

www.westsussex.gov.uk



West Sussex Tree Plan 2026-2030



Contents

1. Introduction 1

2. The Value of Our Treescapes 2

3. Our Responsibilities 3

4. Trees in Policy, Strategies and Plans 4

5. Trees in West Sussex 5

6. Managing our treescapes 9

7. Strategic Objectives14

8. Implementation, Monitoring, and Review.....19

9. References.....20

Appendix A Delivery Plan.....21

Appendix B Urban Neighbourhoods with Low Tree Equity.....26



Ancient Sessile Oak 'Queen Elizabeth I Oak' in Cowdray Park – Photo Credited to [Daniel Greenwood](#)

1. Introduction

The West Sussex Tree Plan 2020 laid the foundation for this revised plan for 2026-2030, setting out principles and priorities that continue to guide our approach today. It reaffirmed the vital role trees play in shaping the character of our county's landscapes and recognised their enduring value as assets delivering economic, social, and environmental benefits. These benefits enrich our communities and sustain the quality of life that makes West Sussex a distinctive and special place to live, work, and visit.

Our strategic aims:



Maintain those which we are responsible for.



Protect those at risk from development and other threats.



Improve their cover throughout West Sussex.

Why have a Tree Plan

Our Council Plan has an underlying commitment to protect our environment, achieved by delivering our climate change strategy and promoting nature recovery and biodiversity. Our Tree Plan complements these commitments, contributing to their delivery.

As a County Council, we manage the extensive treescapes across our diverse portfolio, which includes everything from varied estates and small holdings to local schools and highway verges. We also leverage our influence on local development planning and various council services, ensuring that the numerous environmental and social benefits of trees are integrated into all aspects of our community and operations.

However, a range of challenges continues to face our treescapes, from evolving national policy and legislation, increased pressure for new housing and other development, emerging and existing pests and diseases, and the effects of climate change.

What are we doing about it

The West Sussex Tree Plan 2026–2030 sets out how we aim to address these challenges, considering our own trees and the wider treescape, building from lessons learnt and latest data and research. A high-level delivery plan provides a clear framework for action towards our strategic aims for trees, hedgerows and woodland.

Our ambition is to create resilient, diverse treescapes that deliver benefits for people, wildlife, and the economy for generations to come.

2. The Value of Our Treescapes

Trees, hedgerows and woodlands are vital natural assets delivering economic, social and cultural, environmental, and landscape benefits that underpin life in West Sussex.

Economic Value

The creation and management of our treescapes supports local employment and industries in arboriculture, forestry, farming, landscaping, and horticulture – though the wider benefits of trees far exceed their market value alone.



Social and Cultural Values

Trees shape attractive and healthy environments for living, learning, and working, contributing to our health and wellbeing. Planting, nurturing, and caring for trees is a deeply rooted cultural tradition passed down through families, neighbourhoods, faith communities, and landowners. Our oldest trees and woodlands help reflect our historic landscapes.



Environmental and Ecosystem Values

Trees function as carbon sinks which helps to mitigate the effects of climate change. They improve air quality and reduce flood risks, as well as regulating local temperatures. Woodlands, trees, and hedgerows provide critical habitats, supporting biodiversity and ecological resilience – especially our veteran trees, ancient trees, and ancient woodlands.



Landscape Value

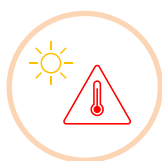
Trees, hedgerows, and woodlands are the defining elements of our landscapes, creating natural frameworks and seasonal backdrops that connect and unify places. They shape the character and identity of an area, offering a strong sense of place and continuity through time. Treescapes soften the built environment, ensuring harmony between nature and development.



Water Attenuation and Quality



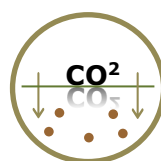
Biodiversity and Nature Recovery



Temperature Regulation



Health and Wellbeing



Carbon Sequestration



Aesthetics



Air Quality

Figure 1 - Benefits of trees

3. Our Responsibilities

As a County Council, we are subject to a wide range of legislation and policies which govern how we manage trees as both a landowner and as a service provider, relating to matters such as highways, countryside, environment, ecology, forestry, planning, heritage, and safety.

Managing the risk from trees – Similar to other landowners, we have a duty of care under the Occupier’s Liability Acts (1957 and 1984), and a statutory duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) to manage the risk from trees under our ownership or responsibility in a reasonable and proportionate manner.

Statistically, the risk posed by trees is very low compared to the risks we are exposed to daily in life¹. When we manage the risks from trees, a balanced approach is considered between the many benefits trees provide, the risk posed, and the cost of managing the risk. In doing so, resources are not wasted and benefits not lost by reducing unnecessary risk. There is no expectation within legislation to guarantee that any tree is safe.

Tree management and operations – Tree management decisions are made by our varied services, usually made at site level to manage risk or to fulfil other management objectives. Tree works are governed by guiding legislation that we are required to adhere to, including:

Highways Act (1980); Forestry Act (1967); Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) (England and Wales) Regulations (1999); Town and Country Planning Act (1990); Town and Country Planning (EIA) Regulations (2017); The Hedgerows Regulations (1997); The Management of Hedgerows (England) Regulations (2024); Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981); Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017); and Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979).

Key guiding standards which also influence how we manage trees include: British Standards (BS3998:2010, BS4428:1989, BS5837:2012, and BS8545:2014); Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice (2016); National Tree Safety Group (NTSG) guidance; and National Joint Utilities Group (NJUG) Volume 4 Guidelines.

Highways and trees – As the Local Highway Authority we manage the risk from trees within the highway, considering our duty to consult before felling street trees on urban roads.

We also consider private trees adjacent the highway which the owner or occupier are responsible for. Where evident such trees endanger, obstruct, or interfere highway users, we can use highway powers to require their management, and if necessary, we can undertake works and recover the costs incurred.

Trees and development – As a planning authority and a developer, we consider both national and local policies which generally seek for the successful retention and integration of existing and new trees within development, with a significant regard to protecting ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees as irreplaceable habitats. We also regard biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirements which seeks to enhance biodiversity, considering habitats such as woodlands, hedgerows and trees.

Biodiversity duty – Delivering the actions set within our Tree Plan actively works towards the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity, contributing to our biodiversity policies and objectives.

4. Trees in Policy, Strategies and Plans

Treescapes and their multifaceted benefits for our society, the environment, climate change, and nature, are well recognised throughout our council functions, strategies, and policies.

Local context

- **Local plans:** Contain policies set by District and Borough Councils, and the South Downs National Park Authority, to guide local development. They generally consider treescapes for amenity, greenspace, green infrastructure, biodiversity, and nature.
- **Waste & mineral plans:** Contain policies set by the County Council to guide waste and mineral development, aiming to protect and enhance natural resources, including trees, hedgerows, and woodlands.
- **National landscape plans:** Including the High Weald and Chichester Harbour, their plans outline policies and objectives for trees, hedgerows, and woodland that we must seek to further in our statutory role.

