Policy 26 – Tree Management

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Responsible Officer:	Director - Infrastructure

OBJECTIVE

This Tree Management Policy (the Policy) has been developed in order to:

▪ document a clear and consistent approach to the way the Dorset Council (Council) manages tree assets; and

▪ assist Council staff in determining priorities for tree programs and works.

The Policy will provide principles and describe processes for addressing:

▪ tree management;

▪ risk identification and mitigation;

▪ tree inspections and assessments;

▪ tree selection and planting;

▪ tree removal;

▪ tree protection;

▪ infrastructure protection;

▪ electric line clearance; and

▪ tree maintenance.

POLICY

Trees are a highly valued asset and significantly contribute to the amenity of the towns across the Dorset municipality. Like any other asset, trees need to be managed effectively to maximise their benefits and minimise adverse effects. As biological assets, trees do not behave uniformly over their life and are prone to influence from many factors outside the control of the tree owner e.g. drought, weather, site conditions and disease. Their life expectancy can vary enormously, is not easy to predict and requires ongoing assessment.

Council is committed to the efficient and effective management of trees within Dorset. Council is responsible for a significant number of trees, and the inspection and maintenance of the tree network is conducted using a risk-based approach.

Trees are categorised according to the risk they present, and this categorisation is based on consideration of their location, any identifiable defects, the probability of the defects resulting in limb or trunk failure and the likely consequences if failure occurs.

SCOPE:

This Policy applies to all operations of Dorset Council and only applies to trees on Council owned or maintained properties, including parks, playgrounds, footpaths, reserves, Council maintained roads and buildings.

REFERENCES:

- *Work Health and Safety Act 2012*
- Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012
- Forest Safety Code 2007
- AS/NZS 4360-2004 Risk Management
- AS 4970 - 2009 Protection of trees on development sites.
- AS 2727-1997 – Chainsaws – Guide to Safe Working Practices
- AS 4373 – Tree Pruning

DEFINITIONS:

- Tree Inventory – a record of identified trees in high-risk areas such as holiday parks, camping grounds, playgrounds, recreation grounds, parks, and reserves within town boundaries.
- All planting and removal of trees is recorded in a Tree Inventory
- WH&S – Work Health and Safety.

RISK MANAGEMENT

The primary reason for tree asset management is to manage the risks to the community. Council's approach to risk management is based on a three-step process:

1. Inspect the asset, either on a scheduled/proactive basis or on a reactive basis triggered by an incident or customer request;
2. Identify any defects which may affect the structural integrity of the tree;
3. Implement the appropriate action within the required time frame based on arborists recommendation.

The risk associated with trees is a combination of the location and condition of the tree, and the public or asset use in the vicinity of the tree. Management of the risk needs to take these factors into account.

The Australian Standard, (AS/NZS 4360-2004 Risk Management), provides a sound basis for managing risk with inspections undertaken by a consultant with an ISA Tree Risk Assessment qualifications and post graduate qualifications in Arboriculture.

Risk assessment is the overriding factor in determining the priority for works and allocating resources. Inspections and risk assessments are undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced arborists.

Proactive Inspection
Proactive inspections are risk-based and scheduled in accordance with the timeframes in Appendix A.

A qualified arborist will undertake a Level 1 limited visual assessment of trees, and / or Level 2 basic risk assessment of any trees with visible defects using the International Society of Arboriculture's (ISA's) risk assessment methodology. Following the Level 2 assessment, recommendations are provided with the aim of

leaving a residual risk level of low or nil. A written tree report will be recorded for level 2 assessments and include the following:

- Provide brief observations, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations, including associated risks and likelihood of failure.
- Provided recommendations that clearly inform Council and associated stakeholders of mitigation options (removal or retention, and any recommended works if the tree is retained)
- Recommendations for the timing of any mitigation works, as well as recommendations for re-assessment.

Reactive Inspections

Reactive inspections are carried out when one of the following occurs in relation to a tree or trees that Council is responsible for managing:

1. An incident has occurred;
2. A member of the community has raised an issue; or
3. A Council employee has identified an issue.

