

Notes from Tree Safety Meeting – 31 July 2009
Forestry Commission, 620 Bristol Business Park, Bristol

Attendees:

Harry Studholme (HS)	Andy Tipping (AT)	Neville Fay (NF)
Simon Richmond (SR)	Mike Seville (MS)	Mark Daniels (MD)
Rachael Edwards (RE)	Jon Stokes (JS)	Graham Garrett (GG)
Judith Webb (JW)	Mike Ellison (MS)	Mick Boddy (MB)
John Watt (JW)	Shireen Chambers (SC)	

Apologies were received from Simon Wallis, Rebecca Haskell, Gareth Price, Caroline Harrison, John Lockhart, Emily Ramsay.

Welcomes were extended to Jon Stokes, Tree Council and Graham Garrett, RICS.

Review of notes/actions from last meeting

The notes were agreed as a correct record.

Report on DARM Stage One

The work by DARM was commissioned to look further in to the risks posed by trees.

Two reports were circulated at the meeting and are included with the minutes – January 2009 and June 2009.

In the first report, known tree failures that resulted directly (i.e. primary cause of death rather than vehicle colliding with a fallen tree) in fatality were collated with particular assistance from Mark Daniels, National Trust. The list was then circulated more widely and people were invited to suggest amendments and additional events that they were aware of. This puts the risk in context through the inclusion of comparative tables looking at other everyday risks.

AP - JW will look for a risk with a level of risk similar to death as a result of trees for comparison.

The second report was largely a literature review looking at what causes the amplification of risk perception. A powerful predictor of risk perception can be seen in natural versus unnatural hazards. This means that public risk perception of tree risk is less emotive and members of the public are also likely to become aggrieved over the inappropriate felling of trees. Concern is generally heightened due to multiple fatalities, rather than more isolated, single incidences of death. This appears to be more than solely media influence.

Greater work needs to be focussed on the numbers of tree failures. These near misses could provide a learning and evidence opportunity.

Investigations in to tree failures will focus on whether the management carried out was reasonable. This is the role of the NTSG guidelines that are being produced. It needs to be about balance between national natural assets and public safety.

The HSE are in the position that they do not over regulate tree risk. Their SIM reflects this change in mood. This document was influenced by consultation with external organisations even though used for their own regulators. Need to now

look at the application of the Death at Work. Natural risks should not be classified in the same way as machine/commercial accidents.

If the level of risk is currently tolerable landowners may feel that they should be able to continue to fell all trees or do nothing as at present. However, it was felt that if there is a well understood, reasonable methodology people will want to operate within it. This will be further investigated through the guidance drafting work group. Risk averse management is contributing to the safety figures but risk management goes on all the time in all areas of life.

Update from guidance drafting group – progress to date

A sub committee formed after the last meeting this includes, JW, MS, NF, AT and SR. Initially the group was looking to set parameters for the contents of a document to guide drafting. This has been completed and it has progressed to doing the drafting.

The model for the document will be 'Veteran Trees; A guide to risk and responsibilities', as well as taking parts from Merton Borough Council and VSCG documents. Therefore, it is felt that there will be some authority behind the recommendations to land managers. Also informed by the play work carried out by Prof. David Ball.

Decided to focus on the wide-ranging benefits from trees and use these as chapters in booklet. Will set this within legal context and provide scenarios from general public to large estates.

It is proposed that there will be 3 levels of this publication. A booklet, policy briefing note and the full document with all appendices available on the website.

The briefing note is in draft format at the moment. Produced by Andy Tipping.

In the full booklet Chapter 7 will be case studies for the following practitioners.

1. Homeowner
2. Farm/private estate
3. Business
4. Local Authority

There will be a formulaic approach to each for consistency and ease of reference.

This approach will include: Background, Benefits and perception, Zoning, Inspection and remedial work. Inspection is further split down: Regime, Competence, Records, Reasonableness.

The document also needs to be visually appealing and include statements from key stakeholders.

Forest Research have indicated that they are willing to produce a 4 page summary on the benefits of trees.

Should we include a position statement? Industry statement is not the full document, need a risk philosophy. Gives the policy context for the guidance. The complexity of this exercise has meant a delay in production of full guidance and so this type of statement would provide both context and information for the guidance.

There is a huge amount of agreement over most of the issues involved. The statement does not need consultation further than the members of the NTSG (management committee).