Our local strategies and plans

- **Our Council Plan (2021–2026):** Commitment to climate action and nature recovery.
- **Local Nature Recovery Strategy (2025):** Identifies priority habitats and locations for coordinated action to recover nature including woodland, hedgerows and trees.
- **Climate Change Strategy (2020–2030):** Aligns with our ambitious target to be carbon neutral and climate resilient by 2030, committing to “adapt and be resilient to a changing climate” and to “support and grow our local green economy”.
- **Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (Our Priorities for 2024–2027):** Supports goals set by our Climate Change Strategy with guiding aims focus on climate mitigation, climate adaptation and responsiveness, and climate equity. One of the six pathways of action includes “Nature and Environment” which pursues nature-based solutions to mitigate the effects of climate change, sequester carbon, and protect the environment.
- **West Sussex Transport Plan (2022-2036):** Recognises the need to avoid or minimise the impact of transport schemes on the natural environment.
- **Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy and Strategy (2024):** Identifies priorities for the management of its physical highway assets including highway trees.
- **West Sussex Flood Risk Management Strategy (2025-2030):** Recognises the wider benefits for nature and biodiversity and prioritising the implementation of nature-based solutions.

These frameworks underpin the strategic objectives and delivery actions of this tree plan, ensuring compliance while driving ambition for climate resilience, biodiversity, and social wellbeing.

National policy drivers

- **National Planning Policy Framework (2024):** Requires tree-lined streets, seeks the successful retention and integration of existing and new trees, provides protection for irreplaceable habitats including ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees, and seeks biodiversity net gain in development.

Environmental Improvement Plan (2025): Commits to increase England’s tree canopy and woodland cover by 0.33% by 2028, as part of the legal target to grow from 14.5% to 16.5% by 2050². Other commitments: boost conifer planting, strengthen forestry sector skills and innovation, and expand tree planting on farms.

- **The England Trees Action Plan (2021-2024):** Strategic framework for woodland creation and woodland management, as well as a long-term vision for England’s treescape.
- **Tree Health Resilience Strategy (2018):** Sets out an action plan to reduce the risk of threats occurring and to strengthen natural resources to better withstand future threats.

5. Trees in West Sussex

The treescapes found across West Sussex reflects centuries of human influence, from ancient woodlands and historic parklands to modern urban forests. This heritage shapes today’s landscape and informs our future priorities.

Our Treescapes Today

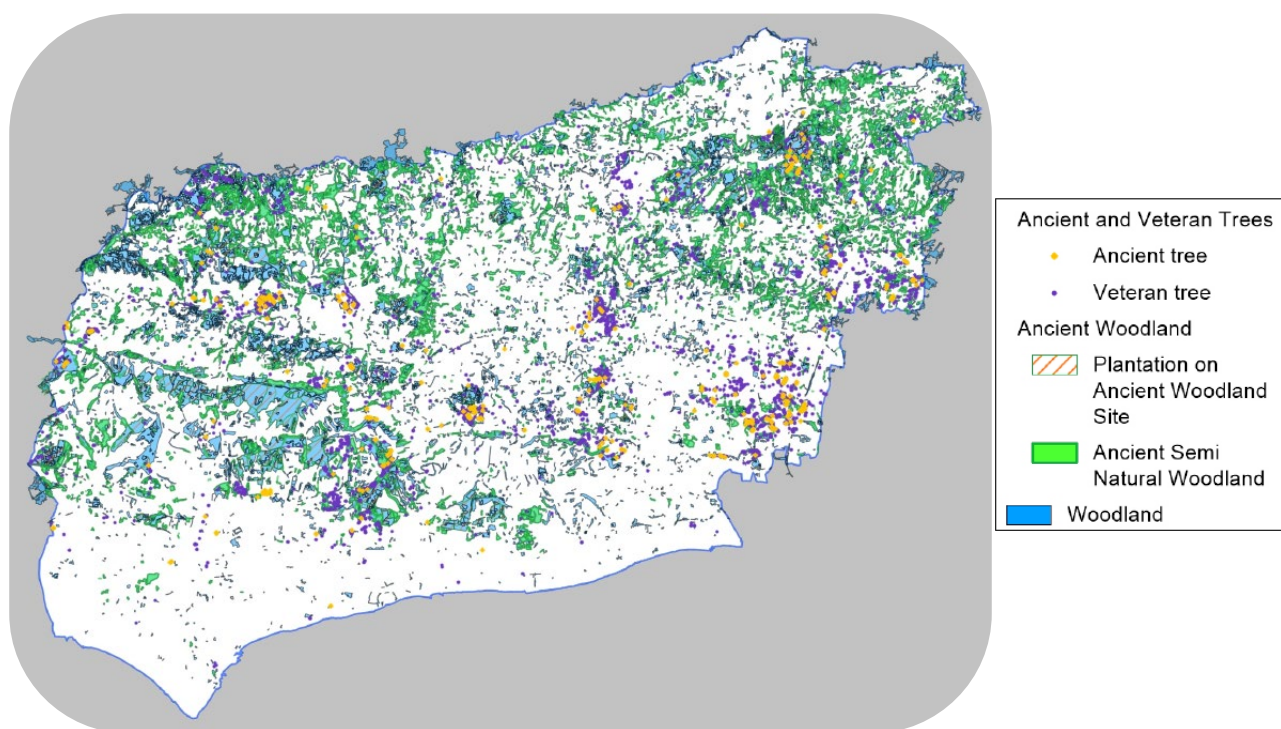


Figure 2 - Treescape types within West Sussex

Of the total land cover for West Sussex:

- **29%** is covered by canopy of both **trees and woodland**
- **22%** is covered by **woodland**³
- **7%** is covered by canopy of **trees outside of woodland**⁴
- **11%** is covered by **ancient woodland**⁵
(44% of which is **plantation on ancient woodland sites**)

Within West Sussex:

- **406** ancient trees and **3337** veteran trees have been recorded so far⁶

Woodland

Vast throughout the rural landscapes of the county, our woodlands are important for a diverse range of well-known environmental, social, and economic reasons. West Sussex contains a range of woodland types, including rare floodplain, wet and ghyll woodland, with broadleaved woodland making up 78% of the total woodland cover found within the county.

Challenges:

- Despite high woodland cover, condition and resilience are significant concerns, only 9% of England's native woodland is in favourable condition. This reflects a change in woodland management and use, climate change, as well as increased impacts from a rise in pests and diseases (notably damage from deer and squirrel, and the ongoing impact of ash dieback).
- Woodlands are scarce in both quantity and size within the county's coastal range, the Low Weald, and pockets of urban areas. These woodlands are at greater risk of fragmentation, with opportunities to enhance connectivity through woodland expansion and hedgerows being key for the resilience of their ecosystems.

Ancient woodland

Ancient woodlands are irreplaceable habitats that have stood for over 400 years. They are of primary importance due to their exceptional biodiversity, their profound historical and cultural significance, and their undisturbed soils providing extensive levels of carbon storage and seed banks rich in genetic diversity. Whilst the total coverage within the county is high, most of the ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW) sites are small plots most frequently found within the High Weald, to the northwest of the county, and scattered across the South Downs. Plantation on ancient woodland sites (PAWS), which are ancient woods that have been felled and replanted with non-native species, are found in similar regions though most are far larger in size compared with ASNW.