An inspection will be carried out is in accordance with the timeframes documented in Appendix A. Mitigation works will be carried out in accordance with recommendations provided by a qualified arborist.

Tree Inventory Management

Council maintains information on previous tree inspections within zones that it is responsible for managing, which includes the following:

- Details of all incidents;
- Tree inspections that have been carried out including any reports that identify and assess trees, providing their location, species, dimensions, age and life expectancy, health and structural condition, suitability and significance, and tree photographs.

This information enables the appropriate scheduling of maintenance and programmed works in accordance with, recommendations for the timing of any mitigation works, as well as recommendations for re-assessment or internal auditing of processes.
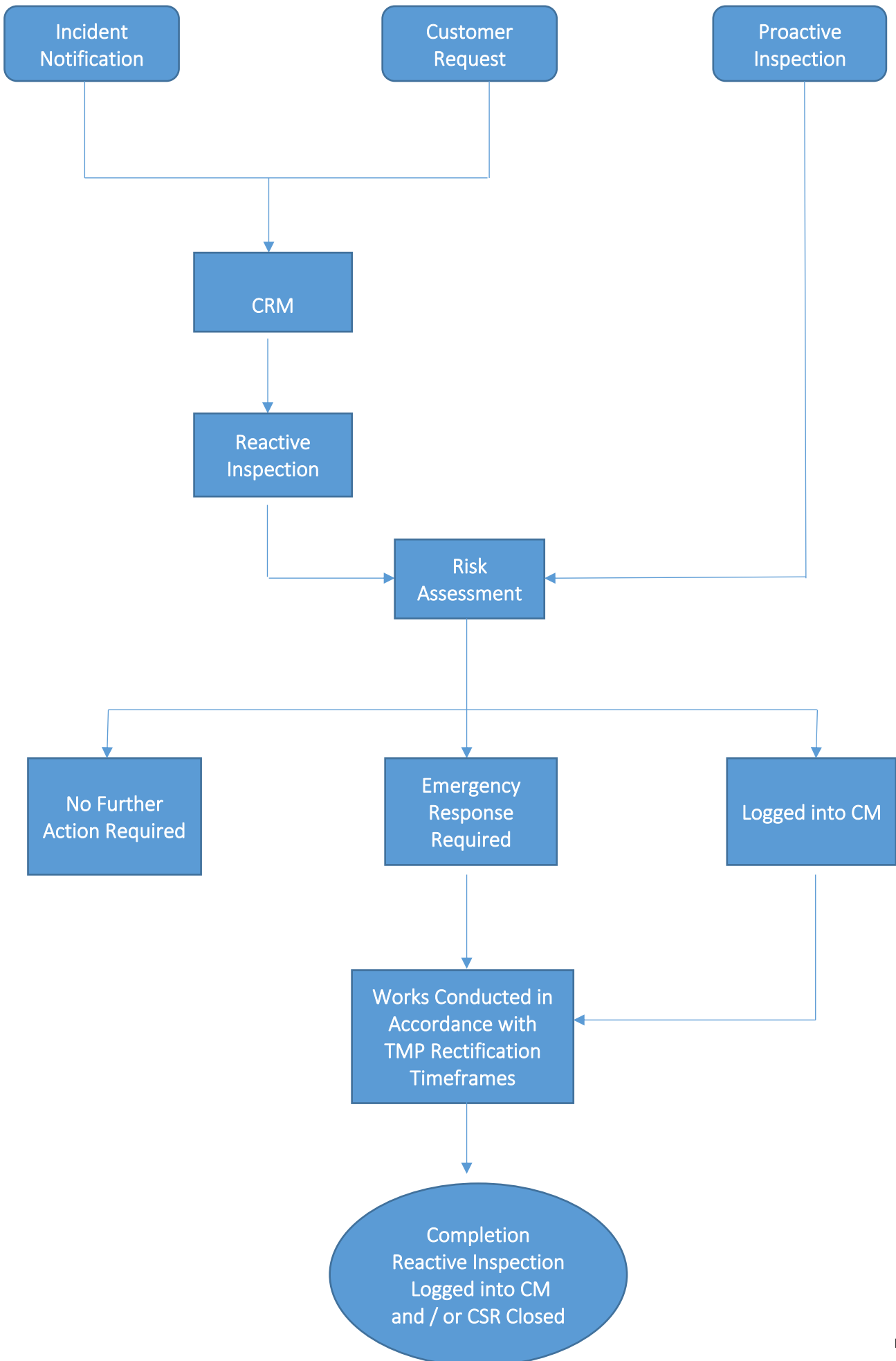
Customer Request Management