The context of the aims and objectives of the NTSG need to be understood and included in the statement. They also need to be specific to the stakeholders involved. The wider stakeholder group also needs to see progress and be included in the process to ensure buy in.

The bullets in the front of the document presented could be expanded in to a policy statement if so desired.

Forum Meeting

The NTSG has research to present. Powerpoint presentation from JW/David Ball to go through research and findings. Does not matter is not full guidance, in fact may be beneficial.

It was felt that the forum meeting should include:

- Presentation of risk research
- Position statement
- Legal context
- Structure of the guidance document
(Discussion about areas of contention)
- Timetable going forward

This could however be a press release event, with an invited audience rather than a forum. There was some debate about what type of event is required.

After discussion, it was felt that the October date would be used by the NTSG management committee to discuss the guidance document in greater detail and discuss key questions the drafting group may highlight.

The wider meeting has been postponed until Spring 2010

AP - Drafting group will circulate what they have produced to date to the NTSG 2 weeks before meeting of the NTSG MC on 2nd October.

BS8516

Mike Hodson has retired and has been replaced as secretary of the BSI.

A comments resolution panel convened and has gone through all comments received from consultation. A second draft has now been produced. Committee comments to be included and then a further draft will be circulated to NTSG management committee members.

One of the most significant additions is the inclusion of a risk zone matrix. Starts from a position of no management required and builds from there. Also a flow chart to help decision making.

Next meeting of this standard group is 16th September 2009.

The Standard no longer covers the statutory duties of the householder, any specific reference has been removed. It is currently around 14 pages and it is proposed it will cost around £58 to non BSI members.

The document will be released to the NTSG by the end of August 2009. General comments rather than detailed would be helpful before next meeting of BSI.

Publication not time-tabled but need to decide whether to be incorporated in to B3998.

AP – MB to forward documents to RE for circulation to the NTSG management committee.

AP – NTSG MC to feed back to MB by 15th September

The emphasis of the document has changed. It is aimed specifically at tree safety inspection rather than other hazards they may pose and the wider issues.

Tree Safety USA report

Mike Ellison presented his report to the NTSG. The report was circulated with the papers of the meeting. The NTSG contributed £1000 to Mike's attendance at the conference in Charlotte, New Carolina.

Focus on Risk Management, with particular emphasis on defect detection.

Two stage hazard thresholds taken out and now use an 8/9 part matrix to determine risk of failure.

Standard is likely to be published in the next few months.

Through the circulation of a questionnaire, practitioners have been widely consulted on the development of this document, although those present at the Risk Summit were there in their capacity as researchers.

When the NTSG has developed the guidance there may be the opportunity to attend conferences overseas to promote the work. There could be some merit in contacting ISA

Publicity/Promotion

Website

The 'draft' website was shown to the group and comments received included that it must be hosted on the Great Britain pages of the FC website rather than England. It was recommended to keep it simple and as a portal for information sharing until the role of the NTSG was clarified after the production of the guidance.

Magazine articles

The group discussed updates in publications. Many group members update their own magazines. It was felt that for publications such as Tree News and the Woodland trusts magazine larger articles were required at key points but for industry publications smaller regular snippets of information were all that was required until official launches.

AOB

Hedgerow trees

JS outlined his position on the Hedgerow HAP group.

He highlighted concerns over the loss of both young and old hedgerow trees. For example 5,000 trees in Shropshire and up to 8,000 in Devon are thought to be

either at risk or already felled. This is primarily done haphazard fashion by drive-by survey.

It was felt that it would be useful to have a standard for roadside trees. The Department of Transport does not issue any guidance but have indicated if the NTSG produce some meaningful guidance they will issue it. Could modify Highways Agency guidance for trunk roads. Possibly more beneficial to include as a case study in the full NTSG guidance document.

Financial Position

NF requested budget allocation for drafting group to pay for Plain English advisor who has been assisting the development of the guidance document.

The group approved a budget of up to £5,000 for this purpose.

Other

NTSG asked to provide a speaker for Midlands branch technical seminar.

The NTSG thanked Sir Harry Studholme for all his hard work for and with the group. The group agreed to appoint Judith Webb as Chair and welcomed her in to post.

Date of next meeting 2nd October, 10:30 – 15:30 Forestry Commission, 620 Bristol Business Park, Bristol. BS16 1EJ