

Willoughby City Council

Urban Tree Management Policy

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Volume 1

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Introduction

Trees are one of Willoughby's greatest assets. The Willoughby Urban Tree Management Policy establishes a strategic framework to guide the protection, care, maintenance and management of trees throughout the Willoughby local government area.

The policy aims to enhance liveability, connectivity and sustainability. It is the key policy document guiding the development and implementation of other plans and strategies for tree management in Willoughby.

Trees provide many benefits in our urban environment:

- Environment benefits including reducing greenhouse gases, air pollution, stormwater run-off and improving water quality and biodiversity values
- Wellbeing benefits from trees in streets, parks and bushland creating quality passive outdoor spaces and enhanced opportunities for recreation
- Health and social benefits from cleaner air, reduced exposure to air pollutants and temperature extremes and decreased reliance on health system
- Economic benefits from better amenity and connectivity of urban areas, reduced energy consumption and increased real estate values.

The Willoughby Urban Tree Management Policy reflects the goals and objectives of the following key strategic documents:

- Willoughby City Strategy: Community Strategic Plan
- Sustainability Charter
- Sustainability Action Plan
- Council's Delivery and Operational Plans.

The Willoughby Urban Tree Management Policy confirms Council's commitment to protecting and maintaining this asset. It provides a rationale for decision making and consistency in the management approach.

This policy guides a suite of documents and consolidates various plans, policies and procedures for tree protection, management, connectivity and sustainability. These documents include:

- Volume 1: Urban Tree Management Policy
- Volume 2: Regulatory Controls
- Volume 3: Willoughby Street Tree Master Plan
- Volume 4: Willoughby Natural Heritage Register

Background

Context

The Willoughby local government area (LGA), located on the lower north shore only eight kilometres north of the Sydney CBD, offers a broad range of convenient services and facilities as well as accessibility to bushland, parkland and waterways. Willoughby covers an area of approximately 23 square kilometres and is recognised for its leafy green suburbs, tree-lined streets and bushland reserves.

Trees are an important part of this predominantly urban area defining the quality of outdoor spaces, giving scale to buildings and providing shade and habitat for wildlife. They are an integral visual and aesthetic component of the landscape balancing a diverse mix of development from retail, institutional and industrial to residential and recreational facilities. They also contribute significantly to wellbeing and the maintenance of a healthy urban environment by reducing glare and temperature extremes, trapping air borne pollutants, reducing stormwater runoff and absorbing carbon dioxide.

The Urban Forest

Around the world there is a growing awareness of the role cities and local government areas can play in supporting and promoting biodiversity. Urban forest initiatives are taking a key role in shaping these new environments. Willoughby's urban forest includes all the planted and natural trees and all the bushland across the local government area (both public and private land). These trees are an integral part of the urban infrastructure. This "green infrastructure" provides many economic, social and environmental benefits. Willoughby's trees require ongoing protection, monitoring and management to ensure their continued good health. In turn they will deliver a continuous net benefit to communities as time passes.

Many of the large native specimen trees we see today are individual or group survivors of natural ecological communities. They may be examples of regrowth following extensive clearing during the early part of the twentieth century. These trees are valuable reminders of Willoughby's rich natural heritage and biodiversity. Two hundred years ago this landscape was a mosaic of uninterrupted natural vegetation communities reflecting underlying geology, soils and climatic differences. Today these natural communities are increasingly fragmented within the context of urban development and consolidation.

The Blue Gum High Forest (critically endangered) of the central shale plateau, the Hawkesbury sandstone heaths, woodlands, forests and bay-side mangrove communities are all part of Willoughby's natural heritage. Urban development over the past 100 years along with the introduction of new tree species have come to define Willoughby's natural and cultural landscape character and environmental quality. This urban forest combines many different local native, generic (Australian) native and exotic tree species. The age structure is similarly varied ranging from recently established, semi-mature to mature and ageing specimens.

Research has shown that trees make a significant contribution to urban ecology, sustainability and well-being. They provide valuable ecosystem services:

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- Opportunities for adapting to climate change (i.e. heat extremes, increased intensity/frequency of storms, variability in rainfall, etc.)
- Improving air quality by producing oxygen, absorbing carbon dioxide and reducing atmospheric contaminants
- Cooling urban centres and reducing temperature extremes (i.e. mediation of climate fluctuations)
- Reducing energy consumption and associated costs
- Providing benefits of sound mitigation
- Reducing storm water run-off and capturing sediment and pollutants
- Providing habitat and connectivity for native wildlife
- Providing carbon sequestration.

