

PRESTON BROOK PARISH COUNCIL

TREES, CANOPY AND TREESCAPE POLICY

A long-term framework for a greener, healthier and more resilient Preston Brook

Adopted on 22 September 2026

1. Strategic Vision for Preston Brook's Treescape

1.1 Preston Brook Parish Council regards trees as essential natural infrastructure.

1.2 A mature tree is simultaneously habitat, carbon storage, shade, landscape, rainfall interception, a connection with place and history, and an asset inherited by one generation from another. The Council therefore considers the stewardship of trees to be a long-term public responsibility extending beyond conventional grounds maintenance.

1.3 This policy establishes a new principle for Preston Brook in how the parish should become progressively more tree-rich with each generation.

1.4 The Council will protect the best of the treescape it has inherited while creating the treescape that future generations will need. Its approach will consequently move beyond simply replacing trees when they are lost. It will actively seek a measurable increase in canopy cover, greater species and age diversity, stronger ecological connections between habitats and the establishment of trees capable of reaching maturity. This is a policy for 2050 as much as it is for today.

1.5 For land controlled by the Parish Council, the long-term principle will be no net loss of canopy, except where tree removal is necessary to restore another habitat of demonstrably greater ecological importance. The Council's wider objective goes further still - over successive policy periods Preston Brook should achieve net canopy gain.

2. The National Challenge

2.1 Britain is not a naturally tree-poor landscape. Its present level of woodland reflects centuries of human intervention, land-use change and woodland loss.

2.2 The Woodland Trust estimates that only around 13.5% of the United Kingdom is presently woodland, compared with approximately 38% across the European Union¹. Around 1905, UK woodland cover had fallen to approximately 5%, demonstrating the extraordinary historic depletion of the country's wooded landscape².

2.3 Ancient woodland is scarcer still. Only approximately 2.5% of the UK's land area is ancient woodland (ecosystems which have developed over centuries and cannot meaningfully be recreated simply by planting an equivalent area elsewhere)³.

¹ Woodland Trust, *State of the UK's Woods and Trees 2025*. <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/state-of-uk-woods-and-trees/>

² Woodland Trust, *Woods and Forests Facts*. The Trust reports that woodland cover had fallen to approximately 5% around 1905, compared with around 13% today. <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2024/05/woods-forests-facts/>

³ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/protecting-trees-and-woods/ancient-woodland-restoration/>

2.4 The picture is not merely one of insufficient quantity. Woodland wildlife has experienced profound deterioration. Woodland Trust evidence reports a 37% reduction in woodland birds over the last 50 years, a 70% fall in monitored dormouse populations between 2000 and 2022, and a 22% reduction in woodland plant-species richness over approximately 50 years⁴.

2.5 England has now established a statutory objective to increase tree canopy and woodland cover to at least 16.5% of its land area by 2050. The 2022 baseline was 14.9%, and the interim objective requires a net increase equivalent to approximately 43,000 hectares by 2030⁵.

2.6 Preston Brook Parish Council will seek to ensure that this national objective is met and, wherever reasonably practicable, exceeded within the Parish, reflecting the Council's ambition for Preston Brook to make a demonstrably positive contribution to increasing tree canopy and woodland cover.

3. Management, Inspection, and Safety

3.1 Alongside its wider ambitions for canopy expansion and biodiversity, Preston Brook Parish Council recognises that it has a continuing responsibility to manage trees within its ownership or control in a safe, competent and evidence-led manner.

3.2 The Council's approach is one of active stewardship rather than reactive intervention. Trees will be managed with the objective of retaining them in a healthy and safe condition for as long as reasonably practicable, while recognising that trees are living organisms, that absolute safety cannot be achieved, and that excessive intervention can itself diminish their ecological, landscape and amenity value.

3.3 The management regime will therefore combine planned inspection, routine observation, professional arboricultural advice where required, appropriate record keeping and proportionate intervention. This approach is informed by the National Tree Safety Group's *Common Sense Risk Management of Trees*, which advocates a proportionate approach based upon the benefits of trees, patterns of land use and reasonably foreseeable risks rather than an assumption that all trees require the same level of intervention⁶.

