TREE AND WOODLAND STRATEGY

2022 - 2032

RHONDDA CYNON TAF

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg / This document is also available in Welsh

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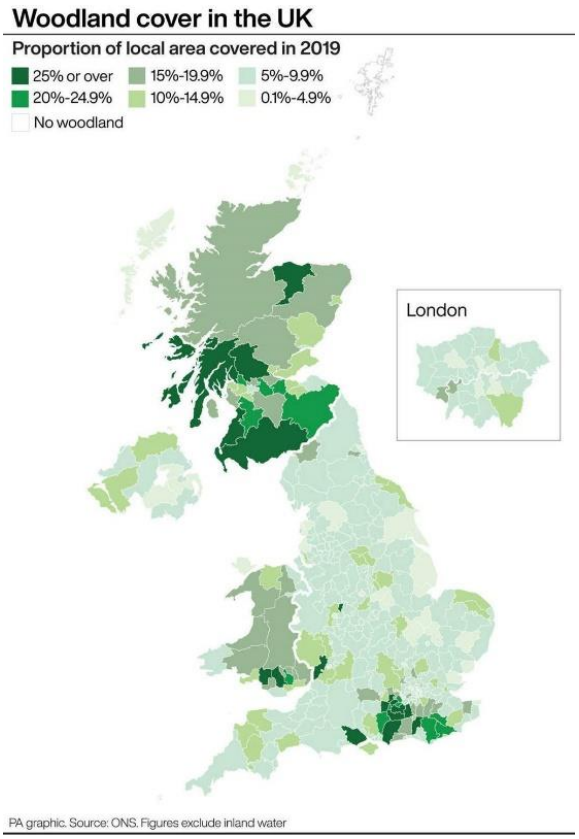
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

In November 2019 Rhondda Cynon Taf Borough Council (RCTCBC) established a Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group to address the climate emergency and subsequently the nature emergency, declared by Welsh Government. In November 2020 the Steering Group received a report on 'Natures' Assets' which set out the Council's natural environment priorities with regard to addressing the climate and nature crises.

Essentially, Rhondda Cynon Taf is putting Climate Change at the centre of what we do. As a Council we are committed to investing in our green spaces and to delivering natural carbon storage solutions such as those provided by trees, peat bogs, marshy grassland and other natural habitats across the County Borough to enhance air quality and reduce the impact of greenhouse gasses.

Rhondda Cynon Taff is one of the very few heavily wooded areas in the UK which also has a large population (see UK map below). The County Borough is about a third wooded and about a third urban, with a population of 241,873 (2020 est) and a population density of 570 persons per square km (2020 mid-year estimates from the ONS. Even within the main urban areas an average of 18.5% is tree covered.



The importance of this resource has been highlighted by the Climate and Nature Emergencies and this strategy will strengthen the Council's commitment to managing

this resource and to maximise the benefits to local residents, to biodiversity, and to climate adaptation and mitigation.

Trees, hedgerows, and woodlands are an integral part of nature, supporting a wide range of insects, animals, birds and plant life. Looking after the trees, hedges and woodlands in our local environment is essential for the future health of nature and of people. Trees can improve the environmental quality of our urban areas, delivering physical, social and economic benefits as well as mitigating climate change, improving storm water management, air quality, biodiversity, visual amenity and more. In considering trees and planning for the future, we need a fundamental shift in attitude and perspective - to recognise trees as public assets, rather than just liabilities.

The focus of this strategy is to actively protect Rhondda Cynon Taf's Urban Forest – the green infrastructure of parks, gardens, woods, trees in streets, footpaths, green spaces, trees and hedges that all benefit our environment so significantly. The strategy looks at the next ten years specifically but with an eye on the longer-term of 50 plus years. To achieve our Climate and Nature ambitions, it must be integrated with wider environmental concerns to protect and manage all the important habitats in our urban areas and in the surrounding countryside. It must also be integrated with other Council policies such as the Revised Local Development Plan (RLDP), the Flood Risk Management Plan, Environmental Health and Community engagement.

The Strategy will be subject to an eight-week period of public consultation.

Vision Statement

In the ten-year span of this strategy the Council will:

- Undertake the largest tree planting programme in a generation and implement a holistic approach to the RCT landscape which integrates consideration of landscape, culture, biodiversity, natural flood management, green infrastructure and carbon storage.
- We will adopt the principle of “the right tree for the right place” in order to ensure the most resilient tree population possible.
- Promote and value the significant extent of existing woodlands in Rhondda Cynon Taf (about a third of the County Borough), recognising the importance of our semi-natural woodland habitats and especially our ancient woodlands.
- Protect important semi-natural habitats and undisturbed soils from inappropriate tree planting.
- Recognise, quantify and monitor the contribution of natural regeneration to woodland expansion across RCT
- Work with Natural Resources Wales to maximise the benefits of the Welsh Government Woodland Estate to local residents and visitors.
- Commit to the management and maintenance of the existing extent of urban tree coverage.
- Work constructively with individuals and groups to deliver this vision.
- Aim to increase the urban tree canopy cover in those urban areas with less than 10% cover.
- Promote the benefits and value of urban trees within our communities.

The Purpose of the Strategy

Providing a mechanism to improve the provision and care of trees and woodlands

Ensuring that decisions and activities undertaken in relation to trees are made in a structured and consistent way; and Monitoring the action plan(s) and policies for the care, management and enhancement of Rhondda Cynon Taf 's trees and woodlands.

Overarching Aims of the Strategy

1. To protect, regenerate and care for Rhondda Cynon Taf's existing trees and woodlands

2. To encourage the natural regeneration and colonisation of trees as the most sustainable way of increasing canopy cover.
3. Encourage new tree and hedgerow planting in appropriate areas to benefit well-being, pollution, climate change and pride in our surroundings
4. Where urban tree cover is below 10% to plant more trees on the principle of the 'right tree in the right place'
5. To recognise the ancient hedgerow heritage of RCT, to restore and maintain the valuable ecological and historic asset, and where new hedges are planted ensure they do not compromise this heritage
6. To provide a framework for decision making and establishing a prioritised action plan for 2023 - 2033

Action Plan:

Rhondda Cynon Taf Borough Council will:

1. Create a cross-disciplinary working group to: monitor the implementation of the strategy; develop an initial tree planting programme; ensure risks and benefits are addressed; operational and regulatory matters; integration with broader land management considerations (flood, biodiversity, carbon storage etc); and integration with policy (Revised Local Development Plan, Flood Risk Management Plan, Action for Nature, Air Quality, sales/leases etc.).
2. Support a condition survey of all the trees for which RCT has management responsibility to form a single data base.
3. Review the extent of woodland across the County Borough, including ancient woodland and naturally regenerating woodland. Establish how Council policy can assist in its protection and management, its relationship to other habitats of biodiversity value and the sustainable management of natural resources.
4. Review and monitor the extent and condition of woodland on Council owned land and in particular, monitor the area of naturally regenerating woodland on the Council's estate, with priority for the sites in excess of 10ha which feature in the Council's carbon calculation submissions to Welsh Government.
5. Ensure that new policies for the protection and enhancement of trees and hedgerows are embedded in the Revised Local Development Plan where

appropriate and supported by evidence and integrated into the Green Infrastructure Assessment where appropriate.

6. Support a comprehensive review of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and conservation areas to reassess historical orders and potentially implement new orders to protect Rhondda Cynon Taf's trees.
7. Review, strengthen, resource and consistently implement enforcement policies, to ensure protection of existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows.
8. Establish the overall value of Rhondda Cynon Taf's trees, to show what condition and size they are, and how much they benefit the environment and the ecosystem services they provide.
9. Establish a cycle of tree risk assessment and update management and action plans.
10. Deliver a training program for staff within the affected service areas on the value of trees, TPOs, and the tree strategy's vision and operational matters
11. Develop and adopt a Tree Risk Assessment Management tool for making decisions about tree felling, pollarding, pruning and coppicing
12. Develop an effective biosecurity policy to reduce the risk of introduced pests and diseases that may threaten native woodland cover as well as planted and new trees.
13. Develop an effective strategy for ash-dieback, that deals with the risks, allows unaffected trees to be retained and addresses canopy cover.
14. Establish a robust partnership and community engagement programme. Improve communication and understanding between the Council, Community Councils and residents relating to: local issues and concerns; tree strategy and detailed policy; the value of trees, woodlands and other natural habitats; and operational matters such essential works.
15. Establish a working partnership with NRW private, community and charitable owners of land, businesses and local developers in the management of trees, hedgerows and woodlands, contributing to maintaining and where appropriate increasing canopy cover across Rhondda Cynon Taf.
16. Set objectives that clearly define what future success looks like and the specific benefits the urban forest is expected to deliver together with milestones for progress during the life of the strategy.
17. Establish monitoring standards that can identify how much of the expected benefits of tree, woodland and hedgerow planting have been achieved.
18. Ensure integration of the tree strategy objectives and outcomes with local biodiversity priorities and objectives to ensure complementary delivery of action.
19. In urban settings develop opportunities to plant long-lived trees and hedgerows to support wildlife, provide Green Infrastructure services and public amenity value, with a focus on urban areas with tree cover below 10%.
20. Outside settlement boundaries protect existing woodlands and rely primarily on natural woodland regeneration for woodland expansion.
21. Create cross council working practices to implement and inform this Strategy, building an informed and expert work force that supports the care and management of trees and woodlands across Rhondda Cynon Taf.
22. Monitor and review the Strategy, in partnership with the cross-disciplinary working group, every 3 years.
23. Produce detailed policy and guidance notes to be followed by RCTCBC, contractors and other partners in following this strategy.

24. Where possible encourage plans for new building or development to make provision for retaining existing trees, space for natural regeneration and, where appropriate, increasing the canopy cover.
25. Support local tree nurseries to provide future tree stock with appropriate biosecurity, that will be climate resilient and offer appropriate planting for Rhondda Cynon Taf's environment and local biodiversity context. This will include schools, community groups and volunteers collecting seeds and cuttings of suitable trees and growing them on.

PART 1
INTRODUCTION

Part 1: Introduction

Trees are vital for our environment and for humanity and, together with our soils and other vegetation, will be key in tackling climate change. Via photosynthesis trees capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in wood and other growth. This carbon is therefore sequestrated, locked up out of the atmosphere. Rhondda Cynon Taf is putting Climate Change at the centre of what we do and this is therefore a key driver in the need for Rhondda Cynon Taf to develop this strategy and have a 'joined-up' vision for trees across the Borough.

Trees, soils and other vegetation are part of our natural 'armour' against climate change. Trees, hedgerows and woodlands are an integral part of nature, supporting a wide range of insects, animals, birds and plant life. Having trees, hedges and woodlands in our local environment is essential for the future health of nature and of people. Trees provide one of the most cost-effective ways to improve the environmental quality of our urban areas, delivering physical, social and economic well-being as well as mitigating climate change, improving storm water management, air quality, biodiversity and visual amenity to name but a few (Appendix 1).

