REPORT FGP26.019 TREE STRATEGY REPORT
Author: Jon Sloan, Parish Clerk
Date: 27th August 2026

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT
   To present the independently commissioned Tree Management plan 2026-2031_AW, together with the accompanying Councillor Summary and Q&A with consultant, for consideration by the Committee. Items two and three included with the report. Full Tree Management plan available on request.

   The Clerk seeks the Committee's initial support for the strategic direction set out within the Tree Management Plan and its associated recommendations, subject to final determination by Full Council.

   The Clerk also seeks to establish a policy position that will enable future tree management budgets for 2027/28 and beyond to be developed in accordance with the consultant's recommendations and the Council's long-term management objectives.

2. BACKGROUND
   The Parish Council owns and manages significant areas of public open space across Laverstock, Ford, Bishopdown and Old Sarum. These areas contain a substantial tree asset comprising approximately 799 individual trees together with 77 groups of trees, hedgerows and woodland areas.

   In 2026, the Council commissioned Amelia Williams, Chartered Arboriculturist and Director of The Arboricultural Company, to undertake a comprehensive review of the Parish's tree stock and prepare a strategic five-year management plan. The commission was intended to:
   - Establish a future tree management approach.
   - Support the strategic inspection and surveying regime.
   - Promote cost-efficient management.
   - Ensure a sustainable and ecologically sensitive approach.
   - Provide a balanced framework for managing the Council's tree stock.

   The resulting management plan is intended to provide a strategic framework for the management, inspection and maintenance of the Council's tree assets over the period 2026-2031.

3. KEY FINDINGS
   The consultant's overall assessment is broadly positive. The report concludes that:
   - The tree stock is generally in reasonable condition.

- There is no evidence that previous recommendations have been systematically neglected.
- 56% of trees are in good condition and a further 33% are in fair condition.
- 90% of the assessed tree stock falls within the 'very low risk' category.
- No trees were identified as presenting significant, serious or extreme levels of risk.

However, the report also identifies several important long-term management challenges, including:

- Ongoing management of ash dieback.
- Future pollarding requirements for the Hampton Park London plane trees.
- Routine cyclical maintenance including crown lifting, pruning and deadwood removal.
- Young tree establishment and maintenance.
- Replacement planting and succession planning.
- Veteran tree and woodland management.

It should be noted that Bishopdown Farm's survey is not due until 2027, so the report is not complete in this regard.

The consultant advises that continued proactive management is necessary to prevent a future maintenance backlog, reduce reliance on reactive works and ensure the Council continues to meet its duties of care as a landowner.

4. STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

The Clerk considers that this report has significance beyond simply identifying tree works.

If adopted, the Tree Management Plan would become the Council's principal strategic framework for:

- Tree inspections and surveying.
- Tree risk management.
- Tree maintenance programmes.
- Ash dieback monitoring.
- Replacement planting.
- Biodiversity enhancement projects.
- Volunteer and community involvement initiatives.
- Long-term financial planning for tree assets.

In effect, it provides the Council with a structured, evidence-based approach to managing one of its largest environmental assets over the coming years.

5. BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

The most significant implication arising from the report relates to future budget provision. The current tree budget for 2026/27 is £26,000. The consultant's assessment suggests the following indicative funding levels:

Management Level	**Annual Budget**
Low Intensity	£29,630
Standard Management	£39,250
High Intensity Management	£48,870

The accompanying Q&A document explains the methodology behind these figures and sets out the consultant's view that the current budget is insufficient to deliver the full programme of recommended works, replacement planting commitments and proactive management activities identified within the report.

The consultant's preferred recommendation is that the Council works towards the Standard Management budget level of approximately £39,250 per annum. Whilst she notes that a High-Intensity Management approach would enable a more ambitious programme of woodland, landscape belt and replacement planting work, she specifically advises that the Standard Management budget should be viewed as the appropriate target at this stage.

No immediate budget decision is required at this meeting.

However, if the Council supports the strategic direction of the report, officers will be able to reflect its recommendations during preparation of the draft 2027/28 budget later in the financial year.

6. OFFICER COMMENTS

Following discussion with the consultant, the Clerk is satisfied that:

- The report provides a credible and evidence-based assessment of the Council's tree stock.
- The consultant has provided detailed justification for her budget recommendations.
- The proposed inspection and management framework is proportionate to the scale of the Council's estate.
- The report aligns with the Council's existing commitment to proactive asset management.
- Early consideration of the financial implications will assist budget development for 2027/28.

