and internationally important habitats. The challenges facing our planet should not be underestimated and caring for it has never been so important. We are committed to showing leadership, working with partners, businesses and residents to undertake local action on the environment. In doing so we will work to protect and enhance our natural environment for future generations.

## 4. Trees in Surrey

### 4.1. Trees in Surrey Heath

Surrey is the most wooded county in England with 30.9% of the land covered by trees (Shaw, 2021) and Surrey Heath has estimated 36.1% of tree cover which is the highest of any local authority in the UK (Horton, 2023).

Trees are a defining characteristic of Surrey Heath; they provide important local landmarks, transform roads into green corridors and make a valuable contribution to the character and quality of urban environments. They complement the built environment by providing screening, perspective, privacy and seclusion and define open spaces. The three most common trees in Surrey Heath are Scots Pine, Silver Birch, and English Oak.



## 4.2. Surrey County Council

Surrey Heath is committed to supporting Surrey County Council to meet their goals regarding Climate Change and Tree Planting. Surrey County Council's Tree Strategy can be found [here](#).

As part of Surrey County Council's ambition to be a carbon neutral county by 2050, the [Climate Change Strategy](#) sets out a target to facilitate the planting of 1.2 million new trees (one for every resident) by 2030. This ambition is not something that the County Council can deliver alone. Therefore, their New Tree Strategy is for the whole of Surrey, including residents, businesses, the public sector and both borough and district authorities, with the County Council taking a coordinating role. Surrey Heath's Tree Strategy contributes to the delivery of County's Strategy.

## 4.3. Planning Control and Planning Policy in Relation to Trees

The National Planning Policy Framework states that planning policies should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that opportunities are taken to incorporate existing tree elsewhere in developments (such as parks, community orchards, and open areas within the sit) that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees for at least five years post planting, and that existing trees are retained wherever as a priority. Applicants should work with highways officers and tree officers to ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places, and solutions are found that are compatible with highways standards and the needs of different users.

This Strategy will feed into the Surrey Heath Borough Council local plan. Actions 6, 7 and 8 of the Action Plan relate to planning policy and the future Local plan (see





pages 15-16). When developed, the future Local Plan will include a detailed policy on trees, as well as wider climate change policies.

## 5. The Importance of Trees

### 5.1. The Value of Trees and Woodland

Trees and hedgerows provide a valuable resource in terms of biodiversity, amenity and for climate change adaption and mitigation, providing habitats for a range of wildlife, and forming a “carbon sink”. They reduce the risks of flooding and can help to reduce the Urban Heat Island effect where urban areas experience higher temperatures than non-urban areas. The woodland trust states that ‘if the UK is to reach its carbon neutral target by 2050 there needs to be an ‘increase in woodland cover from 13% to 19%’ (Woodland Trust, 2022). Find more on the values of trees on the [Woodland Trust](#) and [Royal Parks](#) websites.

Action 3 of the Action Plan supports promoting the educational benefits of trees to people in the community (see page 15).

#### Climate Change Adaptation

- Trees, hedgerows, and other vegetation are key in capturing and storing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) which is the most prevalent greenhouse gas in the United Kingdom. Woodland is the most effective habitat for CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration, as emissions are sequestered within the soil as well as the trees. A tree will absorb anywhere between 10 and 40kg of CO<sub>2</sub> per year on average (EcoTree, 2022).
- Trees provide areas of shade in built-up urban areas as well as providing a source of natural flood risk management.



- Trees reduce wind speeds and cool the air as they lose moisture and reflect heat upwards from their leaves. It's estimated that trees can reduce the temperature in a city by up to 7°C (The Royal Parks, 2022).

### **Air Quality**

- Trees and vegetation can have a positive impact on air quality in urban areas. Trees can remove small amounts of particulate matter (PM) pollutants from the air through deposition to the surface of the leaves. In Surrey, it is estimated that the equivalent of 471 deaths per year can be attributed to long-term exposure to particulates (Surrey County Council, 2020).

### **Health and Wellbeing**

- Trees and green spaces are well-known to have a positive impact on health and wellbeing.
- Green spaces provide an area for physical activities, leisure and, play.
- Trees have been linked to improvements in stress, anxiety, and mental health. Research shows that within minutes of being surrounded by trees and green space, your blood pressure drops, your heart rate slows, and your stress levels come down (The Royal Parks, 2022).