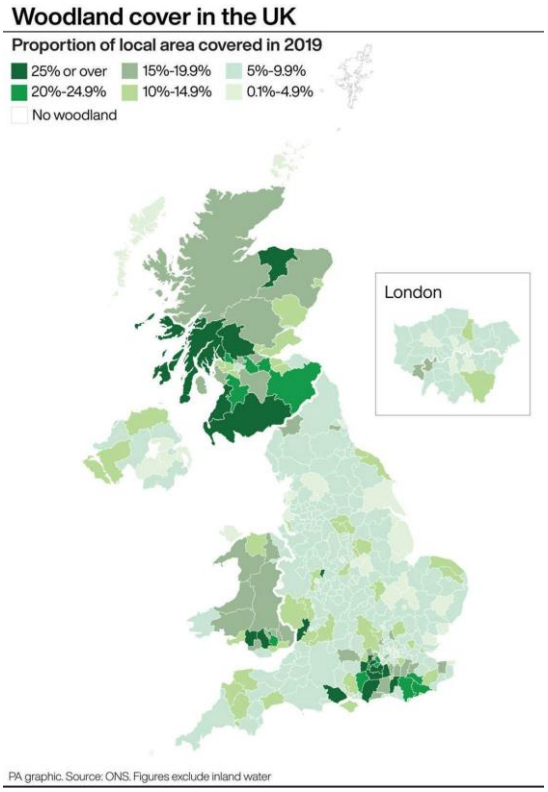
Trees matter to us all for a wide variety of reasons and in developing a Strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf, focused on trees, hedgerows and woodlands, Rhondda Cynon Taf Borough Council will engage with the broad range of issues that inform our thinking about our environment and set out an effective programme of activity that will help all residents meet future climate and environmental challenges. In doing so a fundamental shift in attitude and perspective is required - to one that views and thinks about trees as public assets, rather than liabilities. A ten-year strategy is a starting point, and from the process of developing and implementing policies and plans based on protecting and expanding our tree cover, our strategy can grow, change and develop to meet future challenges.

Why does Rhondda Cynon Taf need a Trees and Woodland Strategy?

Local authorities have significant responsibilities with regard to trees. In Rhondda Cynon Taf about a third of the area is wooded and there is an unusually high level of tree cover in our urban areas (av 18.5%), and on land owned or managed by the Council. This means that the Council is responsible for the management of an extensive tree stock.

Trees are a significant asset to the County Borough. Trees are of landscape significance and legislation relating to Tree Preservation Orders and the Hedgerow Regulations reflect this. Biodiversity considerations relating to trees have become more important and recently the role of trees and woodland as 'Green Infrastructure' has come to the fore.

The Strategy seeks to address these issues and to identify the costs and benefits of an investment in trees.



Challenges and Opportunities in Rhondda Cynon Taf

The age of our tree stock is significant as most of our streets and parks were planted during Victorian or Edwardian times. This strategy recognises the value of this inheritance and seeks to prevent irregular tree planting programmes, poor maintenance, unnecessary felling of trees over which otherwise will have both short and longer term implications on our landscape.

The Urban Tree surveys by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) show a continuing decline in urban tree cover in RCT from 19% in 2009 to 18.5% in 2013. Unfortunately, this included 728 large, well established trees lost from our urban areas. "Overall Rhondda Cynon Taf lost 30 hectares (of urban trees) between 2009 and 2013 with 13 of the 16 towns showing canopy loss." - (Town Tree Cover in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough (cyfoethnaturiol.cymru)).

Public open space, which accounts for 26% of our urban land hosts about 60% of our urban tree cover (Wales 53%), with private gardens only 14% (Wales 20%)

In a well-wooded County like RCT, retaining existing mature trees can be a challenge as they can come under pressure from much needed new development and infrastructure

Our climate is changing which has implications on how our trees, woodlands and wildlife react to it and the levels of management required. Drought, storms and floods present specific hazards but gradual changes in CO2 in the atmosphere, rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns will also have long term impacts. Globalisation increases the threat from pests and diseases and, although not new,

these are a growing concern. Currently ash dieback is a major challenge, as ash is a frequent roadside tree, but others have significant impact on our native tree stock (Dutch elm, Phytophthora, Chalara, processionary oak moth etc.).

Planning Policy Wales (PPW) has been updated to reflect the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the Environment Act amongst other changes in legislation. New iterations of PPW have placed an important emphasis on sustainability and have embedded the concept of placemaking at the heart of decision making. PPW 11 also places a new focus on green infrastructure, its role in Placemaking and vital contribution to future living conditions.

PPW 11 includes the need to undertake Green Infrastructure Assessments (GIA) as part of the Revised Local Development Plan evidence base. The Revised LDP will need to carefully consider the role that green infrastructure will play within it, this includes the consideration of trees.

Successfully retaining existing trees and establishing new planting within housing can be difficult due to pressures to maximise developable space. The RLDP will need to address and balance the requirements for housing and other development with the impact on the local landscape, climate change and biodiversity amongst other things. The Council will also need to consider the long-term management of any green infrastructure provided by the developer and how its function can be assured for the lifetime of the development.

Sustainable drainage requirements, which are now mandatory for developments in RCT (Sustainable Drainage - An Overview | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (rctcbc.gov.uk)), also have implications for the design and long-term management of developments and may also impact on existing trees.

Despite the many benefits offered by trees such as reduced pollution, shade, regulation of temperature, drainage etc, there are still some who regard trees as a nuisance not an asset. Dealing efficiently with cross departmental enquiries is a particular challenge. It is right and proper that public concerns are addressed, clear information provided and the scope for community involvement developed. This strategy will seek to ensure we have consistently applied policies relating to routine concerns such as leaf fall, television reception and tree safety. Positive communications about the benefits of trees and the contributions of citizens and businesses will also be critical to raise the profile of trees and woodland in RCT.

Trees cannot be considered in isolation. They form a major part of our green infrastructure and their operational management should complement other works carried out by the Council. This strategy seeks to ensure that the value of trees to the Council and the residents of RCT is set out clearly, from the well-established aesthetic and landscape benefits, to contributions to local air quality, water cycling and shade etc.

The strategy recognises that other habitats are also important, and conserving these also has benefits for residents, climate and nature. The strategy recognises the importance of our semi-natural biodiversity rich habitats (including woodlands) and the importance of undisturbed soils for carbon sequestration. The carbon stored in soils

greatly exceeds that stored in trees. World-wide soils store twice as much carbon as all vegetation including trees. (prof Peter Smith) It also recognises the on-going natural processes of native woodland regeneration and colonisation taking place across the County Borough. This will inform our plans for tree planting, which will typically be focused in urban areas, parks etc where it is of most benefit to people and causes least damage to undisturbed soils and our existing wildlife rich mosaic of semi-natural habitats.

Integrating consideration for trees and woodland with other aspects of Council land management such as drainage, air quality, carbon accounting and biodiversity will ensure that climate adaptation and mitigation measures achieve the greatest benefits for local people and the wider environment.

In addition to our already extensive tree coverage, there will still be opportunities for the planting of new trees and hedgerows. Our parks, school grounds, open spaces and towns can all benefit from the addition of new planting all within the mantra of right tree – right place for the right reason

Rhondda Cynon Taf's Existing Tree Cover and Habitat

National Forest Inventory data from NRW shows that about a third of RCT is woodland. This is unusually high in the UK and Welsh context and brings particular responsibilities to the Council. NRW 2013 data on the tree canopy in selected urban areas, which include all trees, whether in gardens, fields, parks, woodland, urban spaces, along roads or streets, averages 18.5%. Again, as the Council is responsible for managing much of this urban woodland. More details regarding urban trees is given in Part 3.

As such, whilst the strategy seeks to facilitate the area's largest tree planting programme in a generation there will also be a major focus on actively protecting and increasing Rhondda Cynon Taf's trees, hedgerows and woodlands.

From a biodiversity perspective we need to ensure the native distribution of trees and woodlands in RCT is respected. RCT has a complex topography and geology and very particular and valuable natural and native distributions of tree and shrub species. Outside towns, the preservation of the natural distributions of species is a fundamental component of nature conservation. Local distinctiveness and variation across the County Borough is a key part of the extraordinary natural diversity in RCT.

Planting species that are not native to local area is a damaging activity. Introducing species can lead to gross and damaging impacts on valuable habitats and a de-valuing of biodiversity. It is the complexity of the mosaic of local habitats and species diversity that makes RCT so biodiverse and that needs to be recognised within the Tree Strategy.

Similarly, where hedgerows are a feature of the County Borough those are ancient artifacts, often dating back hundreds or thousands of years to the first farming activities. The species richness provides a clear and invaluable picture of historic and cultural land use continuity. Planting new 'species rich' hedgerows compromises this landscape asset and current RCT ecological advice for new hedges in countryside

locations is to require simple hazel or hawthorn hedgerows. Adding diversity into natural habitats is most effectively achieved through management.

Figure 2
National Forest Inventory Woodland Coverage in RCT from www.lle.gov.wales