Members should note that the Full Council meeting on 21 September 2026 will be attended by Amelia Williams, who will provide a presentation on the report and answer questions from members directly.

7. RECOMMENDATION

The Finance & General Purposes Committee is recommended to:

- Receive and note the contents of the Tree Management plan 2026-2031_AW, the Councillor Summary and the Q&A with the consultant.
- Acknowledge the Tree Management Plan as a comprehensive strategic framework for the future management of the Parish Council's tree stock and associated green spaces.
- Indicate its support, in principle, for the overall management approach and recommendations contained within the Tree Management Plan, subject to consideration and determination by Full Council.
- Recommend that the financial implications identified within the report be taken into account during preparation of the Council's 2027/28 budget and Medium-Term Financial Planning process, subject to future decisions of Full Council.
- Recommend that Full Council consider adoption of the Tree Management Plan as the Council's strategic framework for tree management for the period 2026-2031.

ANNEX ONE – Tree Management Plan 2026-2031_AW

Full report available upon request

ANNEX TWO - Councillor Summary: Tree Management Plan 2026-2031

This report provides a strategic 5-year plan for the management of the Parish Council's trees across Laverstock, Ford, Bishopdown and Old Sarum. The overall conclusion is positive: the tree stock is generally in good condition, presents a low level of risk, and there is no evidence of previous recommendations being neglected. However, continued investment is needed to address ash dieback, maintain safety, and avoid a future backlog of tree works.

Key findings

Tree Stock

Approximately 799 individual trees, plus 77 groups of trees and woodland areas.

59% are young trees, providing a strong future canopy.

56% are in good condition and 33% in fair condition.

Overall tree risk is low, with 90% assessed as very low risk.

No trees were identified as posing significant, serious or extreme risk.

Priority Issues

The principal management challenges over the next five years are:

- Ash dieback monitoring and removal of declining ash trees.
- Ongoing pollarding of London plane trees at Hampton Park, Bishopdown.
- Routine maintenance such as crown lifting, deadwood removal and pruning over footpaths and roads.
- Young tree establishment and maintenance.
- Ivy management to enable inspections.
- Replacement planting and succession planning.
- Management of veteran trees and woodland habitats.

Recommended actions

1. Continue three-year professional tree surveys

Recommendation: Maintain the current system of professional arboriculture surveys every three years.

Reason: This is considered appropriate for publicly accessible open spaces and helps the Council meet its legal duty of care.

Cost Implication: Ongoing survey costs should remain a core annual budget commitment.

2. Introduce annual walkover inspections

Recommendation: Carry out annual inspections between formal surveys.

Reason: To monitor ash dieback; declining trees; deadwood; highway and footpath clearance issues; post-storm damage.

Delivery: Can be undertaken by trained Parish staff rather than consultants.

Cost Implication: Relatively low cost; Rich has Level 1 LANTRA certification. Gary needs to be trained.

3. Complete priority safety works

Recommendation: Ensure all priority works identified in surveys are completed within recommended timescales.

Highest-priority locations include: Whitebridge Spinney (Site A); Pilgrims Way (Site O); Other sites also contain some priority works.

Cost Implication: Should be treated as first call on annual tree budgets.

4. Establish a formal ash dieback programme

Recommendation: Monitor affected ash trees annually. Remove trees entering advanced decline. Replant suitable replacement species.

Current monitoring requirement: 47 individual ash trees. Approximately 148 ash trees within groups.

Cost Implication: Continued annual expenditure is expected as ash dieback progresses.

5. Maintain pollarding programme at Hampton Park

Recommendation: Re-pollard 84 London plane trees every 3 to 5 years. Next cycle due Nov 27 earliest (plan for it in budget). Though tree surgeon advise we can extend to Nov 2028.

Reason: Maintain safe size, manage crown weight and prolong tree life.

Cost Implication: One of the Council's largest recurring tree liabilities and should be planned for in future budgets. Estimated £18k-£20k at 2026 prices.

6. Develop a Hampton Park trail management programme

The consultant recommends a long-term programme to manage excessive poplar and aspen regeneration. This will reduce future maintenance costs and improve footpath access, as well as helping to monitor ash dieback.

Cost Implication: Initial investment required, but expected to reduce future management costs significantly. Note that officers have already purchased equipment and scheduled training to carry out some of this work in house.

