



South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Policy for Planting Trees on Council Land



Foreword - South Oxfordshire

One element of our role as the Tree Champions for South Oxfordshire is to develop and promote a policy for planting trees on council owned land, which we are proud to be able to now share with you.

Through this policy, we set out the principles which will help to achieve our goals as tree champions: **to protect and restore nature across South Oxfordshire, to encourage people to reconnect with nature, to promote tree-growing initiatives, and to tackle the climate and ecological emergencies.** This policy also makes clear **the process which will enable the planting of trees on council land.**

Trees play many important roles, including improving the health and wellbeing of our residents and communities, filtering the air we breathe, cooling the surrounding environment, absorbing and storing rainwater, and sequestering carbon, helping us to reach our carbon neutral targets. **Protecting, planting and managing trees,** as guided by this policy, will help to deliver these outcomes for generations to come.

As residents of South Oxfordshire, **we are lucky to live in an area with good tree cover and green spaces,** which this policy will help to protect and enhance. As a council, we will continue to encourage our communities to reconnect with nature, and support them with their own tree planting initiatives. **This policy provides guidance to residents on tree planting and how residents can work with the Council to facilitate community planting projects.**

This policy and the outcomes it will deliver will contribute to the council's wider corporate plan priorities of **protecting and restoring our natural world, and tackling the climate emergency.**



Cllr Ian Snowdon
Tree Champion
South Oxfordshire District Council



Cllr Peter Dragonetti
Tree Champion
South Oxfordshire District Council

Foreword - Vale of White Horse

Tackling the climate emergency is one of our main priorities as a council, and we want to do everything we can, both as a council and as district, to reduce our emissions.

We are aiming to become a carbon neutral council by 2030, and for the Vale to be a carbon neutral district by 2045. **Our trees are vitally important** for helping us to achieve these goals as they capture and store carbon and provide shade. Beyond the many environmental advantages of trees, they also have health and wellbeing benefits for our residents, contributing to our priority of building healthy communities.

As cabinet member for climate emergency and the environment I am proud to present our tree policy.

This policy outlines five guiding principles we will follow as **we work to protect, plant and manage trees** on our land and seek to expand our tree cover. I am particularly keen on our 'community' principle which provides guidance to residents on planting trees and offers advice on getting involved in tree planting projects, as well as ensuring access to green space, as I want to do as much as possible **to support communities across the district in taking their own climate action as we work together to tackle the climate emergency.**

I look forward to supporting this work and further developing and enjoying our trees and woodlands.



Cllr Catherine Webber
Cabinet Member Climate Emergency and
Environment
Vale of White Horse District Council

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to outline how South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Councils will **protect, plant and manage trees** on the land they own, and how the **community will be supported with their tree planting initiatives**. The Councils will **seek to increase tree cover and to protect trees** on land they own as part of their plans to become carbon neutral.

This policy is an overarching document, setting out principles for protecting, planting and managing trees on council land, and with partners and the community. These principles will be used as a benchmark for future plans and policies developed by the Councils and will inform current projects that involve trees and woodland.

This policy is an ever-evolving document as guidance and thinking develops on this topic.

Tree Context

The councils truly value the many roles that trees play in our districts including their significant role in capturing carbon, providing oxygen, reducing flood risk, contributing positively to the health and wellbeing of our residents, providing homes to many species and supporting biodiversity. Protecting and increasing tree cover will ensure that trees across our district continue to benefit our residents, our environment, and will reduce our carbon emissions by removing carbon from the atmosphere.



Policy Context

Nationally, the government has recently committed to increase tree planting to 30,000 hectares per year across the UK by 2025 and has recently published the [England Trees Action Plan](#) which sets out the actions it will take to support tree planting and to ensure the many benefits of trees are realised. The South and Vale tree policy will help to achieve the UK's tree target.

This policy aligns with several existing county council and South and Vale plans and policies, as outlined below, and will support us in reaching our own carbon neutral targets.

Oxfordshire County Council Tree Policy

The county council's [Tree Policy](#) considers the public amenities provided by trees and how to manage trees in conjunction with the safe passage of highways.