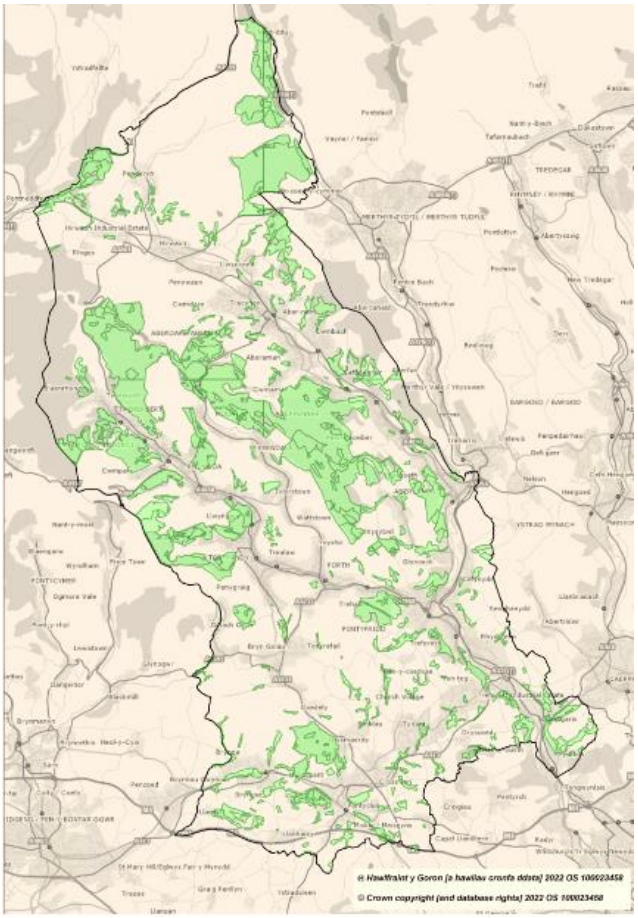
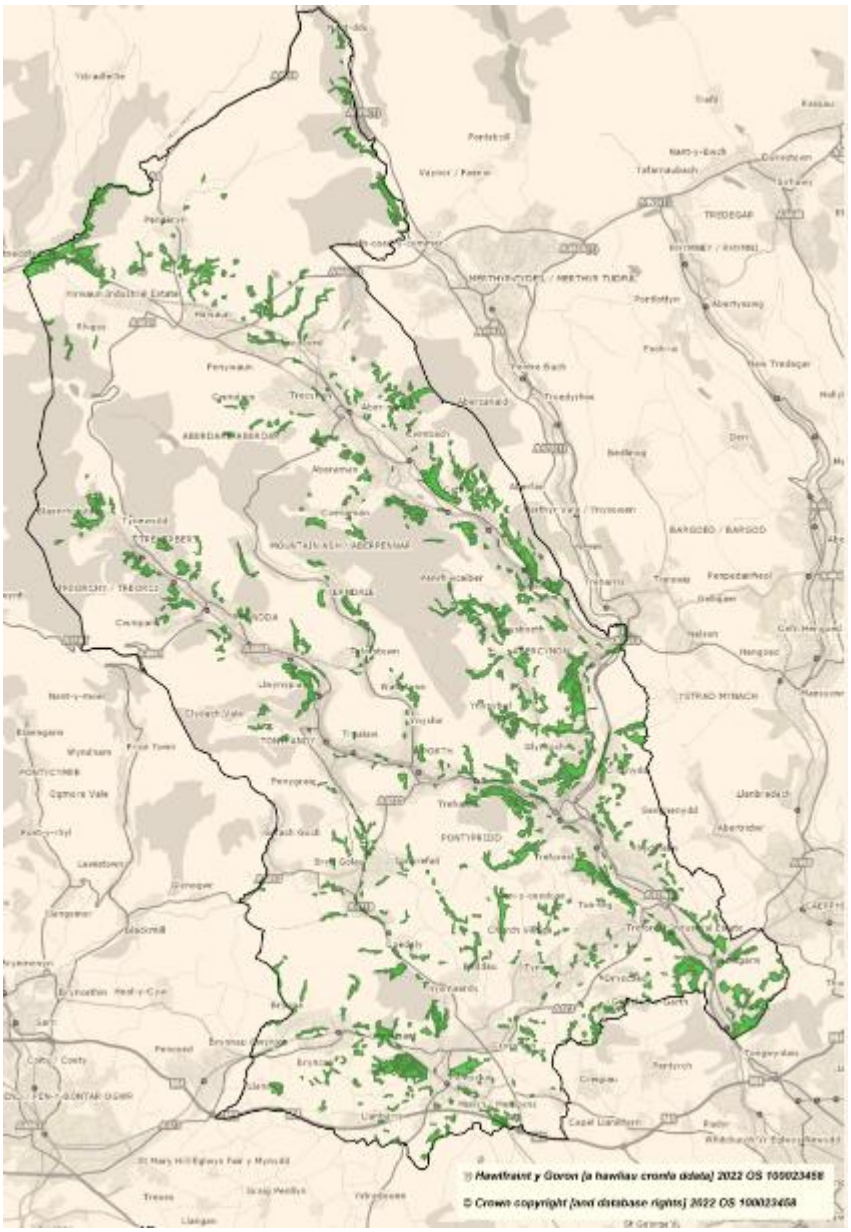


Figure 3
Ancient Woodland Coverage in RCT from www.lle.gov.wales



Scope of the Strategy and Vision Statement

Our overall vision is to deliver a Tree Strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf which recognises the importance of the extensive existing woodlands in the County Borough and providing a robust framework for the delivery of new tree planting projects, our own operational responsibilities for trees and woodlands and embedding this activity within climate change and biodiversity considerations. The aim is to ensure we are not only looking after our trees and woodlands for now but also for future generations.

Purpose of the Strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to deliver the overarching **aims**, using the **general principles** to undertake the **key activities** the Council is responsible for by:

- Providing a mechanism to improve the provision and care of trees and woodlands.
- Ensuring that decisions and activities undertaken in relation to trees are made in a structured and consistent way; and
- Monitoring the action plan(s) and policies for the care, management and enhancement of Rhondda Cynon Taf's trees and woodlands.

The resulting Strategy Actions are listed below.

Overarching Aims of the Strategy

1. To protect and care for Rhondda Cynon Taf's existing trees, hedgerows and woodlands.
2. To encourage the natural regeneration and colonisation of trees as the main and most sustainable way of increasing canopy cover.
3. Encourage new tree and hedgerow planting in appropriate areas to benefit well-being, pollution, climate change and pride in our surroundings
4. Where urban tree cover is below 10%, to plant more trees on the principle of the ‘right tree for the right place’
5. To recognise the ancient hedgerow heritage of RCT, to restore and maintain that valuable ecological and historical asset, and where new hedges are planted ensure they do not compromise this heritage.
6. To provide a framework for decision making and establishing a prioritised action plan for 2023-2033.

General Principles

The following general principles will apply:

- Trees are viewed as an asset with multiple benefits
- All decisions and tree activity must have regard to current legislation and best practice
- Tree management should focus on tree health and seek to maximise benefits for current and future generations
- Tree planting must have regard for; existing soil and habitat, space to mature (below and above ground), future maintenance and management
- Tree works should be evidence-based and undertaken by suitably trained or qualified personnel

Key Activities

The following are the key activities the Council should undertake:

- identifying the tree/woodland resource in RCT and the risk inspection regime
- Undertaking operational works as required by the risk inspection regime (including arrangements for out of hours)
- Administer the dangerous trees on private land requirements
- Operation of the Tree Preservation Order system in conjunction with Planning Services (including updating the GIS mapping, creation and removal of TPO, administration of applications to prune/fell etc. Observations of planning applications affecting TPO trees, TPO on Council owned land prior to sale/lease, enforcement)

- Operation of other tree related legislation such as the Hedgerow Regulations and the High Hedges (Anti-social Behaviour legislation)
- Strategic review of trees in Council management to include amenity, carbon storage, tree health, biodiversity value and other benefits in addition to the risks identified above.
- Undertaking operational works as required on the Council estate
- Long-term planning for replacement planting, remedial works and future challenges
- Advice to schools and other lease holders on the management and planting of trees
- Advice to other departments: for example air quality and trees, SUDS and trees, Carbon storage and trees
- Engaging with, responding to and advising local residents in relations to trees

Strategy Action Plan

- Create a cross-disciplinary working group to: monitor the implementation of the strategy; develop an initial tree planting programme; ensure risks and benefits are addressed; operational and regulatory matters; integration with broader land management considerations (flood, biodiversity, carbon storage etc); and integration with policy (Revised Local Development Plan, Flood Risk Management Plan, Action for Nature, Air Quality, sales/leases etc.).
- Support a condition survey of all the trees for which RCT has management responsibility to form a single data base.
- Review the extent of woodland across the County Borough, including ancient woodland and naturally regenerating woodland. Establish how Council policy can assist in its protection and management, its relationship to other habitats of biodiversity value and the sustainable management of natural resources.
- Review and monitor the extent and condition of woodland on Council owned land and in particular, monitor the area of naturally regenerating woodland on the Council's estate, with priority for the sites in excess of 10ha which feature in the Council's carbon calculation submissions to Welsh Government.
- Ensure that new policies for the protection and enhancement of trees and hedgerows are embedded in the Revised Local Development Plan where appropriate and supported by evidence and integrated into the Green Infrastructure Assessment where appropriate. Ensure polices are adequately enforced for the lifetime of the development
- Support a comprehensive review of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and conservation areas to reassess historical orders and potentially implement new orders to protect Rhondda Cynon Taf's trees. Review, strengthen, resource and consistently implement enforcement policies, to ensure protection of existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows.
- Establish the overall value of Rhondda Cynon Taf's trees, to show what condition and size they are, and how much they benefit the environment and the ecosystem services they provide.
- Establish a cycle of tree risk assessment and update management and action plans.
- Deliver a training program for staff within the affected service areas on the value of trees, TPOs, and the tree strategy's vision and operational matters

- Develop and adopt a Tree Risk Assessment Management tool for making decisions about tree felling, pollarding, pruning and coppicing
- Develop an effective biosecurity policy to reduce the risk of introduced pests and diseases that may threaten native woodland cover as well as planted and new trees.
- Develop an effective strategy for ash-dieback, that deals with the risks, allows unaffected trees to be retained and addresses canopy cover.
- Establish a robust partnership and community engagement programme. Improve communication and understanding between the Council, Community Councils and residents relating to: local issues and concerns; tree strategy and detailed policy; the value of trees, woodlands and other natural habitats; and operational matters such essential works.
- Establish a working partnership with NRW private, community and charitable owners of land, businesses and local developers in the management of trees, hedgerows and woodlands, contributing to maintaining and where appropriate increasing canopy cover across Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- Set objectives that clearly define what future success looks like and the specific benefits the urban forest is expected to deliver together with milestones for progress during the life of the strategy.
- Establish monitoring standards that can identify how much of the expected benefits of tree, woodland and hedgerow planting have been achieved.
- Ensure integration of the tree strategy objectives and outcomes with local biodiversity prioritise and objectives to ensure complementary delivery of action.
- In urban settings develop opportunities to plant long-lived trees and hedgerows to support wildlife, provide Green Infrastructure services and public amenity value, with a focus on urban areas with tree cover below 10%.
- Outside settlement boundaries protect existing woodlands and rely primarily on natural woodland regeneration for woodland expansion.
- Create cross council working practices to implement and inform this Strategy, building an informed and expert work force that supports the care and management of trees and woodlands across Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- Monitor and review the Strategy, in partnership with the cross-disciplinary working group, every 3 years.
- Produce detailed policy and guidance notes to be followed by RCTCBC, contractors and other partners in following this strategy.
- Where possible encourage plans for new building or development to make provision for retaining existing trees, space for natural regeneration and, where appropriate, increasing the canopy cover.
- Support local tree nurseries to provide future tree stock with appropriate biosecurity, that will be climate resilient and offer appropriate planting for Rhondda Cynon Taf's environment and local biodiversity context. This will include schools, community groups and volunteers collecting seeds and cuttings of suitable trees and growing them on.

Communications and Public Engagement

This is an area of work which is increasingly important due to the climate and biodiversity emergencies. It is important both to communicate the Council's policies and also to understand and address public concerns.

A wide range of individuals and groups have important roles and interests in the Borough's trees and RCT knows it cannot achieve the vision of this strategy alone. In developing and delivering this strategy RCT wants to bring people along with it. Working with Natural Resources Wales and other woodland managers in RCT will be an important part of this. A programme of consultation and engagement with residents, businesses, specialist and community organisations is proposed as part of the development of the Strategy.

