Trees for Richmond

A strategy for increasing the benefits provided by trees to Richmond

2025–2035

LONDON BOROUGH OF
RICHMOND UPON THAMES

Foreword

Trees are a vital part of Richmond upon Thames' past, present and future. From the ancient woodlands of former royal hunting grounds, and the world-renowned collections of trees at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, to the thousands of trees on our streets and in our parks, and the trees in gardens across the borough – Richmond is already one of the greenest places in London.

We want to make the most of this heritage: our goal is to grow the urban forest of Richmond for our communities, our health, and the environment. We have a vision, and a plan to deliver it, working with our residents, businesses, and voluntary and public sector organisations.

This is Trees for Richmond – our tree planting strategy for the borough!

Why do we need a tree planting strategy?

The Council already manages more than 30,000 trees – but this is only a small number of all the trees in Richmond.

Trees provide health, social, environmental and economic benefits, and there is strong public interest in this[1].

We need a strategy because, while tree planting brings immediate benefits, it takes time to establish trees, deliver population-level health impacts, build a resilient urban forest, and maximise the benefits.

Higher temperatures in the urban environment are putting people's health – and sometimes lives – at risk. Our homes, schools, workplaces and travel routes will become uncomfortable for all of us in more intense heat. Higher temperatures and changing rainfall patterns pose a threat to our trees as well. Trees have evolved to thrive in specific conditions and may not have the time they need to adapt to the rate of change they are facing. By selecting a diverse range of trees, we will have an enhanced treescape that will help keep us cooler during periods of extreme heat[2], reduce local flood risk following intense rain, and provide enduring habitats for wildlife.

[1] In the 2024-2025 attitudes to tree survey run by the Council, of 1304 respondents 92% had positive views on trees while 8% had neutral or negative views

[2] It is estimated that 153 deaths from heat were prevented by London's urban forest between 2015 and 2022 (Taylor et al, 2024)

The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that trees are planted where they are needed, are successfully established and cared for, and managed in a way that maximises the benefits they provide. It supports the Richmond Climate and Nature Strategy, and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and contributes to making Richmond resilient to the changing climate.

The strategy will also help us address inequalities in terms of access and proximity to trees, so that everyone in Richmond can enjoy their benefits.

The Council's commitments

Working in partnership

This strategy relates to all trees in Richmond, not just those managed by the Council. To maximise the benefits of trees, we will work in partnership across organisational and landownership boundaries to develop Richmond's urban forest. We will work across Council services and public sector partners. We will work with businesses, private landowners and tree owners, and environmental charities and interest groups, to enhance the treescape with tree planting and improve tree retention with good management and best practice. We will advocate for trees through public engagement and our planning policies. We will address barriers to tree planting by promoting the benefits of trees and engaging with people who raise concerns about trees.

Our plans

Our initial commitments include:

- Planting more trees in public spaces and supporting and encouraging tree planting on privately owned land.
- Providing opportunities for residents to understand more about trees through community events and groups.
- Providing information to support residents, voluntary sector organisations, and businesses in nurturing trees and learning about tree management.
- Identifying areas where trees are more urgently needed, to maximise value and impact of planting, incorporating all Council-managed land.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of tree planting.
- Identifying funding for Richmond's urban forest of the future to ensure long-term success.
- Acknowledging the extraordinary tree heritage of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, the Royal Parks, and many historic orchards and market gardens in the borough – and using learnings from these places to enrich our knowledge and inform decisions.

We will develop these plans and continue to look for further opportunities for sustainable tree planting. Local residents, organisations, and businesses: please read on, and join us on our ambitious quest towards a sustainable future for Richmond's urban forest!

Cllr Julia Neden-Watts
Deputy Leader and Chair of the Environment, Sustainability, Culture and Sports Committee.

Our vision

Richmond is a place where residents experience connection to nature, and enjoy the health, wellbeing, and environmental benefits that trees provide.

Richmond will be an environment of tree lined streets, landscaped parks, and diverse woodlands, in public and privately owned spaces. Residents enjoy and value trees on their properties. In addition to public planting, we will encourage and support tree planting on private land to enhance canopy cover, providing the best possible environment in which to live, work, learn, and travel.

We will take the lead as an outstanding example of modern urban green infrastructure, providing a beautiful environment, access to nature on the doorstep, physical and mental health benefits for residents, and integrate trees into public and private spaces, and developments.

