

URBAN FOREST PLAN

OPERATIONAL GUIDE

Approved and adopted by Hutt City Council 26 July 2011. This document replaces the Hutt City Council Tree Maintenance Policy.

OPERATIONAL GUIDE TO THE URBAN FOREST PLAN

MANAGING OUR STREET TREES

This operational guide describes Council's role in providing and managing street trees and summarises the Urban Forest Plan as it relates to street trees.

STRIVING FOR QUALITY STREET TREES

Quality street trees make an important contribution to the character of our city. Street trees are of great interest to local residents and business owners. Providing street trees requires Council to balance the desires of individuals with city wide considerations. It is not always easy to please everyone.

Council is striving to improve the quality of its street trees. Quality trees look better, last longer and cost less to maintain. Well maintained trees are also safer.

Council wants to enhance the perception that our suburbs are green and leafy by providing good quality street trees which are well managed. We're aiming to provide approximately 12,000 street trees citywide. In general terms that works out to approximately 1 tree per 2 to 3 houses citywide. Locally, our ability to provide quality street trees is challenged by seasonal, gusty winds, thin poor soils, narrow berms, underground services and overhead lines. We consider a quality tree to be one that is in good health, displays good form and is 7 to 15m high.

Outside of emergency work, our goal is to manage whole streets of trees rather than deal with individual specimens. Each street tree is inspected at least once annually. During inspections special attention is given to health, maintaining clearance from electricity lines and clearance for traffic.

Determining whether a tree is a quality specimen or is likely to become one is important. Poor quality trees are a liability and contribute negatively to the streetscape. Decisions to retain or remove street trees are usually based on the quality of a tree. Council normally favours retaining quality trees. Poor quality trees are normally removed as part of annual maintenance work or implementing Street Tree Master Plans. The quantity and quality of trees in the street and in nearby properties are also taken into consideration.

WE'RE TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Council is the owner of road reserves and is responsible for all specimen trees on them. Council relies on professional arboricultural and landscape design advice.

Setting our City up with a range of quality trees is a 20 year project. Surveying in 2008 and 2009 revealed that only 10% of our street trees are quality specimens. In order to improve this statistic Council will remove some street trees that are not quality specimens or are unlikely to develop into quality specimens. We'll also plant approximately 6000 new street trees by 2030. These trees will be handpicked from species known to thrive locally. We will select sites carefully and we won't plant under lines.

Council plants trees with long term benefits in mind. We select species and locations that will allow our street trees to have long lives which require only minor intervention. Between 2012 and 2020 we're aiming to plant 300 new or replacement trees every winter.

Young trees get a good start because we prioritise early care and inspect them three times a year.

We comply with the Electricity (Hazards from Trees) Regulations 2003 and this involves pruning trees away from overhead lines or removal. We are also required to prune away from roads and footpaths. Some trees respond well to this pruning while others do not. If quality specimens are unlikely to result from pruning, Council will consider removal – normally through the Street Tree Master Planning Process.

Removal of small trees (under 5m tall) that are unlikely to develop into quality specimens is part of our tree contractor's brief. The contractor carries out this routine work as part of the ordinary maintenance work.

Officers may authorise removal of limited numbers of larger trees (over 5m tall) that are unlikely to develop into quality specimens where removal would be prioritised in the Street Tree Master Plan anyway. Neighbours will be advised of reason for removal. In some streets it may be appropriate for residents to receive advice prior to the work taking place so that any concerns can be considered by Council officers.

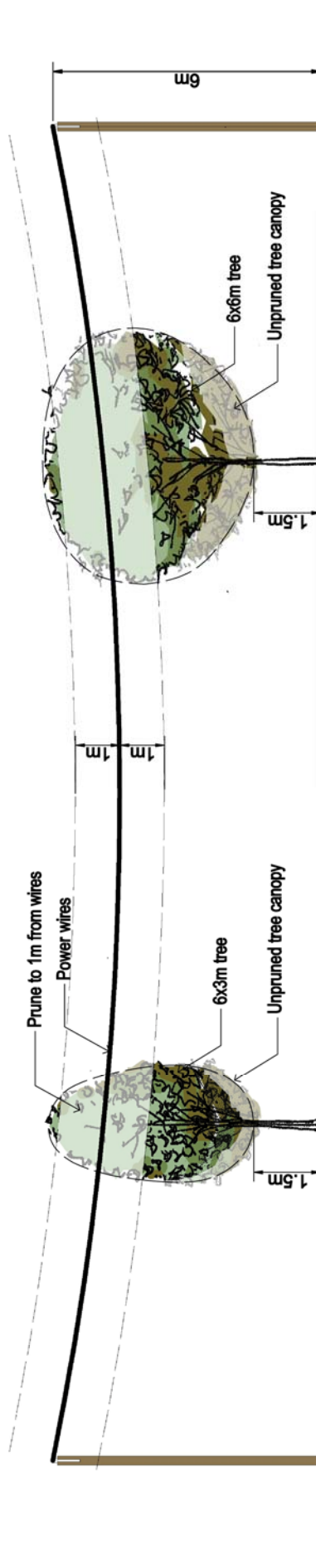
Generally Council relies on the Street Tree Master Plan process to determine whether large trees (5m or taller) should be retained or removed. Again, the key question is whether the trees are quality specimens or are likely to develop into quality specimens.