Governance

It is important that this strategy remains a live document and is continuously used, updated and referred to. RCT propose that the Rhondda Cynon Taf Tree Strategy is governed by a regular and robust review process between the Council and stakeholders. Taking account of the Council's emerging statutory development plan and Green Infrastructure Strategy, and Local Nature Plan this would cover:

- Performance of the strategy
- The relevance of the strategy in relation to local and national policy
- The need for any updated or amended content in the strategy as necessary
- A published report every three years

Statutory Duties

As the Local Authority for the Borough of Rhondda Cynon Taf, have a wide variety of statutory duties which RCT are required to perform by law. These are detailed in Appendix 2.

PART 2
TREE AND WOODLAND MANAGEMENT

Part 2: Tree and Woodland Management

Protection and maintenance of existing trees, hedges and woodland

Data collection will be required to identify existing trees, hedges and woodland in RCT. This will be a major task given the extent of woodland in RCT. The priority for RCT should be those trees and woodlands in urban areas and in particular those which are the primary responsibility of the Council (such as on Council owned land, adjacent to the highway or in housing developments).

The mapping may require specific software, (such i-Tree/CAVAT used by Wirral, or Tree Plotter Inventory used by Birmingham). The type of software used can provide an assessment of the benefits/value of the resource, as well as risk assessment reviews, management schedules etc. The quality of the existing stock, including tree health, age, size, species, tree risk assessment, status (e.g. TPO/ Conservation Area, Green Infrastructure) the identification of ancient woodland, veteran and notable trees should be recorded. This database should include links to detailed surveys undertaken (for example for specific diseases, risk assessment or bat surveys).

As a result of the strategy, we will consider the resources required to robustly enforce legal measures to protect existing tree stock this will require additional resources.

To ensure Rhondda Cynon Taf's trees are protected, The Council will carry out a review of existing Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and conservation areas across the borough and consider implementing additional orders and more extensive enforcement where appropriate.

RCTCBC is committed to a single strategy and related policy implementation whereby all relevant departments build, maintain and use one resource/database.

Location of Trees:

It is important to know how many trees we have and where. We will create such a record by using effective tools, like i-Tree Tree Benefits! | i-Tree (itreetools.org) or Tree Plotter Inventory TreePlotter INVENTORY - Tree Inventory Software - PlanIt Geo. This takes a scientifically- determined sample to give a standardised calculation of the effectiveness of trees in lowering temperature, pollutants, greenhouse–effect gases or in increasing the benefits for our quality of life.

It is also important that we don't just rely on the number of trees as a measure of their benefit to climate change, as a two-foot high sapling and a 300 year-old oak coming into its prime, each count as one tree, but they don't make the same difference to our environment.

National Forest Inventory data from NRW shows that about a third of RCT is woodland. NRW 2013 data on the tree canopy in selected urban areas, which include all trees, whether in gardens, fields, parks woodland, urban spaces or streets. The map and table from the 2013 report is included in Part 3 on page 22.

Measuring the tree canopy still does not provide a basis for calculating the full benefits of trees in the same way as the intended 'i-tree' eco programme can, which can take

into account the type, condition, size, age, health and other vital statistics of trees. Rhondda Cynon Taf will therefore create a baseline through i- tree Eco as a starting point for establishing realistic targets for management budgets, tree retention and replacement and increasing canopy cover in tree-deprived areas.

Trees in RCT are affected by a number of pathogens, typically imported with diseased tree stock. Ash die-back is of particular concern to the Council as it adversely affects highway trees. Further work is required to address the risk, protect disease free or recovering trees and monitor natural regeneration.

There is a maze of legislation around planning, development, sustainability, climate change and nature conservation to take into consideration. Local policies and existing plans need to be considered, updated, and new approaches may need to be added to the strategy. Some of these are considered in Appendix 2

Whilst there is a UK and Wales wide priority to increase canopy cover, this strategy recognises that RCT already exceeds the UK and Wales targets. We also have to respect the international and Wales biodiversity targets and recognise the important contribution that the unique carbon-rich (organic) and undisturbed soils and semi-natural vegetation of much of RCT to carbon capture and storage. The Natures Assets report to the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group in Nov 2020 (Cabinet Report MTSP One4aLL LG (moderngov.co.uk) sets out the Council's priorities in this regard.

This means that RCT will **not** encourage tree planting in the following areas:

- SSSI and SAC sites
- S7 Priority Habitats
- Species-rich grassland, permanent pastures important for grassland fungi, marshy grasslands, heaths, bogs, ffridd (bracken slopes), natural floodplains, species rich colliery spoil and within existing semi-natural woodlands
- SINC
- Pollinator habitats
- Sites where natural carbon soil store would be compromised by planting.

These habitats are valuable in their own right and are increasingly rare in Wales, across the UK and globally. The need for maintenance, removal or regeneration of existing trees on these sites may be considered, being mindful of the characteristics of the site and following best practice.

In urban areas, tree planting locations require careful consideration. Trees should not be planted in locations where the tree does not have space to grow, both above and below ground. This can contribute to poor tree health, high maintenance costs and removal before the green infrastructure, aesthetic and carbon storage benefits are realised. Where-ever possible Green Infrastructure should be planned in an integrated way for longevity and to maximise benefits for the public. It should always be one of the first and most important decisions when considering space allocation in the urban environment. Maintenance must be considered from the outset.

Obtaining professional advice and the consent of the Council's tree officer (for planting on public land) is essential. The advice of an arboricultural consultant, for planting on private land, is also recommended, similarly for planting proposals by community

groups. Planning matters relating to trees, including TPOs, will need to be informed by professional advice.

Quality of existing stock

Tree risk assessment

The risk of being struck and killed by a tree or branch falling is extremely low (in the order of one in 10 million for those trees in or adjacent to areas of high public use). However, the low level of overall risk may not be perceived in this way by the public, particularly following an incident. (Health and Safety Executive (reviewed 2014).

Public safety aspects will be addressed by RCTCBC as part of their approach to managing tree health. A sensible approach will ensure the maintenance of a healthy tree stock, the sound management of the environment and will satisfy health and safety requirements. RCT will develop a Risk Management tool to assist in decision-making around works to trees.

RCT will determine an inspection and recording regime with relevant control measures, following current industry standards and best practice. Individual tree inspection may only be necessary in specific circumstances, for example, where a particular tree:

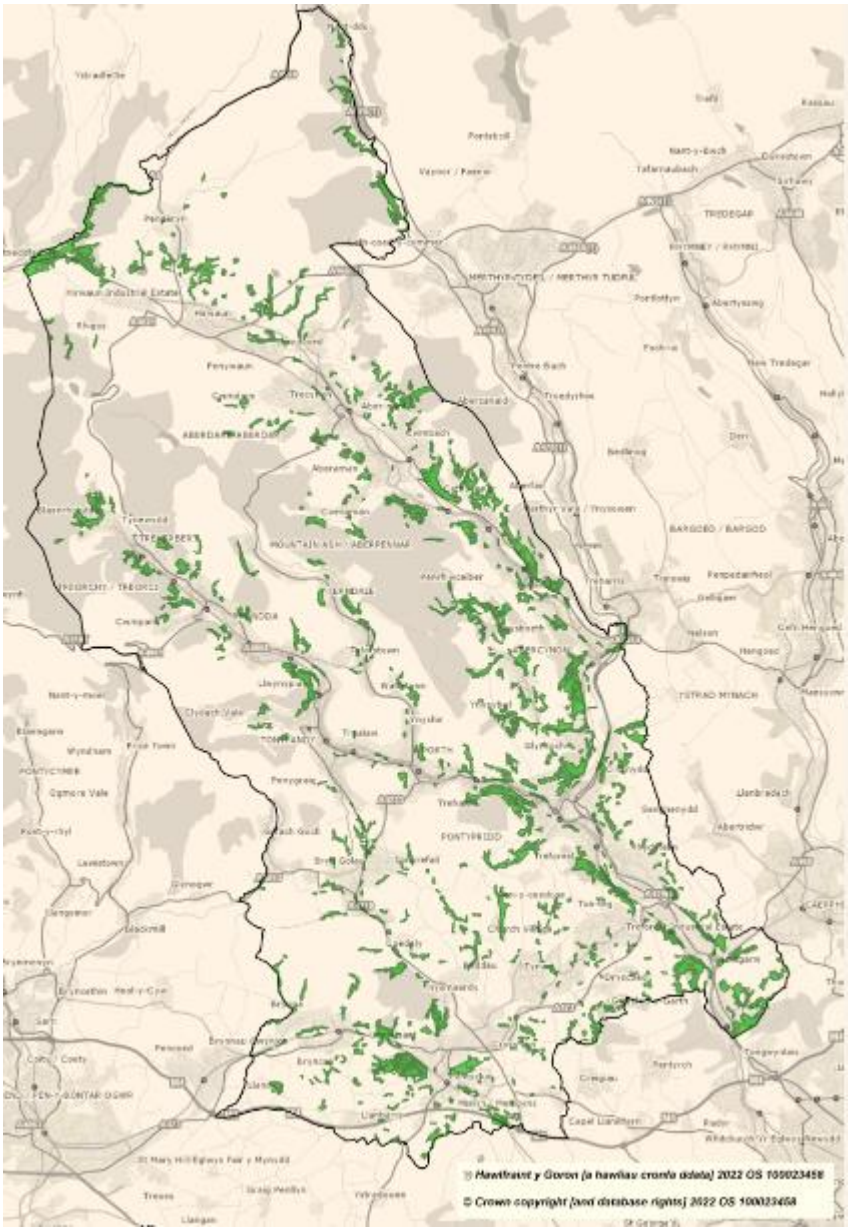
- is in a place frequently visited by the public; and
- has been identified as having structural faults that are likely to make it unstable; and
- has been identified for regular monitoring after a decision has been made to retain it with these faults.

Any planned work on trees or woodland on council land will take account of biodiversity issues e.g. bird nesting, bats roosting. At initial assessment, before any work on trees is undertaken, the local ecology will be assessed by a competent and experienced person and decisions regarding work on trees will take the expert's conclusions into consideration. Biodiversity considerations will be prioritised when providing advice, guidance and planning around tree risk management and all recommendations provided to private landowners.

Ancient Woodland, Veteran Trees and Notable Trees

Ancient woods, defined as those continuously wooded since 1600CE, are home to more threatened species than any other habitat in the UK. They are the closest we have to natural woodland in the UK and an irreplaceable part of our heritage.

Figure 3
Ancient Woodland Coverage in RCT from www.lle.gov.wales



RCTCBC will identify resources to protect and enhance its ancient woodland holdings, which are extensive and include Craig Pont Rhondda SSSI and Local Nature Reserve, Craig Yr Hesg Local Nature Reserve and all ancient woodland Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). This will include resources to help people to appreciate the value of these woods and use them without harming the wildlife. RCT will work with the Local Nature Partnership, local communities and interested groups to achieve this.