The Greater London Authority has a canopy cover target of 30% by 2050. This will not be distributed evenly; Richmond has a reputation as a 'leafy borough' which we will cultivate, providing an example of well planned and executed planting that enhances the environment for residents and the reputation of the borough.

We will target planting to develop an equitable treescape that ensures that residents across the borough benefit from trees. We will build resilience into the borough's tree stock by making it diverse across species, genera, age, and size.

We will work with leading organisations to exchange data and expertise, identify vulnerabilities and opportunities, and trial innovative methods and technologies, to adapt the borough's tree stock to the expected climate and enhance tree establishment and care. Trees will provide habitat and connectivity for wildlife across the borough and into neighbouring areas, supporting the Biodiversity Action Plan.

We will use data to inform and determine how, where and what to plant, to measure the effectiveness of our tree planting, and to manage our trees. Residents will be invested in and care for trees outside their homes. We will use trees and tree planting in Richmond to foster community and an informed and included population.

There is strong interest in trees; by interacting with our residents and community groups we will cultivate this interest to support efforts to improve the treescape and build community. We will run events and support community groups, providing expertise and making connections, so that planting can be influenced or led by our residents and communities, and establishment can be enhanced with their care.

Our young trees will help to support community cohesion, with residents engaged in tree care as a collective, helping to produce an urban forest that is thriving. Channels will be opened to allow residents to feedback information to the Council which helps to further clarify how resources can best be targeted. Residents will be given the resources to learn about the local environment and feel valued as contributors to Council strategy.

Trees will form a central component of development in the borough, preserving existing quality assets and improving the overall contribution of sites. Trees will inform the design of schemes with opportunities for planting utilised in high quality schemes with robust establishment plans.

Trees will be incorporated as a critical component of our transport network with strong collaboration between teams to provide space for establishment of high-quality plantings that cool routes, intercept pollution, and make travel safer and more pleasant. Trees will be planted in ways that are sympathetic to the demands of the highways and species selected that are appropriate to the site.

Trees in Richmond

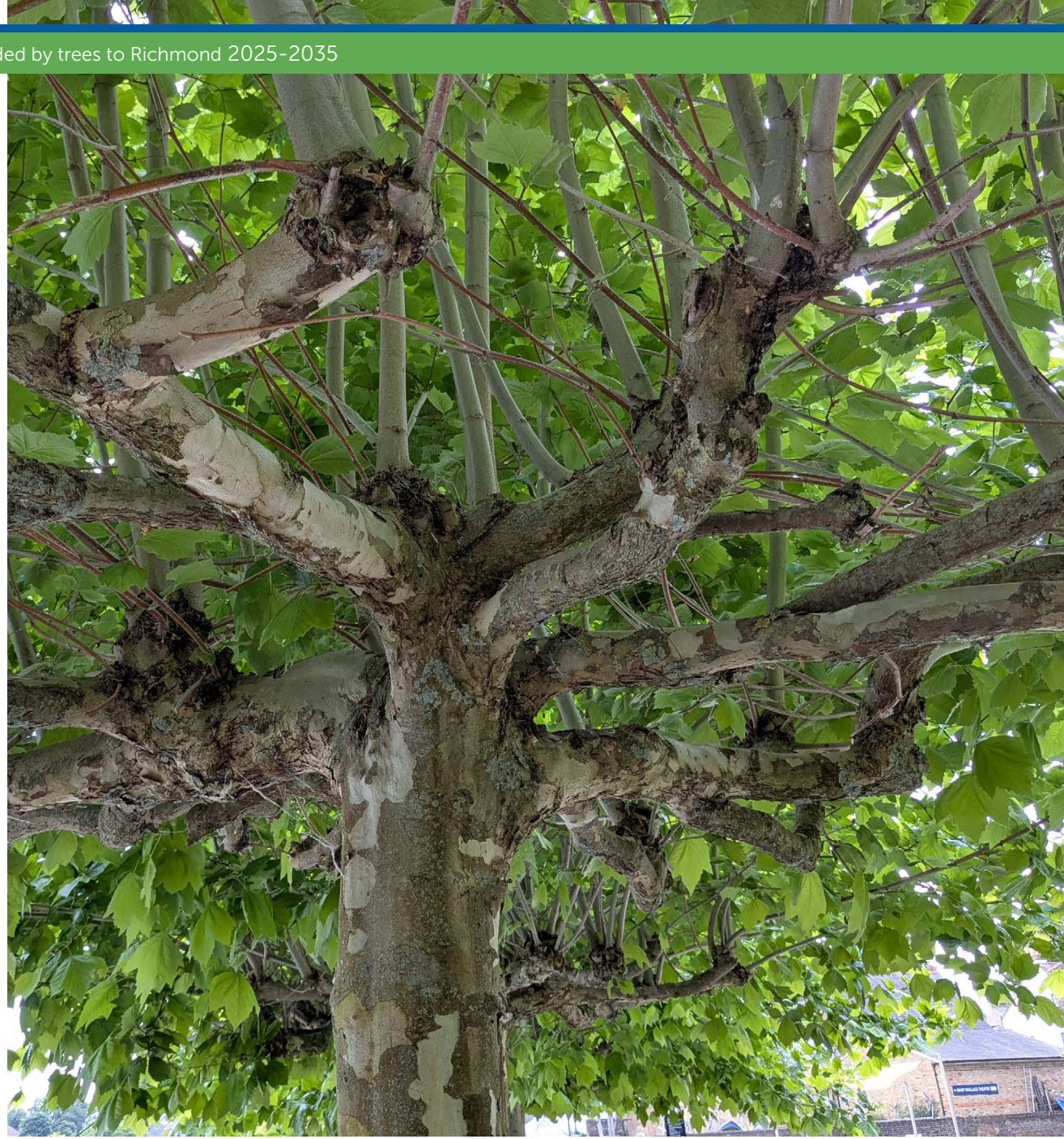
The Council manages more than 30,000 trees in streets, parks and public spaces, schools, and across its other properties. Trees owned or managed by others increase this number significantly. Major landowners and managers in the borough include the Royal Parks, Royal Botanical Gardens Kew, Network Rail, housing associations, and public sector organisations including Transport for London.