### **Education**

- Woodland areas provide a space for accessible education in a natural environment.

### **Economy**

- Green infrastructure supports local economic growth through the attraction of visitor spending, environmental cost savings, health improvement, market spend and employment generation.





- Tourism to rural and wooded areas makes a significant contribution to Surrey's economy.
- Research shows that average house prices are 5-18% higher when properties are close to mature trees (Surrey County Council, 2020).

## Biodiversity

- Increasing tree cover creates biodiversity benefits and increased habitats, provided that the right trees are planted in the right places.
- Trees and hedgerows host complex microhabitats. They offer habitation and food to birds, insects, lichen and fungi.

## 5.2. Challenges for Trees

### Oak Processionary Moths (OPM)

- [Oak processionary moths \(OPM\)](#) are a species whose caterpillars cause significant damage to oak trees by consuming their foliage, and can cause irritation to anyone who comes into direct contact.

### Ash Dieback

- [Ash dieback](#) is a highly destructive disease of ash trees (*Fraxinus* species), especially the United Kingdom's native ash species, common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*). It is caused by a fungus named *Hymenoscyphusfraxineus*.

### Summer Branch Drop

- Summer branch drop syndrome is an issue that typically occurs during the summer and affects completely healthy trees. It is when trees suddenly lose their branches during the warmer months of the year. It is most likely linked to water availability and heat stress.



- Any tree can be affected by sudden branch drop syndrome, however there are certain types that are more likely to experience this issue such as oak, beech, elm, eucalyptus, and sycamore trees.

### **Development**

- The clearing of trees for development such as agriculture, farming, residential and commercial development, and logging is the biggest threat to trees worldwide.

### **Hot weather and Drought**

- During prolonged droughts and extreme heat waves native trees that are accustomed to the local climate can start to develop symptoms of heat stress.
- Drought disrupts the water transport within trees by reducing the amount of water available for the tree. If a tree can't get water to its leaves, it will die.

## **5.3. The Future of Trees**

As the climate warms, trees and woodlands are on the first line of the crisis. They are at greater risk of droughts, wildfires, and invasive species.

If trees are not protected and deforestation increases, it will adversely affect ecosystems, local weather patterns, pollution, and climate. Some consequences of deforestation are:

- Trees have a large impact on the water cycle; they absorb water from the ground and release it into the atmosphere, which form clouds and deposit the water back to Earth in the form of rain. Fewer trees mean less life-sustaining water everywhere.
- Deforestation destroys habitats for native species which would lead to the extinction of many groups of organisms.



- Without trees, formerly forested areas would become drier and more prone to extreme droughts. Drier land can increase the chances of rain causing extreme flooding.

## 6. Our Responsibilities

### 6.1. Legal Obligations

As a land owner, we have a duty for the care and management of council-owned trees within the Borough to ensure they remain safe as reasonably practicable. When assessing requests for pruning or removal of council-owned trees, we will only consider tree work where our inspection has identified that there is an elevated risk to persons or property.

In the case of protected, council-owned trees, we will consider pruning in line with “common law rights” in the same way as any protected tree. A Tree Preservation Order application or a Section 211 notification must be made. We will however not allow excessive pruning to Council trees for reasons shown in 6.4 of this document.

### 6.2. Protecting Our Trees

Trees and woodlands may be protected under The Town and Country Planning Act (Tree Preservation)(England) Regulations 2012 via a Tree Preservation Order (TPO).

The management of TPOs is administered by Surrey Heath Borough Council in its role as the Local Planning Authority (LPA) and TPO’s are made to protect trees or woodlands that provide significant amenity benefit to the area.



Trees within a Conservation Area are protected under Section 211 of Town and County Planning Act. Any contravention of a TPO or the Conservation area is an offence, the legislation requires the Local Planning Authority's written permission to be obtained prior to pruning, felling or undertaking work that disturbs the tree or its root system. Offences for contravention of a TPO are set out under Section 210 of the Town and Country Planning Act to include where work is done to a protected tree, either wilfully or recklessly without the LPA's permission.

The penalty for contravention could be a criminal conviction and a fine, for which the benefit accrued could be a determining factor.

