



Tree Management Policy 2026

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Authorising Officer	Director Community and Infrastructure
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1. Purpose

This policy establishes the principles, requirements, and decision-making framework for the management of trees on Council-managed land, and Council's role in supporting the retention and growth of tree canopy across the municipality. It aims to manage tree-related risks to the community while maintaining and enhancing tree canopy in alignment with the Council Plan 2025–2029.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Councillors, Council employees, contractors and agents involved in decisions or activities relating to trees on Council-managed land.

It also applies to Council's role in supporting the retention, protection and planting of trees across the municipality, including on public land managed by other agencies and on private land, through advocacy, planning controls and community engagement.

3. Policy Statement

3.1. Tree Retention and Removal

- 3.1.1. Council will prioritise the retention of existing trees, particularly mature and established trees, wherever practicable.
- 3.1.2. Where tree removal is proposed, reasonable alternatives to support tree retention must be considered prior to removal.
- 3.1.3. Requests for tree removal will be assessed on their merits, having regard to risk, tree condition, and broader community and environmental values.
- 3.1.4. Tree removal on Council-managed land is a last resort and will only occur where, based on qualified arboricultural assessment, one or more of the following applies:
 - a. The tree presents an unacceptable risk to people or property that cannot reasonably be mitigated; or
 - b. The tree is dead, in irreversible decline, or has reached the end of its useful life expectancy; or
 - c. The tree is significantly affected by pests or disease where removal is the recommended management response; or
 - d. The tree is causing significant and unavoidable damage to infrastructure, and no reasonable alternative solution exists; or
 - e. The tree is unsuitable for its location, where its species characteristics, form or condition are incompatible with surrounding land use, infrastructure, safety requirements, or intended function of the site; or
 - f. Removal is required to enable approved infrastructure works, service delivery, or tree renewal programs, where impacts cannot be reasonably avoided or mitigated; or
 - g. The tree is identified as an environmental weed or invasive species requiring removal.
- 3.1.5. Tree removal will not occur where the above criteria are not met, and the tree can be reasonably retained.

3.2. Risk and Public Safety

- 3.2.1. Council will manage trees on Council-managed land using a risk-based approach.
- 3.2.2. Tree risk assessments and management decisions will be informed by qualified arboricultural assessment and recognised industry standards.
- 3.2.3. Tree risks will be managed to a level that is as low as reasonably practicable, considering public safety, environmental and community considerations, and the cost, feasibility and available resources associated with risk mitigation measures.
- 3.2.4. Where risks are identified, Council will take timely and proportionate action to reduce risk in accordance with its agreed service levels and available resources.

3.3. Tree Protection

- 3.3.1. Works affecting trees on Council-managed land require appropriate approval.
- 3.3.2. Trees on Council-managed land and their growing environments will be protected from damage, vandalism and inappropriate works.
- 3.3.3. Tree protection measures must be implemented during works affecting trees on Council-managed land in accordance with relevant standards and guidelines.
- 3.3.4. Unauthorised removal or damage to trees on Council-managed land may result in enforcement action.
- 3.3.5. Council recognises trees on Council-managed land as community assets and may apply a tree valuation approach to inform decision-making and support cost recovery where trees are removed, damaged, or lost, including in connection with development, vandalism or unauthorised works.
- 3.3.6. Council will support the protection of trees across the municipality, including those on land managed by other agencies and private land, through advocacy, planning controls and collaboration.

3.4. Tree Planting and Canopy

- 3.4.1. On Council-managed land within urban areas and townships, Council will seek to achieve net tree canopy gain over time through tree planting and retention.
- 3.4.2. Tree planting will be guided by the principle of “right tree, right place”.
- 3.4.3. Preference will be given to planting large canopy tree species where site conditions allow and support their long-term growth.
- 3.4.4. Tree selection will consider species diversity, environmental conditions, site constraints and long-term sustainability to support a resilient tree population.

3.5. Trees on Private Land

- 3.5.1. Council will advocate for the retention, protection and planting of trees on private land across the municipality.
- 3.5.2. Council will utilise available planning mechanisms and local laws to support the retention, protection and planting of trees on private land.