Council uses a Customer Service Request System (CSRS) to track customer requests from initiation / receipt through to completion. This system is used by Council staff to record issues which require investigation and follow-up.

Requests received through the CSRS system are assigned to the applicable Council staff member for assessing depending on location:

- Civil Works Supervisor and Civil Works Foreman – Rural Road trees.
- Town Maintenance Supervisor and Team Leaders- Holiday parks, camping grounds, playgrounds, recreation grounds, parks, and reserves within town boundaries.

  Council staff will determine the appropriate action to take in accordance with the timeframes outlined in appendices A.

Workflow

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┌─────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐          ┌─────────────────┐
│    Incident     │      │    Customer     │          │    Proactive    │
│  Notification   │      │    Request      │          │   Inspection    │
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         │                        │                            │
         └───────────┬────────────┘                            │
                     │                                         │
                     ▼                                         │
              ┌─────────────┐                                  │
              │     CRM     │                                  │
              └──────┬──────┘                                  │
                     │                                         │
                     ▼                                         │
              ┌─────────────┐                                  │
              │  Reactive   │                                  │
              │ Inspection  │                                  │
              └──────┬──────┘                                  │
                     │                                         │
                     ▼                                         ▼
                 ┌───────────────┐
                 │     Risk      │◄─────────────────────────────
                 │  Assessment   │
                 └───────┬───────┘
         ┌───────────────┼───────────────┐
         ▼               ▼               ▼
  ┌─────────────┐ ┌─────────────┐ ┌─────────────┐
  │ No Further  │ │  Emergency  │ │Logged into  │
  │   Action    │ │  Response   │ │     CM      │
  │  Required   │ │  Required   │ │             │
  └─────────────┘ └──────┬──────┘ └──────┬──────┘
                         │               │
                         ▼               │
                  ┌──────────────────┐   │
                  │Works Conducted in│◄──┘
                  │ Accordance with  │
                  │TMP Rectification │
                  │   Timeframes     │
                  └────────┬─────────┘
                           │
                           ▼
                    ╭──────────────╮
                    │  Completion  │
                    │  Reactive    │
                    │  Inspection  │
                    │ Logged into  │
                    │  CM and /    │
                    │or CSR Closed │
                    ╰──────────────╯
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Policy Improvements and Monitoring

The Policy is an evolving document to be reviewed and refined on an ongoing basis. A review of the plan is to be conducted as a minimum every four years.

Performance Measures

Performance against the Policy will be assessed against the following key performance indicators:

- Proactive inspections are carried out within the prescribed timeframe;

- Reactive inspections are carried out within the prescribed timeframe;

- Identified maintenance actions are completed within the prescribed timeframe; and

- Documented evidence is being effectively maintained of inspections carried out, issues raised and incidents occurring, and maintenance tasks carried out.

Applicability

This Policy is applicable to the following:

- Street trees planted by Council or for which Council has assumed responsibility;

- Trees planted by Council or for which Council has assumed responsibility located in Council managed parks and reserves; and

- Trees located on other Council owned or managed properties.

Excluded from the scope of this Policy are the following:

- Trees located on private land.

Roadside tree inspections and mitigation works are conducted when resources allow for such works or in the event of a reactive inspection.