3.4 All trees for which the Parish Council has management responsibility will be incorporated within a planned inspection regime. No tree within the Council's managed stock will have a programmed inspection interval exceeding three years. The appropriate frequency within that maximum period will be determined by the location, condition and characteristics of the tree and, importantly, by the nature and frequency of occupation of the surrounding area. Trees situated within or immediately adjacent to areas of regular public use, highways, buildings, play or recreation areas, frequently used footpaths, seating areas or other locations where the consequences of tree failure could reasonably be greater will ordinarily be formally inspected annually. For trees in lower-use locations, the Council may determine that a longer programmed interval is proportionate, provided that this does not exceed three years and there is no known condition or site-specific circumstance requiring more frequent observation. Where circumstances indicate that earlier assessment is appropriate, the Council will act accordingly.

3.5 Inspection will consider the tree in the context of its surroundings rather than treating structural characteristics in isolation. The presence of deadwood, cavities, fungal fruiting bodies, changes in

⁴ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2017/01/ancient-woodland-restoration-for-dormice/>

⁵ DEFRA, *Tree Canopy and Woodland Cover Environment Act Target Delivery Plan*, 2026. England's statutory target is at least 16.5% tree canopy and woodland cover by 2050, against a 2022 baseline of 14.9%. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tree-canopy-and-woodland-cover-environment-act-target-delivery-plan/tree-canopy-and-woodland-cover-environment-act-target-delivery-plan>

⁶ National Tree Safety Group, *Common Sense Risk Management of Trees*, Second Edition, 2024.

vitality, root disturbance, structural unions, storm damage or other features will be considered alongside the size and species of the tree, its history, ground conditions, exposure and the presence and frequency of potential targets. Age, size, cavities, deadwood or natural asymmetry will not, of themselves, be treated as evidence that a tree is unsafe. Many of these characteristics are simultaneously important features of mature and veteran trees and can provide significant habitat. The objective is to identify material and reasonably foreseeable risks requiring management while avoiding unnecessary work to healthy or acceptably safe trees.

3.6 Programmed tree inspections will be undertaken by a person competent to undertake the level of assessment required. The Council may use appropriately trained officers or other competent persons for routine observation and basic inspection. Where a tree presents characteristics requiring specialist assessment, uncertainty exists concerning its structural condition, or significant intervention is contemplated, the Council will obtain advice from an appropriately qualified and experienced arboricultural professional. The Council will distinguish between routine observation, formal visual tree assessment and specialist arboricultural investigation. A routine observation by an officer or councillor will not be presented as equivalent to a professional arboricultural assessment.

3.7 The Council will maintain an accessible means through which residents can report concerns about Council-managed trees (website/email). Reports will be assessed according to their apparent urgency. The existence of a public report will not automatically require tree work, but credible information suggesting a material change in condition will be considered and, where appropriate, investigated.

3.8 The normal inspection cycle will not prevent additional inspections following circumstances reasonably capable of altering tree condition or stability. Significant storms, exceptional winds, prolonged waterlogging, flooding, drought, fire, nearby excavation, construction activity, vehicle impact, soil disturbance or the failure of a neighbouring tree may justify targeted reassessment. Where a tree has failed, the Council will consider whether the circumstances reveal a wider issue affecting trees of comparable species, age, condition, exposure or rooting environment. Similarity of species alone will not justify indiscriminate removal.

3.9 Where an inspection identifies necessary work, the required response will be prioritised according to the nature and immediacy of the risk. An imminent or serious risk to people or property will receive urgent attention. Lower-level defects may appropriately be monitored, incorporated into planned maintenance or reassessed at a specified interval. The Council will not undertake tree removal merely because removal represents the simplest administrative response. Where pruning, management of the surrounding area, restriction of access, monitoring or another proportionate measure can satisfactorily manage the identified risk while retaining the tree, that option should be considered before removal.

