



TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY

Date this document was adopted

CORPORATE

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Policy is to present a clear overview of the City of Adelaide's approach to monitoring, managing, and enhancing its urban forest.

It identifies the key challenges and threats facing its urban forest, while highlighting opportunities to create a more resilient and sustainable canopy that meets community expectations. It also sets out the relevant legislation, standards, and guiding documents that underpin best-practice management of the urban forest.

STATEMENT

Introduction

Managing the urban forest requires balancing the needs of individual trees with the collective benefits they provide. The City of Adelaide is committed to applying industry best practice, operating within the regulatory framework that protects trees, and ensuring the benefits of the urban forest are sustained for future generations.

The urban forest is the collection of all trees within the built and natural areas of a city, town, or suburb. This includes street trees, park trees, and privately owned trees. Council-owned trees form a significant part of this wider forest and are managed collectively to ensure their sustainability and ongoing contribution to the community.

The urban forest in the City of Adelaide is made up of trees owned and managed by the City, including Park Lands, Squares and street trees. In addition, privately owned trees contribute to the overall urban forest, and the benefits trees provide. However, private trees are not managed by the City.

Data on the urban forest includes information about overall canopy cover, collected using remote sensing equipment (LiDAR) and information on individual trees using Council's tree asset management system.

Benefits

Trees provide wide-ranging benefits to the City of Adelaide, including:

- **Economic:** Increase property values, reduce energy costs, support retail activity, and improve public health.
- **Social and health:** Enhance wellbeing, reduce stress, provide shaded places for gathering, and encourage social interaction and activity.
- **Amenity:** Enrich the city's visual character, mark the seasons, offer screening and privacy, and create focal points.

- **Environmental:** Provide shade and cooling, reduce heat island effects and wind speeds, improve air and water quality, stabilise soils, and sequester carbon.
- **Ecological:** Offer habitat and food for wildlife, supporting biodiversity.
- **Cultural and historical:** Represent connections to First Nations peoples, mark cultural events, and highlight significant places in the city's history.

Challenges

Trees are living organisms that grow, shed, age, and eventually die. They are vulnerable to pressures such as urban development, infrastructure works, climate change, and emerging pest and disease threats. They may also fail or cause risks and hazards.

- **Climate change:** Rising average temperatures, reduced rainfall, and more hot days above 36°C will stress species poorly suited to future conditions or already growing in sub-optimal urban environments.
- **Pest and disease:** Increased movement of people and goods, combined with urban stressors and climate change, heightens pest and disease risks.
- **Development impacts:** New developments and infrastructure upgrades can reduce available growing space and damage tree roots.

Opportunities for improvement

Key opportunities to strengthen and sustain the urban forest include:

- **Climate-ready planting:** Trialling new species resilient to heat, drought, and pest pressures.
- **Expanding canopy:** Identifying new planting locations and opportunities.
- **Innovative design:** Applying solutions such as Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) and Biodiversity Sensitive Urban Design (BSUD).
- **Extending tree life:** Improving soil volumes, planting spaces, and growing conditions to prolong useful life expectancy.
- **Building capability:** Recruiting qualified arboriculture staff and supporting ongoing professional development.
- **Infrastructure adaptation:** Reducing tree impacts from electricity infrastructure through aerial bundled cabling or undergrounding powerlines.

TREE MANAGEMENT

Legislation and standards

To manage and enhance the urban forest, the City of Adelaide will adhere to the following legislation and guiding documents.

- Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016
- Local Government Act 1999
- Landscape SA Act 2019

The management of trees will adhere to current industry standards and best practice to ensure they are correctly managed and appropriately protected on development sites.

This includes:

- Australian Standards for pruning of amenity trees, protection of trees on development sites and tree quality for landscape use.
- Arboriculture Australia Minimum Industry Standards for tree pruning, tree removal, tree inspection for access and work, tree support systems, environmental arboriculture, tree health and maintenance, tree risk assessment and tree valuation.

