



Pollarding Policy 2010

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Introduction

The Unitary Borough of Torbay is extremely fortunate in containing large numbers of pollarded trees within its boundaries, contributing as they do to many diverse benefits ranging from their visual and aesthetic value, as well as helping to increase biodiversity by providing food sources and valuable shelter for wildlife and even helping us in our goals of climate change mitigation.

Torbay is one of the UK's richest areas in terms of biological diversity and as such the council seeks to ensure that its commitment to the environment is followed through with the actions proposed within this policy.

Hand in hand with these benefits may come some negative factors such as leaf fall, shading concerns, and possibly even their very presence in some of our more densely urbanised streets may lead to safety concerns from neighbours of the trees.

The aims of this policy are to raise our awareness that the large numbers of pollards within the Bay should not be considered as a forgotten and troublesome legacy but rather as a positive feature within our unique landscape that contributes to the health and well being of our population. These aims are supported by a goal to integrate the management of our pollarded trees within the needs and aspirations of the public of Torbay, in conjunction with the Tree and Woodland Strategy and Tree Risk Management protocol recently adopted, which also links into the Green space strategy adopted as part of the Torbay local Development Framework.

By developing a strategic approach to pollard management it will be possible to identify the resources required to implement a planned cycle of action and to maximise budgets set, grants and other possible forms of income.

There is also a recognised need to increase public education of the importance of the pollarded trees in our environment and also involve residents in decisions on re pollarding trees in their area.

What is a Pollard?

Pollarding should not be confused with either topping or lopping which can be described as the removal of large diameter upper branches in order to reduce the height of a tree considerably. This is poor practice and usually creates large wounds, which often allow decay to invade the tree. New branches are often weak and break off after a few years. Topping looks unattractive, leaving the tree with a stunted appearance.

There is little public understanding of the meaning of what really constitutes a pollarded tree. Common definitions found in arboricultural texts refer to pollarding as the following:

Terms and definitions

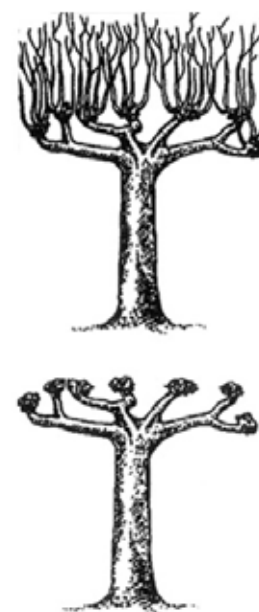
Pollard - tree that has formed a crown consisting of numerous branches arising from the same height on a main stem or principle branches¹

¹ BSI Publication (2010), Tree Work-Recommendations BS 3998:2010

Pollarding –cutting a tree so as to encourage formation of numerous branches arising from the same height on a main stem or principle branches²

Below are an interpretation of Torbay Council's terms and definitions of the three types of pollarding associated with trees in Torbay.

1. Pollarding - beheading a maiden tree by initially cutting through the main stem or leader and sub-sequently to cut on a regular basis back to this point.
2. Pollarding or Repollarding - Re-establishment or continuation of a pollard cycle on trees not too long out of cycle involving cutting back close to the initial cut.
3. Restoration Pollarding - Re-establishment of a pollard cycle on trees long out of cycle by means of selective branch reduction.(There may be situations when it may not be necessary or desirable to do this)



History

Pollarded trees were historically found within open countryside and parklands, both open grown and within hedgelines. They were historically pruned at approximately 2 to 4 metres and then managed on a cyclical basis from that point (Pollard Head, the bolling), to produce new straight regrowth for fodder, fuel and building materials. This system of tree management if carried out correctly can prolong the life of a tree so it can live beyond its normal life span. Regrowth from a pollarded tree is usually rapid and the trees will soon regain their characteristic volume and form.

The realisation that field sized trees could be managed in size to fit the urban landscape by regular cyclical pruning became apparent during the Victorian/Edwardian era.