7. Increase volunteer and staff-led maintenance

Recommendation: Establish a volunteer 'Tree Warden' scheme.

Potential volunteer activities: ivy severance (some carried out in house already); young tree maintenance; minor crown lifting; coppicing small growth and monitoring and reporting issues.

Benefit: Reduces contractor costs and increases community engagement.

8. Expand tree planting and biodiversity initiatives

The report recommends: replacement planting wherever trees are removed; new tree planting annually; community orchards; wildflower areas; habitat piles, bird boxes and deadwood retention.

Grant funding opportunities have been identified to support this work.

Budget implications

Current tree budget (2026/27): £26,000.

The report estimates an appropriate annual budget range of:

Management Level	Annual Budget
Low Intensity	£29,630
Standard	£39,250
High Intensity	£48,870

The consultant concludes that the Council's current allocation of £26,000 is below even the low-intensity management level.

Budget recommendation

The Council should consider increasing the annual tree budget towards:

Minimum target: ~£30,000 per annum

Preferred target: ~£39,000 per annum

This would provide greater resilience for: ash dieback works; pollarding cycles (est £18k+ every 5 or so years); inspections and surveys; replacement planting; emergency works following storms or disease outbreaks.

ANNEX THREE – Q&A with the consultant

The report recommends a standard management budget of £39,250, compared with the Council's current £26,000 budget, an increase of roughly 51%.

1. How was the £39,250 figure calculated?

- 731 individual trees
- 77 groups of trees
- £40 per tree and £130 per group for "standard management"

producing the recommended baseline of £39,250. Then there s the high intensity management figure of £48,870 (£40 per tree or £130 per group).

Is this an industry benchmark, and if so what is the source?

What evidence underpins it?

Is it based on actual expected works or a standard asset-management formula?

The price per tree is based on an industry-calculated formula that I have developed from managing tree populations for the MOD and local authority based on age classes, initially over the past 20 years. It was around £20 for young trees, £54 for middle-aged trees and £100 for mature trees.

Having reviewed your tree population with this initial formula, the results then were as follows:

The annual requirement for the tree stock was the following:

£9,580 for young trees

£15,336 for middle-aged trees

£4,300 for mature trees

A total budget resulted in £29,216 overall for managing just the specific individual trees, which did not include groups at this point, so I needed to expand my assessment to allow for this, and this was already in excess of the current budget of £26k.

I was hoping to review this in relation to the actual tree works that had come out of the tree surveys from before my time as well as during my time and the budgets spent, but I had no actual tree work invoices or costs to use at this point beyond a few budget figures from the Parish Council website.

So for the groups, I had limited data, as I am not aware of the costs of some of the works, but I looked at the cost for the recommended works for the groups based on the number of trees within the groups as well as using industry schedules of rates for tree work, and the figures of £100 based on low-intensity management, £130 for standard management and £160 for high-intensity management were derived from the group assessment, which is not complete, as not all sites have the groups fully recorded yet.

So adding in the group costs of around £10,010 to the individual tree costs of £29,216, the overall figure of £39,226 was the result. This was rounded up to £39,250 to obtain the figures of £40 per tree and £130 per group.

The proposed standard budget of £39,250 is more reflective of the costs of managing the current tree stock that has been surveyed in detail as well as an allowance for areas that still require more detailed tree surveys. It would allow for all the current scheduled and planned maintenance to occur to ensure site safety as well as address the current issues that have been identified. Below is a breakdown of this from a 5-year prediction of costs.

Predicted 5 year costs from 2026 - 2031	**Costs**
Cyclical tree works from tree surveys for H&S	£18,000.00
Ground-based tasks for tree maintenance including young tree maintenance and watering, if this is separated out from the main H&S tree works	£60,000.00
Repollarding the London planes	£21,000.00
Ash dieback works if remaining ash need to be felled – known numbers include 62 individual ash and around 132 recorded in groups currently but assessment incomplete	£28,000.00
Replacement planting costs – for purchase and planting only: £10,500 for purchase of around 100 standard trees and £14,500 for planting with materials, although 169 fells have occured or are planned from 2022 to present day so this is below the policy requirement for one for one replacement planting	£25,000.00
Reactive tree works - storm damage, resident issues	£10,000.00
Tree survey and tree management costs & detailed ground or aerial inspections.	£18,000.00
Incomplete survey areas to bring back into management - eg Hampton Park Trail, Bishops Down Farm areas, Longhenge	£20,000.00
	£200,000.00

2. What specific works cannot be delivered with a £26,000 budget?

What would be delayed or omitted?