3.10 The Proper Officer will ensure that appropriate records are maintained for the Council's managed tree stock. Records should be sufficient to demonstrate the location or identity of the tree or group concerned, the date and nature of an inspection, material observations, recommended action, subsequent works and, where appropriate, the date upon which further assessment is required. The Council will progressively seek to integrate these records within a digital tree register and wider canopy map so that tree safety, asset management, biodiversity and canopy planning form a single evidence base rather than separate administrative exercises. Over time, this will enable the Council to understand not only whether individual trees are safe, but the changing age structure, species composition, condition and resilience of the Council's tree population.

3.11 Any tree work commissioned by the Council will be undertaken by persons possessing appropriate competence, experience, equipment and insurance for the work concerned. Works to established trees will have regard to 'BS 3998:2010, *Tree Work - Recommendations*⁷, or any successor standard. Where development or construction could affect trees, the Council will have

⁷ British Standards Institution, BS 3998:2010, *Tree Work - Recommendations*.

regard to 'BS 5837:2012, *Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction - Recommendations*⁸, or its successor. Pruning will have a defined arboricultural purpose. Routine topping, excessive crown reduction or repeated intervention unsupported by arboricultural need will not form part of the Council's normal approach.

3.12 A dead or declining tree will not automatically be removed. Standing deadwood, veteran characteristics, cavities and decaying timber can have disproportionately high biodiversity value. Where such features can safely coexist with the use of the surrounding land, the Council will consider their retention. Where complete retention is inappropriate, the Council will consider whether ecological value can safely be retained through measures such as partial reduction, retention of standing monolith habitat or the retention of fallen deadwood in an appropriate location. Public safety and biodiversity will therefore be considered together rather than treated as inherently competing objectives.

3.13 The Council will not normally undertake tree works solely to address falling leaves, seeds, blossom, fruit, bird droppings, ordinary shading, obstruction of a private view or interference with television, satellite, radio or telecommunications reception. Similarly, the ordinary presence of branches overhanging neighbouring property will not in itself require Council intervention where the tree is otherwise appropriately managed. Individual circumstances will nevertheless be considered where there is evidence of material damage, an actionable nuisance, an unacceptable safety risk or another substantive reason for intervention.

3.14 The Council will make reasonable financial provision for the inspection and management of its tree stock. Where practicable, tree management will be planned over multiple financial years rather than relying upon emergency expenditure after problems arise. Inspection findings should inform future budgets and allow significant foreseeable works to be programmed appropriately. The Council recognises that good tree management is not simply an expenditure requirement. Timely inspection, preventative management and the retention of healthy established trees represent prudent management of valuable public natural assets.