Challenges:

- Ancient woodlands are under threat from many known factors, such as neglect or poor management, climate change, pest and disease, overgrazing by deer, and non-native invasive species.
- Deterioration and fragmentation from development remains the most recognised threat to ASNW.
- Although PAWS are damaged, they still have the complex soil of ancient woodland and are considered to contain remnants of the woodland specialist species which occurred before. PAWS restoration is at a critical point in time as their timber crops planted in the 1950s-80s are reaching or exceeding their economic felling age. It is vital that they are restored sensitively with native broadleaved trees taking precedence, alongside the removal of invasive plants such as rhododendron. Without achieving this in the near future, the threat of losing irreplaceable remnants found in the soils of ancient woodland sites is a real.

Ancient and veteran trees

Found across the entire county, both ancient and veteran trees (AVTs) are found in high clusters within the High Weald, east of the Low Weald, and to the centre and northwest of the

South Downs. A significant boost in their identification in recent years within the Low Weald and South Downs is thanks to the important work of the Lost Woods project.

Challenges:

- AVTs remain under-recorded, meaning we do not know enough about them to better understand their extent, distribution, or population trends to truly inform on their threats. Many might be lost through felling without recognising and understanding their true value.
- There is an expected 'generation gap' between existing AVTs and their future replacements, which could take several centuries to develop. We must protect future AVTs and mimic features of AVTs to ensure dependent species have suitable habitats for their continuity.
- Inappropriate development and poor tree management presents a significant risk to AVTs.
- Current legislation available to protect trees does not recognise AVTs for their ecological, cultural and heritage value which makes them so special and irreplaceable. Most AVTs are not afforded statutory protection for this reason.

Hedgerows

Found extensively throughout the county, including many ancient hedgerow remnants, our hedgerows are key for habitat connectivity and help define and contribute to the character of our rural and urban landscapes.

Challenges:

- Hedgerows remain under recorded at a local level, meaning we do not know their general condition, species and age composition, or health.
- Management of hedgerows varies throughout the county. Intense modern flailing practices has lowered the ecological condition of many hedgerows, whilst changes in land use have seen lapsed management resulting in outgrown tree lines and removal.

Urban forests

Urban forests are the trees in streets, gardens, parks, and green spaces that contribute to the wider network of green infrastructure across urbanised landscapes. They help to directly address the challenges of urban living and climate change and resilience for the majority of the population who live in towns and cities.

Challenges:

- Reduced growth and higher mortality rates are typically experienced with trees in urban settings due to the harsh growing environments provided for trees and inadequate establishment practices.
- Pests and diseases are a continual future threat to our urban forests.
- The state of our urban forests is unknown. We do not have sufficient information to identify key risks, benefits, or their economic value, all of which would help aid future strategic management.
- Increased pressure to remove important urban trees due to subsidence related property damage. Many are vitally important canopy trees within or near the built environment, taking decades or centuries to replace and only where replanting is possible.
- Access to the benefits of trees, tree equity, varies significantly between neighbourhoods.

Canopy Cover and Tree Equity

Within West Sussex:

- The average neighbourhood tree canopy cover is estimated to be between **17%**⁷ to **22%**⁸
- **85%** of neighbourhoods have **less than 30%** tree canopy cover (78% of which are urban)
- **70%** of neighbourhoods have **less than 20%** tree canopy cover (66% of which are urban)
- **38%** of neighbourhoods have **less than 10%** tree canopy cover (33% of which are urban)
- **21%** of urban neighbourhoods **have low tree equity** scores.

Measuring tree canopy cover provides a general indicator of where their benefits are distributed. In West Sussex, the average neighbourhood cover is likely at or near the recognised 20% target⁹. Figure 3 shows that neighbourhoods with less than 10% cover tend to be geographically smaller than those with higher canopy cover.

Most neighbourhoods fall far below the **desirable canopy cover target of 30%**¹⁰ which would align with the European average, and would see improved public health, biodiversity, and climate resilience.

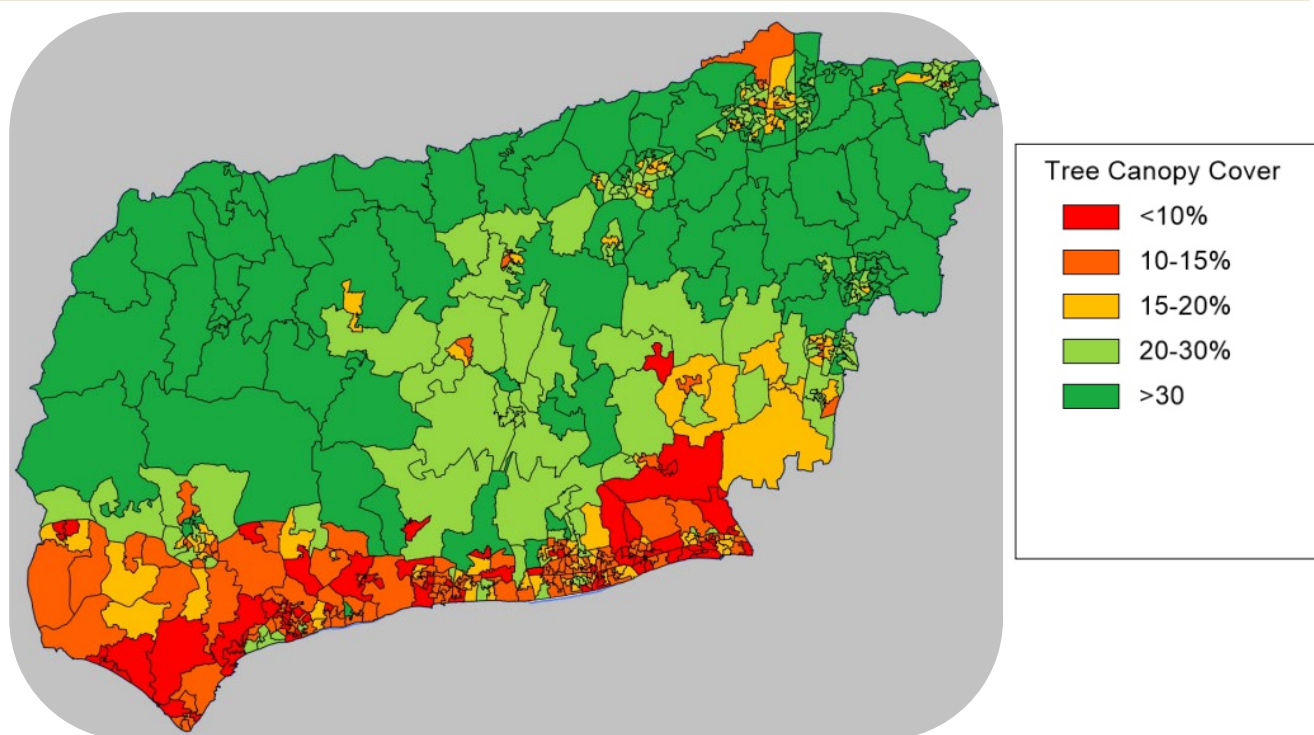


Figure 3 - Tree canopy cover for West Sussex (data from Google EIE December 2024)

Tree equity means everyone, regardless of where they live, has fair access to the health and quality-of-life benefits from urban trees.

