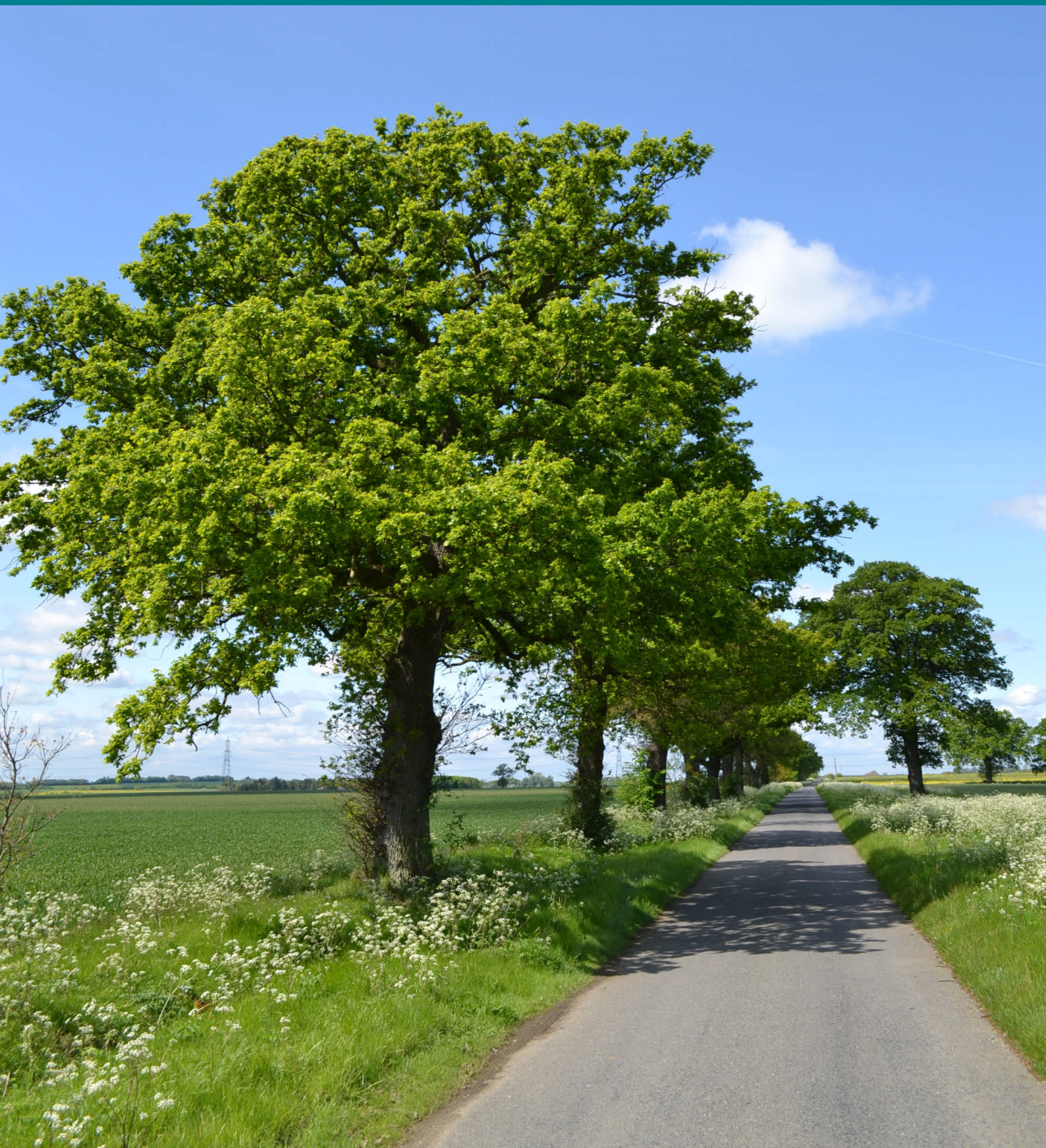
Huntingdonshire
DISTRICT COUNCIL

February 2015

# A Tree Strategy for Huntingdonshire



# Introduction


## Foreword by Councillor Douglas Dew

***Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning & Housing:***

Huntingdonshire has a varied historic landscape of 350 square miles, with 4 market towns and nearly 100 villages, all within an expanse of attractive, open countryside, farmland, and woodland.