4. A Preston Brook Canopy Ambition

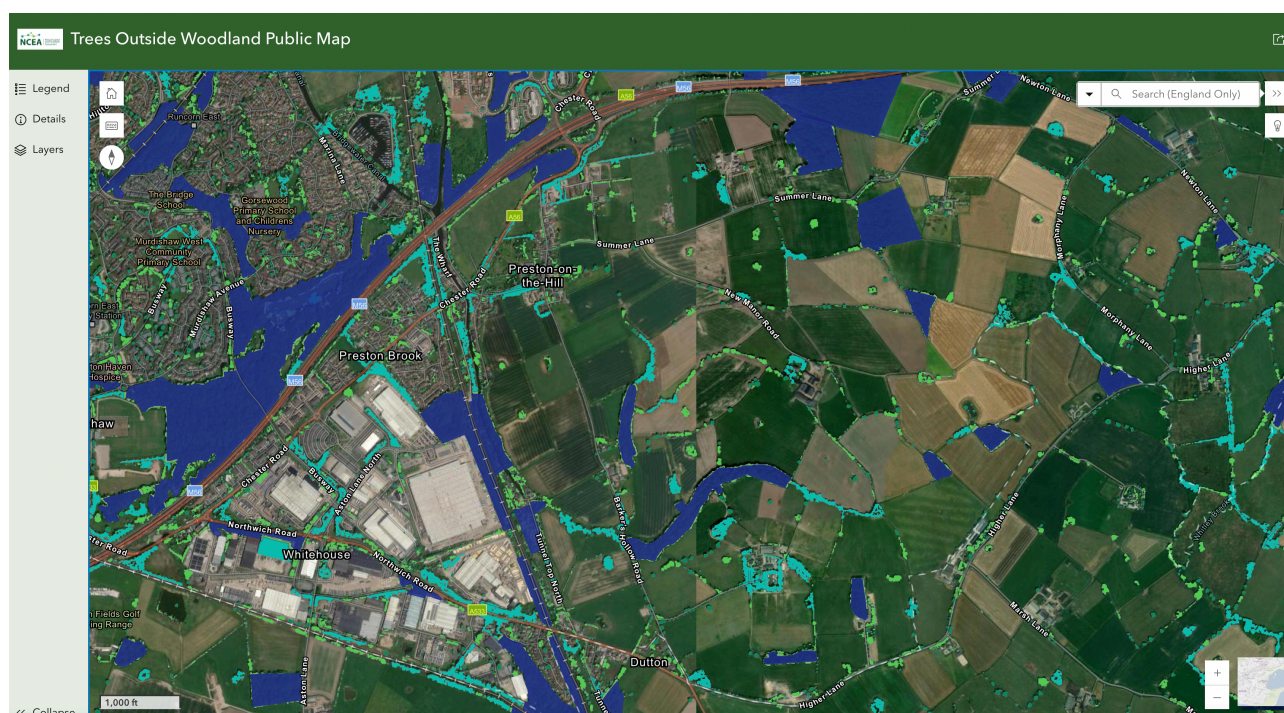
4.1 The Council adopts the principle that no reasonable opportunity to increase the quality, resilience or extent of Preston Brook's tree canopy should be unnecessarily lost. Once a parish-wide canopy baseline has been established in line with the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, the Council will set measurable canopy objectives to 2030, 2040 and 2050.

4.2 Within the built environment and future development areas, the Council will work towards the internationally emerging '3-30-300 Principle' as an aspirational framework⁹ - residents should, where reasonably achievable, be able to see at least three established trees from their home; neighbourhoods should work towards 30% canopy cover, and residents should have good access to quality green space within approximately 300 metres. This is deliberately ambitious. Research published in *Nature Communications* in 2026 assessed 862 European cities and found that only 13.5% of the population studied currently satisfies all three elements of the 3-30-300 approach. Approximately 28% lived in neighbourhoods achieving at least 30% tree cover. The 30% objective will not, however, be applied mechanically to every hectare of land. Open habitats can themselves possess considerable ecological importance. Species-rich grassland, wetlands, ponds, reedbeds and other valuable open habitats should not be planted with trees simply to improve a canopy statistic. The purpose is ecological improvement, not numerical tree planting.

⁸ British Standards Institution, BS 5837:2012, *Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction - Recommendations*.

⁹ [7] Bertassello et al., *Nature Communications* (2026), "Assessing European cities with the 3-30-300 rule underscores the need for enhanced urban greening efforts." Analysis of 862 European cities found only 13.5% of the population examined met all three criteria.

Trees Outside Woodland Map¹⁰, Preston Brook:



4.3 The Council will not judge the success of this policy principally by announcing how many saplings have been planted. A hundred newly planted whips and one mature oak cannot sensibly be treated as environmentally equivalent merely because the former produces the larger number. For this reason, canopy cover will become the Council's principal long-term measure of treescape abundance.