The Woodland Trust has produced a guide to help people recognise trees that have special interest and to help justify why a tree (or group of trees) stands out from others of the same species. Sometimes it is important that their specific qualities can be clearly recognised, so they can be properly protected and managed.

RCT will take into account the value of existing mature trees and invest in a greater range of options whereby trees can be retained safely. We need to keep existing 'old' trees to ensure future veteran trees!

Tree Felling

Sometimes it may be necessary to fell trees at a site after risk assessment has been undertaken. RCT will only fell trees when they are dangerous and there is a risk of people being injured, or disease would have adverse impact on the remaining stock. A tree is considered dangerous if it is in very poor condition, for example because of a significant or notifiable disease or if it is structurally unsound. Taking the decision to remove or cutback a tree is always the absolute last resort and one the Council makes when there is no other option. For every tree the Council fells on public land, replacement will be required. The number of replacement trees planted will be determined in relation to the size of the original tree felled.

Entire deadwood, if safe, can provide a hugely important contribution to naturally succeeding woodland habitat. By leaving more deadwood in place, where it is possible and safe to do so, habitats may be established for a wide variety of invertebrates and other organisms.

RCT tree risk assessment will always seek all alternative options to felling trees or removing hedgerows:

- Keep dead and dying trees wherever possible, as they provide important habitats for wildlife
- When looking at a dying tree, consider managed retrenchment or turn retained standing trunks into a feature or sculpture
- Leave cut or fallen branches as complete as possible. Leave them where they fall or move them closer to the tree to decay naturally and even artistically
    - decaying wood is too valuable to be burnt or chipped
- Stumps are important reservoirs of biodiversity and provide an historical record of a tree. Leave them to decay naturally
- Where health and safety concerns exist, felling is not the only option. Changing public access routes so they are kept away from the tree or reducing the extent of the tree canopy are often amongst acceptable alternative strategies.

The gradual incremental tree loss due to poor quality tree work and unnecessary felling is one of the biggest threats to the privately owned urban and suburban tree-scape. RCT commits to working with its partners to improve standards of tree surgery on Rhondda Cynon Taf and better inform the public in best practice in tree care.

Protection and enforcement of legal measures to protect existing tree stock

There is extensive legislation and policy in Wales that supports environmental best practice. In relation to trees, the key policies are:

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

TPOs are administered by the Council and are made to protect trees that bring significant amenity benefit to the local area. This protection is particularly important where trees are under threat. All types of tree but not bushes or shrubs, can be

protected, and a TPO can protect anything from a single tree to all trees within a defined area or woodland. Any species can be protected, but no species is automatically protected by a Tree Preservation Order. 'Amenity' is not defined in law, so authorities need to exercise judgment when deciding whether it is within their powers to make an Order. Orders should be used to protect selected trees and woodlands if their removal would have a significant negative impact on the local environment and its enjoyment by the public. Before authorities make or confirm an order they should be able to show that protection would bring a reasonable degree of public benefit in the present or future, thereby evidencing that it is expedient to serve a TPO.

Conservation Areas have protection to ensure permission is required to work on trees and some hedges and time is allowed to apply TPO protection where appropriate. Before authorities make or confirm an order they should be able to show that protection would bring a reasonable degree of public benefit in the present or future. It may be expedient to make a TPO if we believe there is a risk of trees being cut down or pruned in ways which would have a significant impact on the amenity of the area.

Conservation Areas protect trees by requiring that anyone proposing to cut down or carry out work on a tree in a conservation area must give six weeks' prior notice. The purpose of this requirement is to give the council time to consider making an order on the trees. A Conservation area notice is not an application for consent under an Order. Instead, it is used to protect trees in Conservation Areas which are not protected by TPOs. RCTCBC commits to vigorously enforce all infringements of TPO's and Conservation Area protections.

TPO's do not normally cover trees on Council owned land because it is assumed the same level of protection will be given by the Council to its own tree stock. This position should be clarified in policy and applied in all Council leases. Consideration should always be given to TPO protection for trees on land the Council proposes to sell.

Legislation, policy and guidelines

All landowners have a common duty of care under the Occupier's Liability Acts (1957) and (1984) and statutory duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (1974).

All public bodies in Wales are subject to the "biodiversity duty" contained in The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 s.6. This states that public bodies, including Local Authorities: "…must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems, so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions". The Council must report on the S.6 Duty every three years to Welsh Government (next due end 2022).

Appendix 2 provides a summary of the key Wales, UK, regional and local legislation, policy and guidance relevant to this Strategy. The range is extensive and the success of the Strategy will depend on integrating the various concern into a coherent whole. This should reflect the specific landscape, culture and aspirations of Rhondda Cynon Taf and its constituent communities. For example; the RCT Climate Change Strategy sets out the ambition 'to protect and enhance our wild spaces and work with nature to tackle both the Climate and Nature Emergencies and benefit our communities'. The

Vision for this Tree Policy is built upon this ambition and is underpinned by a series of related commitments set out within the Climate Change Strategy.

There is an extensive literature available for Local Authorities and landowners/ homeowners on the management of trees, hedgerows and woodlands. RCTCBC will take into account 'best practice' when implementing this strategy. These include relevant British Standards that provide clear, best practice guidance and recommendations on many issues. Two key standards are BS3998: 2010 Recommendations for Tree Work and BS5837: 2012 Trees in relation to Design, Demolition and Construction - Recommendations.

There is a range of legislation that protects biodiversity and urban green spaces by regulating planning, contamination and conservation. Legislation relevant in Wales is listed in Appendix 2.

Planning Policy Wales (Edition 11) (6.4.24-26)

Trees, woodlands, copses and hedgerows are of great importance for biodiversity. They are important connecting habitats for resilient ecological networks and make valuable wider contribution to landscape character, sense of place, air quality, recreation and local climate moderation. They also play a vital role in tackling the climate emergency by locking up carbon, and can provide shade and shelter, a sustainable energy source and building materials. The particular role, siting and design requirements of urban trees in providing health and well-being benefits to communities, now and in the future should be promoted as part of plan making and decision taking

Planning authorities should protect trees, hedgerows, groups of trees and areas of woodland where they have ecological value, contribute to the character or amenity of a particular locality, or perform a beneficial and identified green infrastructure function. Planning authorities should consider the importance of native woodland and valued trees, and should have regard, where appropriate, to local authority tree strategies or SPG. Permanent removal of woodland should only be permitted where it would achieve significant and clearly defined public benefits. Where woodland or trees are removed as part of a proposed scheme, developers will be expected to provide compensatory planting.

Ancient woodland and semi-natural woodlands and individual ancient, veteran and heritage trees are irreplaceable natural resources, and have significant landscape, biodiversity and cultural value. Such trees and woodlands should be afforded protection from development which would result in their loss or deterioration unless there are significant and clearly defined public benefits; this protection should prevent potentially damaging operations and their unnecessary loss.

Trees and Planning:

As part of the preparation of the Revised Local Development Plan (RLDP) all the existing policies in the adopted Local Development Plan will be reviewed. The current LDP provides some policy guidance regarding trees. Core policies CS1 and CS2 make reference to 'protecting the cultural identity of the Strategy Area by protecting historic built heritage and the natural environment'.

Policies relating to the environment are also included in the Area Wide section, for example AW4 Community Infrastructure and Planning Obligations refers to Environmental and Landscape improvements, AW5 supports proposals which where appropriate, existing site features of built and natural environment value would be retained, and AW6 Design and Placemaking includes landscaping and planting, and protecting and enhancing the landscape and biodiversity.

Policy AW8 Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment is the main policy relating to biodiversity and is supported by specific Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on Nature Conservation. This contains two paragraphs (below) in relation to trees on development sites. (Nature conservation (rctcbc.gov.uk))

'*4.1.16 Where a planning application affects trees, woodlands or hedges on or adjacent to the development site, applicants will be expected to provide information about these and the impact of their proposals on them, both in respect of their nature conservation and amenity value. Where important features are affected, the Council will require a tree report as specified in the British Standards Institutes, BS 5837: Trees in relation to construction.*

4.1.17 This report should be based on a survey by an appropriately qualified aboriculturalist, categorise the trees and set out the arboricultural implications of the proposed development. For trees etc. that are to be retained, or areas to be planted, an Arboricultural Method Statement and a Tree Protection Plan should be provided and Construction Exclusion Zones identified on the site layout plan. Any specified works to trees etc. should conform to BS 3998: Recommendations for Tree work.'

The Nature conservation SPG also makes multiple references to trees, woodlands, hedges and Tree Preservation Orders.

The council also has a number of policy statements regarding trees on its website

- TPO Tree Preservation Order | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (rctcbc.gov.uk)
- Conservation areas Conservation areas | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (rctcbc.gov.uk)
- Dangerous trees Dangerous Trees | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (rctcbc.gov.uk)
- Reporting overgrowth etc,

Trees and Development

Proposals for development and other land use changes will need to consider how trees, woodland and hedges will be successfully integrated with the overall scheme. To avoid future conflict, the following must be carefully considered:

- appropriate space for retained and new trees to allow for future growth and spread;
- how to avoid damage due to compaction of soil, severing roots or branches; and
- the need for infrastructure and service installation as well as the presence of pre-existing utility provision to be mindful of trees.

In exceptional circumstances where the loss of existing trees and hedgerows can be fully justified through a site specific arboricultural assessment, provision will be required for replacement plantings in a suitable location. Developers should use the Council's pre-application service to obtain expert advice on the matters that will need to be addressed, before a formal planning application is made. Any Supplementary Planning Guidance must be followed. (Nature conservation (rctcbc.gov.uk) contains the current requirements)

Highway Works and Utility Services

Street trees can be vulnerable to damage from work associated with installation and repair of utility services. This can result in loss of vigour and at worst, death, both of which may take several years to become evident. It also poses a health and safety risk if trees are made unstable (severing of major roots) and work just covered over. Utility services should be aware of and work to the current best practice guidelines. Guidelines on the planning, installation, and maintenance of utility apparatus in proximity to trees.

RCTCBC commits to holding discussions and agreeing terms of best practice with any company or organisation that has permitted development rights.

Deliberate Damage and Vandalism

Damage to trees, both deliberate and through ignorance, is sadly common. Criminal damage includes cutting down, lopping or topping trees, snapping saplings, setting fires beneath trees and various other attempts to kill trees.

Accidental or careless damage to trees includes vehicle impact, damage from strimming and mowing around trees and compaction from parking on grass verges etc.

Damage may also be related to highway use and maintenance by the installation of driveways, infrastructure and signage or through contamination from salt in grit or hydrocarbons etc.

RCTCBC will apply suitable planning conditions to protect new and existing trees and enforce them.

Most damage to trees is through ignorance and will be addressed by Information and education campaigns but cases of deliberate or wilful accidental damage will be prosecuted.

Viewing trees as public assets, rather than liabilities will allow the Council to make better and more consistent decisions about Rhondda Cynon Taf's tree stock in all areas of conflicting interests and damage. This will also facilitate responses where the value of a single tree in monetary terms enables quantifiable and justifiable decision making.