What recommendations are essential versus desirable?

The current budget of £26k will not currently cover the annual cost of the tree works from the tree surveys from 2026. The tree surveys identified more works at Site A, for example, which will potentially create an overspend in addition to the other works recommended following the most recent surveys for 2026.

All the priority works are essential for safety, while the routine works are desirable to mainly address inspection restrictions around ivy severance as well as young tree maintenance and establishment. The current budget does not allow for the young tree maintenance to occur or the replacement planting to meet the current tree policy of one-for-one replacement planting.

3. Why does the report recommend a budget increase when the tree stock is generally in reasonable condition and predominantly low risk?

The current budget is not sufficient to allow for carrying out the tree works from the tree surveys for both the priority and routine works at present to fully manage the health and safety risks posed.

Even though the trees themselves generally are young to middle-aged, there is still a level of risk associated with this, and without works, these issues can build up to become larger issues if left like ivy building up in trees, causing them to then fail or hiding defects from which the trees then fail, and this is preventable.

The full extent of the risk at Bishops Down has not been surveyed in detail, and although it is currently seemingly low, as the trees continue to develop, this risk will increase if the trees are not being managed, and for this site there is a backlog of management in relation to the landscape belts.

The low-risk element does not cover the replacement planting to ensure a sustainable tree stock for the future with replacement planting as well as the associated cost with establishing young trees, which is very expensive within the first 3-4 years, especially around watering.

4. What happens if the budget remains at £26,000 (with annual inflation only increases)?

After 1 year? 2 years? Etc.

You will store up a backlog of tree work and have an increased risk for insurance claims if works have been recommended and are not carried out within the timescales and subsequently the tree or part of the tree fails and causes damage or injury, and this could have been prevented if the works had been carried out.

You will not be able to meet your replacement planting requirements as set out in your current tree policy.

It will lead to a build-up of more reactive requests for tree works as well as potentially statutory notices from Highways if roads and footpaths are not managed annually for statutory compliance for safety.

The cost of reactive tree works is always higher than planned tree works, as they are usually required on shorter timescales, and contracts or tenders are not always in place to aid with getting them good value prices with schedules of rates for planned works.

5. Is there a maintenance backlog developing?

If so, how large is it?

What costs are being deferred to future years?

There is currently a maintenance backlog for the sites that have not been fully surveyed to record the full tree stock and required tree management and maintenance works, so at present the full extent of the number of trees and groups is not able to be accounted for, and, likewise, the scale of works has not been fully assessed.

The backlog also includes landscape belts that may now require pruning or thinning, as they have developed without proactive intervention and just reactive work on an ad hoc basis.

The tree stock as it grows will continue to require management, and the young trees will develop into semi-mature trees, so the risk increases in addition to the cost of management to carry out tree works, as they will require, in some instances, aerial tree work as opposed to ground-level tree work.

So formative pruning while trees are young is a good example of pruning out stem defects while the tree is developing to prevent failures as the tree ages.

Annually, the costs of purchasing trees, planting trees and establishing trees are going up, as this becomes harder with changing climates and demand for trees as well as the cost of producing the trees and sourcing the correct trees.

6. What level of future ash dieback expenditure is expected?

How many ash trees are likely to require removal?

What is the expected financial impact over five years?

See the tables which include ash dieback removal costs as well as replacement planting costs – approximately 62 individual ashes are present, excluding the recorded 134 ashes within groups and ash that have not been recorded on the sites that have not been fully surveyed yet, like Bishops Down Farm and Longhenge.

I have factored in a £28,000 cost for ash removals over the next 5 years, and this could also be used to deal with dead elms, which are also increasing in numbers due to Dutch elm disease and changing climates.

7. Why has the high intensity management (£48,870) been included?

Is it a recommendation? A benchmark? A worst-case scenario?

The proposed high-intensity management budget of £48,870 allows for an even more proactive approach to each site as well as the tree stock overall, including addressing any future issues of tree health problems; climate change; large projects around woodland management and around boundary treatments by properties, roads and rivers; and allows for a tree population that is developing from a young tree stock to an established tree stock.

Tackling problem areas now to avoid future conflicts for tree locations with site constraints, especially for tree landscape belts that will need thinning as well as managing.
Also meeting replacement planting proposals to ensure newly planted trees can be established for survival rather than just being planted and creating a replacement planting programme based on a tree strategy and full site assessment prior to planting.