The Council's records and publicly available data provides some indication of existing canopy cover, how much tree planting could be considered, and some quantification of the benefits. However, it does not provide sufficient detail as a baseline for measuring change over time and where to focus tree planting efforts. Existing records do not provide canopy cover metrics – tree numbers can remain stable while large trees are removed and replaced with smaller, less beneficial, specimens. We do not know in detail what the planting potential of either public or private land is.

There are several public datasets estimating canopy cover in Richmond placing it between 20.9%[3] and 27.3%[4]. These estimates include the Royal Parks and other large green spaces, masking much lower figures in urban areas indicated by data broken down by Local Super Output Area[5].

The Richmond Climate Risk Map and the GLA Green Cover Map and their underpinning data sets provide granular data at a more local level.

Available data shows that trees, and particularly benefits provided by trees, are not equitably distributed across the borough. Areas of lower canopy cover are often correlated with areas of socio-economic deprivation. These are also areas where there are typically greater challenges to planting. Climate risk mapping shows that these areas are also more likely to feel the health impacts of climate change more strongly.



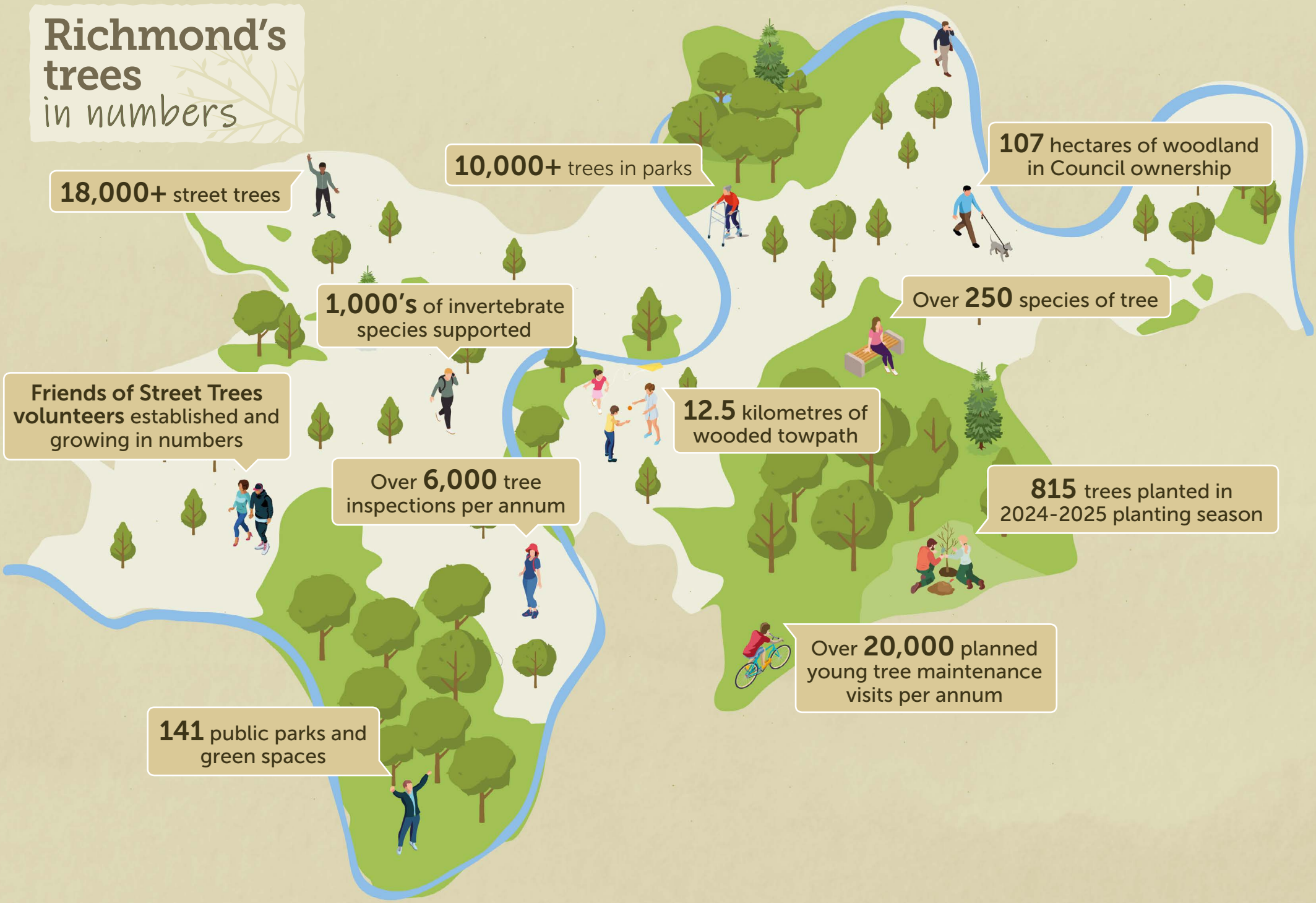
[3] Source: Sales, K. et al. (2023) 'The canopy cover Webmap of the United Kingdom's towns and cities', Arboricultural Journal
[4] Source: GLA Methodology Report Tree Canopy & Green Cover Mapping (2024)
[5] Source: The Woodland Trust tree equity score map https://uk.treeequityscore.org/map#15.25/51.45417/-0.3361

The tree stock in Richmond is biased towards a limited number of genera, species and varieties. While the Council is working with others to trial new species and how they succeed as part of an urban forest, there is limited data on suitable species for the future to inform how to adapt the borough's tree stock.