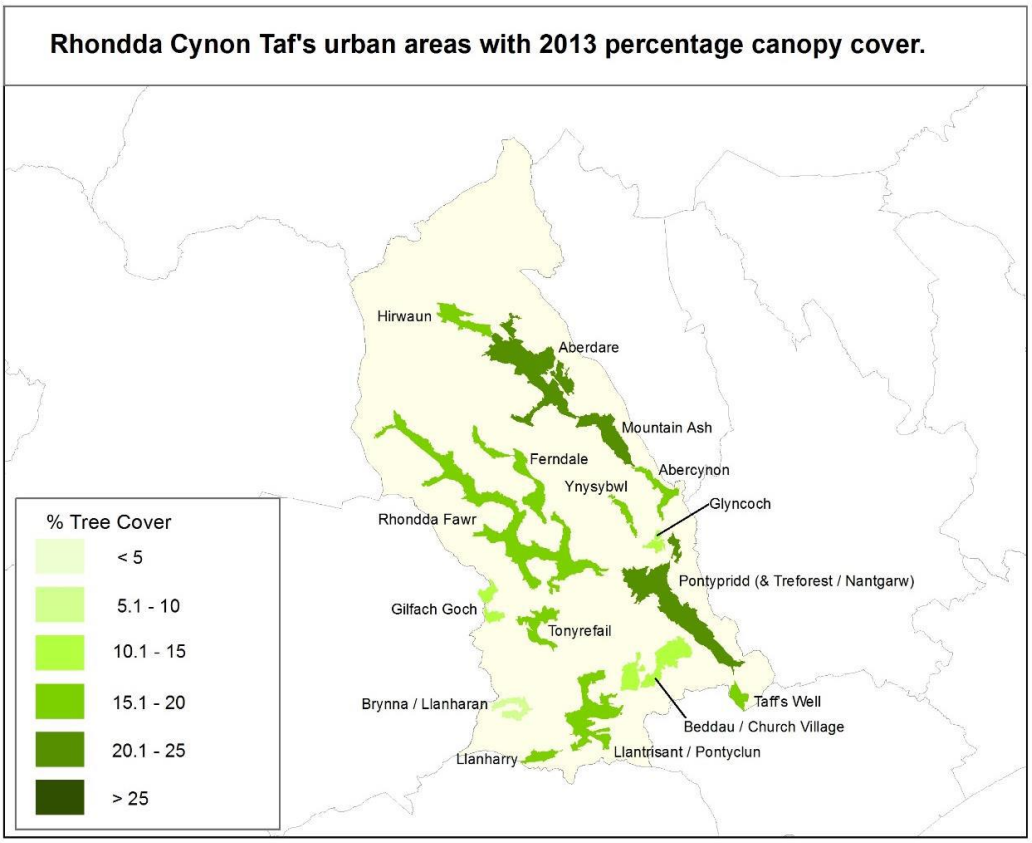
PART 3
URBAN TREE STOCK

Part 3: Urban Tree Stock

What we have

Rhondda Cynon Taf has extensive canopy cover in urban areas, but unfortunately the most recent NRW survey indicates that we are losing large mature trees which contribute so much to our townscape, biodiversity and amenity.

The urban areas surveyed by NRW are illustrated below.



The table below summarises the results of the 2013 survey. Eleven of the 16 urban areas have cover greater than the Wales national average with Aberdare, Pontypridd and Mountain Ash exceeding 20%.

Only Brynna /Llanharan (9.8%), Beddau / Church Village (11.7%), Gilfach Goch (12.2%) and Glyncoch (12.4%) fall below 15% cover. NRW also considered former Communities First areas and none showed a serious under provision of canopy. The Valleys are unusual in this regard; 'leafy suburbs' are typically associated with richer neighbourhoods but in RCT almost all communities benefit from extensive tree cover. NRW note that much of this cover in RCT is in woodlands, which need to be well managed and accessible for the public to gain full benefit.

Urban Area	Landscape Character Zone	Population ONS 2011 Census	Urban Area (ha)	Total Cover '13 (ha)	Total Cover '13 (%)
Rhondda Fawr	H. of Valleys	58,904	1538	278	18.1%
Aberdare	H. of Valleys	29,748	1026	224	21.9%
Pontypridd (& Treforest / Nantgarw)	S. Valleys	30,457	1004	215	21.4%
Llantrisant / Pontyclun	S. Valleys	14,422	605	103	17.0%
Beddau / Church Village	S. Valleys	8,236	470	55	11.7%
Ferndale (& Maerdy)	H. of Valleys	7,338	351	68	19.3%
Mountain Ash	H. of Valleys	11,230	332	78	23.4%
Hirwaun	H. of Valleys	7,247	229	40	17.3%
Tonyrefail	S. Valleys	9,317	224	35	15.8%
Abercynon	S. Valleys	5,983	158	30	18.9%
Brynna / Llanharan	S. Valleys	6,686	141	14	9.8%
Gilfach Goch	S. Valleys	4,395	132	16	12.2%
Llanharry	S. Valleys	3,035	92	16	17.2%
Taff's Well	S. Valleys	5,567	91	17	18.2%
Ynysybwl	S. Valleys	3,503	84	15	17.5%
Glyncoch	S. Valleys	4,020	71	9	12.4

Rhondda Cynon Taf's existing urban tree stock contains a mixture of native and non-native species of different ages in our streets, parks, river and rail corridors and in private gardens. While the existing urban trees were often originally planted, in RCT trees from the pre-development landscape have survived and flourished. The proximity to native woodlands in the surrounding countryside means that even urban locations can be colonised by natural regeneration from the natural seedbank.

Rhondda Cynon Taf Tree Legacy

Mature, larger trees are particularly important for our legacy, for their ecological value and for the ecosystem services they provide (such as carbon stored from the atmosphere). Ensuring that maintenance and management of the urban tree stock is particularly important for the long-term development of large and mature trees. Efforts must be increased to protect them and reduce the premature loss of these important trees. The Council will also work with all landowners to promote best practice in trees, woodland and hedgerows management on their land

Natural regeneration, which is an extremely robust and strong process in RCT, with no attendant carbon footprint and minimal risk of spreading tree disease, should be encouraged in and around woodlands where this doesn't compromise other priority habitats or important landscape or cultural features.

Where planting is considered, this should be on the basis of the right tree for the right place, and with a clear understanding of the existing biodiversity value of the site.

Trees should be chosen that are appropriate to each individual site and have the space, both above and below ground, to grow to maturity. Wherever appropriate, RCT will plant locally grown and propagated trees. The nature conservation benefits of planting and encouraging characteristic native trees will be recognised.

Climate change means that the range and distribution of trees will change over time, also the range of tree pests and diseases. For native trees that sexual reproduce there is likely to be considerable natural adaptation and natural resilience to a changing climate. The major native trees of RCT also occur much further south in Europe where they have proven capacity to adapt to different climatic conditions.

Increasing temperatures may also allow non-native trees to survive with the potential for new invasive species effecting a wider area, and the potential for attendant biodiversity loss. An example of this is the invasive Cherry Laurel, a plant native to the Azores that benefits from higher temperatures and the damp conditions and threatens to overwhelm the natural flora within RCT woodlands. In urban centres where concrete and buildings may cause significant localised hot spots the use of heat- tolerant species may be required.

This also presents challenges for how the Council manages existing trees in urban areas.

- Consideration of the future climatic suitability of new trees as the climate in Rhondda Cynon Taf changes, especially given the long life span of many trees
- Consideration of how our existing tree stocks may be affected by changing climatic conditions and potentially greater frequency of extreme weather events
- Consideration of the future biodiversity impacts of introducing non-native tree species into areas of high biodiversity importance.

There are many factors which need to be considered when planting urban trees, woodland trees and hedgerows, involving both species selection and the actual growing and living conditions for the trees in the future. (See Appendix 4: The Right Tree in the Right Place – Deciding What to Plant)

Whilst trees will be affected by climate change, they are also part of the solution to Climate mitigation and adaptation. We need a variety of tree species, and trees of varying age in order to create a legacy for the future, and we need to work with natural process where those can realise the best results.

Specification, Planting and Maintenance

Many trees in urban areas are compromised by ground conditions, proximity to buildings and roads, disturbance to roots from utilities and loss of canopy spread through management pressures. It is therefore particularly important in urban situations to plant the right tree for the right place. Non-native species, which are not ecological problematic or invasive, may be considered in these situations. It is however important to recognise that non-native species will not support the range and diversity of native wildlife.

Maintenance of urban trees is also important, for promoting tree health, prolonging life, managing risk and maintaining the space for the tree to develop.

Where planting is undertaken RCT will ensure that all tree plantings follow best practice. This includes ensuring water in periods of high temperature and/or drought, and that all appropriate protections are made.

Collaboration with local communities will be vital to success when planting urban trees across the County Borough. Vandalism of planted trees is a continuing problem and urban trees often generate comment. Overhanging branches, leaf litter, satellite reception, loss of view, parking obstructions, uneven pavements etc. are frequent complaints. At the same time, pruning, other works and tree removal may also be unpopular.

Species Diversity Selection

In urban situations a wider choice of planted trees may reduce the risk of pests, diseases, and climate change. Retention is always better than planting. There must be trees in varying age classes to replace the mature trees as they decline and die. It is important to allow for loss in all age classes due to damage, past poor maintenance, or disease. The urban environment is often difficult for trees and therefore the choice of tree species must be appropriate to the location to gain maximum benefit. Trees lost or made vulnerable through climate change and disease may need to be replaced with more resilient species. For example, the choice of urban replacements for diseased ash, so as to gain the greatest benefit to wildlife and people. In ash woodlands particular value will be placed on both the natural reaction of ash to selection pressure of ash die back, and the development of naturally resistant trees, and also to the reaction of other native trees species to the gaps and spaces created by dying trees. It is, for instance, anticipated that oak, sycamore and beech will naturally seed into and take advantage of such opportunities in RCT.

Imported diseases and pests are a major threat to our trees, so all trees bought by RCTCBC will be certified as grown and propagated in Wales. We will support local communities and groups in setting up tree nurseries using locally collected seed, to access a wider genetic pool than is available commercially. Where it does not compromise other priority habitats, natural regeneration, which comes disease free, from the local seedbank, and with no attendant carbon footprint will be facilitated where possible.

Replacement Planting

In urban areas replacement planting will be essential to ensure continuity of the tree stock. A single young tree will take many years to achieve the size and scale of a large mature ‘one and one’ for one replacement does not give the same benefit. If it is found necessary to remove trees the Council will ensure that appropriate replacement based on a site related arboricultural assessment takes places. Trees will generally be replaced in the same location but in some circumstances a nearby location may be more practical and appropriate.