In exceptional circumstances Council may promote the idea of rearranging infrastructure in favour of an outstanding tree. Alternatively neighbours may promote rearrangement and Council may offer support. Cost sharing may be negotiated.

Our contractor inspects each street tree annually and schedules any required maintenance. The contractor's brief is to achieve natural forms, typical of the species while complying with road, footpath and line clearance rules. Council and our contractor manage trees in line with standards and practice recognised by the New Zealand Arboricultural Association.

Topping is recognised as unsound arboricultural practice. We avoid topping.

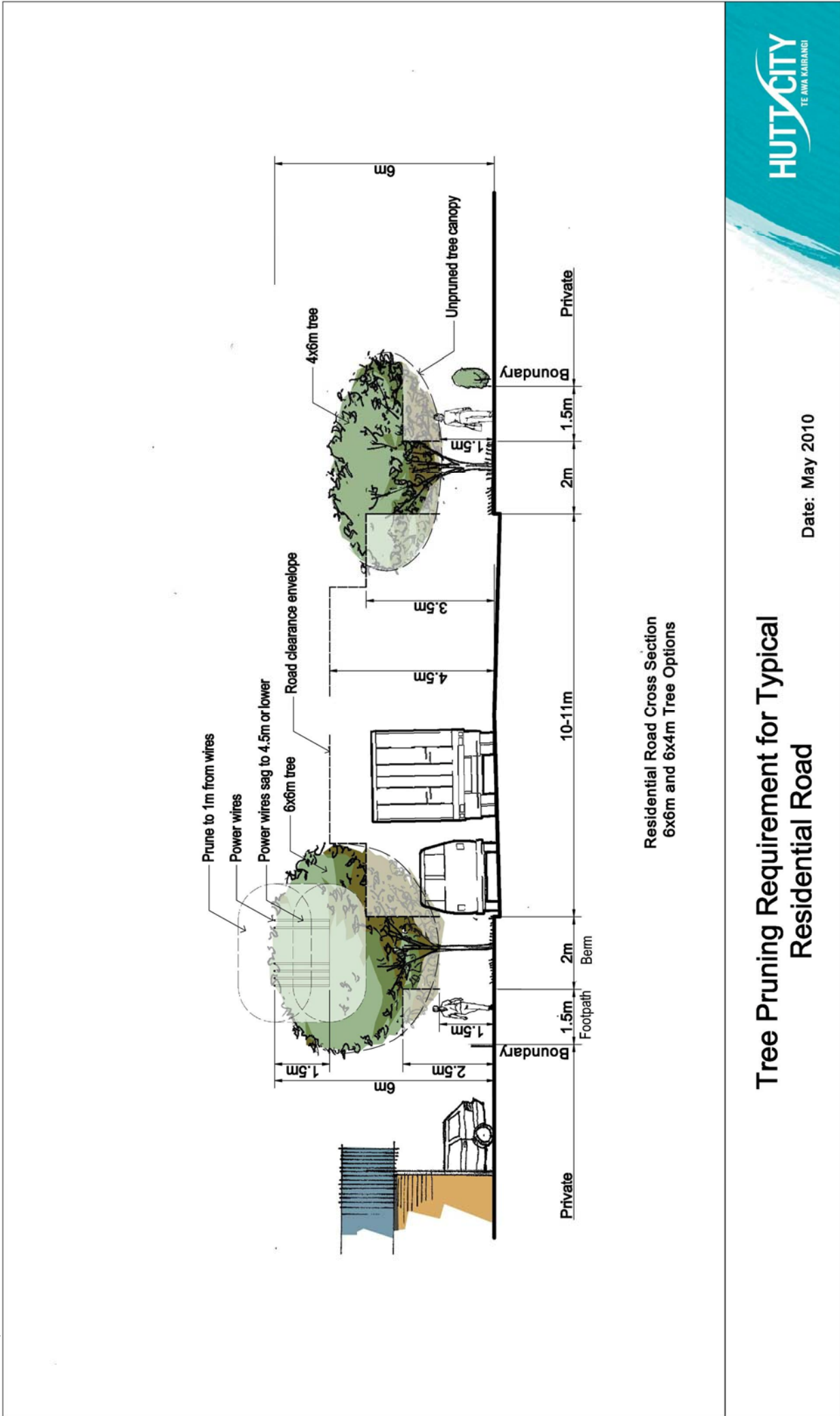
The following diagrams show line clearances our contractor is required to comply with in order to satisfy electricity and traffic regulations.