The introduction of pollarded trees into the urban environment took place predominantly within the eras mentioned above, with many of the larger pollards within Torbay dating from this time. This introduction coincided with the laying out of the Victorian street scene we know today.

A correctly pollarded tree that has been planted in a group, line or avenue, can be a fantastic architectural feature, which complements the area in which they are situated and historically belong.

A second class of pollard is present in much smaller numbers and comprise of now isolated mature hedgerow and field grown trees that have become integrated within spreading urban areas throughout Torbay and are now absorbed in to developments, but retained within small property gardens.

^{2 2} BSI Publication (2010), Tree Work-Recommendations BS 3998:2010

Torbay's Pollards

Our rich legacy of mature and maturing pollarded trees is mainly due to the foresight of the Victorian Torbay Town Planners who understood the importance of including trees when laying out the new suburbs. They intuitively understood that large trees could successfully coexist with residential properties and our highways if regularly managed by pollarding.

There are presently over one thousand pollarded (or topped) trees within our total holding of approximately fifteen thousand trees within Torbay. This equates to more than five percent of Torbay's street trees being pollards of one form or another.

The Torbay Tree Officers have carried out an analysis of the numbers of enquiries raised by residents against these pollards and revealed a higher ratio of enquiries against these trees than those raised against unpollarded trees, or 'Maiden' trees (those having received only minor tree works if any through their life). This has led to recognition of the need to apply a policy driven cyclical management process for these trees.

Benefits of Urban Pollards

In recent years, and in light of increased awareness of ecological and conservation concerns, a greater understanding of the importance of the retention of pollards within the urban environment has developed.

Some associated benefits related to pollards (and urban trees generally) are identified within the Torbay Council's Tree and Woodland Management Policy. However, in summary pollarded trees may provide the following specific benefits:

A tree-lined avenue of well managed pollards positively affects property prices and arguably provides greater aesthetics when reaching a worthwhile size within a developed urban street scene.

Large trees can be retained in small urban spaces, where trees would not normally be an option.

From a purely practical point of view the larger species of street tree can more satisfactorily provide the height and stem clearance required for highways clearance.

A positive desire to grow trees as pollards because they represent a traditional feature of the formal landscape or townscape.

Advanced wildlife ecosystems may be present, which require the presence of mature trees as a habitat.

Studies undertaken in the U.S. show residents enjoy living in a mature tree lined road more than those not and that crime rates are lower.

Negative effects of urban pollards

Neglected pollards can give rise to a situation where the size of the tree creates a nuisance or where heavy and potentially poorly attached regrowth could be a hazard.

Potential root interference with foundations and other structures, as a result of the overall size of the tree.

Debris falls due to dense competition of vigorous regrowth (sap, leaves, fruit, twigs and branches).

The perceived psychological risk of living near of under mature trees.

May attract undesirable habitat for wildlife e.g. bees, pigeons (and their waste), and squirrels.

People find pollarded trees unattractive in winter months due to their structurally usually frame work.

It would appear that there are as many advantages as disadvantages when living near pollarded trees. Further complicating the issue are the personal views of groups of people who may live near the tree or trees. Whether the above issues are relevant or not they should be considered within the trees management process. This will depend on a number of other variable factors eg species, site type, targets.

Types of pollards in Torbay

A study of the general make up of Torbay's urban pollard tree population revealed that our pollards can be divided into three categories as identified within Torbay Council's arboricultural work contract and as listed below:

Lapsed pollards. (15 years growth plus)

Semi lapsed pollards. (5 to 15 years growth)

Actively managed pollards. (Up to 5 years growth)

The lapsed pollard

These pollards comprise our most important Victorian planting characterised by highly prominent aesthetically important mature trees. Large-sized stems emerge from above the historic pollard points (pollard heads or knuckles) subsequently leading to large and broadly spreading crowns. The pollard cycle has now lapsed considerably and a study of the size of regrowth suggests that this may have happened approximately 20 years ago on average. Branch attachment is typically good from the original pollard framework with little sign of dysfunction to any tree part or surrounding the swollen pollard head itself. Great wildlife, historic and visual amenity benefits are conferred by these trees which, despite their size, lead to a limited number of contentious enquiries to the council.



