

Management of Highway Trees

A report by Director, Kent Highway Services, to the Swale Joint Transportation Board on 25th June 2007

Introduction

1. Kent is recognised nationally as the 'Garden of England' and a safe, healthy and thriving highway tree population contributes significantly to that recognition.
2. Public perception of the need for tree management is variable and can focus on a single issue affecting one individual to the wider issues surrounding the environment, biodiversity, and sustainability.
3. This report outlines the approach to managing highway trees as an asset on a county wide basis by Jacobs' arboricultural team. This approach will ensure the safety of users of the highway and will develop an inventory based tree management system.

Background

4. Kent Highway Services (KHS) has, for some years, met its duty of care by undertaking regular inspections of highway trees (tree safety audit) and arranging for identified safety works to be carried out.
5. The inspections were undertaken by Jacobs' arboricultural team with the resultant works arranged by KHS staff using local arboricultural contractors. Emergency tree works, routine maintenance and ad-hoc inspections requests were managed by KHS staff at divisional offices.
6. Routine maintenance was sometimes arranged through district council contracts and no co-ordinated replanting policy was in place.

The Philosophy

7. The aim is to develop a consistent tree management regime across the county administered by arboricultural specialists. The management regime will be driven by a tree policy approved by Members and will provide clear objectives against which budgets can be prioritised.
8. The tree policy will inform customers and other interested parties how Kent County Council (KCC) manages its tree stock and the objectives guiding that management. The tree policy can provide a framework for KCC and the KHS tree management practice should sit within the policy. Approval of the policy across KCC directorates will reduce risk to the Authority by ensuring a consistent approach to tree safety management and ensure environmental objectives, subject to budgetary constraints, are met.

Management Objectives

9. The management process will deliver a 'one stop shop' for all tree matters. It will ensure that tree issues are dealt with by tree specialists, budgets are spent in a consistent manner and arboricultural contractors are properly assessed and managed.
10. The process will prevent duplication of effort and ensure that tree issues and enquiries go direct to the individual best placed to deal with them.

Management of Highway Trees

11. The management of trees and the associated budgets is based on inaccurate historic data. An inventory of the asset will be developed and managed electronically and will inform future management and budget requirements.
12. The overriding objective will be to ensure the safety of the users of the highway.

Performance

13. The tree safety audit process is carried out in accordance with a practice note that is reviewed at least annually and amended as appropriate. The practice note sets out the frequency of inspections, the criteria for assigning priority levels to tree works and an internal audit process. It also details how trees on private land adjacent to the highway are assessed and the methodology for dealing with operational matters for both KHS and private trees. The performance against programme is audited annually.
14. All response times are monitored and will be audited against targets. This applies equally to emergency call outs and all calls received via the KHS Contact Centre.
15. Contractor performance will be monitored against call-out times and site performance data collected by Jacobs. Emphasis will be placed on safe working practices and the training of staff and development of processes as tree work is a relatively high risk activity requiring skilled operatives.

Communications

16. The safety of trees, the unnecessary removal of trees and the replacement of trees that have been removed raise concerns that can be alleviated by an effective communications process. The process will inform the public, Parish, Borough and County Council Members and officers of the progress of the tree safety audit and of the intention to carry out works. Where replanting cannot be undertaken a reason will be given.
17. The tree safety audit also identifies private trees that may present a danger to users of the highway. Owners of these trees are contacted by letter advising them of the need to have all their trees that may affect the highway inspected by a competent person. The owners are also sent a copy of a leaflet explaining how KHS looks after trees on the highway and their responsibilities as an owner.

The Inventory

18. The current paper based system used for inspections and reporting is inefficient when compared to computer based systems. The system is open to human error and variation in recording criteria. An electronic system, with the availability of time stamped records including inspection reports and response times will reduce KHS liability in the event of an incident.
19. To achieve compatibility with existing systems the asset management software of choice is Confirm. Confirm modules, with suitable mobile hardware, will allow a tree database to be built up over time that can be used to manage reporting, consultation and implementation needs. The tree modules are compatible with other Confirm modules.
20. The use of Confirm will result in savings from the initial inspection process through to completed works. These savings can be measured under three headings:

Management of Highway Trees

- . Time – Efficient collation and analysis of data, searchable parameters through user definable fields requires significantly less man-hours to schedule proposed works.
- . Money – Efficient data collation, improved work output, accurate allocation of budget and targeting of works in accordance with contract priority parameters.
- . Environment – Less contractor driven miles as works proactively programmed in areas rather than reactive responses. Less paper usage across whole life of project.

Conclusion

21. Tree management software will offer improved service delivery, customer satisfaction and a demonstrable improvement in quality of tree stock.

Accountable Officer: Alan Riley, Technical Director, Kent Highway Services – 01622 66645
alan.riley@jacobs.com