The Tree Equity Score UK¹¹ identifies the disparity of tree equity of urban neighbourhoods by comparing canopy cover with climate, health and socioeconomic variables. This helps identify urban neighbourhoods in greatest need of people-focused investment in trees.

Appendix B shows urban neighbourhoods with the lowest tree equity, which are found along the coastal plain, as well as a select few central to Burgess Hill, Horsham, and Crawley.

Improving the tree canopy cover gap to reach desirable goals would help reduce rising peak temperatures (through their cooling effect) and improve local air pollution amongst delivering a multitude of multifaceted benefits. This would require sustained long-term planting initiatives which ensures tree establishment, focussing on urban neighbourhoods with low tree equity as a priority.

Pests and diseases

Introduced pests and diseases are severely affecting UK woodlands, threatening biodiversity, forestry, landscapes, and the economy. Our treescapes also face ongoing risks from serious pests and diseases, such as recent outbreaks of *Ips typographus* in West Sussex. Climate change is driving more frequent and severe weather events, placing trees under increasing stress and making them more vulnerable. At the same time, shifting climate patterns are creating suitable conditions for priority pests and diseases that have not yet become established in the UK.

Healthy and resilient treescapes are our key defence. This requires collaborative landscape scale management of key introduced pests and diseases, improving the provenance and genetic diversity of our trees, as well as stringent biosecurity measures and raised awareness.

Ash Dieback continues to be a significant threat to treescapes found in West Sussex. Whilst the cost to West Sussex's treescape remains unknown, the impacts extended well beyond just ecological and economical; there has been a well-recognised social effect resulting from the loss of ash trees and woodland throughout the landscape. There will be a long route to recovery from the effects of ash dieback, as well as lessons learnt from managing such a serious and costly tree disease.

Deer are an important part of our woodland ecosystems when their numbers are kept at healthy levels. But without natural predators, deer populations can grow too large and cause serious damage, not just to trees, but to the wider environment. Too many deer eat young plants and reduce the variety of wildlife, which can harm soils and release carbon. They also damage young trees by stripping bark and eating lower branches, making it harder for woodlands to regenerate and for new ones to be created. In West Sussex, the woodland risk from deer¹² is currently 'moderate' in the central area and 'high' in places like the High Weald and west of the South Downs. To protect our treescapes now and in the future, and to achieve canopy cover targets, we need to work together across landscapes to understand deer numbers and manage them sustainably.

Grey squirrels can harm the sustainable management of woodlands by stripping bark from trees. This damage can weaken or kill vulnerable tree species, reducing the quality of tree stocks and affecting the wildlife that depends on them, such as fungi and insects.

6. Managing our treescapes

We manage a wide range of land where trees are present, including schools, highways, depots, agricultural land, countryside sites, small holdings, offices, and libraries. This brings common challenges as well as and opportunities for improvement which are explored below.

Tree Management and Data

Tree Management

Our tree management practices vary across services, reflecting the different functions and purposes of each site. A high-level tree management policy remains a priority for the council. Its main purpose is to set out our approach to managing the risks trees may pose to people and property, including injury and damage. The policy will also help clarify what the Council will and will not do in terms of general tree management, while recognising both the value of trees and the risks they present.

National guidance¹³ recommends that tree risk management should be tailored to each site or site type (and sometimes to individual trees) based on land use and occupancy. To achieve this, service-level procedures must be in place to ensure a reasonable system for inspection and management. These should include site or network zoning to determine the type, level, and frequency of inspections. Some services may also need strategies for managing tree root-related subsidence, considering resources, risk areas, control measures, and maintenance records.

Clear procedures that demonstrate reasonable care, while balancing biodiversity and other values, have proven highly defensible in recent case law where tree failure caused damage or injury.

Tree Data and Inventories

As a council, we hold extensive tree data across our services, including inventories of existing and newly planted trees. Sharing this data internally and accessing external sources, such as Tree Preservation Orders, would improve the planning and management of our treescapes.

Currently, inventories are recorded in varied formats limiting consistency and usability (from GIS-based systems to contractor-supplied PDFs). Standardising data collection in electronic formats, as recommended by Forest Research¹⁴, would enable integration with tools like CAVAT, i-Tree, and the Ancient Tree Inventory, providing valuable insights at both strategic and local levels.

Public access to selected data can also deliver benefits. For example, publishing maps showing tree values or the locations of newly planted highway trees can raise awareness and encourage community involvement. A pilot project with West Sussex Tree Wardens aims to use such maps to help residents water young trees, supporting their successful establishment.

Tree Health and Resilience

Pests and Diseases

Deer – We recognise the benefits of a county-wide deer management strategy for our land, for the wider landscape and economy, and for nature recovery. Learning from and aligning with existing strategies/initiatives in the South Downs National Park and the High Weald will be the key for collaborative success, alongside evidence-based decision making. For our sites, challenges may arise with existing governance, public accessibility, and resourcing.

Ash Dieback – We are continuing to deliver our Ash Dieback Action Plan (2019), which includes proactive tree removal and, where appropriate, replanting. A survey is underway to

assess natural regeneration on cleared sites, review the effectiveness of current recovery methods, and identify options where regeneration has failed. Implementing alternative recovery measures may be challenging due to funding and resource constraints. An important objective of the Plan is to use lessons learned to shape future tree management strategies.

Raising awareness of key threats - Through internal and public engagement, we will help raise awareness and prevent the spread of key pests and diseases. Knowing how to spot and reporting tree health issues is vital and is something our workforce and the public can do to make a difference.

Biosecurity - When visiting woodlands or areas with trees, everyone can play a part by following basic biosecurity practices. We will support this by raising awareness on good biosecurity practices for visitors and operators.

To reduce the risk of serious pests and diseases and ensure traceability if an outbreak occurs, it is essential we adopt UK tree and plant health biosecurity standards when enabling or procuring new tree planting. For example, sourcing stock from local nurseries which meet Plant Health Management Standards.

Resilience of our urban forests

Diverse urban forests are more resilient to the threats faced from changing climates and pests and diseases. A greater understanding of species and age composition, distribution, health and ecosystem services, using tools such as i-Tree, would help identify their key risks and ecosystem values provided to aid future management decisions to ensure resilience.

Monitoring and caring for newly planted trees

Planting new trees is a long-term investment of time and money. Young trees need care to establish and deliver the benefits we expect. When plantings fail or grow poorly, understanding why is essential, especially as climate change and competing land use make successful establishment harder.