Semi lapsed pollards



Walnut Road, Torquay

These pollards appear to be mainly post Victorian planting which have undergone some routine maintenance or cyclical pollarding for a significant portion of their lives. The pollard cycle has now lapsed and a study of the regrowth suggests this may have happened approximately 15 years ago on average. A schedule of non-cyclical pollarding has occurred in some trees with others having undergone minor crown reductions either to address residents concerns or to alleviate developing structural issues as a result of previous neglect.

This gap within the pollard cycle has led to the forming of crowded drawn out maturing stems, with acute unions from the previous pollard heads or knuckles. This type of stem and union formation can result in the maturing stem regrowth from either the pollard head or stem itself potentially becoming hazardous and breaking out.

This category can create the largest volume of enquiries within the council due to their noted structural issues in conjunction with their typical location in narrower streets often causing a poor relationship with other trees and their neighbours.

Actively managed pollards

A category relating to pollarded trees that have been actively managed throughout their lives. Normally applying to trees in some of Torbay's more formal areas, hence why pollard management has continued and a permanent branch framework has formed with good pollard head formation. These trees, due to their active cycle of management appear to enjoy a good relationship with their neighbours and are aesthetically pleasing within the surrounding landscape/street scene. They also seem to generate very few contentious enquires to the council unless they are physically looking overgrown.

The pollard cycle is usually undertaken within a five year time span and would normally include the removal of all growth (Including epicormic growth) back to a pre determined framework of larger limbs or to a point on, or points close to the main stem to the height above ground as specified by the supervising officer.



Goshen Road Steps, Torquay



Typical street scene Fareham, Hampshire

New pollards can be developed on pre selected nursery stock before it has been lifted and containerised or if required recently planted trees, but it would be fair to say that a minimum requirement for this new cycle on a recently planted tree/s is that the tree/s to be worked on have been established for a minimum of 5 years within the planting location. Managing a tree as a small pollard from the onset of a pre determined cycle has some advantages as the pollard heads would be formed and defined more quickly, making future maintenance easier.

Members of public would also see the new trees going in as pollards and therefore understand the planned management from the offset, reducing the likelihood of protest of any future pollard works undertaken.

The frequency of a cutting cycle can vary according to requirements, or as specified by the supervising officer within Torbay's Natural Environment Services.

Examples of pollard categories at sites within Torbay

Lapsed pollards

Trees that have been repollarded from a lapsed state most likely to be category 5 and above and have visibly been pollarded in the past: Plane trees at Crown Hill Park, Torquay and Plane trees at Thurlow Road, Torquay: approximately 15+ years regrowth present.

Semi lapsed pollards

Trees repollarded from semi lapsed state most likely to be category 2 to 4 that have been visibly pollarded in the past: Lime trees at Solsbro Road, Torquay and Lime trees at Elmsleigh Road, Paignton, approximately 5 to 15 years regrowth present.

Actively managed pollards

Trees pollarded from Maiden or repollard as per current tree work schedule: Plane trees at Torquay Harbour and Lime trees at Goshen Road steps, Up to 5 years regrowth present or managed on 5 year cycle.

Management options and when the Council will intervene

The presence of such large numbers of urban pollards in our highly urbanised towns often leads to complex and often contentious relationships between the trees, residents and the wildlife they support. Currently there are many lapsed Plane and Lime pollards of varying ages on the streets of Torbay that are in need of management or maintenance in some way. These larger trees however could also be felled due to their previous lapsed management as an option and not replaced due to their location and current budget restrictions within the Natural Environment Services team. Therefore rejuvenating some of the lapsed/semi lapsed pollarded trees might still be a better option long term, otherwise potentially the numbers of

these older Plane and Lime pollards, for example, will dramatically decrease as a result of neglect in the forthcoming years.