Increasing canopy cover

Increasing and maintaining a sustainable urban forest canopy cover requires consistent and continuous tree planting. New tree plantings will continue through a replacement program when trees are removed.

Additional tree planting opportunities will be identified through routine tree audits and strategic planning efforts that support the City of Adelaide's goal to achieve 40% tree canopy cover by 2035.

The success and long-term health of tree plantings will be improved by sourcing high-quality tree stock, applying both proven and innovative planting methods, and using effective ongoing establishment techniques.

Increasing tree canopy cover also includes preserving existing trees by:

- **Protecting trees** during public events, infrastructure upgrades and both public and private development projects.
- **Improving growing conditions** around established trees to support their long-term health.

URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT:

New tree planting

Tree planting in the City will focus on replacement, opportunity, quality, diversity, and innovation:

When managing new tree planting the following should be considered:

- **Replace:** Trees removed will be replanted through an ongoing replacement program.
- **Identify opportunities:** Routine data collection in streets and Parks, along with broader strategic planning, will highlight new planting sites.
- **Use quality stock:** All trees will meet AS2303 *Tree stock for landscape use*.

- **Select resilient species:** Planting will prioritise diversity, climate readiness, and pest and disease resistance.
- **Plant to best practice:** Works will follow the City's planting specification, with enhanced growing environments and innovative techniques applied where suitable.

Apply innovative design: Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) and Biodiversity Sensitive Urban Design (BSUD) will be integrated where possible.

Urban forest diversity

A resilient and sustainable urban forest relies on strong diversity of both species and age. This diversity helps the forest adapt to climate change, pest and disease threats, and other urban challenges.

Species will be selected to balance site conditions, diversity, resilience and habitat value:

When managing diversity the following should be considered:

- **Match to site conditions:** Consider available space above and below ground, proximity to communication and utility infrastructure, legislative requirements, and climate suitability.
- **Build climate resilience:** Select and trial species that are tolerant of projected climate conditions (using climate analogues) and less prone to pests and diseases.
- **Improve diversity:** Strengthen ecosystem resilience, reduce pest and disease risk, and create more adaptable and visually interesting urban landscapes.
- **Enhance biodiversity:** Prioritise species that support natural habitat opportunities in suitable locations.

Tree valuation

Tree valuations are increasingly important for protecting trees, raising awareness of their value, and supporting improved management.

- The City of Adelaide determines tree values using a method consistent with *Minimum Industry Standard 506 Tree Valuation*.
- Tree valuations are undertaken as part of routine tree audits, on an as-required basis.

Useful Life Expectancy

The useful life expectancy (ULE) of a tree is the number of years it can be expected to provide benefits at an acceptable level of risk under current site conditions.

Maintaining a mix of tree ages ensures that large numbers of trees do not reach the end of their ULE at the same time. This helps sustain canopy cover, spreads

replacement costs, and reduces sudden losses. In some cases, habitat value may extend or increase a tree's useful life expectancy.

Understanding remaining ULE helps us plan for replacement and new planting. Age diversity will be supported through consistent and continuous planting programs.

Tree management objectives shift as trees mature, with pruning and care tailored to each stage:

- **Young trees:** Apply formative pruning to improve structure, accommodate site constraints, and reduce future conflicts.
- **Mature trees:** Prune to mitigate risk, manage site constraints, and enhance amenity value.
- **Veteran trees:** Manage the gradual, natural process of decline in aging trees, reduce risk, and preserve amenity and habitat values.
- **End-of-life trees:** Remove or replace when useful life expectancy is reached, unless ecological, cultural, or historic values warrant retention.

Additional considerations:

- **Prioritise risk:** Management will focus on trees with elevated risk ratings.
- **Support health:** Trees may require supports, pest and disease treatments, or soil amendments at different life stages.
- **Maximise benefits:** Trees provide greater and longer-lasting value when managed appropriately across their lifespan.