We will monitor new tree plantings to identify trends and improve future investments. While some sites may require specialist monitoring, local community groups and volunteers can play a vital role in checking tree health.

Enhancing Treescapes

By aligning with our Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements, we will help deliver measurable landscape scale enhancements to the priority treescapes habitats of West Sussex. Maintaining and endorsing strong planning policies is critical, alongside community engagement and sustained partnerships.

Improving Tree Cover

Improving tree cover is important to us for both nature recovery and climate resilience and adaptation. The creation or enhancement of new trees, hedgerows and woodland creates more of the habitats needed, which in turn, supports more species and makes these habitats bigger, better, and more joined-up with each other.

Trees, hedgerows and woodland are also an effective nature-based solution to help protect us, and wildlife, against the effects of a changing climate. When undertaking our functions, we will

consider how tree removal might increase exposure to the effects of climate change at a local or site level. When undertaking tree planting, we will select species that provide resilience to our changing climate in the short and long term (considering heat stress, flooding, rising sea levels, and pest and disease).

Tree establishment techniques for improved tree cover

Tree planting or establishment enabled or undertaken by the County Council will focus on delivering the right tree, in right place, for right reason, with the right start (considering species, soils, space, infrastructure, and aftercare). Without considering these basic principles, new trees are unlikely to mature and provide their full benefit potential.

Most tree planting we undertake is within the highway or occasionally on other managed estate, where individual tree planting or group planting is suitable. However, to actively increase tree cover at scale and where space allows, there are other tree planting or establishment techniques that could be more effective in terms of cost and time, whilst also improving species diversity and resilience. For example, natural colonisation or micro-woods, also known as Miyawaki planting.

Improving tree cover into our wider landscapes can also be achieved by incorporating trees in farming systems (agroforestry), creating new orchards, or by creating food forests.

Prioritising tree planting and establishment

To focus our efforts, tree planting or establishment undertaken or enabled by the County Council will aim to address our key challenges where it's needed most. These are identified below:

Nature recovery - Tree planting and woodland creation will play an important role in addressing nature recovery within the county. The developing Local Nature Recovery Strategy for West Sussex will identify the key habitat priorities relating to tree planting and woodland creation, as well as where and how it could be provided to achieve a positive outcome without impacting upon other priority habitats or land designation.

Pest and diseases recovery - Recovering from pest and disease outbreaks where significant impacts to the local landscape or wider environment have occurred or are likely to arise. This currently relates solely to ash dieback, though other emerging threats should not be discounted. Accordingly, the County Council's treescapes most impacted align our highways, indicating where recovery efforts should be focused.

Tree equity - Targeting tree establishment in urban neighbourhoods with the lowest Tree Equity to address the greatest disparity of canopy cover and climate, health and socioeconomic variables. For West Sussex, these neighbourhoods are shown within Appendix B.

Nature-based solutions - Tree establishment or woodland creation initiatives should also be prioritised which are used as a nature-based solution to directly address or adapt to the localised effects of climate change. This includes their use for shade or cooling effects, dispersal of air pollution, to aid local flooding incidents, or to diversify tree species to build future resilience.

Opportunity mapping for increasing tree cover

A Woodland Opportunity Mapping¹⁵ tool was produced in 2022 which maps 'woodland opportunity areas with less sensitivity' across Sussex and South Downs National Park. These tend to include areas of 50-350m around existing woodland areas where there are least constraints to woodland creation, and where it will deliver benefits, such as flood risk reduction or a buffer to noise and air pollution along major roads. The County Council will use the tool when identifying opportunities for woodland creation, or if providing funding to do so. We will its revision at appropriate intervals to ensure the tool remains viable.

Knowing where small scale tree planting or establishment could be undertaken has been a barrier to recent funding opportunities. Developing a mapping tool that identifies the sensitivity and space availability for tree planting or establishment on County Council land is feasible using existing spatial datasets. This would provide a high-level understanding for land managers and stakeholders and would help with future funding opportunities. It would not rule out the need to undertake a site assessment and gaining the relevant consents for growing trees.

Resources

The County Council employs a limited number of officers who fulfil statutory obligations while also providing specialist advice to internal services and external partners. Their capacity beyond core duties is limited, reflected within the objectives and actions set.

Tree planting budgets are significantly constrained, meaning that trees removed for general management may not be replaced. Continuing to maximise the available resources through initiatives such as the Highways "Donate a Tree" scheme or seeking external funding is essential.

Future opportunities for wider tree, hedgerow or woodland creation or enhancement are likely to arise within the span of this Tree Plan resulting from the targets and commitments set by the Environmental Improvement Plan 2025. Previous funding streams often become available at short notice, meaning it's paramount that we know where efforts could be facilitated and where the focus is needed.

Meeting our strategic objectives depends on effective collaboration with external organisations, stakeholders, and private landowners, alongside influencing actions that align with our aims.

7. Strategic Objectives

To respond effectively to the challenges and opportunities identified, the Tree Plan sets out five strategic objectives for 2026–2030. These objectives provide a clear framework for action, ensuring that our efforts are focused where they deliver the greatest impact for West Sussex’s treescapes. To help deliver these aims, five shorter-term strategic objectives have been identified:

- **Objective 1:** Better data management and evidence-based decision-making
- **Objective 2:** Establishing and embedding policies and procedures
- **Objective 3:** Managing and improving resilience to tree pests and diseases
- **Objective 4:** Identifying opportunities for focused investment and improved management of our treescapes
- **Objective 5:** Working with partners and supporting communities and individuals

Key actions have been allocated to each objective below which we will undertake over the next five years. To help keep track along the way, measures of success and performance indicators are shown.

Objective 1: Better data management and evidence-based decision-making

This is a commitment to improving data collection, evaluation, and use for informed decision-making.

- a) Review current **tree survey data** and implement improvements in storage and management.
- b) Promote internal **tree datasets** and seek access to external sources (e.g., Tree Preservation Orders).
- c) Regularly **evaluate data** to guide strategic and operational actions.

Measure of success:

By 2030, we will have tree-related datasets shared between services and councils to help guide future decision making, and key datasets promoted and made available through online resources.

Performance indicators:

2027 – Data reviewed across the council with a clear plan for improvement.

2028 – Improvements achieved enabling services to make well informed decisions.

2030 – Data and improvements being reviewed and reflected on for Tree Plan revision.

Objective 2: Establishing and embedding policies and procedures

This is a commitment to establish agreed policies, procedures and standards across the Authority in accordance with best practice.

- a) Adopt a comprehensive **tree management policy** prioritising safety, health, and benefits.
- b) Implement proportionate **tree inspection and management** procedures for Council-owned land for which we have responsibility.
- c) Ensure **tenant contracts** reflect legal tree responsibilities.
- d) Publish **guidance** for property managers, tenants, and contractors.
- e) Reviewing and, as necessary, strengthen **planning policies** in Local Plans and other strategies to protect or enhance our treescapes (including 'validation lists').
- f) Adopt a **policy to protect highway trees** from damage, seeking compensation to reinvest in replacements.