Ideally the Council would prefer to create new pollards where possible in order to help maintain the succession of this historic practice in Torbay and create awareness of this cycle of management. Starting with young trees which have a better chance of responding to the treatment prescribed within this policy and surviving long term within an urban environment.

Lapsed Pollards

Due to the nature of our lapsed pollards, Torbay Council's tree officers will aim to inspect such trees as a priority in line with the tree risk management policy, which may result in recommendations for works.

Another trigger point for potential management intervention may come in the form of repeated correspondences for a tree or group of trees (pollards), Councillors' enquiries or similar.

Given the importance of our pollards and the difficulties they pose in management terms. Any proven need for intervention to lapsed pollards will require further detailed tree assessments, than would normally be undertaken for general tree maintenance. An Individual Tree Management Plan (ITMP) will be created for each tree or tree group operation.

The assessment may include the following:

- Non-invasive decay detection;

- Detailed study of species response to cutting, present tree vigour including branch extension, bud proliferation, foliage densities, and chlorophyll tests;

- Study of relationship with the trees' neighbours; (consultations)

- Any wildlife considerations; (may require specialised ecologist assistance)

- And possible cultural matters e.g. tree as a landmark, part of a historic landscape, providing cover to playgrounds etc.

This list is not exhaustive but serves to demonstrate the extra requirement for information before any possible pruning can be undertaken.

It is unlikely that a tree identified as a lapsed pollard will be repollarded in one operation, as it is felt that complete repollarding of these trees would be poor arboricultural management in terms of tree health, loss of habitat and/ or historical associations.

If the tree is considered suitable for management intervention, a phased works program may be created extending over several years dependant on the level of works required in conjunction with the health of the tree, as dictated by the ITMP.

The ITMP will be based upon the following considerations:

Once an assessment has been undertaken in conjunction with the desired outcomes of the ITMP, then works can commence dependent upon current budgets.

- a) The objectives of restoration pruning for the tree concerned with respect to its structural integrity, desired crown shape and size, vitality and with regard to the desires of the local residents.
- b) The suitability of pruning as a means of improving or safeguarding the mechanical Integrity of the tree, taking in to account its predicted tolerance to pruning by species, age, current vitality and vigour.
- c) Whether to try to achieve the desired size and shape of crown in a single operation (in consideration of the previous decision).
- d) The number of phases of work, the predicted details of each phase and the timescale (duration).
- e) The date for starting the work (assessment of priority for different trees).
- f) Pragmatic options to be implemented in tandem with prudent financial planning.

Semi lapsed pollards

It is considered that these groups of trees will require some management intervention to continue their safe presence within the urban landscape.

Torbay Council will aim to repollard all semi lapsed pollards as identified and recommended by the Council Tree Officer. All regrowth will then be maintained within the 5 year pollarding cycle proposed for actively managed pollards.

Phased pollarding by way of staged crown reductions and/or selective stem or pole thinning and reductions may be considered. However, before any works are implemented the assessment will be undertaken as for lapsed pollards in addition to the present criteria for triggering tree pruning that may apply, and the ITMP may be created.

Actively managed pollards

Torbay Council will continue to actively manage these tree groups within a five year time span by way of cyclical pollarding to maintain their presence in the locality without allowing a lapse in pruning that may lead to these trees moving into the latter categories of pollards.

Actively pollarded trees will not be pruned outside of the cyclical pruning programme in place, unless a significant risk is identified or an actionable threat of legal action is received. The 5 year cyclical pollarding time span proposed ensures a sound approach to management of the trees once pollarded both financially and contractually.

If, due to reasons out of the Natural Environment team's control, an active pollard cycle has been allowed to lapse, all safety works to pollarded trees will still be undertaken in line with the Tree Risk Management Policy. However, given the potential long term hazard constraints pollarded trees can pose in an urban environment, alternative solutions may be considered before any further tree surgery recommendations are undertaken to continue a cycle of pollard management.

Intervention or not - the risk?

With regard to the lapsed urban pollards within Torbay, a decision not to introduce a cutting cycle may lead to a situation where the size of the trees will at some point create a nuisance.