Corporate Plan

South Oxfordshire's [Corporate Plan](#) includes themes to protect and restore our natural world, and action on climate emergency, with specific objectives addressing trees, which states that we will:

- With partners, promote in depth mapping and surveying of ecosystems across the district, **planning for restoration of the natural world** and working closely with landowners and specialist agencies
- Encourage the use of natural processes to combat risks arising from climate change, such as **meadows and trees to reduce flooding**
- Call for the establishment of a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire to promote an ambitious **nature recovery programme, including tree and meadow planting, rewilding and providing habitats for wildlife** including wildlife corridors

The **Vale of White Horse** [Corporate Plan](#) prioritises tackling the climate emergency with objectives relating to trees which states that we will:

- Develop a **tree-planting strategy** and **work with partners to plant more trees** across the district
- Include in the council's Open Space Strategy opportunities to increase biodiversity, **increase tree cover**, and consider carefully the use of our open spaces
- Explore setting up a Habitat Bank to deliver biodiversity offsetting requirements and **facilitate tree planting**

Local Plan

The [South Oxfordshire](#) and [Vale of White Horse](#) local plans support the **protection and enhancement of the natural environment**, including on specific development sites. The design guides ([South](#) and [Vale](#)) provide further **guidance to developers**

on how the councils expect tree planting to be integrated into new development sites. Linked to this, the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) encourages the protection of trees and woodlands and seeks to achieve net gains in biodiversity. It also provides clear guidance that developments that cause the loss or deterioration of ancient woodlands and ancient or veteran trees should be refused.

Green Infrastructure Strategy

The South and Vale [Green Infrastructure Strategy](#) presents our visions and objectives for the future provision and management of green infrastructure, which includes woodland, green space and amenity open space, up to 2031.

Tree Preservation Orders and Conservation Areas

A Tree Preservation Order (TPO) ([South](#) and [Vale](#)) prevents land owners from cutting down, uprooting, topping, lopping and wilfully damaging or destroying a tree without the council's written permission.

Trees in a conservation area that are not covered by a TPO also receive protection. Those wishing to fell or work on a tree in a conservation area must gain our permission.

Climate and Ecological Emergencies Declarations

In February 2019, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils both declared **climate emergencies**, and in February 2021 South Oxfordshire declared an **ecological emergency**. These declarations highlight the importance of addressing these emergencies and that action is needed.

South Oxfordshire's targets are to become **carbon neutral in its own operations by 2025 and to be a carbon neutral district by 2030**. The Vale aims to be **carbon neutral in its own operations by 2030, with a 75 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2025, and aims to be a carbon neutral district by 2045, with a 75 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030**. Increasing tree cover and protecting trees will be vital for us to achieve these goals.



Principles

We will aim to protect, plant and manage trees on land owned by South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts through the following principles:

Planting:

- **Commit to planting more trees** on our own land to further develop a robust treescape, where appropriate **aiming to double tree cover** in areas
- Any trees that have been removed or have died on council owned land **will aim to be replaced, and where possible more than one tree will be planted**, ideally with a minimum of three trees

Caring and maintenance:

- **Best practice**, including sustainable methods, for planting, growing and caring for trees will be used to ensure a healthy tree population
- **Safety precautions and measures** will continue to take place in line with the councils' duty and legal responsibilities to maintain public safety

Supporting Biodiversity:

- Plant **appropriate tree species** for the planting environment, including considerations for endangered species, ensuring tree planting does not adversely affect other habitats
- Manage woodlands and trees to **maximise canopy cover and carbon storage** where possible
- Encourage biodiversity and habitats for wildlife in **trees through maintenance and planting methods**

Planning and Development:

- Develop new **planning policies designed to increase the amount and quality of tree planting** within new development proposals on council owned land, and work closely with developers to achieve this
- Use powers to **protect important trees, woodlands and hedgerows** where they are under threat from damage or destruction arising from development, inappropriate management or other land use change

Community:

- **Establish procedures to enable communities to plant and care for trees** on council land where appropriate – see our [guide to planting trees for community groups](#) and the 'how to get involved' section below
- **Support the community and partners** to protect and plant trees to increase tree cover in appropriate locations across the districts, including through tree planting initiatives
- **Promote funding opportunities** and work to secure funding for planting trees through government and other funding sources as a council or in partnership

How to get involved

If you would like to plant trees on council land, please follow the steps below:

- First contact the council to establish whether the land identified for planting is owned by South Oxfordshire or Vale of White Horse District Councils. Please email your enquiry to climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk
 - We will let you know if the site is within the councils' ownership
 - If the identified land is owned by the council, please fill in [this form](#) to apply to plant trees on the land.
 - Specialist teams in the council alongside relevant cabinet members will then assess your application for site suitability and against the principles in this document and our tree planting guide to make a decision.
 - If the form is approved, you will be asked to sign a legal contract before proceeding with the tree planting. This agreement requires you to take full responsibility for the newly planted trees for at least three years following planting to ensure that the planting becomes successful.
 - Please note that this process could take up to three months
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