Measure of success:

By 2030, we will have an active tree management policy that governs service-level procedures, ensuring our responsibilities are clearly met. Highway trees are afforded greater protection through policy, alongside wider protections of our treescapes through planning policies.

Performance indicators:

2027 – Policy to protect highway trees adopted.

Tree management policy planned for and adopted.

Guidance published and distributed.

2027 – Tree management procedures adopted at service level with tenant contracts reviewed.

2028 – Planning policies reviewed and amended as necessary.

Objective 3: Managing and improving the resilience to tree pests and diseases

This is a commitment to raise awareness and further action against key pests and diseases.

- a) Collaborate with national bodies and local networks to **monitor and raise awareness** of tree pests and diseases.
- b) Collaborate with national bodies to develop and implement **best practice** for pest and disease management and biosecurity.
- c) Ensure, where possible, trees planted or enabled by the County Council are sourced from **Plant Healthy** certified nurseries.
- d) Fund and deliver reactive and proactive works under the **Ash Dieback Action Plan**, reviewing and implementing recovery (seeking funding for replanting where appropriate).
- e) Capture **lessons learned** from managing ash dieback for future responses to serious tree pests and diseases.
- f) Support local research of **urban forests and hedgerows** to inform or their future resilience.
- g) Work with partners and national bodies to develop **deer management strategies** for all our landscapes.

Measure of success:

By 2030, we will have raised the awareness of key pest and diseases and see improved biosecurity measures for all our operations impacting treescapes. We will have learnt from our completed Ash Dieback Action Plan and recovery efforts. A clear approach for deer management will be in place across all landscapes in West Sussex and we will have supported research for urban forests and hedgerows.

Performance indicators:

- | | |
|------|--|
| 2027 | <p>Improved online resources and communications, regarding the monitoring and awareness of key tree pests and diseases.</p> <p>Plan established to identify where and how biosecurity can be improved within council operations alongside management of key pest and diseases.</p> <p>All trees planted or enabled by the County Council are from Plant Healthy nurseries.</p> |
| 2028 | <p>Plan established to identify and support local research of urban forests and hedgerows.</p> |
| 2030 | <p>Ash Dieback Action Plan completed alongside learning and recovery efforts.</p> |

Objective 4: Identifying opportunities for investment and improved management of our treescapes

This is a commitment to identify opportunities for the investment in tree management and planting or establishment.

- a) **Prioritise tree planting and establishment** undertaken or enabled by the County Council for nature recovery, pest and disease recovery, tree equity, and as nature-based solutions.
- b) Promote treescapes as **nature-based solutions**, supporting their delivery following latest guidance.
- c) **Monitor new planting or establishment** undertaken or enabled by the County Council to ensure successful outcomes.
- d) **Work with partners** and national bodies to further the recording of ancient and veteran trees, the restoration of plantations on ancient woodland sites, and the condition of woodlands.
- e) Explore opportunities for tree planting and establishment through **carbon and biodiversity offsetting** on County Council land.
- f) Align County Council land use with our **Local Nature Recovery Strategy** priorities.
- g) Develop **opportunity mapping** for tree planting or establishment on County Council land and promote the use of existing woodland opportunity mapping.
- h) Promote, and facilitate where necessary, emerging **funding streams** to help drive improved tree cover and management.
- i) Collaborate with landowners and stakeholders to **promote investment** in woodland products and woodland creation for rural economic growth.

Measure of success:

By 2030, we will see increased tree equity of urban neighbourhoods that need it the most. Well established treescapes will be delivered as nature-based solutions for our future resilience. Ancient and veteran trees inventories will have substantially grown, there will be improved plans for restoration of PAWS within West Sussex, and local woodland owners will know the condition of their woodlands and how they can enhance them. Our treescapes will have been enhanced as a result of the delivery of the LNRS and carbon and biodiversity offsetting opportunities. Opportunities for tree planting or establishment are mapped, ready for funding streams. We will see increased production and use of sustainable, woodland products with further investment for our future woodlands.

Performance indicators:

- | | |
|------|--|
| 2027 | Services adopt the use of treescapes as nature-based services and design guidance.
Agreed approach for the monitoring of new tree planting between services. |
| 2027 | Delivery of LNRS supporting: recording of AVTs, restoration of PAWS, and enhanced condition of woodland.
Opportunity mapping for tree planting on council land established. |
| 2029 | Opportunities for carbon and biodiversity offsetting on County Council land utilised. |

Objective 5: Working with partners and supporting communities and individuals

This is a commitment to support high standards of tree management, to enable others to manage and protect trees in their ownership, and to support them in delivering their ambitions to increase woodland and tree cover in the County. It also aims to engage a greater social understanding towards the benefits of public trees and encourage their care.

- a) Share knowledge with key partners and landowners to **promote best practice** for woodland and tree management.
- b) Continue to facilitate and coordinate the **West Sussex Tree Warden** network.
- c) Highlight the **amenity and ecosystem values** of our treescapes and promote through online resources.
- d) Continue the highway "**Donate a Tree**" scheme and seek other funding streams to further subsidise costs.
- e) Promote **public care for highway trees** through guidance and mapping tools.
- f) Use our online resources to **promote resources** for communities and individuals on tree management and planting.
- g) Explore ways to support **community-led tree planting programmes**, including woodland and hedgerow creation.

Measure of success:

By 2030, we will have a supported Tree Warden Network and partnership with key landowners and partners who help deliver our objectives. Our online resources provide clear guidance towards best tree management, how to support local tree planting, as well as how to care for local trees.

Performance indicators:

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2026 | <p>Establish a steering group for the West Sussex Tree Warden network to deliver mutual aims and clear future objectives at county level.</p> <p>Continued support of the West Sussex Tree Forum, promoting best practice and shared knowledge.</p> <p>Online resources reviewed and regularly updated.</p> |
| 2027 | <p>Promoting events for public care of community trees and planting programmes within West Sussex.</p> |
| 2028 | <p>Amenity and ecosystem values of our treescapes and promote through online resources.</p> <p>Highway "Donate a Tree" scheme continued with funding further supported.</p> |

8. Implementation, Monitoring, and Review

The focus of this Plan is on the delivery of the key actions identified above over the next five years. A high-level delivery plan is attached as Appendix A; it identifies the senior responsible officer, the internal services and external partners/parties that will be involved in their delivery, and likely sources of funding.

Given the constraints on the County Council's resources, it may be that some actions cannot be progressed or that they need to be delivered in a different way. However, they demonstrate the ambition of the Authority to effect positive change with regard to the trees in its ownership and more widely within the County.

Where possible, the opportunity will be taken to secure external sources of funding to deliver some aims within this plan. The opportunity will also be taken to continue working in partnership with other councils, agencies, statutory bodies, landowners, and other key stakeholders to share and make the best use of staff and other resources.

Delivery of our Tree Plan will be subject to monitoring and annual review and as necessary, will be amended in response to changing circumstances.