Also, the trees' maturing regrowth from the original pollard heads may become too heavy and drawn out, potentially becoming a hazard to surrounding objects beneath the tree.

For urban pollards that have been allowed to grow past any form of cyclical management for many years, the main options are as follows:

Pollard Intervention

Any tree surgery carries a risk of promoting full or partial tree decline and, therefore, careful consideration will be given to works to pollarded trees of any stage. The need for intervention will arise from either the result of a regular inspection, resident enquiry or other communication raising concerns regarding the state of the tree or a poor relationship with its neighbours.

The first and most desirable option would be to restore a cycle of pollarding back at the original pollard heads. However, this carries the greatest risk of harm to the tree as the size of the pruning wounds mean that they take longer to heal and are more susceptible to decay. Other physiological and environmental factors would need to be taken into consideration when the above option is chosen.

The second option requires the shortening of the original pollard regrowth to form secondary pollard heads. This allows the retention of younger wood and branch growth less susceptible to decay. However, the retention of a taller framework may cause a problem if decay has been identified within the original pollard heads to which it is attached. In addition, the taller framework may also require more work in order to manage and maintain it, compared with the primary pollard structure. Consideration will also need to be taken that, from an aesthetic point of view, the trees may appear to look unsightly in the early stages of restoration.

Choosing between the above two options will need to be based on the experience of the supervising Council Tree Officer, known tree tolerance and the overall condition of the tree/s. The frequency of a cutting cycle can also be varied, either shorter or longer if necessary to address any significant issues identified and raised by members of the public and/or supervising Council Tree Officer.

Lapsed Pollards

Given the present low frequency of enquiries against our larger lapsed pollards, it is felt that complete repollarding of these trees would be poor arboricultural management in terms of tree health, loss of habitat and/ or historical associations. Target pruning of secondary limbs above the pollard heads/bollings may be considered to address specific concerns, but requests for whole tree pollarding intervention would be likely to be resisted unless a professionally submitted case study was presented, that did not greatly affect the wider public interest nor lead to the loss of an important tree.

Semi-lapsed Pollards

These groups of pollarded trees raise a disproportionate level of enquiries to the arboricultural section, mainly in relation to debris fall, size of tree, light issues etc.

The often crowded nature of branch formation above the pollard heads/bollings can lead to potential significant structural issues that if left unmanaged could pose a potential serious risk from the tree.

If the supervising council tree officer has recommended pollard management or a professionally submitted case study found a tree to be suitable for the reintroduction of the pollarding cycle then, budget permitting, works would be undertaken or an Individual Tree Management Plan (IMTP) would be created for the tree/s which may involve staged crown reduction or selected thinning and/ or phased reduction of emerging stems.

We propose to return many of these semi-lapsed pollarded trees to an actively managed pollard cycle over a period of 5 to 7 years, restoring the original pollard framework identified to its previous size and shape, as specified within Torbay Council's Tree and Woodland Framework and Tree Risk Management Strategy. (budget realignment or other external factors may affect the numbers of semi lapsed sites or individual trees selected for repollarding each financial year) A List of 26 proposed semi-lapsed sites to be repollarded into actively managed sites throughout Torbay have been shown below:

Adelphi Lane, Paignton
Asheldon Road, Torquay
Bampflyde Road, Torquay
Broadsands Road, Paignton
Chelston Road, Torquay
Crownhill Park, Torquay
Daison Crescent, Torquay
Elmsleigh Park, Paignton
Higher Erith Road, Torquay
Kents Road, Torquay
Livermead Hill, Torquay
Old Mill Road, Torquay (Sections)
Parkhurst Road, Torquay

Polsham Park, Paignton
Rathmore Road, Torquay
Rawlyn Road, Torquay
St Mathews Road, Torquay
St Lukes Road South, Torquay
St Lukes Road North, Torquay
St Vincents Road, Torquay
Solsbro Road, Torquay
Thurlow Road, Torquay
Underhill Road, Torquay
Vansitart Road, Torquay
Walnut Road, Torquay
Windsor Road, Torquay

The exact number of semi-lapsed pollarded trees to be returned to active pollard management within Torbay and each of the sites above is currently unknown and can only be approximated. This is mainly due to a lack of significant data being collected during previous inspections carried out throughout Torbay. All of the above sites will be re-inspected prior to any repollard works being undertaken and the council systems updated. Individual trees and sites chosen for repollarding will become actively managed after repollarding works have been undertaken and added to the actively managed list below.