Tree pruning and removal

Pruning and removal of Council-owned trees will be carried out within legislative, policy, and industry frameworks to prioritise safety, amenity and tree longevity:

- **Legislative compliance:** Works will meet the requirements of the *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016* (regulated and significant trees, with planning consent as required) and the *Local Government Act 1999*.
- **Policy alignment:** All activities will follow the City of Adelaide's Tree Management Operating Guideline, with priority given to risk management and providing safe clearances for thoroughfares, signage, and infrastructure.
- **Scope of works:** Trees will not ordinarily be pruned or removed in response to customer requests or new developments unless they meet policy criteria. This does not limit Council's authority or obligation to act where a tree presents an unacceptable risk to public safety, or where legislative requirements or urgent operational circumstances require action, regardless of whether a customer request has been made.
- **Standards and expertise:** Works will comply with industry standards and be undertaken or supervised by trained, experienced arborists.

- **Objective:** Management practices aim to extend the useful life expectancy of Council-owned trees.

RISK MANAGEMENT:

Tree-related risk status

The City of Adelaide uses the International Society of Arboriculture's (ISA) Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ), an industry-recognised methodology endorsed for assessing tree risk. Tree risk ratings are recorded during routine audits and ad-hoc assessments by qualified arborists trained in TRAQ. These ratings assist in prioritising tree works, with higher-risk trees addressed before those assessed as lower risk.

When managing risk across the urban forest, the following principles apply:

- **Trees provide essential benefits:** they contribute significantly to community wellbeing and environmental health.
- **The statistical likelihood of harm from tree failure across the urban forest as a whole is low:** this does not mean that individual trees cannot present elevated risk, and Council's risk management program is specifically designed to identify and address those trees through systematic inspection and prioritisation.
- **Risk cannot be eliminated:** trees are living structures that may shed branches or fall during severe weather, and society must accept this to continue gaining their benefits.
- **Duty of care applies:** tree risk is managed in a way that is reasonable, proportionate, and practicable.

Trees in high-use areas are inspected more often than those in lower-use zones. Information supports both individual tree care and whole-of-forest management, including:

- Risk management (pruning or removal)
- Pest and disease monitoring
- Planning replacement of aging trees
- Identifying new planting sites and opportunities

Preparing for a warming climate

The urban forest will be managed to remain sustainable under future climate conditions by:

- **Balancing tree ages:** Monitor and replace over-mature trees, ensuring continuous replenishment with younger plantings.
- **Enhancing water availability:** Support tree health with permeable surface treatments, Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD), additional irrigation systems and expanded water truck programming.

- **Strengthening resilience:** Combine adaptive management with diverse planting to reduce vulnerability to climate stressors, pests, and diseases.

Pest and disease management

The movement of people and goods, combined with a changing climate, increases the risk of pests and diseases in the urban forest.

These risks will be managed by:

- **Monitoring:** Conducting routine audits using Forestree tree inventory software.
- **Diversifying:** Increasing species diversity and selecting climate-ready, pest-resistant species.
- **Strengthening health:** Optimising growing conditions for both new and existing plantings.
- **Managing sustainably:** Applying integrated pest management practices rather than relying solely on chemicals.

HERITAGE AND CULTURAL MANAGEMENT:

National Heritage

The Adelaide Park Lands and City Layout are listed as a National Heritage Place under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)*. Tree management activities — including removal, planting, pruning, maintenance, and infill planting — have the potential to affect this listing.

The National Heritage values include historic plantings and designed landscapes that reflect the contributions of successive City Gardeners. These values are expressed through:

- Groves and avenues of trees
- Gardens and plantations
- Open areas with small copses
- Perimeter and shelterbelt plantings
- Specimen trees
- Designed and natural vistas
- Remnant pre-colonial native vegetation

Culturally Significant Trees

Beyond nationally listed heritage trees, the City of Adelaide recognises a range of culturally important trees. These trees contribute not only to the urban forest but also to the City's sense of time, place, and identity. They are recorded in Forestree, Council's tree asset management system.