9. References

- ¹ Common sense risk management of trees, National Tree Safety Group Guidance (2024).
- ² The Environmental Targets (Woodland and Trees Outside Woodland) (England) Regulations 2023
- ³ National Forest Inventory GB 2024, Forestry Commission (2025).
- ⁴ National Trees Outside Woodland Map, Forest Research (2025).
- ⁵ Ancient Woodland (England) inventory, Natural England [accessed September 2025].
- ⁶ Ancient Tree Inventory, Woodland Trust, [accessed 02/12/2025].
- ⁷ Average neighbourhood canopy cover when combining the following datasets which derive from mixed datasets which date from 2017-2023: Trees Outside of Woodlands Map, Forest Research [accessed 18/09/2025], and, National Forest Inventory, Forestry Commission (2024).
- ⁸ Average neighbourhood canopy cover using an AI semantic segmentation model for by Google Environmental Insights Explorer (2024).
- ⁹ The Canopy Cover of England's Towns and Cities: baselining and setting targets to improve human health and well-being, K,Doick et al. (2017).
- ¹⁰ Evidence-based guidelines for greener, healthier, more resilient neighbourhoods: Introducing the 3-30-300 rule, Cecil Konijnendijk (2023).
- ¹¹ Tree Equity Score UK (2025). American Forests. Last accessed [September 2025] <https://uk.treeequityscore.org/>. Co-developed by American Forests, the Woodland Trust and the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare in 2023.
- ¹² Forestry Commission Map Browser and Land Information Search [accessed 22/09/2025].
- ¹³ Common sense risk management of trees, National Tree Safety Group (2024).
- ¹⁴ Individual Tree Data Standard, Forest Research (2021).
- ¹⁵ Sussex Nature Partnership, Woodland Trust and South Downs National Park Authority, Woodland Opportunity Mapping, [accessed 03/10/2025].

Appendix A Delivery Plan

Objective 1: Better data management and evidence-based decision-making

Action	Senior Responsible Officer	Lead Service	Other Services	External Partners/Parties	Funding Mechanism/s
(a) Tree Survey Data	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services	Local Highways Operations (tree department), Property, IT, Countryside Services		Base budget
(b) Tree Datasets	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services	Local Highways Operations (tree department), Property, IT, Countryside Services		Base budget
(c) Evaluate Data	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations	Property, Countryside Services		Base budget

Objective 2: Establishing and embedding policies and procedures

Action	Senior Responsible Officer	Lead Service	Other Services	External Partners/Parties	Funding Mechanism/s
(a) Tree Management Policy	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services	Local Highways Operations (tree department), Property, Countryside Services Legal Services		Base budget
(b) Tree Inspections and Management	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning & Director of Property and Assets	Local Highways Operations, Property	Legal Services, Countryside Services		

Action	Senior Responsible Officer	Lead Service	Other Services	External Partners/Parties	Funding Mechanism/s
(c) Tenant Contracts	Director of Property and Assets	Property	Legal Services	WSCC tenants	Base budget
(d) Guidance Notes	Director of Property and Assets	Property	Legal Services	Property managers, WSCC tenants, contractors	Base budget
(e) Planning Policies	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services	Legal Services		Base budget
(f) Policy to Protect Highway Trees	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations	Planning Services, Property, Legal Services		Base budget

Objective 3: Managing and improving resilience to tree pests and diseases

Action	Senior Responsible Officer	Lead Service	Other Services	External Partners/Parties	Funding Mechanism/s
(a) Monitor and Raise Awareness	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services	Local Highways Operations (tree department), Countryside Services	Defra, Forestry Commission, West Sussex Tree Wardens, Tree Council, APHA	Base budget
(b) Best Practice	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services		Defra, Tree Council, Forest Research	Base budget
(c) Plant Healthy	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations	Property, Planning Services		
(d) Ash Dieback Action Plan	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations	Property	Adjoining landowners	Base budget plus in-year budget bids to address pressures

Action	Senior Responsible Officer	Lead Service	Other Services	External Partners/Parties	Funding Mechanism/s
(e) Lessons Learnt (Ash Dieback)	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations	Property		Base budget
(f) Urban Forests and Hedgerows	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services		Forestry Commission, West Sussex Tree Wardens	Indirect: volunteering and sourcing of funds
(g) Deer Management Strategies	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services	Countryside Services	Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, High Weald, South Downs National Park, District and Borough Councils	Base budget

Objective 4: Identifying opportunities for investment and improved management of our treescapes

Action	Senior Responsible Officer	Lead Service	Other Services	External Partners/Parties	Funding Mechanism/s
(a) Prioritise Tree Planting or Establishment	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations, Planning Services	Property		Base budget
(b) Nature-Based Solutions	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services	Local Highways Operations (tree department), Property		Base budget
(c) Monitor New Planting or Establishment	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations	Planning Services, Property, Countryside Services	Tree Council, West Sussex Tree Wardens	Base budget
(d) Work With Partners (ancient and veteran trees, restoration of PAWS, and woodland condition)	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services		Woodland Trust, Forest Research, High Weald, South Downs National Park, District and Borough Councils	Base budget

Action	Senior Responsible Officer	Lead Service	Other Services	External Partners/Parties	Funding Mechanism/s
(e) Carbon and Biodiversity Offsetting	Environment and Public Protection	Climate Change Team	Planning Services, Property		Base budget
(f) Local Nature Recovery Strategy	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services	Local Highways Operations (tree department), Property, Countryside	Sussex Nature Partnership, Woodland Trust, Forest Research, High Weald, Chichester Harbour Conservancy, South Downs National Park, District and Borough Councils	Base Budget
(g) Opportunity Mapping	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services	Local Highways Operations (tree department), Property, Countryside, IT		Base Budget
(h) Funding Streams	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations	Climate Change Team, Planning Services, Property, Countryside		Base Budget
(i) Promote Investment	Executive Director Place Services	Economic Growth	Climate Change Team	Major Landowners, Coast2Capital LEP, Area Economic Partnerships x3	Base budget

Objective 5: Working with partners and supporting communities and individuals

Action	Senior Responsible Officer	Lead Service	Other Services	External Partners/Parties	Funding Mechanism/s
(a) Promote Best Practice	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services		Forestry Commission, major landowners, Tree Council, Woodland Trust	Base budget
(b) West Sussex Tree Warden Network	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services		Tree Council	Base budget
(c) Amenity and Ecosystem Values	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services	Local Highways Operations (tree department), Property, Countryside, IT		Base budget
(d) 'Donate/Adopt a Tree' Scheme	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations		Members of the Public	Base budget Indirect: private contributions and external funds
(e) Promote Care for Highway Trees	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Local Highways Operations	IT, Planning Services	West Sussex Tree Wardens	Base budget
(f) Promote Resources	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services	IT		Base budget
(g) Community Tree Planting Programmes	Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Planning Services	Climate Change Team, Local Highways Operations (tree department)	Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, Sussex Wildlife Trust	Base budget Indirect: external funds

Appendix B Urban Neighbourhoods with Low Tree Equity

Acknowledgement

All data and information derive from Tree Equity Score UK. 2025. American Forests. Last accessed [October 2025]

Further information and methodology can be found on the Tree Equity Score UK website.

