

COLLINGHAM *Parish Council*

TREE SAFETY POLICY

Adopted: October 2025

Next Review: October 2026

1. Introduction

Trees provide significant environmental, social and aesthetic benefits to the parish. They are living organisms that naturally change, shed branches or, rarely, fail. The overall risk to human safety is extremely low, but the Council, as landowner, has a legal duty of care to manage those risks in a reasonable and proportionate manner.

This policy sets out how Collingham Parish Council manages the risks associated with trees under its ownership or control while balancing public safety with biodiversity and environmental value.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

- The Parish Clerk will maintain the tree register and inspection records, arrange inspections and ensure recommended works are carried out.
- Grounds Maintenance Contractors and volunteers must promptly report any visible hazards or storm damage to the Clerk.
- The designated councillor will oversee implementation of the policy, commission inspections where needed, and review the policy annually.

3. Legal Duty and Standard of Care

The Council recognises its responsibility as a “reasonable and prudent landowner” under health and safety law. The law requires that reasonable care is taken to avoid acts or omissions that may cause a foreseeable risk of injury or damage. The Council will take actions that are proportionate to the level of risk.

4. Tree Safety Strategy

Trees will be managed on a risk basis, focusing on those within falling distance of areas frequently used by the public such as highways, footpaths, recreation areas, and burial grounds. Trees in remote or infrequently used areas will not normally be subject to formal inspection unless concerns are raised.

Tree management will seek to preserve biodiversity, retain veteran trees and standing deadwood where safe to do so, and support climate resilience through appropriate species selection and maintenance.

5. Inspections

There are three levels of inspection:

1. Informal Observations – ongoing visual checks by people with good local knowledge, including Councillors, contractors and volunteers. Any signs of instability, hanging branches or uprooted trees should be reported immediately.
2. Formal Inspections – structured visual assessments at ground level by someone with general knowledge of trees and an ability to recognise obvious defects. These will identify trees requiring further investigation or work.
3. Detailed Inspections – carried out by a qualified arboricultural specialist where formal inspection indicates a potential problem or for high-value or heritage trees in well-used areas.

6. Inspection Frequency

- Formal inspections will be carried out every 12 months for trees adjacent to public highways, footpaths, play areas, cemeteries or other areas of regular public use.
- Informal checks will be ongoing.
- Detailed inspections will be arranged when a tree presents concern or following severe weather.
- After significant storms, the Clerk will arrange informal checks of key public areas and ensure any urgent risks are made safe.

7. Record Keeping

The Tree Register will record:

- Location and reference number (where appropriate)
- Date and type of inspection
- Findings and risk rating
- Recommended action and date completed

Records will be retained for at least seven years and will be available for review by the Council.

8. Contractors and Volunteers

Any person carrying out tree works on behalf of the Council must:

- Have appropriate qualifications, insurance, and equipment.
- Follow the Council's Health and Safety Policy and use suitable personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Cease work immediately and report to the Clerk if unforeseen hazards are identified.

9. Emergency and Storm Damage

After high winds or other extreme weather events, the Clerk will arrange for informal visual checks in high-use areas. Any tree posing an immediate risk will be cordoned off or the area temporarily closed until inspected and made safe. The Council may use emergency contractors where necessary to protect the public.

10. Reporting and Review

The Council will:

- Review this policy annually or after any tree-related incident.
- Consider inspection reports and ensure that recommended works are included in the Council's maintenance plan.
- Ensure that contractors used for tree work are competent and adequately insured.

11. Definition of Defects

A defect is any structural, health, or environmental condition that may predispose a tree to failure.

An obvious defect is one that a reasonable person, whether specialist or not, would recognise - for example, a cracked trunk, hanging branch, or significant root plate movement.