Actively Managed Pollards

Torbay Council continue to actively manage these trees on a cyclical basis by maintaining the original pollard framework in its present size and shape, as specified within Torbay Council's Tree and Woodland Framework and Tree Risk Management Strategy. A list of the 37 actively managed sites throughout Torbay, comprising of 189 trees in total are shown below:

Asheldon Road, Torquay
Babbacombe Road, Torquay
Bridge Road, Torquay
Burridge Road, Torquay
Cary Parade, Torquay

Chelston Road, Torquay
Cleveland Road, Torquay
Croft Hill Road, Torquay
Croft Road, Torquay
Crownhill Park, Torquay

Headlands Grove, Paignton
Higher Erith Road, Torquay
Higher Furzeham Road, Brixham
Kents Road, Torquay
Lower Shirburn Road, Torquay
Lymington Road, Torquay
Manor Road, Torquay
Oldway Gardens, Paignton
Parkhurst Road, Torquay
Princess Gardens, Torquay
Quinta Footpath, Torquay
Rawlyn Road, Torquay
Rousdown Road (path), Torquay
Solsbro Road (path), Torquay

St Lukes Road South, Torquay
St Lukes Road North, Torquay
St Marks Road, Torquay
Teignmouth Road, Torquay
Thurlow Bank, Torquay
Thurlow Park, Torquay
Thurlow Road, Torquay
Vansittart Road, Torquay
Vaughan Road, Torquay
Victoria Park, Paignton
Walnut Road (path), Torquay
Walnut Road (rear), Torquay
Walnut Road, Torquay

Time of Cutting

It is hard to give a good time of year to pollard due to the variation between species and environmental and physiological factors that need to be considered. However the times to definitely avoid are spring, when the leaves are just opening on the tree and autumn when they are being lost. At these times it is considerably more difficult for the tree to deal with the stress of heavy pruning. In Torbay cutting has been carried out traditionally in winter with the most ideal time being between January and March. Cutting before this time should be avoided if possible for example November to December, however this is still possible and it is best to avoid cutting at all in frosty weather. Mid summer cutting again is not ideal but can be achieved if carried out in the summer months of July and August, however drought seasons should be avoided. Other reasons for not cutting within the summer period are for example, birds nesting, herbivorous insects are abundant and it is difficult to see the shape of the tree in order to establish a good pollard frame work.

No Pollard intervention

The main risks from non intervention relates to the possible increased risk and expense to the council as the maturing regrowth increases in size and offers a greater risk to targets identified below as well as the tree increasing in size within a confined street scene. This may result in a combination of management as with maiden trees in need of remedial action e.g. Crown reduction and thinning, followed by regular monitoring and priority maintenance or no action other than regular inspections to ensure that the tree maintains a strong branch structure, with no indications of significant structural defects due to decay and is potentially not to large for the site.

References

Lonsdale, D. (1999), Principles of Tree Hazard Assessment, Stationary Office

Corporation of London (1996), Pollard and Veteran Tree Management Part 2, Richmond Publishing Co

BSI Publication (2010), Tree Work-Recommendations BS 3998:2010

Shigo, A. (1991), Modern Arboricultural, Shigo and Tree Associates

Helen Read (February 2000) Veteran Trees: A Guide to good management

CABE (March 2005) Does Money Grow On Trees

This policy document will be reviewed in conjunction with the documents mentioned below and is not to be used on its own but in conjunction with Torbay Councils Tree Risk Management Strategy and Torbay's Tree and Woodland Framework.