4. Decision-Making Principles

Tree management decisions will seek to balance public safety, asset protection, environmental outcomes and community benefit. The following principles guide implementation of this policy:

- Public safety as a primary consideration
- Tree retention over removal
- Evidence-based arboricultural practice
- Whole-of-life asset management
- Right tree, right place
- Equity of tree canopy distribution across the municipality
- Recognition of trees with cultural, environmental or heritage significance
- Community understanding of, and engagement in, tree management decisions

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Council	• Adopts and periodically reviews this policy • Sets strategic direction for tree management across the municipality
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	• Ensures implementation of this policy across the organisation
Directors, Managers and Coordinators (within area of responsibility)	• Ensure compliance with this policy • Allocate appropriate resources for tree management and service delivery • Ensure that tree-related risks are appropriately managed
Relevant Officer and Arborists	• Provide specialist arboricultural advice • Undertake the assessment, management and maintenance of trees on Council-managed land in accordance with this policy and supporting procedures
Relevant Planning and Compliance Officers	• Apply this policy in planning, development assessment and compliance activities relating to trees on private land and land managed by other agencies
All Council Employees	• Comply with this policy when undertaking activities that may affect trees • Avoid actions that may result in damage to trees and seek appropriate advice where required
Contractors and Agents	• Comply with this policy, relevant standards, and any contractual requirements when undertaking works involving trees on Council-managed land

6. Breaches

- 6.1. Unauthorised removal, damage or vandalism of Council trees may result in enforcement action in accordance with applicable legislation, local laws or contractual arrangements.
- 6.2. Council may seek financial recovery for the loss or damage of trees on Council-managed land based on an established tree valuation approach.
- 6.3. Breaches by Council staff may result in disciplinary action in accordance with Council policies and agreements.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

This policy is supported by associated strategies, procedures and guidelines that provide detailed direction for implementation. Policy performance will be monitored through:

- Urban Tree Plan Strategy reporting
- Tree asset management data
- Service performance measures

8. Definitions

Arboricultural Assessment	An evaluation of a tree conducted by a suitably qualified arborist to determine its health, structure, condition, and risk.
Council-managed Land	Land owned, occupied or under the care, control and management of the Rural City of Wangaratta.
Equity of Tree Canopy Distribution	A principle that seeks to ensure fair access to the benefits of tree canopy, recognising that some communities may require targeted investment to address lower existing canopy cover and associated social, environmental, or health disadvantages.
Evidence-Based Arboricultural Practice	An approach to tree management that relies on current research, recognised standards, and expertise to inform decisions, ensuring they are objective, defensible, and aligned with good practice.
Tree Canopy	The area of land covered by the foliage of trees when viewed from above, typically expressed as a percentage of total land area.
Tree Risk	The likelihood of a tree or part of a tree failing and causing harm to people, property or infrastructure, combined with the potential consequences of that failure.
Tree Valuation Approach	A method used to assess the value of trees on Council-managed land, considering factors such as size, condition, amenity, environmental contribution, and remaining life expectancy. Tree valuation may be used to inform decision-making and support cost recovery where trees are removed, damaged, or lost.
Right Tree, Right Place	A principle of tree selection and placement that ensures a tree species is appropriately matched to the site conditions to support the tree's long-term health, safety, and performance and minimise infrastructure conflicts.
Risk-based approach	A method of decision-making that prioritises the identification, assessment and management of risks to people, property and infrastructure, ensuring that resources are focused on areas of greatest potential impact.
Whole-of-Life Asset Management	An approach to managing assets that considers their entire lifecycle ensuring decisions optimise performance, cost, risk, and community benefit over the long term.

9. References and Related Documents

9.1. Council Documents

- Council Plan 2025–2029
- Urban Tree Plan Strategy 2023-2043
- Tree Management Plan XX

9.2. Legislation

- Local Government Act 2020
- Planning and Environment Act 1987
- Wrongs Act 1958
- Road Management Act 2004
- Electrical Safety Act 1998
- Electricity Safety (Electric Line Clearance) Regulations 2020

9.3. Standards

- Australian Standard AS 4373 – Pruning of Amenity Trees
- Australian Standard AS 4970 – Protection of Trees on Development Sites
- Australian Standard AS 2303 – Tree Stock for Landscape Use

10. Review

Any change or update which materially impacts and/or alters this policy must be by Council resolution following review by the Director of Community and Infrastructure. This policy will be reviewed every three years or as required.

Version History		
Version number	Date of change	Reasons for change
1.0	XX 2026	Policy creation