6x6m Tree and 6x3m Tree under Power Wires

Tree Pruning Requirement for Typical Residential Road

Date: May 2010



Residential Road Cross Section
6x6m and 6x4m Tree Options

Tree Pruning Requirement for Typical Residential Road

Date: May 2010

LIVING WITH STREET TREES

In some streets it is difficult to provide quality street trees and match residents' expectations. Street trees bring tremendous benefits to our City but they are not always trouble-free. Across the community, opinions about street trees vary greatly.

Street trees have importance beyond the individual property closest to them. We're managing the street tree asset as a coordinated collection of trees which adds value and character to the urban area overall. A street tree's amenity value is enjoyed by people walking and driving along the street and those living, working, shopping, dining and recreating nearby. Mature trees help to give neighbourhoods an established feel.

The Urban Forest Plan accepts that good quality vegetation or specimen trees on private property may offset the need for street trees in some sites. On the other hand, lack of quality vegetation on private properties may increase the need for Council to provide street trees or to encourage planting on private properties.

SHADE AND VIEWS

Views of Wellington Harbour and the Hutt Valley are important to many residents in Hutt City, particularly in the Eastern and Western Hills and above the Eastern Bays. Prospective landowners and tenants need to consider the effect of nearby trees, including their potential to grow larger. Although Council does not prioritise panoramic views as part of managing street trees, there is often scope to improve views with modern pruning techniques as part of our regular maintenance work.

During their lifespan, trees can periodically interfere with views and sunlight enjoyed by residential properties. Where a tree is, or is likely to become a quality specimen, pruning may improve a resident's situation. Council and the contractor will carry out pruning where the result is going to benefit the residents and have little effect on the quality of the tree.

Where poor quality trees cause interference Council may consider removing the tree.

When residents believe that quality street trees unreasonably interfere with sunlight and views of residential properties Council will consider whether it is practical to manage the situation individually by pruning. Developing a Street Tree Master Plan may provide a long term solution, particularly where several properties have similar complaints. When Street Tree Master Plans are developed, options to remove, retain and plant street trees are considered.

Overall, Council prefers to retain quality specimens, or specimens that are likely to develop into quality specimens. This preference needs to be weighed up against other considerations in the street, including neighbours' expectations. Council's role is to consider whether tree removal will reduce the attractiveness of the area for neighbours. The function of the road reserve is also a very important consideration.

As trees grow taller the space under the crown is likely to increase, improving light and views for residential neighbours. Trees with large crowns often offer more opportunities for thinning the crown (improving light and views) than smaller trees. It is not practical to manage the City's street trees to provide all residential properties with panoramic views. In any case, Council is only responsible for a portion of the specimen trees that affect light and views. Many privately owned specimen trees also cause irritation to residents.

Council may recover costs associated with some felling and pruning work.

Council is committed to being a good neighbour. We recognise that street trees aren't always appreciated by everyone and that some neighbours favour views and sunlight over street trees. Council aims to provide quality street trees without creating unreasonable view and shade problems for neighbours. Generally Council's position is that quality street trees will be retained.

	RESIDENT REQUESTS REMOVAL	RESIDENT WANTS TREE TO STAY
Good quality tree	<p>Removal unlikely</p> <p>Crown may be pruned to improve sunlight.</p> <p>Will be considered in street tree master plan process and considered along side other factors eg quantity of trees in street, extent of planting on nearby private property, replanting opportunities, impact of tree on residents, future interference with infrastructure</p>	<p>Tree likely to be retained</p> <p>Will be considered in street tree master plan process</p>
Poor quality tree	<p>Tree likely to be removed</p> <p>As budget allows, tree may be removed, especially if long term ongoing maintenance will be required</p> <p>Usually considered in street tree master plan process</p> <p>Replacement tree may be provided nearby, possibly on private property, or at existing site</p>	<p>Tree unlikely to be retained</p> <p>As budget allows, tree likely to be removed. Paying to maintain poor quality specimens is not good value for money.</p> <p>Replacement tree may be provided nearby or at existing site</p>

Sections 332 to 338 of the Property Law Act 2007 guides the management of trees where residents experience problems with shade, leaf litter and views planted on private property or Council land, including road reserve.