To invest further in tree management and maintenance now to save costs long-term, preventing trees from becoming problems later with management intervention now.

To also invest in training for in-house staff for tree surveys or use external consultants to aid with tree management annually rather than just for the re-surveys.

Predicted 5 year costs from 2026 - 2031 - High intensity	**Costs**
Cyclical tree works from tree surveys for H&S	£18,000.00
Ground based tasks for tree maintenance including young tree maintenance and watering	£60,000.00
Repollarding the London planes	£21,000.00
Ash dieback works if remaining ash need to be felled – known numbers include 62 individual ash and around 132 recorded in groups currently but assessment incomplete	£28,000.00
Replacement planting strategy and costs for 150 standard trees – for purchase and planting only for 5-year replacement – this is closer to the actual number of fells that have occured and require replacement within the past 5 years so this would allow for compliance with the policy for one-for-one replacement planting	£30,000.00
Reactive tree works - storm damage, resident issues	£10,000.00
Tree survey and tree management costs & detailed ground or aerial inspections and training of in-house staff and managing volunteer groups to aid with education and community engagement tasks.	£20,000.00
Incomplete survey areas to bring back into management - eg Hampton Park Trail, Bishops Down Farm areas, Longhenge	£20,000.00
Woodland management plan and woodland management works for Site A Whitebridge Spinney	£15,000.00
Landscape tree management works for Site G, Site K and Site N and Site P to bring these areas into management	£23,000.00

	£245,000.00

8. What additional activity would this extra £9,600 above the standard management budget fund?

See above and I would recommend going for the standard budget increase to the £39,250 although it would be good to aim for the high intensity to reduce the longer term issues.

9. What savings could be achieved through volunteer, staff-led or (any) lower cost maintenance programs?

Some detail on the tender suggestions you gave would help here. Lower hourly rates instead of tree surgeon rates for low level work.

Example costs for tree work tasks (excluding VAT)

- Young tree maintenance is around £15 - £20 per tree for mulching, checking stakes, ties, formative pruning etc
- Watering a young tree is around £8 - £10 per tree per watering and 24 waterings are recommended for the first 4 years to get trees established, once per week over period from April to October and doubling up on watering during hot summers so approximately £240 per tree over each year for 4 years
- Re-pollarding young London Plane trees cost £240 - £280 per tree so for the 84 London planes £20,160 - £23,520
- Crown reductions - £1200 - £1500 for mature trees and usually a days work involved
- Crown lifting is around £95 - £110 per tree for up to 2.5 metres
- Ivy severance - £30 - £55 per tree, subject to size
- Deadwood removal – young to semi-mature trees – cost per tree £120 - £125
- Fell price for a small tree - £95 - 150, medium tree £150 - 390, large tree £390 - £1200+ subject to site constraints etc
- Day rate for 3 person tree team is around £1,200 - £1,500 plus VAT
- Day rate for a 2 person tree team is around £700 plus VAT

Ground-based costs for tree maintenance annually: £12,000 - £14,000

- This could include formative pruning, mulching, watering, checking stakes and ties, crown lifting over footpaths, pruning back from signs and paths or roads, and ivy severance and removal.
- Frequency is to be based on at least 2 days a month, with fortnightly visits as a minimum around the sites – it would be good to create a work schedule for each site.
- The specification would be to maintain access around the footpaths at all times.
- Report any tree damage or defects to the LFPC immediately when they are observed with a W3W and photograph them via WhatsApp.
- To ensure young trees are well maintained, watered, mulched, weeded, staked, and tied and replaced as necessary, including any replacement material costs and will specifications for each element of works, e.g., number of waters and how much

- Ivy severed on all trees over 20cm on all sites within 3 years from contract commencement and removed from the first 1.5 metres all round to enable future inspections, etc.
- This would be useful to go out for a mini framework tender over 5 years with an annual cost of around £12-£14k per year.
- The day rate is around £225 for a more skilled grounds person and £150 for a less skilled one, so for 2 people it's around £375 per day excluding vehicles, machinery, tools, etc., so potentially a day rate for 2 of £450 plus VAT.

Volunteer types of tasks

- Ivy severance
- Ivy removal
- Pruning back from boundaries
- Working parties to coppice, cut natural regeneration
- Young tree maintenance – check stakes and ties
- Reporting defects and hazards
- Reporting young tree issues
- Reporting pests and diseases and vandalism
- Pruning back overhang