

Briefing Report

Tree Management Principles 2025

February 2026



I. Background

Plymouth City Council manages tens of thousands of trees across public land, including parks, highways, and open spaces. The city's estimated 395,000 trees deliver £4.6 million annually in ecosystem services, such as carbon capture, air quality improvement, flood mitigation, and urban cooling. Trees are integral to Plymouth's identity and resilience, but they face pressures from urban development, climate change, and limited local government resources.

In 2019, the Council adopted the Plymouth Plan for Trees, built around four principles: Care, Protect, Enhance, and Promote. The Tree Management Principles document sets out the council's approach to managing its trees in relation to that. This document and the approach it sets out has been updated during 2025, aligning with new statutory duties under the Environment Act 2021, local planning policy, and best practice guidance.

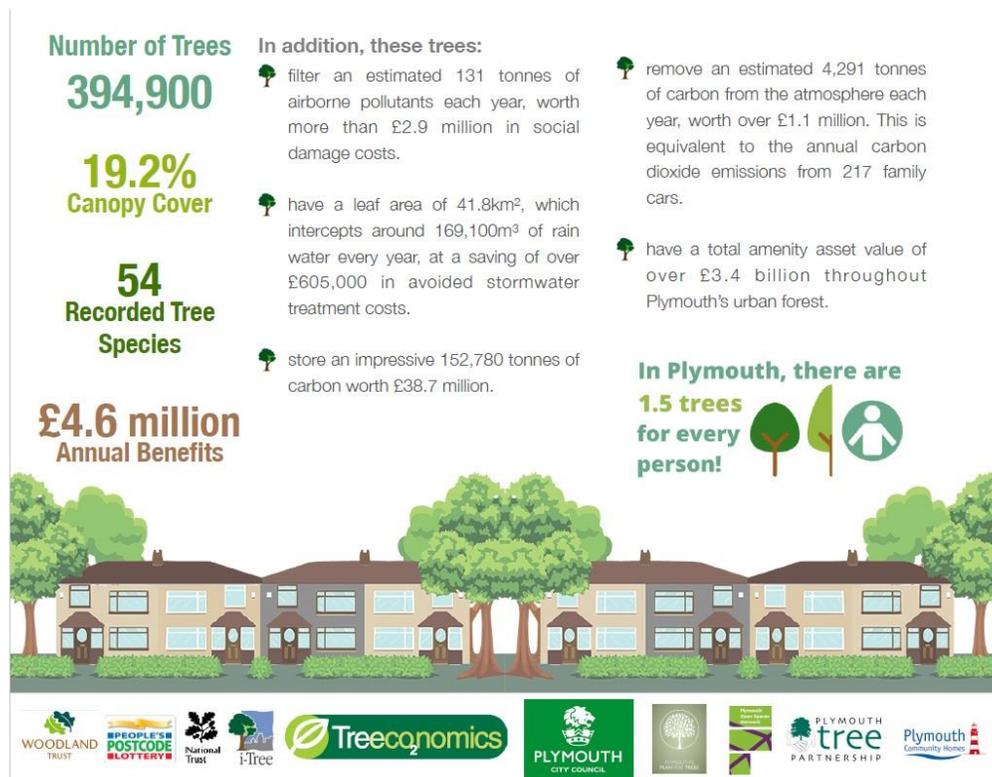


Figure 1 – The Value of Plymouth’s Urban Forest (Treeconomics, 2021)

2. Purpose of the Tree Management Principles

The document provides a clear framework for managing Council-owned and protected trees to:

- **Ensure public safety** through risk-based inspections and maintenance.
- **Define criteria for tree works**, including felling, pruning, and replacement.
- **Integrate tree management** with planning and infrastructure projects.
- **Promote community engagement and transparency in decision-making.**
- **Support urban forestry goals**, including canopy cover, biodiversity, and tree equity.

3. Review Process

There have been several key national and local drivers for this review:

- The introduction, through the Environment Act 2021, of a duty for highways authorities to consult on the removal of ‘street trees’ in certain circumstances and settings

- The council's commitment set out in the Armada Way Learning Review
- The council's commitment through a motion on notice to review its processes around protected trees

The previous document was reviewed to create this updated version by an internal group of council officers from across several departments including Street Services (including Highways, Strategic Planning and Infrastructure, Legal and Corporate Communications.)

As per the council's commitment, this draft of the document has also been reviewed by the Plan for Trees Steering Group, which includes partner organisations including Plymouth Tree People, Woodland Trust, National Trust, Plymouth Community Homes and Plymouth Open Space Network.

Final comments from scrutiny committee alongside that of the steering group have been reviewed, responded to and suitable updates have been made to the final document.

