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Tree policy for South Petherton Parish Council

Why are trees important?

- a) They make our village more attractive and desirable
- b) Absorb air pollution and noise
- c) Intercept rainfall and reduce runoff and flooding
- d) Provide shade and shelter for people and animals
- e) Create a variety of habitats for wildlife
- f) Help to emphasise the changing season
- g) Produce fruits, nuts and seeds
- h) Produce firewood
- i) Help to combat climate change by sequestering CO₂
- j) Are a source of inspiration and have health and well being benefits

Why should Parish/Town Council take positive actions to protect and plant trees?

Throughout the county medium sized elm trees are still dying from elm disease. These are the latest victims of a disease which has killed millions of trees in Somerset and probably many hundreds in every parish and town. No-one has been counting!

As ash dieback disease also becomes more prevalent over the next few years we are likely to see many more dead trees appearing. Ash is the most common species over much of England and this area is no exception. While the elms that die are relatively small trees, there are many large ash which will be susceptible and the loss of these will be visually a very significant loss to the Parish/Town.

There follows a list of possible policies with corresponding recommendations which can be selected and adopted by a Parish or Town Council. Of course the policies can be adopted wholesale – as they have been by North Curry PC and Langport TC.

Recommendations for actions to address continuing tree loss and promote tree planting.

- 1) When applications are made to fell trees and agreement is given, the PC will, whenever possible, request that a suitable replacement tree, or trees, are planted, either on or near the felled tree or on an alternative site to be agreed with the owner.

Recommendation: For every tree felled at least one replacement be planted.

- 2) The PC will seek an agreement with their local district council (as Planning Authority) that a replanting condition will be included in all consents which are granted in the village/town.
Recommendation: An agreement will be sought with the District Council in respect of replacement planting.

- 3) The PC will take an active interest in ensuring that all trees, shrubs and hedges which are planted on development sites (as a condition of planning consent) are actually planted and that they survive. Where trees are lost the developer has an obligation to replace any losses for a period of 5 years. While this is sometimes monitored by district officers they are not always aware of the local situation and the PC/TC is in a good position to monitor losses and notify the district that enforcement action be taken where necessary.
Recommendation: The Council will notify the District Council about non compliance with planting conditions on development sites.

- 4) Where trees in the Parish are removed or are to be removed without requiring any consent, the PC will take the initiative and encourage owners to plant replacements on or near the site of the removed tree. This policy will be publicised locally so that Parishioners know that this is an issue about which the PC are concerned and are less likely to be surprised if they are approached after a tree is removed.
Recommendation: The Council will encourage tree replacement where no statutory obligation applies and will publicise this policy widely.

- 5) In some cases, occupants of new houses may not welcome the trees or shrubs in their gardens which are a planning condition and remove them. The PC will perform a monitoring role and keep the District council informed, where possible negotiating a more suitable location for unwanted trees by agreement with all parties.
Recommendation: The Council will monitor trees adjacent to new houses which are part of a planning condition, inform District Council of removals, and negotiate replanting.

- 6) The PC will take an active role in finding suitable sites for planting new trees and have an annual tree and shrub planting programme. The relatively low cost of this will be met from a variety of sources including the Parish precept or Community Infrastructure Levy or S106 funds. Unlike high tiers of Local Government, their precept is not presently capped. As tree planting is a relatively low cost activity and Parish Councils are close to the 'grass roots' of local affairs, they are well placed to take tree planting initiatives. Local volunteers may be prepared to help plant the trees. In some locations shrubs may be preferable to trees.
Recommendation: The Council will identify opportunities for tree planting in the parish, help with funding packages for tree planting, and involve the community as volunteers where possible.

- 7) If ready identification of sites for tree planting proves difficult a thorough local survey will be conducted to identify suitable planting sites. Notices will be placed in local publications asking the public to offer up or identify sites which could then be explored to check their suitability. A parish map will then be produced showing suitable sites. Some sites may be more suitable for new shrubs rather than trees, in locations under overhead wires for example.
Recommendation: The Council will, in the event of failing to identify sites for tree planting, initiate a survey of the parish, publicise the search, and produce a map of potential sites.

- 8) The PC will consider the appointment of a dedicated Tree Warden – who might or might not be a member of the PC. The Tree warden role could be shared, or combined with the Footpath Warden role.

Recommendation: The Council will appoint a Tree Warden to inform the Council about tree matters, advise on suitable actions and lead on the co-ordination of tree planting projects.

- 9) Consultation on a draft tree policy will ideally be carried out by putting the draft policy on the Parish council website and inviting people to comment through an agreed feedback mechanism. Notice will be given of the Parish Council meeting at which adopting the policy will be proposed.

Recommendation: The Council will publicise its draft Tree Policy, allow for feedback, and publicise the meeting at which the Policy will be proposed.

- 10) The Parish Council will use its best endeavours to support the creation of new community woodlands and the maintenance of existing community woodlands and community orchards in their parish/town.

Recommendation: The Council will promote, publicise and support the creation of new community woodlands and community orchards and the maintenance of existing ones in this parish or town.

Existing Tree Care in the Parish

For Council (SPPC) owned trees, we will endeavour to:

- Maintain our trees in a safe condition
- Prune trees when our trees are causing an actual nuisance, i.e. damage to buildings (advise the customer to contact their household insurer if there are cracks in a wall)

Tree works the Council are not able to do:

- To prune privately owned trees
- To prune trees back because they are overhanging
- To systematically prune trees to control their size/height
- To prune or remove trees in order to improve light (if the trees are evergreen in a line of two or more, refer call to Parish Council – 01460 241002)
- To prune or remove trees to improve a view
- To prune or remove trees because of falling leaves, sap, seeds or debris
- To prune or remove trees to improve television or satellite reception

Common tree related enquiries: How we assist

If the customer is concerned about:

- Electricity cables (trees interfering with): Scottish and Southern Power – 0845 7708090
- South West Electricity Board – 0845 6012989
- Telephone wires: 'B.T. Faults' – 0800 800151
- Trees threatening or obstructing the Highway (including pavements); Somerset Council Highways – 0845 3459155
- Trees obstructing streetlights; Somerset Council Streetlight Department – 01823 423366
- Trees obstructing Rights of Way (ROW); Somerset Council Highways – 0845 3459155
- High evergreen hedges – Refer to Tree Officer: 01935 462670
- Nesting birds and roosting bats - Contact the Police

- If the customer is unsure about which arborist to employ: helpful consumer advice and directories are available at: www.trees.org.uk

Doing the work yourselves

In common law, a property owner can cut back overhanging branches to the boundary of his/her property. The Parish Council will usually have no objection to property owners carrying out this type of tree works or engaging a contractor at their own expense, **providing:**

- Access is not gained via Council land or trees without written permission of the Parish Council – contact the Clerk: Kate Alford 01460 241002 / clerk@southpethertonparishcouncil.gov.uk
- The tree is not situated within a Conservation Area or subject to a Tree Preservation Order – refer to Somerset Council Tree Officer on 01935 462670
- That any work to the tree is not detrimental to its health or stability and is carried out in accordance with British Standard 3998: 2010 – Tree Works
- That the cut branches are disposed of in a responsible manner and that no unauthorised damage to Council property occurs