4.4 The Council will seek to establish a baseline assessment of Preston Brook's existing tree canopy. As increasingly detailed national and local mapping becomes available, this baseline should distinguish, so far as practicable, woodland, groups of trees, hedgerow trees, individual trees and the distribution of canopy within the built and rural environments. This approach recognises the importance of trees outside conventional woodland. National mapping confirms that trees outside woodland make up around 30% of England's tree cover. Lone trees, hedgerow trees, small copses, parkland and garden trees must therefore be understood as parts of a connected treescape rather than environmental fragments. Progress should subsequently be measured against that baseline at appropriate intervals.

5. Trees per Acre

5.1 Historic British treescapes cannot reliably be expressed through a single national number of trees per acre. Different landscapes ranged from closed woodland to coppice, wood pasture, hedged farmland and open landscapes containing large individual trees. The Council will therefore not manufacture or repeat an unsupported historic density figure.

¹⁰ DEFRA/Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment, *Trees Outside Woodland Map*, 2026. Trees outside conventional woodland represent approximately 30% of England's tree cover. <https://www.data.gov.uk/collections/environment/non-woodland-trees>

5.2 Modern woodland-establishment evidence nevertheless provides useful context. The Woodland Trust advises that new woodland is typically planted at approximately 1,000-1,600 trees per hectare, equivalent to approximately 405-648 trees per acre, depending upon the site and objectives¹¹.

5.3 Current England Woodland Creation Offer requirements ordinarily specify at least 1,100 broadleaved stems per hectare, although significantly lower densities can be appropriate for particular nature-recovery approaches¹².

5.4 These figures demonstrate why tree numbers alone are an inadequate parish-wide target. Mature wood pasture containing a comparatively small number of enormous veteran trees may be ecologically more valuable than densely planted young woodland.

5.5 Preston Brook will therefore measure what ultimately matters: canopy, survival, maturity, ecological condition, connectivity, diversity and longevity.

6. The Preston Brook Treescape

6.1 The Council adopts the concept of the treescape rather than viewing woodland, hedges and individual trees independently.

6.2 A treescape includes woodland, copses, orchards, hedgerows, veteran trees, street trees, trees in gardens and public open spaces, riparian trees alongside watercourses and individual landmark trees. Collectively they form a network through which wildlife can move and through which ecological resilience can develop.

6.3 The Woodland Trust describes resilient woodland landscapes through the principle of woods becoming more, bigger, better and more joined up¹³. Preston Brook will apply the same thinking at parish scale. New planting should therefore preferentially strengthen existing ecological networks rather than simply occupy whichever pieces of land happen to be easiest to plant. Particular attention will be given to connections between established habitats, watercourses, hedgerows and existing groups of trees, including opportunities to strengthen riparian habitat and ecological corridors identified through the emerging Neighbourhood Plan evidence base.

6.4 A key focus for the Council will be improvements to Bridgewater Canal, and green zones across the land adjacent to Windmill Lane, Summer Lane, Barkers Hollow Road, and Hill Top Road (including adjacent land where TPOs exist).

6.5 The Council rejects the proposition that planting a tree constitutes environmental success in itself. A tree that dies after three years has delivered little of the benefit expected of a tree capable of surviving for a century. RHS research identifies trees as particularly powerful components of green infrastructure because their size and longevity allow them to contribute to flood mitigation, cooling, insulation, noise attenuation, carbon sequestration, biodiversity, air quality and human health¹⁴. Every significant planting scheme promoted or funded by the Council should therefore be designed around successful establishment and eventual maturity.

¹¹ Woodland Trust, *Planning and Designing a Woodland*. Typical new woodland planting density is approximately 1,000–1,600 trees per hectare, dependent upon site and objectives. <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/managing-trees-and-woods/woodland-planning-and-design/>

¹² Forestry Commission/DEFRA, *England Woodland Creation Offer*. Standard minimum stocking density includes 1,100 broadleaved trees per hectare, with different arrangements possible for defined nature-recovery circumstances. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/england-woodland-creation-offer>

¹³ Woodland Trust, *State of the UK's Woods and Trees 2025*. Woodland resilience is associated with size, condition, connectivity, structural complexity and species diversity.