Current Council tree planting efforts focus on replacing trees removed in the previous 12 months, replacing trees lost over longer periods where residents are pursuing replanting, supporting parks, highways, and other Council property, and using available grant funding. This approach does not necessarily address equity and strategic canopy cover needs. For street trees, there are many competing priorities for kerbside uses, including parking, active travel improvements, and access to private properties.

Council budgets support the replacement and aftercare of trees that had to be removed. To increase tree numbers beyond replacement planting, further funding from external sources is used. This has been in the form of government grants, contributions from developers offsetting tree losses, and gifts made by community groups.

Richmond's trees in numbers



What are the challenges?

Climate change presents a threat to the borough's trees; higher temperatures and more variable and extreme annual rainfall are already causing harm. This trend is expected to become more extreme in future, creating further stress. At the same time, we will be more reliant on trees to mitigate the effects of climate change in the borough.

Climate change

Tree species have a natural range – the changing climate means that some tree species established in the borough and available for planting are unable, or expected to be unable, to thrive as they are pushed to or beyond these boundaries[6].

Urban heat island effect

In addition to the effects of global warming, the urban environment absorbs and reflects solar radiation in the day and radiates it at night amplifying temperatures that stress trees, wildlife, and people.

Pests and diseases

There has been an increase in the arrival of pests and diseases that are affecting our trees and continue to pose an increasing threat. Diseases such as Xylella and Canker Stain of Plane are advancing on the continent and these and others are increasingly likely to reach our area[7].

