

# MEETING REPORT

**Meeting:** Assets Committee, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2024  
**Agenda item:** AS24/008  
**Report subject:** Quantified Tree Risk Assessment for Ivybridge Town Council's Parks and Open Spaces  
**Report author:** Julie Gilbert, Assistant Town Clerk

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## PROPOSAL:

- (i) To receive and note the information within the Town Council's Quantified Tree Risk Assessment for all its parks and open spaces;
  - (ii) To consider appointing Devon Tree Services to provide tree management works to address 'urgent immediate works' in accordance with their proposals and as recommended in the Quantified Tree Risk Assessment. And to not require additional two quotes on the grounds of health and safety and urgency requirement.
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## Background

In line with the Town Council's health and safety policy, regular Quantified Tree Risk Assessments (QTRA) are conducted in order to determine the health of trees for which the Town Council is responsible. This also includes any trees off-site which could pose a risk on Town Council land. The QTRA was carried out in June 2024 by Devon Tree Services (copies attached), using colour coding to illustrate advisory risk thresholds.

Red - unacceptable - risk threshold of 1/1000

Orange - unacceptable/tolerable by agreement if the tree has exceptional value – risk threshold 1/10,000

Yellow - tolerable – risk threshold 1-1000,000

Green - broadly acceptable

The data collected has been saved on the Devon Tree Services system OTISS which can be easily transferred or accessed to re-survey the sites in future making tree management cost effective for the long term.

Frequency of inspection is usually between 1-5 years dependent on the condition of trees. For example, if there are large portions of ash trees with ash dieback disease within a higher target area, more frequent assessments may be necessary, compared to a low target area of moderately healthy trees.

Since the tree survey has been undertaken, Devon Tree Services have returned twice to conduct post-failure visits. On both occasions the failed trees had previously been recorded as healthy with no sign of decay. The tree consultant's professional opinion was that the recent weather conditions easterlies may have instigated failures that are unpredictable. Summer conditions also pose the risk of summer branch drop; a phenomenon where large mature branches unpredictably break off from trees typically during calm warm weather.

The consultants have also liaised with Longtimber Wood neighbours on Pithill Lane where one of the failures occurred onto a private road. They endeavoured to reassure them that

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the Town Council are fulfilling their duty of care with regard to trees. The only way to completely remove risk is to fell 'all trees' as there is a risk associated with 'all trees'. The tree survey relies upon identifying trees with defects which increase the risk of failure and therefore being able to suggest control measures such as tree removal, pruning or moving a target area if possible.

The survey has identified a significant quantity of trees requiring either urgent immediate works or management and inspection within a 6-month timescale. Others identified management within 1 year.

Devon Tree Services were invited to provide a quotation for the works. The company confirms that the tree consultancy aspect of the business is completely separate to the tree surgery side, and as professionals would not seek to create any additional unnecessary works. It is however extremely helpful to the Town Council that the consultants can liaise with the tree surgeons within the same company on the Council's behalf.

The company is registered as ARB Approved. The Arboricultural Association accreditation requires arboricultural knowledge, ecology and environmental policy and stringent health and safety standards. Tree surgeons without this accreditation have been used in the past, and on occasions the necessary health and safety documentation has proven difficult to obtain.

The Council is keen to ensure that all health and safety procedures are in place, and tree surgeons have the necessary health and safety knowledge before any works are undertaken. The following example provided in the HSE Bulletin from 12 August 2024 gives an example of poor health and safety practice and the consequences for the conservators of the forest:

*East Sussex body fined as dog walkers struck by tree*

*A body that manages a major forest in East Sussex has been fined after a husband and wife were struck by a tree, with the latter suffering a traumatic brain injury.*

*Caroline Leafe, 70, was walking along a deer track in Ashdown Forest with her husband, Kenneth, and their dog, Monty, when the pair were hit by a silver birch tree that was being felled on 25 January 2023.*

*The Conservators of Ashdown Forest, the body that manages Ashdown Forest, had identified that the 12-metre tree was rotting and needed to be cut down.*

*The tree was located in the corner of Broadstone Car Park on Colemans Hatch Road in Upper Hartfield, East Sussex and surrounded by public footpaths, including the main pathway to the visitor centre.*

*The tree began to fall after a forest ranger made a sink cut with a chainsaw. As it was falling, the ranger noticed Mr and Mrs Leafe walking on the nearby deer track and attempted to warn them but it was too late.*

*Mrs Leafe suffered a traumatic brain injury, a fractured collar bone, several fractured ribs and a shoulder dislocation. She spent considerable time in hospital following the incident and continues to undergo physical and cognitive therapy several months later. She also had to surrender her driving licence.*

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*Mr Leafe suffered cuts and bruising.*

*A Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation found The Conservators of Ashdown Forest failed to identify the risk to members of the public from tree felling. This meant precautions, such as posting warning signs and using barriers and banksmen, were not implemented to prevent members of the public from accessing areas where the tree felling was taking place.*

*The Conservators of Ashdown Forest pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The trust was fined £8,000 and ordered to pay £3,589.80 in costs at Brighton Magistrates' Court on 12 August 2024.*

*HSE principal inspector Emma Stiles said: "Members of the public should be able to enjoy a walk in a forest without fear of being struck by a tree being felled. The guidance is clear on how to fell trees safely and this means keeping members of the public out of an area around the tree measuring two times the height of the tree.*

*This can be achieved by various means including signs, barriers and banksmen. Given the high levels of public access around this tree, all of these precautions should have been taken."*

The Devon Tree Services tree surgeons were supplied with the QTRA and made subsequent site visits to assess the works, and have provided a prioritised quotation for the most urgent works. There are further quotations for the remainder of the works identified, and within these some requiring attention within 6 months. However, due to the costs involved, the Town Council will need to seek two additional quotations and bring these back to the next meeting which will still be inside that timescale.

## [Resources/implications](#)

### [Financial](#)

Quotation received from Devon Trees (no. 14830) for the immediate urgent works, at £7,805 plus VAT. Funds for this work to come from EMRs Tree Surgery and Parks, Woods & Open Spaces.

### [Staffing](#)

Staff are regularly liaising with the tree consultants and have transferred the information from the QTRA into a spreadsheet in order to monitor the data. This will be updated by recording tree management works required and also failures plus completion of any required works, whilst also monitoring the frequency of inspections.

Further quotations to be obtained from two additional ARB Approved tree contractors for the next most urgent works within 6 months.

## [Decision on urgent health and safety grounds](#)

Due to the identification of 'urgent immediate' works required following our QTRA, it is proposed that the most urgent works are carried out at the earliest opportunity. Our Financial Regulations state that for works in the region of the figure quoted above, two further quotes should be obtained. However, for expediency, members are asked to consider approving the quote without seeking additional quotes, on the grounds of urgency. (Note, the requirements or limits for seeking quotes is not set in law, and can be determined or suspended by council as required).