

**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
OPERATIONS COMMITTEE
3 SEPTEMBER 2025**

Officer: Helen Ball (Town Clerk)

TREE UPDATE

Purpose of Report

To update Members on the impact that the long, hot, and dry summer has had on the Town Council's tree stock, and to highlight incidents of limb loss despite adherence to the Council's adopted Tree Strategy.

Background

Shrewsbury Town Council manages in excess of 120,000 trees across its estate, including parks, open spaces, cemeteries, highway verges, and play areas. The Council's Tree Strategy sets out a robust framework for inspection, maintenance, and succession planting, recognising the environmental, social, and economic value of trees to the town.

This summer has seen prolonged periods of high temperatures and reduced rainfall, creating significant stress on both young and mature trees. Nationally, arboricultural bodies have reported an increase in branch drop and tree failures linked to drought conditions, with Shrewsbury experiencing similar patterns.

Current Position

- **Incidents of Limb Loss:** Officers have responded to a number of incidents where mature trees have shed significant limbs. In the last two weeks alone there has been limb drop Castlewalk Recreation, Moston Road Recreation Ground, Boiler House Pitch and Old St Chads.
- **Public Safety Response:** Each incident was managed swiftly, with sites secured and remedial works undertaken by the Town Council's tree team. No injuries have been reported.
- **Tree Strategy Compliance:** All affected trees had been inspected and maintained in accordance with the Council's Tree Strategy, with no pre-existing defects identified that would have predicted failure.
- **Climate-Related Stress:** Arboricultural advice indicates that "summer branch drop" is increasingly linked to prolonged heat and drought, where trees shed large limbs to reduce physiological stress.

Wider Implications

- **Health of the Tree Stock:** Younger trees have shown signs of drought stress, with some losses despite supplementary watering. Mature trees, while generally resilient, are at higher risk of sudden limb loss under extreme weather.

- **Risk Management:** Whilst the Tree Strategy provides a strong management framework, climate change is introducing new and less predictable risks. Officers will continue to balance proactive inspection with responsive interventions.
- **Financial Impact:** The additional reactive works undertaken this summer have increased pressure on the tree maintenance budget.
- **Reputation & Public Perception:** The community values the town's tree cover. Clear communication is essential to explain that limb loss is a natural stress response and not necessarily a failure of management.

Next Steps / Recommendations

1. **Review Tree Strategy Implementation:** To ensure emerging climate-related risks are fully reflected, with consideration of increased inspection frequency during prolonged hot spells.
2. **Budget Monitoring:** To review whether contingency funds should be identified for reactive works linked to extreme weather events.
3. **Tree Planting & Resilience:** To continue diversifying species selection as part of the Council's planting programmes, with a focus on drought-tolerant and climate-resilient varieties.
4. **Community Communication:** To prepare a short public information piece explaining the causes of limb loss during hot summers, emphasising the Council's proactive management.
5. **Collaboration:** To engage with national bodies (e.g. Tree Council, Arboricultural Association) and neighbouring authorities to share best practice and adapt management approaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (i) That the Report be noted
- (ii) That the Committee endorses the proposed next steps to strengthen resilience and risk management in line with climate change challenges.
- (iii) That Officers prepare a further update report on the outcomes of any review and additional measures introduced.