Competing demands for space

Trees bring benefits to the urban environment but can be seen as a barrier to achieving other objectives. There are many competing needs in the borough, e.g. sport and recreation on open spaces and a demand for more housing. This can result in the loss of existing trees, insufficient replacement planting, over reliance on public planting, unambitious or inadequate planting schemes, and insufficient maintenance to establish trees planted as part of changes to the built environment. Realising the potential gains of sites is a challenge that requires effective protection of existing trees to be balanced with the development needs, combined with carefully considered planting and establishment schemes.

[6] Planting for the future: Kew's Landscape succession plan (2024)
[7] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plant-biosecurity-strategy-for-great-britain-2023-to-2028/plant-biosecurity-strategy-for-great-britain-2023-to-2028

Space for trees competes with the other requirements of highways and services, including parking, vehicle crossovers, and electric vehicle charging points. Established trees can cause issues including loss of footway width, footway damage from shallow rooting, reduced visibility at junctions, and obscured signage and streetlights. Tree planting in otherwise suitable locations can be prevented by insufficient footway width, parking spaces, buried utilities, and other existing highways infrastructure.

Assessing the impact of tree planting

We have an incomplete picture of the borough's tree stock that makes it difficult to measure changes in canopy cover and the effects of interventions. A reliable and repeatable means of measuring changes is required, and we are exploring different existing tools available from across the sector.

Trees provide benefits to other services, such as those responsible for public health, transport, schools, policing, however these are currently unquantified, while the management challenges of trees can be more obvious.

Continuity

Tree planting and establishment is a long-term venture; many of our most significant trees are legacies of planting from the nineteenth century. The benefits of trees can be maximised through long term planning and informed decision-making. Strong public support for tree planting can be a positive driver to increase tree planting. However, rapid planting based on limited data can have unintended negative consequences, such as lost opportunities for higher quality planting schemes, reduced long-term resilience, loss of species diversity, inadequate aftercare, resentment from residents, and reduced value for money[8].

A balanced approach

Trees can be a divisive issue. They can be perceived as a liability rather than valuable assets. Trees are sometimes perceived as an annoyance. People may consider the shade trees provide undesirable, find leaf or fruit fall an issue, or have perceived safety concerns. Fostering greater understanding of the benefits can create planting opportunities. Without the support of residents, tree planting schemes may face challenges and be less successful. While some people may object, tree planting is usually widely supported by residents. This was evident in the survey we carried out to inform this strategy.

[8] https://www.ltoa.org.uk/docs/London_Tree_Officer_Association-Position_Statement.pdf

Our approach to implementing this strategy

Challenging ourselves and working in partnership with others

Understanding the existing urban forest is necessary to provide a benchmark for measuring the effectiveness of the strategy, to recognise and quantify the benefits and value of the treescape. We must be able to identify vulnerabilities in our tree stock and canopy cover, identify opportunities to enhance the urban forest, and to design resilience into successional planting. To do this requires a combination of data and community insight. Achieving this strategy must be a partnership effort.

- We will use data and evidence to inform our decisions, including how best to allocate resources, planting trees where they are needed that are suitable for needs of the location.
- We will look for opportunities to undertake and collaborate in research that improves the quality of our tree stock, and trial innovative ways of planting putting research into practice. We recognise that canopy cover data sources have their limitations, and we will draw on the best available data at the time.
- We will work with interested parties to deliver projects and develop systems that support the vision.
- We will set ambitious targets and develop realistic plans to deliver them.
- We will listen to residents, businesses, voluntary, and public sector partners when we implement the actions in this strategy. The consultation we undertook has informed this strategy and we will use the learning from the consultation when we move into delivery.
- We will be frank and open about the challenges and encourage others to do the same so that obstacles are identified, and solutions can be developed.
- We will support individual and community interest in planting and caring for trees with resources that will create model schemes that drive interest in other locations.

Measuring the impact of the strategy

By 2040 every resident can access the benefits of trees with a cool green space easily accessible, 30%+ canopy cover in their Lower Layer Super Output Area[9], and able to see trees from where they live.

Trees are valued by communities across the borough and residents are involved with and feel a sense of ownership of public trees and connection to the natural environment.

There will be a measurable increase in canopy cover across the borough, particularly in areas identified as a priority, considering climate risk and equity.

Key sustainable transport routes are enhanced and protected by trees that attract users supporting a shift to active travel.

Our parks and open spaces are enhanced with tree planting that provides an accessible connection to nature.