Tree-lined streets are likely to slow traffic speeds and quality streetscapes will increase real estate values. Trees growing in public street verges and private gardens maintain vital linkages and corridors between bushland parks and reserves. In this way trees can help to sustain ecological function, biodiversity and resilience within Willoughby's natural areas and across the urban landscape.

Strategic Direction

Willoughby City Council is committed to reducing the community's carbon footprint. Council has developed a strategic framework for a green, connected and sustainable environment. The strategy aims to connect and expand opportunities for communities and neighbourhoods creating a more diverse and vibrant environment. Connectivity involves ecological, social and economic choices for a greener more sustainable living environment. Tree management policy plays a pivotal role in this process offering significant opportunities to improve the quality of urban ecosystems.

Willoughby City Council is committed to protecting and maintaining trees in public parks, streetscapes and natural areas as well as on private land. Council recognises that the health of these trees must be continuously monitored to maintain vital ecosystem services. This calls for vigilance by Council, particularly against acts of vandalism and damage to these valuable community assets. Trees growing in the City of Willoughby are broadly protected by the WLEP2012 Clause 5.9 Preservation of Trees or Vegetation and WDCP Part C.9.

Willoughby's urban tree management policy aims to deliver industry best practice and cost effective management so that community benefits can be maximised. For this to happen, tree policy needs to broadly work across administrative boundaries and disciplines and actively engage with the community.

Four key tree management *policy objectives* have been identified:

1. To **protect and manage** Willoughby's urban forest (i.e. all planted and natural trees on public and private land);
2. To **enhance connectivity and recovery** of fragmented habitat;
3. To ensure **whole-of-life-cycle tree asset management**;
4. To **promote community awareness and appreciation** of the values and benefits of trees and tree policy issues.



1. Tree Protection

Aim:

To protect and manage Willoughby's urban forest (i.e. all planted and natural tree canopy cover on public and private land).

1. Protecting and managing Willoughby's Trees

Willoughby City Council aims to achieve a sustainable balance between development and the protection of its urban forest and conservation of the natural environment. Urban Tree Management Policy will aim for consistency with Council's strategic planning documents and provide achievable objectives for implementing policy.

2. Willoughby Local Environmental Plan 2012

Willoughby City Council will continue to regulate and assess applications to prune or remove trees in accordance with the Willoughby Local Environmental Plan clause 5.9 and Willoughby Development Control Plan Part C.9- Preservation of Trees or vegetation (WLEP 2012 and WDCP).

3. Willoughby Development Control Plan

The Willoughby Development Control Plan applies to all land in Willoughby and all types of new development. The WDCP provides detailed guidelines and environmental controls, including tree protection and management, to guide development within the Willoughby local government area. Development applications in Willoughby need to comply with all relevant provisions of the WDCP.

4. Willoughby Natural Heritage Register

Willoughby Natural Heritage Register (WNHR) highlights the importance of protecting natural heritage values, including native trees and other vegetation on public and private land in Willoughby.

Willoughby Natural Heritage Register (WNHR) contains many listed trees and other vegetation of natural heritage significance. These items occur as individual specimens and fragmented groups or as contiguous bushland.

The WNHR provides a valuable data base for protecting the natural canopy cover and habitat connectivity between bushland reserves across Willoughby LGA.

5. Development Applications (documentation)

Development applications will need to address the protection of existing trees on, and adjacent to, development sites.

Where tree or other vegetation items have been listed in the Willoughby Natural Heritage Register additional survey and arboricultural information will be required by Council.

6. Pruning for Overhead Powerlines

Urban infrastructure, including overhead and underground services, provides a network of constraints on the urban forest. These issues will be adequately considered in the planning and design stages of development.

Willoughby City Council will continue to promote alternative measures with Ausgrid for reducing the need for ongoing maintenance pruning and cumulative negative impacts on health, vigour and integrity of Willoughby's urban forest.

Streetscapes and precincts defined by groups of mature remnant native tree species or mature planted avenues will continue to be a high priority for alternative options.

Willoughby City Council will condition, where applicable, underground power cabling/ or Aerial Bundled Cable (ABC) in public verges adjacent to new development sites, particularly in commercial areas.