Woodland

Where there is scope to expand an existing urban woodland, natural growth will be prioritised as the best means to increase woodland cover. Planted trees have an inherent carbon footprint based on the whole process of their propagation and raising in nurseries, transportation, plastic tubes and cane provision when planted, and

aftercare. The disturbance of soils to form planting pits releases soil carbons. These are inherent problems with woodland planting which need to be considered in all cases. In comparison natural regeneration of woodland involves no human derived carbon footprint, and minimal aftercare. The process leads to natural diversification, and the trees that establish are much less prone to drought or competition.

In general, established woodlands benefit from having a range of tree ages, densities and species for the benefit of biodiversity and continuity of crown cover. However, woodlands are long term habitats that take hundreds of years to fully develop, and which will go through continued adaptation and change as they do so. There are natural processes within woodlands which lead to structural changes over time, competition between adjacent trees, wind throw, and disease can all interact to influence structural diversification.

Trees in Hard Landscapes

It is a priority to plant trees in areas within hard surfacing such as car parks, streets and pedestrianised areas. It is better to design open planting areas, but where this is not possible, special planting techniques are available which ensure adequate soil volumes to ensure the trees reach their full potential. The publication by TDAG, 'Trees in hard landscapes - a guide for delivery' considers practical challenges and solutions to allow integration of trees in our streets, civic spaces and surface car parks.

These areas are the most challenging urban environments for growing trees but are also the areas that benefit most from their inclusion. The Council commits to best practice in the use of modern planting techniques which have been researched and developed to enable successful tree establishment and growth in these areas.

Existing Trees in the Highway

The 2013 NRW survey of trees in urban areas of RCT identified transport routes (including verges and pavements) as an important component of the urban tree resource. In RCT they comprise 18% of the urban land and include 9% of the urban tree cover. (the figures for Wales' urban areas for comparison is 16% of Wales' urban land and 9% of cover). They also note that motorised traffic causes much of the urban air and surface water pollution, which trees have the ability to remove. (Town Tree Cover in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough (cyfoethnaturiol.cymru)).

Urban air quality is most affected by road traffic emissions producing nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter. Commercial food cooking and wood- fuel stoves are also significant sources of particulate matter in some areas. Trees absorb some nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter by acting as a 'filter'. The simplest and best way to improve air quality is to plan urban places to reduce sources of pollution. Green infrastructure can help reduce pollution by providing welcoming spaces through which people will prefer to walk or cycle rather than drive. Improvements can be made from modifications to the urban environment, including the number, size, and position of urban trees and hedges e.g. around school playgrounds, health centres, shopping areas.

Trees add considerably to our streetscape and parking areas however streets offer a very unnatural environment for trees and so they need special care and protection. In

residential areas verges have often been resurfaced with tarmac and used for parking and where tree roots could previously access adjacent gardens, these have now been paved. Highway trees are not only located within the carriageway and footways but also within verges and small areas of green space. These areas need to be retained and protected as they provide a better growing space than fully hard surfaced areas and opportunities should be taken wherever possible to reinstate this soft landscaping. Because it is difficult to get replacement trees established in the existing highway, the removal of street trees will only be considered as a last resort where all other solutions have been considered. RCTCBC will set best practice for urban tree pit use maintaining and improving existing tree plantings where possible.

Trees in Parks and Cemeteries

Rhondda Cynon Taf has x parks and green spaces, of which 4 Council and 9 community sites have Green Flag accreditation.

According to the NRW survey of urban areas in RCT referred to earlier, public open space hosts as much as 60% of urban tree cover in Rhondda Cynon Taf, whilst public open space accounts for 26% of urban land. (For Wales the figures are 53% of all tree cover in our Welsh communities in public open space which makes up only 22% of urban land).

Parks are very important contributors to the overall environment and landscape character of the area. Parks include some key heritage designed landscapes, where the overall design and the treescape must be maintained in future management and restoration plans. In other parks tree cover will be increased in line with site specific, design led management plans that seek to maximise the aesthetic, social, health and ecological benefit of our parks. Parks could provide a clear exemplar of planning for the future and best practice in tree care, maintenance and planting. The principle should be that retention is better than replanting.

Ecologically rich areas, especially with trees, have been shown to help reduce people's stress levels and improve general mental health and well-being. Wildlife continues to decline nationally. Parks have an important role to play in supporting wildlife and will be managed to encourage this.

It is important that whenever trees are lost in our parks they are replaced. This strategy seeks to develop management plans that anticipate future climate and tree problems. RCT will commit to working constructively with Friends Groups and other stakeholders to review park management plans in light of both climate change and biodiversity plans and this Strategy.

The table below shows if Trees, Hedgerows and Woodlands are located in cemeteries managed by RCT.

CEMETERY	TREES	HEDGEROWS	WOODLAND
Abercynon Cemetery	X		
Aberdare Cemetery	X	X	X
Aberffrwd Cemetery (Old Mountain Ash)	X		X
Bryn y Gaer Cemetery (Hirwaun)	X	X	
Cefn y Parc Cemetery(Talbot Green)	X		X

Ferndale Cemetery	X	X	X
Glyntaff Cemetery and Crematorium	X	X	X
Llanharan Cemetery	X		
Llwydcoed Crematorium	X	X	X
Maes yr Arian Cemetery (New Mountain Ash)	X	X	
Penrhys Cemetery	X	X	X
Trealaw Cemetery	X	X	
Treorchy Cemetery	X	X	
Ty Rhiw Cemetery(Taffs Well)	X	X	
Ynysybwl Cemetery	X		
Abercynon Cemetery	X		
Aberdare Cemetery	X	X	X
Aberffrwd Cemetery(Old Mountain Ash)	X		X
Bryn y Gaer Cemetery(Hirwaun)	X	X	
Cefn y Parc Cemetery(Talbot Green)	X		X
Ferndale Cemetery	X	X	X
Glyntaff Cemetery and Crematorium	X	X	X
Llanharan Cemetery	X		
Llwydcoed Crematorium	X	X	X
Maes yr Arian Cemetery(New Mountain Ash)	X	X	
Penrhys Cemetery	X	X	X
Trealaw Cemetery	X	X	
Treorchy Cemetery	X	X	
Ty Rhiw Cemetery(Taffs Well)	X	X	
Ynysybwl Cemetery	X		

School grounds

There are 117 school premises in RCT, the majority of which have some green space and many have trees, hedges and woodlands within their grounds. As with other urban spaces, some of these are survivals from the pre-development landscape (and probably including some ancient woodland) but many were planted, either when the school was built or more recently. The management of school grounds is typically the responsibility of the school governing body and head teacher. Some schools have extensive woodlands, planted decades ago, where these areas require specialist advice to maintain them in a safe condition for pupils to use these valuable externals areas for the curriculum. There is an urgent need to review the support and advice available to schools for planting and maintaining tree species, grounds management, to maximise the benefits for amenity, climate change, biodiversity and to allow schools to take full advantage of much needed external teaching and learning spaces to assist in delivering the ‘New Curriculum for Wales’.

Trees in Private Gardens

Private residential gardens provide only 14% of urban tree cover in RCT despite taking up about 35% of the urban area. In Wales’ urban areas, private gardens cover about

the same area but provide 20% of all Wales' town tree cover. This is probably due to the dense population and settlement pattern in Rhondda Cynon Taf, but it emphasises the importance of the tree canopy in Council ownership or management to local amenity. - (Town Tree Cover in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough (cyfoethnaturiol.cymru)).

Green Infrastructure

The provision of green infrastructure in and around urban areas is now widely recognised as contributing towards creating places where people want to live and work Planning Policy Wales, green infrastructure has been defined as:

> *"the network of natural and semi-natural features, green spaces, rivers and lakes that intersperse and connect places". Green Infrastructure can function at a range of different scales; from entire ecosystems such as wetlands and rivers to parks, fields and gardens at the local scale and street trees, hedgerows, roadside verges, and green roofs/walls at the micro scale. (PPW 11, paragraph 6.2.1).*

RCTCBC will undertake a Green Infrastructure Assessment (GIA) for the Revised Local Development Plan. This will include sites and corridors that contribute to the green and blue elements of our urban infrastructure. An example of Green Infrastructure relevant to this strategy could be visual and auditory barriers to separate housing from other uses, busy roads and railways and other residential areas. Trees and hedgerows, especially in urban areas, can help provide visual barriers as well as barriers to pollution, noise and wind.

The GIA will need to

- **Identify** where existing green infrastructure can currently be found and where there may be opportunities for improvement, such as through the provision of new green infrastructure, or the enhancement of existing green infrastructure;
- **Consider** what improvements can be made to biodiversity and ecosystem resilience, as well as consider the needs of local communities and society as a whole and how these can be met through green infrastructure;
- **Be applicable** at a range of different levels, from helping to inform the planning of green infrastructure at a development site level, to the more strategic level planning needed to inform, for example, strategies for growth (6.2.9) or to identify suitable locations for off-site compensation (6.4.21).
- **Be regularly reviewed**, to ensure that the information contained within them is up to date and appropriate for use as an evidence base, to inform development management decisions and assists with relevant reporting requirements (6.2.12)

It is worth highlighting that in addition to Planning Policy Wales, there are other drivers for the delivery of green infrastructure, such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. (NRW guidance note 042 June 2021)

Orchards

RCT has very little in the way of traditional orchards. There is however potential within Parks, School Grounds and urban community green spaces to plant orchards. However, to be successful fruit trees do require annual aftercare pruning involving skill and knowledge of what needs doing. There is therefore a long-term commitment required.

Sale of Council Land

Where Council land is sold or leased there may be an increased risk of tree loss and failure to replace them. Valuable trees will be identified and protected prior to sale or transfer of the land to retain the County Borough's asset for the benefit of the wider population. The Council will expect the new landowners or lease holders to work within the guidelines of this Tree Strategy and where appropriate will ask for annual data from them regarding the future condition on felling and planting to feed into our figures for monitoring progress.

Nurseries

Sourcing local provenance, disease free trees will be difficult. Importation of trees played a part in the rapid spread of Ash dieback and further importation runs the risk of importing more pests or diseases. Commercial stock often comes from a limited genetic base and is therefore vulnerable when new disease strikes. The Council will actively engage with volunteer-assisted nurseries that can collect local seed and grow up until large enough to plant out. This will provide a variety of local genotypes and trees that are likely to be adapted to local conditions.

While this should not be the only source of trees for Rhondda Cynon Taf, it can play an important part and increase community involvement in new trees while at the same time managing biosecurity i.e. the prevention of the introduction and spread of harmful organisms.

The primary driver for including biosecurity in procurement policy is to prevent the transmission of pests and diseases due to transportation of tree stock, specifically transportation without adequate oversight or an effective audit trail attributing ownership and a chain of custody from seed to planted tree at its final destination.