Management of culturally significant trees follows the same legislative requirements and best-practice standards applied to all trees. However, additional resources may be allocated to reflect their importance.

Future plantings near these trees will be designed to complement and respect their heritage values.

Protecting Kaurna and Colonial Heritage

The Adelaide Park Lands and City Layout include archaeological and cultural sites protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988* and the *Heritage Places Act 1993*. Damage or disturbance to these sites can result in significant penalties for individuals and Council, as well as reputational harm.

Council identifies areas with a high likelihood of archaeological or cultural significance before any works are undertaken.

National Trust of South Australia – Significant Trees Register

Administered by The *National Trust of South Australia* which is a community based NGO. It identifies and recognises individual trees (or groups of trees) that are considered significant.

It is non-statutory recognition. Being listed does not automatically protect the tree under law, but it raises public awareness and can influence planning decisions. Protection may still come under state laws (e.g. regulated/significant tree provisions in the *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016*) or local council policies.

OTHER USEFUL DOCUMENTS

Related documents

- **Tree Operating Guideline (TOG)**
- **Tree Risk Assessment Protocol (TRAP)**
- City of Adelaide Developments and Applications resources
- Protecting Trees in the Adelaide Park Lands During Events
- Fees and Charges Policy
- Greening Technical Specifications
- Integrated Climate Strategy 2030
- Pest and Disease Management Plans
- Street Tree Planting Policy/Advanced Tree Planting Standard

Relevant legislation

- Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988
- The Adelaide Park Lands Act 2005
- Electricity Act 1996
- Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999
- Heritage Places Act 1993
- Highways Act 1926

- Landscape South Australia Act 2019
- Local Government Act 1999
- Native Vegetation Act 1991
- Planning and Design Code
- Planning, Development, and Infrastructure Act 2016
- Water Industry Act 2012

GLOSSARY

Throughout this document, the below terms have been used and are defined as:

Amenity – A positive element or elements that contribute to the overall character and pleasantness of an area, e.g. trees, old buildings, and other features of the environment.

Arboriculture – The art, science and practice of managing trees in the built environment for social, economic, environmental and aesthetic benefits. Arboriculture is distinct from forestry, which manages trees at a forest scale.

Asset ID – A unique identifier assigned to a tree or other asset in Council's Forestreet management system.

Biodiversity Sensitive Urban Design (BSUD) – An approach to urban design that incorporates habitat, connectivity, and ecological values to support biodiversity in urban environments.

Canopy cover – The proportion of land area covered by the overhead spread of tree canopies, measured using aerial photography or LiDAR.

Council-owned tree – A tree located on land managed by the City of Adelaide, including streets, Park Lands, Squares, and reserves.

Culturally significant tree – A tree recognised for its cultural, historic, or social importance (including links to First Nations peoples, historic events, or community identity). These are recorded in Council's tree asset management system and managed in line with heritage values.

Customer request – A request by a resident or ratepayer within the City of Adelaide for a street or Park Lands tree to be assessed, managed, removed, or planted.

Forestreet – The City of Adelaide's GIS-based tree asset management system, which records tree locations, attributes, inspections, and management actions.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) – A sustainable approach to managing pests and diseases that combines monitoring, cultural practices, biological controls, and minimal use of chemicals.

Minimum Industry Standards (MIS) – Technical standards published by Arboriculture Australia that define accepted practices for pruning, removal, risk assessment, tree valuation, and related arboriculture activities.

Park Lands – The Adelaide Park Lands, including Squares, formal gardens, and natural areas, which are publicly owned and form a ring of green space around the city.

Planting – The installation of a tree at an identified site on public land under the control of the City of Adelaide, including roadways, Council-owned reserves, or Council-owned/leased property.

Qualified arborist

AQF Level 3 (Certificate in Arboriculture) – A person trained to undertake practical tree works in accordance with AS4373–2007 *Pruning of amenity trees*.

AQF Level 5 (Diploma of Arboriculture) – A project arborist responsible for assessment, reporting, tree protection measures, and certification. Competency is based on training, qualification and/or equivalent experience, in line with AS4970–2009 *Protection of trees on development sites*.

