

Leisure & Recreation Committee Report

Date: 5th March 2026

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Subject: Review of the Tree Planting Policy

1. Purpose of the Report

To present the revised Tree Planting in Public Space Policy for Committee consideration following a structured review of the policy adopted in September 2023, and to seek approval to recommend the updated policy to Full Council.

The report also outlines the key amendments made to the policy, assesses improvements against the previous version, and recommends the review of parish tree canopy data to provide an updated evidence base.

2. Background

Central Swindon North Parish Council adopted a Tree Planting in Public Space Policy in September 2023 to guide decision-making regarding tree planting and management within the public realm. [Tree-Planting-Policy-September-2023.pdf](#)

Since adoption, the Council has delivered significant planting programmes across multiple locations through grant funded initiatives and partnership working. This has resulted in the establishment of a substantial number of new trees.

The scale of planting activity has increased the Council's role in the long term stewardship and management of public tree assets. A review of the policy was therefore considered necessary to ensure it reflects:

- operational experience gained through planting programmes;
- ongoing maintenance and financial implications;
- governance and decision-making arrangements;
- current national and local policy context; and
- updated evidence requirements.

The Finance & General Purposes Committee requested that the policy be reviewed by L&R to ensure it remains appropriate and robust.

3. Summary of Policy Review

The review has confirmed that the 2023 policy provides a strong foundation in relation to urban design principles, site considerations and species selection. However, it was primarily written as a guidance document and did not fully reflect the Council's expanded role in delivery, managing a growing stock of trees.

The revised policy strengthens governance, clarifies responsibilities and introduces a framework for monitoring and ongoing management while retaining the original principles and local context.

4. Key Changes to the Policy (Change Log)

The revised policy retains the structure and intent of the 2023 document where appropriate but introduces additional sections and clarifies responsibilities.

4.1 New Sections

Policy Status and Scope

- Clarifies the Parish Council's role as a non statutory delivery authority.
- Defines the policy's application to Parish led and partnership planting.
- Clarifies relationship with Swindon Borough Council responsibilities.

Local Context – Central Swindon North

- Provides a clearer description of the Parish's urban environment.
- Recognises air quality pressures, urban constraints and distribution of tree cover.
- Strengthens place based decision making.

Tree Asset Management and Maintenance

- Introduces establishment and maintenance requirements.
- Recognises long-term financial implications.
- Introduces tree asset recording.

Monitoring and Reporting Framework

- Introduces monitoring of planting activity.
- Establishes review cycle.
- Commits to canopy cover review.

Community Engagement

- Provides framework for community requests.
- Encourages coordinated planting.

4.2 Strengthened Existing Sections

Purpose and Aims

- Updated to reflect lifecycle management and financial sustainability.

Implementation

- Governance arrangements clarified.
- Working Group advisory role recognised.
- Programme approval process defined.

Species Selection

- Updated to emphasise resilience and diversity.
- Reduced dependence on fixed climate projections.

Urban Design and Site Considerations

- Expanded accessibility and safety considerations.
- Greater emphasis on long term planning.

4.3 Sections Retained from 2023 Policy

The following core elements of the 2023 policy remain largely unchanged:

- environmental, social and economic value of trees;
- practical site considerations;
- urban design principles;
- canopy baseline information (now identified as historic data).

5. Improvements

The revised policy provides:

- clearer governance arrangements;
- recognition of long-term maintenance responsibilities;
- improved financial awareness;
- greater transparency in decision making;
- monitoring and reporting framework;
- clearer policy scope and application.

Overall, the revised policy represents a progression from a guidance document to a delivery and asset management framework appropriate to the Council's current role.

6. Tree Canopy Cover Evidence and Data Review

The current policy references historic canopy data and local estimates. These figures now provide baseline context only and do not reflect recent planting activity.

To support evidence-based decision-making, it is recommended that the Council:

- review national and local canopy cover datasets;
- establish an updated parish baseline;
- commission updated mapping
- implement a five year review cycle; and
- monitor the impact of Parish planting programmes on canopy change.

This approach will enable the Council to measure progress and support future funding applications.

Officers have approached SBC for assistance with this – waiting response.

7. Financial and Risk

Tree planting creates long term financial commitments relating to establishment, inspection, maintenance and replacement. The revised policy introduces stronger recognition of these responsibilities and supports prudent financial planning.

8. Environmental Implications

The updated policy supports the continued enhancement of the Parish environment through appropriate tree planting while recognising operational and financial constraints.

9. Recommendations

The Leisure & Recreation Committee is requested to:

1. **NOTE** the outcome of the policy review.
2. **APPROVE** the revised Tree Planting in Public Space Policy.
3. Present the updated policy to Finance & General Purposes for adoption.
4. Support the review of parish tree canopy data to establish an updated baseline.
5. **NOTE** that the policy will be reviewed within five year or as legislation requires.