Tree Selection and Planting

When selecting species for tree planting the following factors must be considered:

- Preferred "Landscape Character";
- Adopted masterplans, strategies and development plans;
- The significance of previous history of tree planting;
- Drought tolerance/low water usage;
- Longevity;
- Growth habit, size and structural integrity;
- Tolerance to harsh urban environments;
- Soil type and structure;
- Root growth characteristics and tolerances;
- Pruning requirements;
- Amount and type of debris shed;
- Proximity and form of surrounding existing and future below ground and above ground infrastructure;
- Proximity to powerline assets;
- Solar radiation/orientation;
- Pest and disease susceptibility;
- Existing and future use of the surrounding area;
- Habitat value;

- Suitability to a public environment i.e. allergens or pathogens;
- Weed potential; and
- Existing and likely future adjacent land use.

Planting in Parks
Tree planting will be carried out in a programmed and sustainable manner.

Due to lead times associated with the production of tree stock it is essential to forward plan to determine what tree stock will be needed and to be assured of obtaining the right species, acceptable quality of stock and availability at the right time.

An approach which results in balanced diversity of tree ages and sizes across the municipality will be followed to achieve long term stability of the tree population and landscape character.

Priority for tree planting by Council will be given to:
- areas with an existing lack of trees;
- areas where residents or community groups have requested trees;
- high profile and high use areas;
- areas where there are a high percentages of old aged trees, low species diversity and/or trees in poor condition; and
- sites where trees have been removed.

Council must be consulted and give approval for any tree planting within streets, open spaces and reserve it manages or will take control of, as Council will ultimately become responsible for their maintenance and any problems that may arise.

Tree Establishment
Effective after-care tree management can greatly increase the success of the planting. Trees will be planted in line with best practice and an after-care maintenance program implemented for a minimum period of three years in order to target a tree establishment success rate of greater than 80%.

Tree Removal
Trees can take many years to develop fully and once removed cannot be quickly replaced.

Urban trees are living organisms with a finite life span; they often grow in non-ideal environments; they can be subject to numerous forms of physical damage; and can become a potential risk. Removal of trees will therefore be a regular and necessary process of Council's tree management program. Tree removal decisions must be undertaken systematically and with due consideration of all factors.

The Council takes into consideration the opinions and feelings of Dorset residents, and through the Tree Management Policy, will consult with residents, while continually demonstrating the Council's respect for the importance of trees within the municipality.

The potential requirement for tree removal can be triggered by a Council officer as a result of an inspection, or from a member of the public via Council's customer request system.

Any decision to remove a tree will be based on a range of considerations in order to determine the best long-term outcome in the location.

Tree removal considerations include:

- Hazards which cannot be addressed to an acceptable level by pruning or other maintenance works;

- Interference with nearby trees;

- Aesthetic value;

- Tree health and estimated remaining useful life;

- Degree of public nuisance because of its species, size, location or condition. The nuisance could be caused by excessive fruit or seed drop, suckering, harbouring of insects or excessive twig or limb breakage;

- Impact of required infrastructure works in proximity to the tree which are assessed as being likely to kill or render the tree a hazard or significantly impact on the trees condition and useful life expectancy. Careful consideration must be given to alternative construction and/or intelligent design principles to reduce the impact.

- Damage or nuisance to public or private property where no other viable means are available to rectify the situation;

- Infection with an epidemic insect or disease where the recommended control is not applicable, and removal is the recommended practice to prevent transmission; and

- The tree or group of trees is a recognised woody weed species.

Wherever possible prior to tree removal, the following engagement will be carried out as a minimum in order to inform immediately impacted residents and businesses:

- Notification via social media post or newspaper article.

- Council officers may 'door knock' the nearby residents and businesses or undertake a letter drop if the situation dictates.

Exceptions to the notification process are when there is an immediate "high risk" to the public or property. In these cases, tree removal will occur as a priority to ensure public safety is protected, and the minimum notification requirements may not be achieved.

All State legislation or permits and local planning requirements controlling the removal of trees must be met.

Tree Removal Costs
Where Council determines that tree removal is required, removal costs shall be borne by Council.

If a Council managed tree or group of trees is removed by any person or authority without Council authorisation, that person or authority may be subjected to enforcement action under the relevant Council local law. That person or authority shall also meet the full cost of reinstatement, which includes purchase of an advanced tree, tree planting and a minimum three-year tree establishment period for the tree.