Before any work is undertaken, you should check the tree is not subject to:

- Tree Preservation Order (TPO)
- In a Conservation Area (6 weeks' notice required for trees with a stem over 75mm in diameter measured at 1.5m above ground level)
- Subject to a restrictive Planning Condition

Find out more about [Tree Information and Preservation Orders](#).

### **6.3. Planting Trees in the Right Place**

The Council commits to choosing the right place for new trees to be planted. We will carefully consider the most effective places for the greatest environmental benefits and to help combat climate change.



## 6.4. Tree Pruning

If the tree is subject to a TPO, in a conservation area or subject of a restrictive planning condition you will need to follow Council procedure to obtain the consent of the Council to prune any part of the tree. Please see [frequently asked questions here](#).

The Council will not approve the excessive pruning or removal of a protected tree in the following situations:

- To prevent or reduce bird droppings or the use by mammals such as squirrels.
- To mitigate or reduce the nuisance of tree sap (honeydew), falling leaves, seeds or fruits from either the homeowners or third party land.
- To improve natural light in a property or garden.
- Because a tree is considered to be 'too big' or 'too tall'.
- To prevent interference with TV and satellite reception or solar panels.
- To remove or reduce interference with telephone or electrical wires.
- To alleviate the nuisance of overhanging branches where such works would leave the tree unbalanced.
- Because a tree is perceived as causing or exacerbating a personal medical condition.
- Due to drainage or utility service issues.
- Due to disruption of drives, paths, shed bases etc.

If any type of bird is nesting in a tree or hedge then it is [legally protected](#), so long as the nest is in use. This may prohibit certain types of tree pruning or removal until the nesting season is over. The bird nesting season according to Natural England begins on March 1st and runs through to July 31st. This is a guideline and it can be



assumed that birds will nest both before and after this time period. Penalties that can be imposed for criminal offences in respect of a single bird, nest or egg contrary to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is an unlimited fine, up to six months imprisonment or both.

Find more [Tree Advice and Guidance](#) for landowners, homeowners, arboricultural contractors and consultants.

We recommend people look at the [Arboricultural Association](#) when looking for a contractor and general tree information

## 7. Implementation of the Strategy

### 7.1. Action Plan

	Objective	Action	Target	Responsibility
1	Increase opportunities for fruit foraging in the Borough.	Establishing community native fruit hedgerows and/or orchard initiatives in every SANG.	Minimum of one SANG every year	Green Space Officer (SANGS)
2	Report on tree planting	Report on numbers of trees planted	4,000 trees per year for 2023/24 with a review for 2024/25 to establish ongoing	Green Space team





	Objective	Action	Target	Responsibility
			planting aspirations	
3	Deliver educational training for all ages on the benefits of trees	Working independently or with others (e.g. the Museum), deliver educational workshops.	4 per year	Green Space team
4	Support the volunteer groups to help maintain tree stock	Promote the work of volunteers and help them to apply for grants.	Have 6 joint projects working with volunteers throughout the year	Green Space team
5	Commit to having the appropriate infrastructure to maintain tree stock	Annual audit of tree stock and equipment	Update GIS accordingly and maintain levels of equipment	Green Space team
6	Use the planning system to enhance tree planting in the Borough	Ensure that Planning Policy facilitates this through the new Local Plan.	Adopt new Local Plan with tree policy in line with the Local Development Scheme	Planning Services



	Objective	Action	Target	Responsibility
7	Use the planning system to protect trees in the Borough	Ensure that Planning Policy facilitates this through the new Local Plan.	Adopt new Local Plan with tree policy in line with the Local Development Scheme	Planning services
8	Planting of trees to provide shade, flood management, and cooling.	Consider tree sponsorship scheme for residents in open spaces	Adopt new Local Plan with tree policy in line with the Local Development Scheme	Planning Services
9	Have a clear understanding of how many trees are in the borough	In line with Climate Action Plan, assess the feasibility of a tree density assessment of the borough	Feasibility study produced	Green Space team

## 7.2. Governance and Next Steps

The action plan updates will be presented to the Climate Change Working Groups throughout the year. The annual actions will be reviewed under the Climate Change Action Plan.

The strategy will be reviewed annually taking into consideration the emerging climate change directives and current legislation and guidance.



## 8. Useful Links

[SHBC Tree Advice and Guidance](#)

[Surrey County Council Tree Strategy](#)

[The England Trees Action Plan 2021-2024](#)

## 9. References

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