Where a resident disagrees with a Council officer's decision to retain a tree the matter can be escalated. This process involves officers submitting a report to the local Community Board or Ward Committee. The Board or Ward will make a final recommendation.

Beyond Council's own decision making processes, residents may wish to pursue the issue by making an application for a court order under Section 334 of the Property Law Act 2007.

LIFTING FOOTPATHS AND DAMAGE TO UNDERGROUND SERVICES

Where quality street trees cause significant damage to footpaths and driveways Council will look for ways to retain the tree and this may involve alternative surfaces or realignment.

When quality street trees cause significant, uncontrollable damage to footpaths and underground services Council considers practical alternatives. If you suspect that your pipes are being blocked by roots from a street trees you should call Council. We can often assist.

STREET TREE MASTER PLANS

Council's Urban Forest Plan sets out a requirement for Council to develop Street Tree Master Plans. These plans will indicate which trees stay, which trees will be removed and locations for new plantings. In some streets there will be scope for residents to influence the final plan.

Council will consider requests to remove trees, particularly where the request is supported by the objectives and policies in the Urban Forest Plan.

HOW IS A STREET TREE MASTER PLAN DEVELOPED

1. Resident requests that Council develop street tree plan for street (or section of long streets). Alternatively Council officers identify streets which require a street tree master plan.
2. Officers visit the site and consider whether planting, felling or tree management work is required to meet the requirements of the Urban Forest Plan and look for opportunities to complement the Ward Theme.
3. Officers consider whether arborist or landscape architect report is beneficial.
4. Officers consider whether a before and after (mock up) photograph would be beneficial.
5. Officers collate information, and outline non-negotiable items and items that may be negotiated between residents and Council. It may be appropriate to develop a draft plan for residents.

(In some cases where a draft plan is deemed to be non-controversial, officers will merely inform households of work to be undertaken and steps 6 to 12 will be skipped).

6. Officers provide written information to the street's residents and landlords and invite them to a street meeting to discuss street trees. Residents are advised that the process is transparent and all discussions and solutions are developed with residents – officers will not make special arrangements with individual residents outside the street meetings.

If residents/landlords have opinions they are not prepared to share at the meeting, or if they are unable to attend the meeting and wish to make known their opinions, they can advise officers of such opinions prior to the meeting, and these will be raised at the meeting on their behalf. Residents may also nominate a representative to speak for them.

Failure to attend the meeting or pass on opinions to officers will not entitle residents/owners to appeal decisions.

7. At the street meeting officers provide background and explain any non-negotiable items.
8. Residents outline their aspirations and consider options.
9. Residents develop one or two draft plans, which officers take away for further consideration.

The meeting will be attended by an officer from the Parks and Gardens Division and larger or controversial meetings may be facilitated by another person. Preferably a local Community Committee or Community Board member attends the meeting.

10. Officers consider the detail of the draft plans and seek advice from arborist, contractor, landscape architect, engineer, Wellington Electricity as necessary
11. Officers provide a second set of information to residents, with refined draft plans and invite residents to a second (and final) meeting.
12. At the meeting residents and officers outline any concerns, modify the drafts and, in making every effort to reach a consensus*, adopt as a final street tree plan.

Preferably a Community Committee or Community Board member attends.

Again, a facilitator may be beneficial. If residents and officers cannot reach a consensus officers prepare a report and the Community Committee or Community Board will be required to finalise a street tree plan in accordance with the Urban Forest Plan.

13. Officers seek quote, order job and provide residents with advice about physical works (dates, felling, heavy pruning, planting).
14. Officers notify Community Committee or Community Board of the finalised plan.

* Most residents and officers will not agree with 100% of any plan. In terms of the Urban Forest Plan, consensus will be reached when all residents agree on a plan that will provide the best overall long term outcome for the street, even when individual residents may not have all of their aspirations met.

In some streets developing a Street Tree Master Plan will be straight forward and the physical changes will be minor. In these cases an initial or second meeting may not be required.

CONTACT US

Street trees are managed by the Parks and Gardens Division of Council. Our Street tree contractor is Downer New Zealand Ltd.

Direct all street tree queries, requests and reports to:

Telephone: 570 6666

Email: contact@huttcity.govt.nz