7. Tree Vandalism

Tree vandalism has a significant and cumulative impact on environmental quality, integrity and connectivity, Willoughby City Council will pursue acts of vandalism on trees (i.e. illegal tree removal, damage or poisoning) in accordance with Councils adopted procedures.

Tree pruning and/ or removals are subject to the provisions of the Willoughby Development Control Plan Part C.9. Illegal tree removal, damage and poisoning are specifically prohibited acts and penalties are in place for breaches of this Order.

8. Management of Bushfire Risk

Trees can be managed for Bushfire Risk on private property in accordance with the *Rural Fires (Vegetation Clearing) Amendment Bill 2014* and the *10/50 Vegetation Clearing Code of Practice*.

Councils Bushfire Hazard Reduction team manages Council's hazard reduction program in accordance with the Bushfire Risk Management Plan (BRMP).



2. Habitat Protection, Recovery and Connectivity

Aim:

To enhance ecological connectivity and recovery of fragmented habitat.

1. Habitat Fragmentation and Recovery

Historically, most of the natural bushland in Willoughby was cleared for development. Willoughby City local government area now conserves approximately 290 hectares of bushland, comprising 12% of the total land area.

Willoughby City Council supports a broad range of local community-based conservation efforts and programs which have played a vital role in protecting and recovering Willoughby's bushland.

2. Enhancing Green Infrastructure

Willoughby City Council will continue to enhance connectivity of bushland reserves and waterways with commercial centres and urban green spaces creating a more diverse, vibrant and sustainable environment.

Improved connectivity creates opportunities for synergy encouraging a broader range of outdoor activities, a greater emphasis on quality green spaces, recreational facilities and broader use of the parks system.

3. Promoting Connectivity – “Islands to Networks”

Many cities around the world and across Australia have established, or are establishing, urban forest canopy cover targets. The methodology for developing these targets is as varied as the target values and time-frames.

Willoughby City Council will review opportunities to build on the existing tree data base and Council's asset management system to establish achievable targets for urban forest cover.

4. Designing for Connectivity

Willoughby City Council will continue to encourage best practice in the design and implementation of green infrastructure, genetic integrity and networking of natural systems.

Willoughby's urban forest policy and bushland conservation strategies are closely linked to ensure consistency with objectives and outcomes.

Connectivity and recovery processes support and supplement the work undertaken in bushland reserves (i.e. bush regeneration, restoration and enhancement strategies including local provenance sourcing).

5. Protecting natural heritage values

Willoughby City Council will promote integrity values and the potential benefits of habitat connectivity through appropriate selection of suitable plants in replacement and restoration programs.

Protecting and securing the genetic integrity of local populations or communities will ensure future resilience and continuity in ecological processes. Using local native species consistent with the fragmented ecological community will maintain a sense of place and protect the integrity of natural areas.

Willoughby City Council will continue to ensure pruning, removal and replacement procedures for habitat trees are consistent with the objectives for public safety and risk management as well as habitat protection, recovery and connectivity.



3. Tree Asset Management

Aim:

To maintain health, integrity and diversity in the tree population.
To promote a balanced approach to tree species selection dependent on local site context, suitability and performance criteria.

1. Maintaining health, integrity and diversity

Willoughby City Council will continue to enhance the quality and connectivity of urban streetscapes ensuring appropriate selection of tree species – the right tree for the right place.

Diversity is a critical driver for connectivity providing many benefits for a community – improving health, well-being and enhanced opportunities for recreation. Diversity provides enhanced protection against the spread of diseases and pests.

2. Street Tree Inventory and Asset Management

Willoughby City Council will continue to update and enhance capabilities of the existing Street Tree Inventory:

- To provide a tree management tool which can be easily updated
- To maintain a continuous record of whole-of-life-cycle management
- To provide opportunities to link data base with Council's asset management system
- To assist in valuation of Council's tree assets
- To assist planning and preparation of a Street Tree Masterplan.

3. Tree Asset Valuation

Willoughby City Council will continue to review options for valuation of tree assets (i.e. establishing replacement value). This data will be linked to Council's asset management system.

Valuation methods provide a range of options for measuring benefits including reducing energy inputs, total stored CO₂, improving air quality, stormwater harvesting and aesthetics.