¹⁴ Royal Horticultural Society, *Small Trees, Big Impact*. RHS research identifies multiple services provided by trees and green infrastructure including cooling, flood mitigation, carbon sequestration, biodiversity, air-quality and health benefits. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/gardening-in-a-changing-world/environmental-projects/small-trees-big-impact>

6.6 Species selection, provenance where relevant, soil volume, rooting conditions, drainage, future climatic conditions, drought, waterlogging, exposure, ultimate dimensions and maintenance requirements should be considered before planting. Trees will not be overcrowded into inadequate spaces simply so that a development or project can claim to have planted them.

6.7 A resilient Preston Brook cannot depend upon a narrow palette of tree species. The Council will deliberately seek a greater diversity of species, ages, forms and genetic material across the parish. This is not merely aesthetic preference. It is ecological risk management.

6.8 The Woodland Trust's 2025 assessment warns that British woods face growing pressures from climate change, pests and disease. It records 121 introduced pest species affecting UK native trees¹⁵.

6.9 RHS research similarly emphasises that long-lived trees planted today are likely to experience a materially different climate during their lifetimes, including hotter and drier summers and warmer and wetter winters¹⁶. Preston Brook will consequently favour native species where their ecological value and site conditions make them appropriate, particularly when strengthening native habitats and ecological corridors. It will not, however, impose a simplistic native-only rule where carefully selected non-native or climate-resilient species would strengthen the resilience and longevity of the wider treescape. The objective is not uniformity. It is a diverse living system capable of adapting to change.

7. The Neighbourhood Plan

7.1 The Preston Brook Neighbourhood Plan will be one of the principal mechanisms through which the ambitions of this policy may be translated into the physical development of the parish. Trees should not be treated as decoration added after buildings, roads and parking have been designed.

7.2 Subject to the evidence base, statutory planning framework and conditions, the Council will seek a Neighbourhood Plan which identifies the existing treescape, areas of canopy deficiency, valuable hedgerows and trees, ecological corridors and strategic opportunities for canopy creation. Development should be designed around high-value existing trees wherever reasonably possible.

7.3 The Council will investigate the feasibility of incorporating measurable canopy expectations for significant development and will support the principle that major development should make a demonstrable positive contribution to the future canopy of the parish. The Council's long-term aspiration will be for new residential neighbourhoods to be capable of achieving approximately 30% canopy at maturity, where this is compatible with local landscape character and other important habitats. This reflects the emerging European 3–30–300 approach and the Woodland Trust's contemporary advocacy that new development should deliver 30% tree cover.

7.4 Planning drawings showing tiny circles representing newly planted trees will not be regarded as evidence of a successful future treescape if the space, soil or design makes their eventual maturity improbable. Similarly, planning drawings not identifying species or age of trees, or specifying a particular treatment (especially where loss subsequently arises) will be strongly challenged by the Council.

¹⁵ Royal Horticultural Society, *Trees for Climate Change Resilience*. Guidance emphasises the long lifespan of trees and the need to consider changing temperature, rainfall, drought and waterlogging conditions. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/types/trees/for-climate-change>

¹⁶ Woodland Trust, *Towns and Cities Need More Trees to Tackle Temperatures*, 2026. The Trust advocates protection of mature trees, action in low-canopy neighbourhoods and 30% tree cover in new development. <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/press-centre/2026/07/towns-and-cities-need-more-trees-to-tackle-temperatures/>

7.5 When considering planning applications¹⁷, the Parish Council will ask whether a new development will leave Preston Brook's treescape better or worse for the next generation. That question will be informed by recognised planning considerations rather than used as a substitute for them. The Council will scrutinise significant applications for the retention of established trees, realistic future canopy, adequate rooting environments, species diversity, ecological connectivity, long-term management and the relationship between landscaping and the wider green infrastructure network. 'BS 5837, Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction', will remain an important technical reference.

7.6 Where valuable trees are proposed for removal, the Council will expect the justification to demonstrate why retention or redesign is not reasonably achievable.