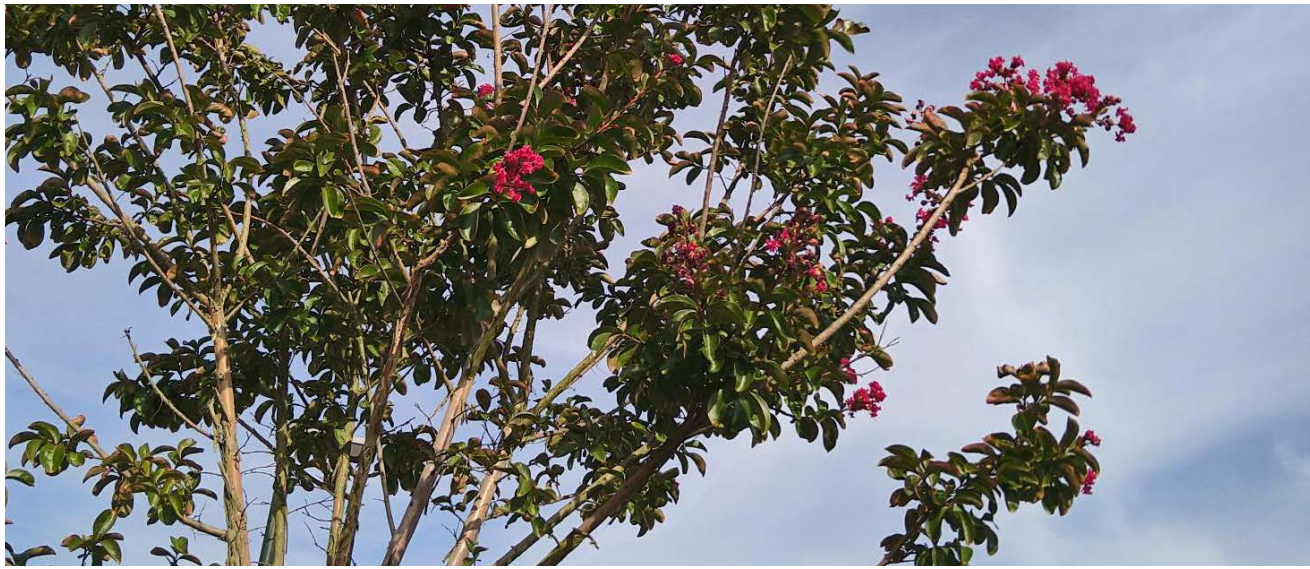
Developers recognise the benefits of trees, placing important trees at the heart of design and proposing well considered planting to enhance the borough's treescape.

There will be a greater variety of tree species and genera, and enhanced genetic diversity, to increase resilience to climate change, pests, and diseases.

There will be more trees that enhance habitats and provide food resources for wildlife to thrive in the borough.

What we will do

- Evaluate and select a method of measuring canopy cover and ecosystem services that is reliable and repeatable to establish a baseline of the existing treescape to inform and direct efforts and measure planting effectiveness. The method should give comparable data and meaningful measurement of planting variables as well as change over time.
- Undertake a baseline assessment of the borough's existing tree stock, canopy volume, and ecosystem services to establish a baseline.
- Develop a Supplementary Planning Document that details how development can successfully integrate trees into design so that development contributes to the treescape the borough requires.
- Publish our plans, provide progress updates, and communicate our data to support public engagement.
- Develop opportunities for public participation, and mechanisms to act on the feedback we receive.
- Develop advice and guidance for Council staff to ensure we take an equitable approach to increasing canopy cover, considering the needs of different groups of residents.
- Bring together a partnership of residents, the private sector, voluntary sector, institutions, and other stakeholders, to develop innovative ways to deliver the urban forest Richmond requires.



[9] Lower Layer Super Output Area has been selected as canopy cover data can be combined with other data such as measures of social deprivation and pollution and give a more detailed and nuanced picture.

Theme 1:
Trees for communities

Developing local community approaches and creating opportunities for tree planting in our neighbourhoods.

Where are we now?