The sign-off of the document is delegated to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change. Natural Environment service will run an internal training session for staff across PCC to familiarise them with the document and what it sets out as the council's commitment to tree management and the requirements for all departments in relation to this.

The Tree Management Principles will continue to be reviewed every five years by Plymouth City Council with partner input. Updates will reflect new legislation, emerging best practice, and local priorities. The review process includes:

- Assessment of risk-based management effectiveness.
- Evaluation of community engagement and consultation outcomes.
- Alignment with the Plan for Trees Delivery Programme and the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest Plan.

4. What Difference Will We See in Tree Management in Plymouth Between 2025–2030?

Key changes and improvements anticipated over the next five years include:

Risk-Based and Transparent Management of trees:

- Expanded use of Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) and proactive surveys.
- Clear public communication on tree works, including online updates and site notices.

Compliance with New Legal Duties:

- Full implementation of Environment Act 2021 requirements for public consultation before felling street trees.
- Strengthened processes for Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and conservation area protections.

Enhanced Urban Forestry:

- Increased tree equity through targeted planting in underserved areas.
- Delivery of 6,000 additional trees via the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest by 2030.
- Adoption of “Right Tree, Right Place” principles and feasibility checklists for street planting.

Integration with Infrastructure and Climate Goals:

- Trees embedded in highway and public realm schemes, balancing safety and canopy cover.
- Use of mitigation hierarchy in development projects to minimise tree loss.

Community Engagement and Stewardship:

- Greater involvement of residents and stakeholders in tree planting and replacement decisions.
- Development of veteran tree trails and interpretation to promote heritage and biodiversity.

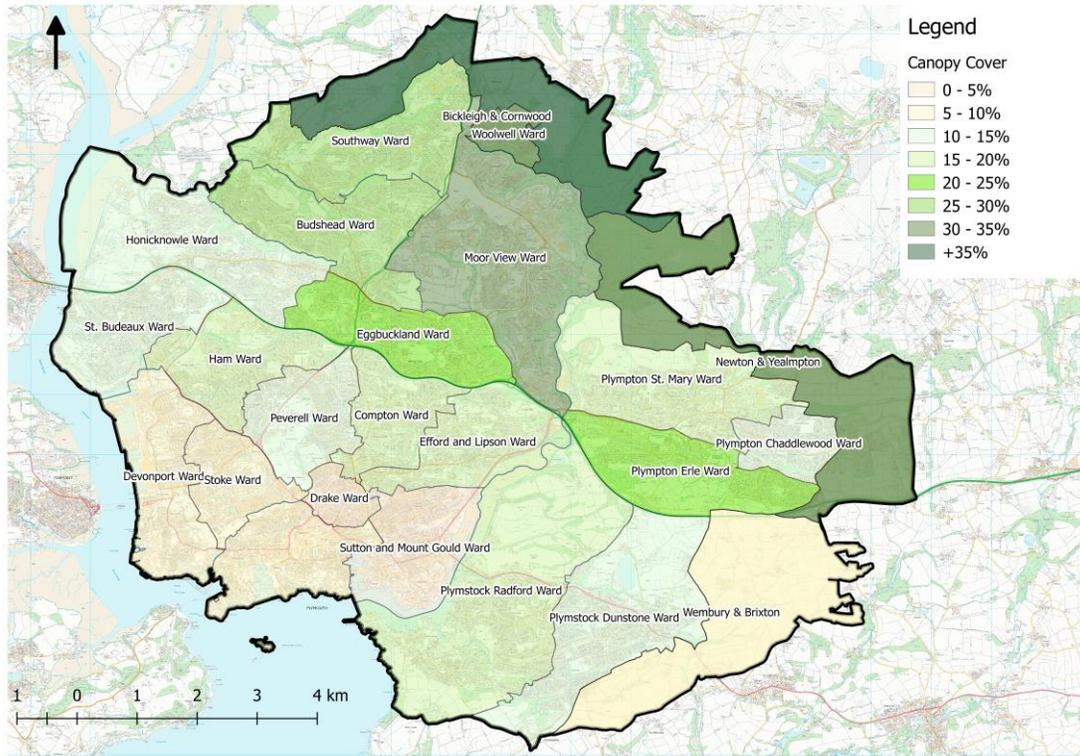


Figure 2 - Plymouth Canopy Cover across Wards

5. Conclusion

The Tree Management Principles 2025 sets a robust, forward-looking framework for managing Plymouth’s urban forest. By prioritising safety, transparency, and sustainability, and by embedding trees into planning and infrastructure, the Council aims to protect and enhance tree cover, while meeting statutory duties and community expectations. Between 2025 and 2030, Plymouth will see more equitable tree distribution, improved resilience to climate change, and stronger public engagement, ensuring trees remain a vital asset for generations to come.