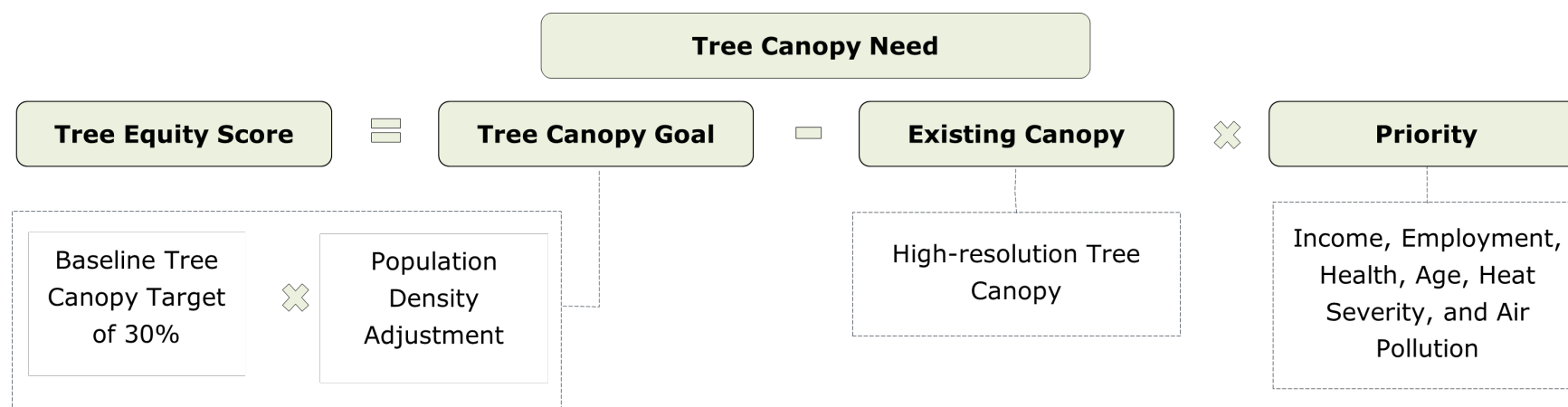
<https://uk.treeequityscore.org/>

What is the Tree Equity Score?

Tree Equity Score UK combines information from a variety of sources to create a single measure from 0 to 100. The lower the score, the greater the priority for tree planting investment. A score of 100 means the neighbourhood has enough trees to meet the canopy cover goals.

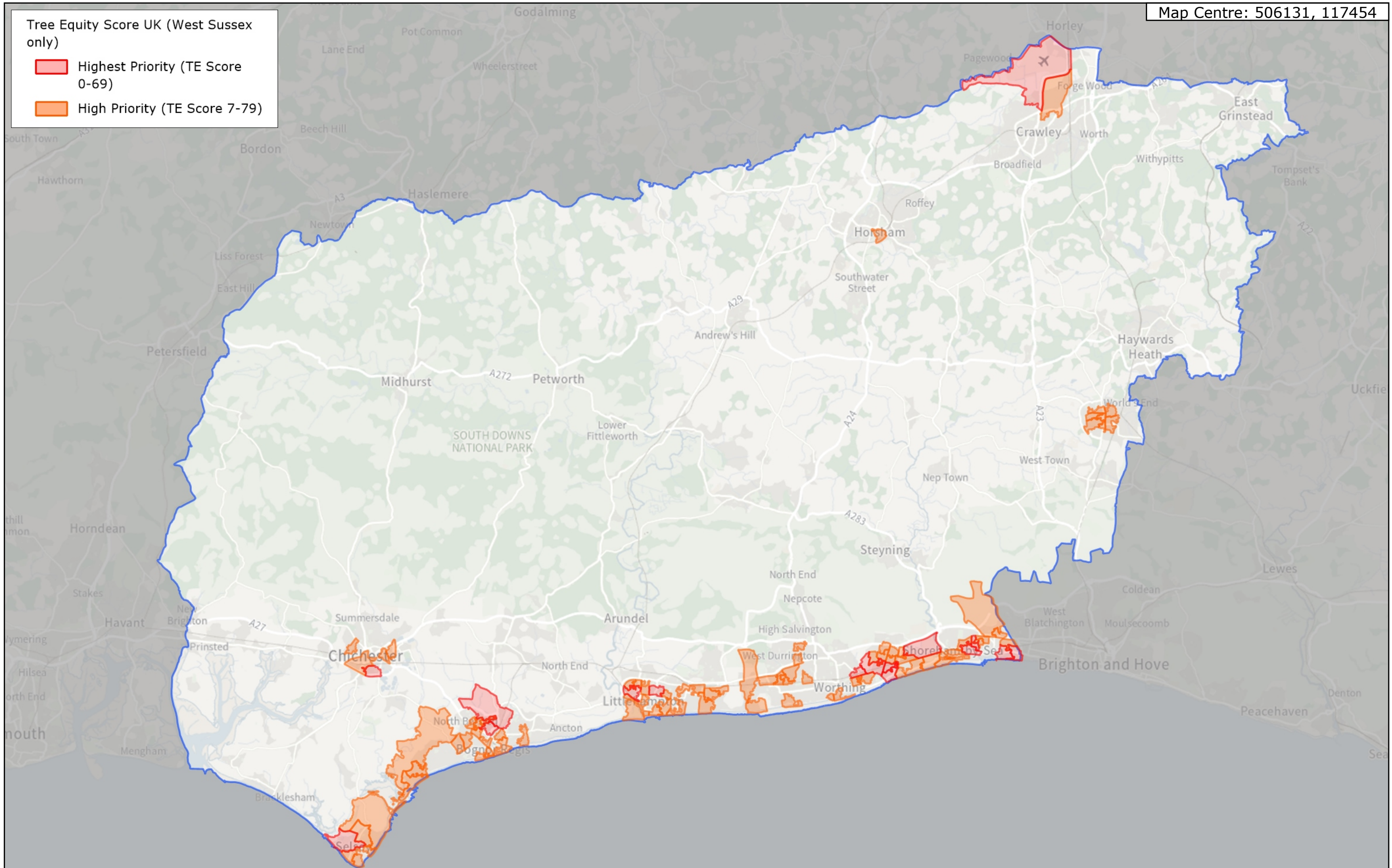
It measures how well the benefits of trees are reaching communities living on low incomes and others disproportionately impacted by extreme heat, pollution and other environmental hazards. Tree Equity Score UK is a nationwide score that highlights inequitable access to trees. The score is calculated at the neighbourhood level (Lower Super Output Areas in England and Wales).

How are Tree Equity scores calculated?



Tree Equity Score UK (West Sussex only)

- Highest Priority (TE Score 0-69)
- High Priority (TE Score 7-79)



© Crown copyright and database rights 2025 OS AC0000849983. You are permitted to use this data solely to enable you to respond to, or interact with, the organisation that provided you with the data. You are not permitted to copy, sub-license, distribute or sell any of this data to third parties in any form.