- There is community support for tree planting in Richmond with requests for new trees and replacement planting regularly received by the Council.
- Residents are watering street trees and caring for tree pits, introducing flora to the street scene.
- The Council supported the Friends of Street Trees to launch and is now helping residents make connections, build a community of tree volunteers, and help to water trees near them.
- Friends of Parks groups across the borough work with the trees and parks teams to enhance green spaces.
- A survey of public opinion on trees and planting to inform this strategy received over 1,300 responses and revealed strong support for tree planting.
- Through working in partnership with contractors, we delivered Richmond's first Free Tree Giveaway events, with over 1,000 trees collected for planting by residents and community groups.
- Council tree officers are active in engaging with the community to educate on the benefits of trees. This includes providing presentations and talks to community groups, talking to residents at community fairs, and supporting the public vote for Richmond's Tree of the Year competition.
- The Council has supported the Greening Richmond's Schools[10] programme, meeting with the groups and sharing expertise.
- Existing trees within our high streets make for a pleasant and inviting environment, encouraging people to spend longer within these areas and visit local businesses. There is however potential to expand our network of trees in these areas and enhance the benefits provided, in partnership with local businesses.

[10] https://www.lgoal.org/get-involved-2/richmond-school-and-climate-ch/

What will success look like?

Residents, businesses and voluntary sector organisations come together to actively engage with tree planting, care, and advocacy.

Concerns over tree planting are addressed at an early stage and there is even stronger community support.

There are planting opportunities for all, with community-led planting schemes making a valuable contribution to the canopy cover.

Our aims

We will promote the benefits of trees so that more residents understand and are invested in the borough's urban forest.

We will engage with business to promote the benefits that trees can provide and make the case for private sector investment in the development of our urban forest including tree sponsorship.

We will engage more residents in supporting the establishment of street trees, undertaking watering, collaborating with neighbours to identify planting opportunities, and providing advocacy that protects trees.

What we will do

Build community and business support for investment in and engagement with tree planting

- Create routes for residents to be involved with trees and have a personal stake in the urban forest.
- Support Friends of Street Trees and other community groups.
- Support residents interested in tree ownership and planting to get the most out of their trees and contribute to the urban forest.
- Create tree planting volunteering opportunities for those who want to plant trees but don't have the permission or resources to plant at home.
- Promote tree planting undertaken by the Council and community groups to create further connections and interest.
- Attend community events to promote the benefits of trees for communities.
- Build on the engagement from the initial public survey with ongoing engagement as we implement the strategy.
- Enhance communication of the Council's tree management programme and safety works.
- Develop a streamlined way for residents to address fruit and leaf fall issues.
- Use planting methods that prevent pavement disruption and consider the costs and benefits of retention and engineering solutions for established trees.
- Provide information on subsidence and direct damage and provide informative responses to subsidence and other insurance claims.

Theme 2:
Trees for health

Where are we now?

Trees in Richmond already contribute to better health by:

- Providing shade that makes spaces cooler, preventing heat stress in vulnerable populations and intercepting harmful UV radiation.
- Making sustainable transport modes more appealing with sheltered routes and traffic calming.
- Increasing feelings of wellbeing and connection to nature having a positive impact upon mental health.
- Trees can intercept harmful dusts and particulates mitigating pollution.

What will success look like?

Trees are acknowledged as central to good health and wellbeing of residents, support Richmond's public health objectives, and reduce pressure on our health services.

There is equitable access to the health benefits of trees across the borough.

Our aims

We will support increased use of active and sustainable transport, focused on schools and other important infrastructure.

We will contribute to air quality improvement.

We will work to mitigate the urban heat island effect by increasing canopy cover and reduce heat stress for vulnerable populations in extreme heat events.

We will work to improve the understanding of the benefits of trees across professions and communities.

What we will do

Plant trees to encourage active travel

- Increase tree numbers along key walking, cycling and public transport routes to create shade corridors to schools, healthcare facilities, transport hubs, shops and services to support the emerging Transport Strategy for Richmond 2040.

Creating and enhancing cool spaces

- Enhance existing planting in public spaces with tree cover to provide cool and shaded areas.
- Create additional cool spaces where residents can gather and relax in the shade of trees and enjoy the other benefits of public spaces accessible across the borough.

Plant trees to improve air quality

- Work with public health and highways teams to identify air pollution hotspots.
- Target planting in air pollution hotspots, maximising pollution interception and support the aims of the Richmond Air Quality Action Plan 2024-2029.

Promote the health benefits of trees

- Run events and use the Council's communication channels to highlight the positive impacts of trees on physical and mental health.
- Work with public health to plant trees to support the objectives of the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024 – 2029, including improvements in mental and physical health.
- Develop internal learning and development programmes that improve the understanding of the benefits of trees across Council services.
- Combine data on trees with health and deprivation data to target planting into areas of need to improve equity across the borough.