Hazardous Trees
All Council trees reported as being unsafe or hazardous by the public or identified as being of concern by staff will be inspected by an appropriately qualified and experienced arborist. Options will be considered to minimise and or reduce the immediate risk which may include emergency tree removal.

A tree must only be removed as emergency work if it is considered to be hazardous or structurally unsound, has an unacceptable risk of failure in the near future, and there is a potential target.

A record of trees removed under the emergency work provisions will be maintained to ensure replanting occurs, where replanting is appropriate.

Tree Protection

Trees on Council-managed land are to be protected with the objective of reducing the potential negative impacts of development, construction and temporary works.

Typical negative impacts that may occur during construction include:

- mechanical injury to roots, trunk or branches;

- compaction of soil, which degrades the functioning roots and inhibits the development of new roots by reducing the availability of oxygen and water;

- changes in existing grade which can cut or suffocate roots;

- alteration of the water table - either raising or lowering;

- microclimate change, exposing sheltered trees to sun or wind;

- sterile soil conditions, associated with stripping off topsoil; and

- chemical damage due to leaking or spilling of fuels, lubricants, hydraulic oils or other toxic substances.

No damage, pruning or removal of any tree will be permitted without the prior written approval of Council. The contractor, relevant responsible authority or property owner shall be responsible for the protection of trees on Council managed land that are likely to be affected by development, construction and temporary works.

All trees on Council managed land shall be protected in accordance with AS 4970 - 2009 Protection of trees on development sites.

Tree Maintenance in the Vicinity of Electrical Infrastructure

Electrical Energy Service Providers provide details of required line clearances and regulatory considerations with respect to trees and tree maintenance; which is subject to periodic change.

Council Officers shall liaise with Energy Providers when tree maintenance is required around electrical infrastructure and shall comply with the current requirements advised by the service provider.

Existing Tree Controls and Regulations

There are existing laws and regulations that control the removal and pruning of both native and exotic vegetation on private and public land. The policies and procedures in this Plan are in support of those laws and regulations and need to be viewed as being in addition to those laws and regulations.

It is the responsibility of all persons to ensure they do not do anything that is in contravention of any existing laws and regulations.

Exceptional Circumstances

Trees are a living organism and the environment in which they live can change quickly. Council will endeavour to meet all aspects of its Policy. However, in the event of natural disasters and other emergency events, including but not limited to storms, fires, floods, or droughts, Council reserves the right to suspend compliance with its Policy.

DISSEMINATION OF POLICY

The Policy, once it has met all criteria of the approval process, will be kept in the Dorset Council Policy Manual, and provided upon request.

Appendix A – Inspection Frequencies and Timeframes

Category	Minimum Frequency of Proactive Inspections	Timeframe for Completing Reactive Inspections
Very high risk zones, including: ■ Children's centres and kindergartens ■ Holiday and Caravan parks ■ High profile parks, open spaces and reserves ■ Playgrounds	Every 12 months	Within 2 working days of notification
High risk zones, including: ■ High use parks and sports grounds that contain picnic tables and/or BBQs ■ Main school entrances and exits, including school crossings, bus stops and carpark entrances. ■ Major retail areas	Every 3 years	Within 5 working days of notification
Medium risk zones, including: ■ General parks and street trees, not included in either of the above categories.	Every 5 years	Within 10 working days of notification
Low risk zones, including: ■ Low use parks and reserves ■ Easements, drainage reserves, and riparian zones.	Reactive inspections only	Within 30 working days of notification

Document Control	

Document ID: Tree Management Policy						
Rev No	Date	Revision Details	Author	Reviewer	Approver
1	08 December 2011	Inclusion of OHS requirements to comply with new draft of OHS Act	C. Shipton	D. Jolly	Council
2	07 December 2012	Inclusion of new Risk Management System Audit Requirements	C. Shipton	D. Jolly	Council
3	7 June 2016	Listed for review in 2015/2016 Annual Plan	C Shipton	D Griffin	Council
4	July 2020	Listed for review in the 2020/2021 Annual Plan	C Shipton	D Griffin	Council
5	July 2024	Listed for review in the 2024/25 Annual Plan	M Buckley	C. Wheeler	Council