Regulated tree – A tree within a regulated tree overlay that has a trunk circumference of 1.0 m or more (measured at 1.0 m above ground) or, for multi-stemmed trees, trunks with a combined circumference of 1.0 m or more and an average circumference of at least 310 mm. Regulated tree requirements are defined under the *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016*.

Reserve – Parks, gardens, playgrounds, ovals, river corridors, detention basins and similar open spaces under the control and management of the City of Adelaide. Reserves are classified as:

- Urban address
- Formal Park
- Sport and recreation
- Woodland
- Riparian

Retrenchment (natural retrenchment) – The gradual process of crown reduction in aging trees, where branches are shed and new shoots develop closer to the trunk. This conserves resources and can extend tree longevity while providing habitat.

Significant tree – A tree with a trunk circumference of 2.0 m or more (measured at 1.0 m above ground) or, for multi-stemmed trees, trunks with a combined circumference of 2.0 m or more and an average circumference of at least 625 mm. Defined under the *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016*.

Species diversity – The variety of tree species (at family, genus, and species levels) within the urban forest. Diversity reduces vulnerability to pests, diseases, and climate stress.

Street tree – A Council-owned and managed tree growing within a road reserve.

Tree – A mature long-lived, woody, perennial plant greater than 3 m in height that has one or relatively few stems or trunks.

Tree pruning – The process of removing branches (or roots) using approved practices to achieve a specific objective, in accordance with MIS308 *Tree Pruning*.

Tree removal – The felling and disposal of a tree in accordance with criteria outlined in this framework and legislative requirements under the *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016*.

Tree risk assessment – A systematic process to identify, analyse, and evaluate the likelihood and consequences of tree failure. Assessments are carried out by qualified arborists using industry-recognised methods such as TRAQ, QTRA, or VALID, consistent with MIS501 *Tree Risk Assessment*.

Tree valuation – The process of determining the monetary value of a tree based on baseline market values, tree quality, social, environmental, and ecological factors, in line with MIS506 *Tree Valuation*.

Urban forest – All trees (public and private) growing within cities, towns, or suburbs, contributing social, economic, environmental, and ecological benefits.

Urban forestry – The art, science, and practice of managing trees and forest resources in and around urban areas for the benefit of people and ecosystems.

Useful Life Expectancy (ULE) – The number of years a tree is expected to continue providing benefits with an acceptable level of risk under current site conditions.

Veteran tree – A tree that has reached a great age relative to others of the same species. Veteran trees often display features such as cavities, deadwood, and retrenchment, and they have high habitat, cultural, or heritage value.

Verge – The strip of land between the roadside kerb and the footpath, typically containing grass, garden beds, and/or street trees.

Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) – An approach to urban planning and engineering that integrates water cycle management (stormwater, groundwater, and wastewater) into urban design to improve water quality, reduce runoff, and support vegetation.

ADMINISTRATIVE

Governance and Review

The Tree Management Policy will be overseen by the City of Adelaide's Arboriculture and Asset Management teams, with accountability through the organisation's Executive and Council. Implementation will be guided by Council policy, legislative requirements, and recognised industry standards.

As part of Council's commitment to deliver the City of Adelaide Strategic Plan, services to the community and the provision of transparent information, all policy documents are reviewed as per legislative requirements or when there is no such provision a risk assessment approach is taken to guide the review timeframe.

This Policy document will be reviewed every **four** years unless legislative or operational change occurs beforehand. The next review is required in **2030**.

Review history:

Trim Reference	Authorising Body	Date/ Decision ID	Description of Edits
ACC2019/84203	City Infrastructure and Public Works Committee	19/11/2019	Review document, update data content and format.
ACC2009/24042	City Infrastructure and Public Works Committee	18/03/2014	Review document, update data content and format.
ACC2009/24042	City Infrastructure and Public Works Committee	01/05/2009	Date created.

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