West Suffolk Council Tree Management Policy
Appendix 2: Inspection methodology

Survey technique

A walkover technique will be used during the councils' formal regular tree inspection regime. Areas for inspection will be identified using maps and lists generated by the GIS tree management system within locations specified by the cyclical inspection areas.

Where practicable, drive by inspections will also be utilised within a given inspection area in conjunction with walkover inspections, as the inspector moves through a given area.

Whilst inspecting an area of trees, inspectors will apply the zoning approach, whereby trees in a low risk zone will receive the lowest detail of inspection looking for obvious faults and problems.

Where trees are within higher risk zones, or where potential faults and problems may not be readily observable, more detailed inspection will be applied through ground based visual inspection.

Inspections should look to identify features that indicate serious, significant decline in tree health, or structural weakness.

Features that can indicate imminent structural failure are few and far between and include the following:

- Actively lifting root plate
- Heavy limb actively splitting or breaking away from the tree
- Stem fractured, moving and opening enough to 'pinch'

Features that may indicate possible structural failure include:

- Cracks and splits in main stem or heavy branches
- Decay across large cross-sectional area of trunk or large branch
- Broken or hanging heavy branches
- Weak forks with bark trapped between heavy stems
- Dead trees
- Disease
- Decline in health e.g. small or discoloured leaves, die-back of branches
- Damage from construction and development
- Fungal fruiting bodies
- Significant amounts or sizes of deadwood

It is inappropriate to react to tree defects as though they are all imminently hazardous. Growth deformities and other defects do not necessarily indicate structural weakness. When noting features that might indicate possible weakness or collapse as detailed above, it is important that concern for risk of

failure is restricted to events likely in the near future. Some features persist for many years in a vast number of standing trees:

- Tight forks with bark trapped between the two stems with incipient cracks and splits; while this can indicate a structural weakness, a high proportion of such trees remain intact throughout their lives.
- Old wounds with decay and trunk hollowing may indicate impaired strength; trees often accommodate these with continued growth.
- Decay across a large cross-sectional area, resulting in the circumference of the trunk or large branch being breached, may warrant investigation; often such circumstances are manageable and do not require urgent treatment.
- Heavy broken branches and dead trees; dead trees may in some cases be cost effectively reduced and retained as a habitat feature, even where close to high use areas. Treatment of broken branches should be prioritised according the level of risk.
- Dead wood and fungal fruiting bodies; inspectors automatically interpreting these features as hazards tend to be overreacting. As with other external signs of possible structural weakness, these features are often diagnosed as more risky than they actually are. Both need to be competently assessed, in order to avoid unnecessary and costly intervention.

Management requirements

As a result of an inspection, it may be necessary to undertake some form of management if a defect or hazard has been identified. Such management is known as pro-active management.

In general, choosing which measures to use to keep the level of risk as low as reasonably practicable while conserving the tree, involves weighing up the costs and benefits involved.

In some circumstances it may be possible to manage the risk posed by a tree by managing the area within which it is a hazard, or manage access to that area. This could be in the form of discouraging access by leaving grass to grow longer, diverting paths, relocating facilities such as play equipment or benches, using mown paths in long grass areas to direct access, using planting, dead hedging or logs to prevent access, change of use of the area or signs.

When all the options for managing the area within falling distance of the tree have been explored or where public exclusion from the area is neither desirable nor practical, remedial tree work will be necessary. Such work can include felling, pollarding, crown thinning, crown reduction, crown lifting, dead wooding and de-suckering/removing epicormic growth. In such circumstances the following principles will be applied:

- Undertake the minimum work necessary to reduce risk to an acceptable level.
- Where biodiversity and habitat have high value, a range of treatment options may be appropriate to retain maximum habitat balanced with the need for adequate safety.

- With high value trees, felling will be a last resort after taking into consideration all other options.
- When felling is specified, upright dead trees will be retained for habitat value as 'monoliths' where possible. Felled trees and trunks will also be left on the ground to provide important deadwood habitat where possible.

In some circumstances it may be necessary to commission a detailed inspection of a tree as a result of possible defects or hazards identified during a formal regular inspection, or in the case of a potential defect which in the inspectors view is outside of their competency to fully assess.

It may also be appropriate to instigate additional or more regular inspections of a given tree as a result of a formal regular inspection, to monitor a tree's condition more closely, such as where a potential defect is found but is not imminently dangerous.

Detailed inspections, or additional more regular inspections, as detailed above, may also be required where a tree of high amenity, historical or biodiversity value is to be retained where there may be potential defects or hazards.

Where trees are identified as not posing a risk in the near future, there is no specific requirement for additional management. Existing informal and/or formal inspection procedures should be sufficient.

Recording of survey results

A record of areas surveyed will be kept by the council using the GIS system. This will record the following information:

- Date of survey
- Surveyor
- Species
- Condition
- Size
- Management requirements