7.7 Replacement planting should respond to the canopy and ecological function lost, rather than simply replacing one stem with another. The Council will encourage developers to engage with it before designs become fixed and will seek opportunities for development, Biodiversity Net Gain and other lawful planning mechanisms (such as CIL or S106 contributions) to contribute towards a coherent parish treescape.

7.8 The Forestry Commission itself recognises that Biodiversity Net Gain can contribute towards increased canopy and that greater variety and proportion of native species can increase the biodiversity value delivered by new woodland¹⁸.

8. Biodiversity Duty

8.1 The Council recognises its enhanced biodiversity duty under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006¹⁹, as amended by the Environment Act 2021. Tree management will consequently seek not merely to conserve biodiversity but actively to enhance it.

8.2 The ecological value of deadwood, cavities, veteran features, nesting habitat, bat roost potential and connected hedgerows will be considered when works are planned.

8.3 Safe standing deadwood and fallen timber may be retained where appropriate. Tidiness alone will not constitute sufficient ecological justification for removing habitat.

8.4 The Council will have proper regard to legislation protecting nesting birds, bats and other protected species.

9. Hedges

9.1 Preston Brook's future treescape cannot be delivered through trees alone. Hedgerows are linear habitat infrastructure, connecting otherwise isolated ecological areas while providing shelter, nesting opportunities, food and landscape structure.

9.2 RHS research highlights both the environmental value of urban hedges and the importance of diversity rather than creating homogenised planting vulnerable to pests and diseases²⁰.

¹⁷ Natural England and Forestry Commission, Ancient Woodland, Ancient Trees and Veteran Trees: Advice for Making Planning Decisions. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-ancient-trees-and-veteran-trees-advice-for-making-planning-decisions>

¹⁸ Forestry Commission, *Biodiversity Net Gain: What Can We Expect for Trees and Woodlands?* Discusses the contribution of tree planting and woodland creation to Biodiversity Net Gain and national canopy objectives. <https://forestrycommission.blog.gov.uk/2024/02/19/biodiversity-net-gain-what-can-we-expect-for-trees-and-woodlands/>

¹⁹ Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, s.40, as amended by the Environment Act 2021.

²⁰ Royal Horticultural Society, *Urban Hedges - Environmental Research*. RHS research considers the multiple environmental benefits of hedges and the value of diverse planting. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/gardening-in-a-changing-world/environmental-projects/urban-hedges>

9.3 The Council will therefore seek the retention, restoration and extension of appropriate native and mixed hedgerows and will consider hedgerows alongside trees when assessing ecological connectivity.

10. Community Stewardship

10.1 The Council wants residents to see the parish treescape as a shared inheritance.

10.2 Community planting will therefore be encouraged, but the emphasis will increasingly shift from the act of putting trees into the ground towards their subsequent survival. The Council will explore opportunities for residents, schools, businesses and community organisations to participate in planting, watering, monitoring and recording trees. This practice is commonplace in other areas such as Hackney in London.

Trees planted on Wilberforce Road and Riversdale Road, Stoke Newington by Hackney Council:



10.3 Over time, the Council will further the development of a publicly accessible Preston Brook Tree and Nature Map, allowing residents to discover notable trees, woodland, hedgerows, wildlife corridors and community planting projects. Where practicable, significant trees may be accompanied by interpretation explaining their species, approximate age, ecological significance and place within Preston Brook's landscape.

10.4 Preston Brook is small enough to understand its treescape at a meaningful scale but large enough to demonstrate what ambitious community-level environmental governance can achieve. The Council will therefore be open to partnerships with universities, schools, environmental organisations, citizen-science initiatives, the Woodland Trust, RHS and other appropriate bodies. Where opportunities arise, the parish may support trials and research into tree establishment, climate resilience, soil, hedgerows, canopy mapping, natural colonisation, biodiversity and community stewardship. The Council's aspiration is not simply to follow environmental best practice but, where proportionate to the resources of a parish council, to demonstrate it.