Theme 3: **Trees for the environment**

Where are we now?

- Trees in Richmond provide habitats for a variety of wildlife and are an important food source for pollinating insects and foraging birds and animals.
- We have increased planting of resistant Elm species which is supporting White-letter Hairstreak butterfly populations.
- Richmond is home to a native black poplar population with genetic diversity of national importance.
- We have begun planting a more diverse range of trees, however this is limited by what we can buy from our suppliers.
- We have expanded our planting programme year on year since 2019 – we now plant more than twice as many trees as we remove.
- Our tree team, arts team, the Friends of Hamton Common, and the artists Ackroyd and Harvey worked together to create an oak circle artwork that connected people to the natural environment through creativity.
- The climate is changing, and the southeast is expected to warm significantly, experiencing prolonged heat waves, milder, wetter winters, and higher average temperatures. This is putting stress on established trees as conditions move to the extremes or beyond the parameters of some species' native range. Research published by the Royal Botanical Gardens Kew indicates that half of their trees will be at risk by 2050. Most of the trees in Richmond will be more exposed to the heat island effect, placing our trees at even greater risk.
- We are working with Royal Botanical Gardens Kew to deliver research trials of different trees in Richmond streets to test their resilience in a changing world.
- International travel and trade, in tandem with global warming, is contributing to the spread of pests and diseases. Ash dieback, oak processionary moth, Dutch elm disease, and Phytophthora, to name a few cause tree losses and endanger the ecosystems they support.

What will success look like?

Richmond's urban forest is protected and is more resilient through a diverse and healthy tree stock.

Trees in the borough are planted and managed to benefit wildlife and biodiversity, enhancing the borough's natural heritage and supporting the Biodiversity Action Plan.

Trees in Richmond contribute to reducing flood risk.

Our aims

We will build resilience to pests and diseases and global warming into the Richmond tree stock.

We will develop connectivity for nature, linking habitats in the borough and beyond, and enhance habitat and food resources for wildlife.

We will increase rainwater interception and reduce surface water run off to reduce flood risks.

What we will do

Build resilience into Richmond's trees

- Undertake research to understand the vulnerability of the current tree stock and target resilience through tree planting of appropriate tree type and species.

- Continue to plant trees from a broad palette that includes non-native species to diversify the borough's tree stock, tailoring it to species adapted to the expected climate that can support existing ecosystems or provide other significant ecosystem services.
- Collaborate with researchers and nurseries to identify and grow species that are suitable for the anticipated climate.
- Work with Forest Research and use Tree Alert to identify new threats and manage our trees in accordance with best practice.
- Source trees from reputable, plant-safe nurseries and implement biosecurity protocols to prevent the introduction and spread of pests and diseases.
- Work with government agencies and professional bodies to monitor tree health and identify emerging threats, adapting management practices as needed.

Plant for nature recovery

- Continue to plant native species where appropriate to maintain habitats.
- Work with ecologists to identify opportunities to enhance existing wildlife corridors and create new ones linking habitats and colonies that help wildlife to flourish.
- Work with communities to foster relationships with nature through planting trees that host wildlife and create habitats for endangered species of flora and fauna.

Reduce flood risk

- Develop and implement flood reduction approaches that combine tree planting with sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) to reduce surface runoff.
- Review the London Surface Water Strategy, due to be published this year, to understand how tree management can play an even bigger role in reducing surface water flood risk.

Be part of Trees for Richmond!

Do you want to enhance your neighbourhood and help trees grow in Richmond? Here's how you can get involved!

- Join the Friends of Street Trees! They are an independent organisation that wants to transform the way people engage with street trees in Richmond. Friends of Street Trees is developing communities that help street trees thrive. https://www.friendsofstreettrees.org.uk/
- Plant a tree! Look out for our free tree giveaway for residents and community groups.
- Coming soon! Sponsor a tree or organise a fundraiser for new street trees. Keep an eye on our website.
- Support a local park! With over 70 friends' groups, you can get involved with caring for a green space near you. https://www.richmond.gov.uk/volunteering_in_parks
- Share your tree! Show us the tree you planted or one you care for and why it's important to you.
- Take part in surveys and consultations about environmental improvements! To find out when these and other events are happening, sign up to our newsletter on the Council website.
- Vote for your favourite tree in the Richmond tree of the year competition at the Full of Life Fair!
- Have an idea that you would like to share? Let us know!

For more information, please visit richmond.gov.uk/trees_for_richmond

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