4. Street Tree Masterplan

Willoughby City Council will develop a Street Tree Masterplan that responds to site-specific conditions and surroundings consistent with tree management policy and best practice methods.

5. Tree selection and nursery procurement

Willoughby City Council will continue to promote environmental sustainability, best practice and ethical procurement in the approach to planting design and selection of suitable species.

The Street Tree Masterplan can provide the planning framework for establishing pre-growing to order, specialist provenance services, implementation of larger projects and staged replacement programs and NATSPEC compliance.

6. Tree planting, establishment and maintenance

Willoughby City Council will continue to ensure best practice methods and horticultural standards are applied to planting, establishment and ongoing maintenance of trees in street verges and parkland.

7. Tree pruning, removal and replacement

Willoughby City Council is required to assess trees with respect to pruning and removal in public streetscapes, parkland, bushland and/ or private property in accordance with the WDCP.

Trees can pose public safety risks, particularly if they have sustained physical damage or disease, or are ageing and senescent. Public safety must always take priority. Willoughby City Council has specific strategies in place for monitoring tree performance, condition and health, and determining the appropriate response where tree pruning, monitoring or removal and replacement may be necessary. Generally, only dead, dying or dangerous trees are removed to avoid potential hazardous situations.

To ensure consistency in tree pruning, removal and replacement Willoughby City Council will continue to assess tree applications in accordance with established criteria and procedures.

8. Emergency procedures (tree removals)

In emergency situations, risk to public safety or property will take priority over Council's tree protection measures.

Where public safety or property is at risk, emergency services may remove tree(s) in accordance with relevant legislation, policies and protocols.

9. Tree maintenance and risk management

Willoughby City Council will maintain trees proactively and follow standard procedures for emergency and general claims in relation to tree damage.



4. Community Engagement

Aim:

To promote community awareness and appreciation of the values and benefits of trees and tree policy issues.

To provide information and engage with the community in tree management issues.

1. Facilitating community awareness and appreciation of the benefit of trees

Willoughby City Council will continue to provide strong leadership and to guide a participatory approach to community engagement with respect to tree management policy. This policy aims to develop community knowledge, skills and opportunities to actively engage in programs to enhance urban environmental quality.

Willoughby City Council aims to inspire community participation, flexibility in delivery of programs, adaptive learning, transparency in processes and opportunities for reflection and celebration of milestones through media releases, newsletters, special events and Council's website.

2. Community programs: street tree selection and management

Willoughby City Council will continue to promote awareness in the community of tree policy objectives and the need for a consistent approach to selection and management of street trees.

Willoughby City Council will continue to provide a broad range of community programs with opportunities for involvement in tree planting and broader environmental and social sustainability.

3. Managing change: street tree removals and replacement programs

Tree removal and replacement programs involve considerable change for a community. Willoughby City Council will clearly articulate the issues and the rationale established for tree removal/ replacement programs.

Council will provide strong leadership whilst ensuring flexibility, transparency and opportunities for community response and engagement. This process aims to build a capacity for change through broader ownership of the actions, decisions and shared responsibility.

4. Community information: tree pruning, removal and replacement

Willoughby City Council will continue to provide community information regarding pruning and removing trees under the WDCP. This information includes:

- Pruning a neighbour's tree including reference to the L&EC and *Trees (Disputes between Neighbours) Act 2006*
- Poor management issues
- Application process for removing or pruning a tree
- Council feed-back and appeals process
- Assessment of applications
- Penalties for a breach of the WLEP 2012 and WDCP.

5. Neighbour disputes over tree removals

Willoughby City Council will maintain current procedures, referrals and community information with respect to tree disputes between neighbours.

Tree disputes between neighbours on residential properties (i.e. not Council owned or managed land) will be referred to the *Trees (Disputes between Neighbours) Act 2006* and the Land & Environment Court website.

Where agreement is reached between neighbours involving removal or pruning of a tree, an application under the WDCP may need to be submitted by the owner of the property on which the tree is situated. Written approval from Council must be received prior to undertaking any work.

6. Solar panels and tree protection

Willoughby City Council will provide leadership in connecting reduced energy use objectives with Tree Management Policy.

Council will promote awareness in the community of the benefits of protecting trees when installing solar hot water and photovoltaic systems.

Requests for tree removals following installation of solar panels are inconsistent with the broader objectives of sustainability and connectivity. Applications for tree removals will be assessed accordingly.