Planting for Resilience

This strategy will contribute to Rhondda Cynon Taf's emerging strategy on climate change. The Environment (Wales) Act 2016, sets the context for resilience and the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR) in Wales. It also introduces a requirement for NRW to produce Area Statements and the South Central Wales Area Statement gives a framework for both policy and resilience. The two 'cornerstone' themes 'Building Resilient Ecosystems' and 'Connecting People with Nature' are relevant as are the three specific issues or challenges: Working with Water, Improving Health and Improving Air Quality. Green Infrastructure is a recurring feature of the Areas Statement.

Seven ecosystem profiles are being developed and will provide an evidence base for policy making. The ecosystems are peatlands, freshwater, woodlands, grasslands, valleys and urban (plus coastal).

Environmental Goals for Tree Resilience:

Ecosystem resilience underpins the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources. The Environment Act defines the as four elements that contribute to adaptability. In their guide Natural Resources Wales / Ecosystem resilience field guide NRW define these as

- Diversity - at a variety of different levels and scales, including genetic diversity, species diversity, diversity within and between ecosystems and structural diversity for example.
- Extent - where its area is sufficiently large to sustain populations, support ecological processes and cope with negative edge effects like predation.
- Condition - where the impacts of pressures and demands are positively managed so that the physical environment can support a comprehensive range of organisms and healthy populations.
- Connectivity - where organisms can move within and between different ecosystems, from foraging or migration of individuals, through dispersal of seeds and genes, to the major shifts of species' populations to adjust to a changing climate.
- Ecosystem resilience comes about as a result of an interplay between these aspects, allowing ecosystems to adapt, recover and resist pressures and demands more readily. It is important to note that this applies to all ecosystems in RCT, not just trees and woodlands.

Tree Pests and Diseases

Trees, like all plants, can be attacked by a wide variety of diseases and pests. Dutch Elm Disease in 1970's severely reduced the elm population. Part of the role of the tree risk management programme which will be developed through this strategy will consider the threat of diseases to trees.

Chalara Ash - dieback is of particular importance to the Council as it has become established in parts of the County Borough and can pose a particular threat to trees in the highway corridor. The Council will develop a protocol for dealing with Ash- dieback issues in RCT.

There are opportunities to harvest seed from Rhondda Cynon Taf's own existing tree stock. Mature trees which have naturally seeded in Rhondda Cynon Taf are likely to be best suited to Rhondda Cynon Taf's climate and growing conditions and may be disease resistant. For example, certain mature Wych Elms (Ulmus glabra) in Rhondda Cynon Taf appear to show resistance to Dutch Elm Disease, and ash trees are also showing natural resistance to ash dieback.

Following good biosecurity practices is critical for preventing the introduction of pests and diseases.

Trees and Development of Land

Planning applications will need to demonstrate that there will be enough room for the future growth of new and retained trees to ensure long term retention and avoid pressure from future occupiers to top, lop, or fell healthy trees due to safety concerns or effects on living conditions in order to obtain reasonable sunlight and unshaded

external amenity space. Planning applications will need to provide sufficient information to enable proper consideration of trees on and around the development site with tree survey and planting scheme with appropriate root protection zones undertaken to the latest British Standard. The selection of new species to be planted will use the “right tree for right place” approach.

Tree Management Plans

Trees and woodlands need long term management to ensure their current and future value. Opportunities will be taken on both Council and private land to achieve this long-term management. This will be done through funding applications, working with communities, partner landholders and land managers and, within developments, through planning conditions and any appropriate and necessary obligations as set out in the forthcoming Revised Local Development Plan.

Staff Skills and Training

Arboricultural inspections and works are carried out to the relevant British Standards and following current industry best practice guidance. All staff dealing with trees whether in a planning, landscape, design, highway, safety or operational context will hold the relevant skills, experience and qualifications to undertake their particular roles. Rhondda Cynon Taf's Ranger Service includes several staff with excellent woodland management skills. These skills will be recognised and used, including training other staff. Rangers will be kept informed of all plans and contribute to initiatives about the sites they manage.

Arboriculture is a skilled profession, and for good reason as arboricultural work done improperly can be dangerous and pose risks both to people, property and trees. In the UK, two accreditation schemes exist which provide assurance of the competence and skill of contractors:

- Arboricultural Association
- International Association of Arborists

Council contractors will be held to arboricultural association standards and relevant British Standards for all work, and to set best practice in managing its own tree estate.

Community and Voluntary Engagement

Community support and voluntary engagement will be vital to the successful implementation of this strategy. RCTCBC commits to building a good communication strategy to attract support, advice and help from across local communities.

- A wealth of knowledge and experience exists in Rhondda Cynon Taf's communities around trees and woodland.
- Members of the public on the ground are in the best position to spot signs of tree disease, vandalism etc. or other woodland issues in their local areas.
- Community involvement with trees, woodland and other habitat management, whether it be the council’s planting proposals or those of community or private sector interests will create a sense of ownership for new and expanded trees and woodlands. A sense of community pride will protect new trees and woodlands from vandalism.
- The Council will use its interactive ‘Lets Talk’ platform to engage with communities and develop Let’s Talk Trees.

‘Trees are key to sense of place, identity and pride in local communities’

The Council will develop effective communication channels using both online and paper-based platforms as well as face-to-face local meetings to support the strategy and effectively communicate about the occurrence of and reasoning for planned works. We will share this information more widely with interested groups, individuals and the general public and will encourage residents to get involved with local tree planting and woodland and biodiversity management initiatives, and to engage with them to ensure they are part of the long-term delivery of tree, woodland and wider habitat and biodiversity delivery across the County Borough.

PART 4
RHONDDA CYNON TAF'S HEDGEROW STRATEGY

Part 4: Rhondda Cynon Taf's Hedgerow Strategy

Definition of a Hedgerow

A hedgerow or hedge is a line of woody plants, at least 20m long and up to 5m wide, usually one which is or was a boundary. (Hedgerow Regulations 1997). In Rhondda Cynon Taf hedgerows are important habitat and cultural/landscape feature. Within RCT hedgerows are particularly a feature of the lowland parts of the Cynon Valley and the Taff Ely area, where they are part of ancient pastoral landscapes created when land was first farmed. In many cases our hedgerows are hundreds and possibly thousands of years old. They are linear strips of original ancient woodland, retained and managed as field boundaries by the earliest farmers. As such in their species-richness they are of enormous biodiversity and cultural landscape value.

In the more upland parts of the County Borough, traditional field boundaries typically comprise stone walls. Both types of boundary are of landscape significant in Rhondda Cynon Taf, contributing to the connectivity of habitats across the countryside.

The main threats to traditional boundaries in Rhondda Cynon Taf are from management neglect and from development. The Council has opportunities to improve hedgerow management practices, especially in relation to road verges and to protect hedges in development through the planning system.

Some initiatives to increase hedgerow length to combat climate change are not always appropriate in RCT due to the nature of the historical boundaries, their importance in illustrating landscape history and their locally characteristic fauna and flora.

Value of Hedges

Hedges and stone wall boundaries have great benefits for wildlife and make important and regionally distinct contributions to the landscape of the valleys.

- They act as refuges, food sources, shelter and corridors for movement of wildlife. In RCT their continuity is of particular important for a number of s. 7 species including dormice and bats.
- The presence of some taller trees adds to their wildlife value, as song-posts, perching posts and shelter.
- Hedges benefit people by filtering pollutants from the air, lessening noise and providing screening, all at human height. They are of particular benefit in urban areas and around key sites such as schools and hospitals and along roads.
- Hedges can be valuable where height or width is restricted so larger trees are inappropriate.
- Hedges need to be maintained to keep their value, being best when growing densely without gaps. Hedge-laying styles vary between the north and south of the County Borough.
- In RCT species-rich hedgerows are features of cultural and historic landscape value. Their species composition and the hedge construction varies between different parts of the County Borough and the diversity of species can be a guide to the age of the hedge.
- Valuable hedges, e.g. species-rich hedges or ones of historical importance can be protected by The Hedgerow Regulations 1997. Sites of Importance for

Nature Conservation (SINC) may include ancient and species rich hedgerows in RCT.

Hedgerows, hedge banks and stone walls are acknowledged as an important part of green infrastructure and the Council will seek to protect and manage existing hedges and where appropriate, new planting of simple hawthorn or hazel hedges.
Hedgerows are an undervalued resource. They are important for biodiversity and provide a range of benefits to people. In the past, hedges were used as larders of healthy seasonal food – apples, berries and nuts were collected as a healthy tasty supplement to the diet. Today, we need them as wildlife corridors and because of the large numbers of animals from songbirds to pollinating insects that they support. Existing urban hedges are often clipped, sterile habitats. By changing peoples' perception of what a hedge should be, from a neat 'box' to a more natural and 'wild' hedge, we can improve many urban edges for both biodiversity and for food.

Council Hedges

Hedges will be retained on Council land wherever possible. Young hedgerows will be managed to ensure that they develop into healthy mature hedges in accordance with good practice. Staff training in the management of hedges will be required.

In certain urban locations hedges of exotic or ornamental species may be more suitable and will still contribute to amenity and wildlife. Leyland Cypress hybrids and invasive non-natives such as cherry laurel, will not be specified for use as hedging on Council property. The use of thorny species in house estates or schools should be avoided, unless the hedgerows are being used for security reasons.

Hedges in house gardens are the responsibility of individual owners/tenants and the Council will provide advice and guidance to encourage their retention and sustainable management.

Hedges on Private Land

Although most hedges cannot be protected by a TPO, many, ancient countryside hedgerows in RCT do quality as 'important' under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997 and can have some protection through that process. In some cases, hedgerows also form parts of Sites of Importance for Conservation (SINC) and will have the appropriate planning policy considerations if affected by planning applications. For hedges on development sites the Council will seek protection, improvement, replacement and when appropriate the planting of new hedges. New hedges will also be sought where appropriate to act as boundary features. Generally speaking, new hedges will typically be simple in composition (hazel or hawthorn) and of the construction style typical of the locality. Stone walls or hedge banks may be more appropriate in some areas or RCT.

Enforcement

RCTCBC will ensure that existing hedgerow legislation is properly enforced. The Council will prosecute offenders who damage or destroy hedges in contravention of the law. Where an offence has been committed the Council will take appropriate enforcement action which may include prosecution proceedings. Note this will require increased resources.

All requests for works to hedges on private land will be assessed in accordance with statutory requirements by the Local Planning Authority to determine whether an application is needed under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997 and any other subsequent legislation. The Local Planning Authority is required to determine a Hedgerow Removal Notice including an assessment as to whether the hedge can be classed as “important” under the Hedgerow Regulations.

Requests for work to hedges on Council property will be assessed and authorised by RCTCBC with reference to the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 and best practice guidance.

High Hedge Legislation

Complaints relating to evergreen hedges over 2m in height will be considered in the context of the High Hedges legislation as set out in Part 8 of the Antisocial Behaviour Act 2003 which gives local authorities powers to adjudicate in unresolved disputes over high evergreen hedges: the complainant must first try to resolve the issue through negotiation with the hedge owner.

https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-05/high-hedge-appeals-guidance.pdf


RHONDDA CYNON TAF