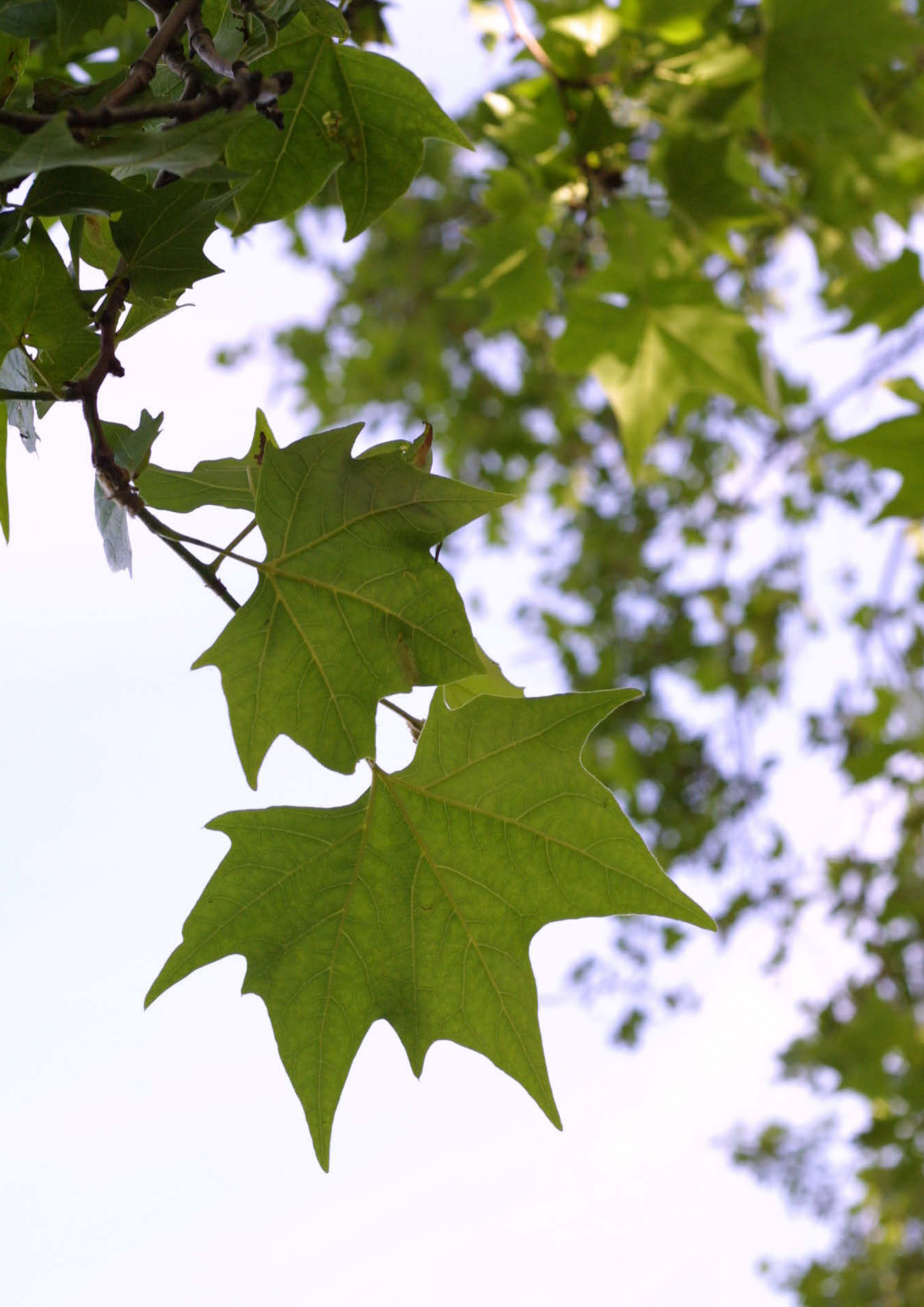
Trees play an important role in the rural and urban landscapes of Huntingdonshire, improving the quality of life in many ways. They make a great contribution to our rural and urban areas, adding great beauty and character and creating a sense of place. They enhance and complement the built environment by providing screening, focal points, privacy and perspective. Those in parks and gardens bring nature into the hearts of our towns. Streets planted with trees look better, and they also provide valuable wildlife corridors, connecting open spaces.

Trees are the largest and oldest living things in the environment. Trees and woodlands are dominant landscape features, and collectively they form one of Huntingdonshire's finest features.

We need to protect our trees and care for them properly. We also need to make sure we plant new trees to replace those that we have to remove, or which have reached the end of their normal lives, so that future generations can derive the same enjoyment and benefits from trees that we do.

This strategy sets out how the Council will do this over the coming years. We aim to have more and better trees than we have at the moment, in an attractive environment which will help make Huntingdonshire a better place in which to live, work, study and spend leisure time.


# Contents



# Introduction

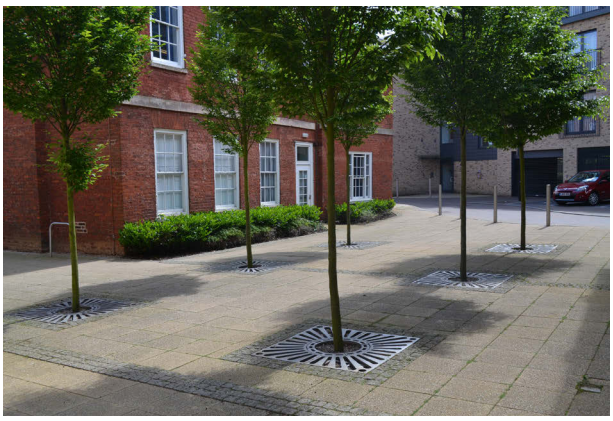
## Purpose of the Tree Strategy

Most people agree that trees are a good thing, and yet we continually see them felled for development, damaged and neglected, both on public and private land.

We need to protect our trees and care for them properly. We also need to make sure we pass on a legacy of an attractive and healthy tree population for future generations, by ensuring that we plant new trees to replace those that have died or been removed.

Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) has a key role to play in the care and protection of existing trees and planting of new trees in the District. As well as looking after trees and woodlands on Council-owned land and protecting trees on private land, HDC has a role in raising the awareness of the importance of trees and influencing their positive management. We do this by acting as an example of best practice and by providing information about tree management that we would like to see adopted by other public and private sector agencies within Huntingdonshire.

The action plan, policies and guidance within this strategy provide the Council with a framework to manage its own tree operations.

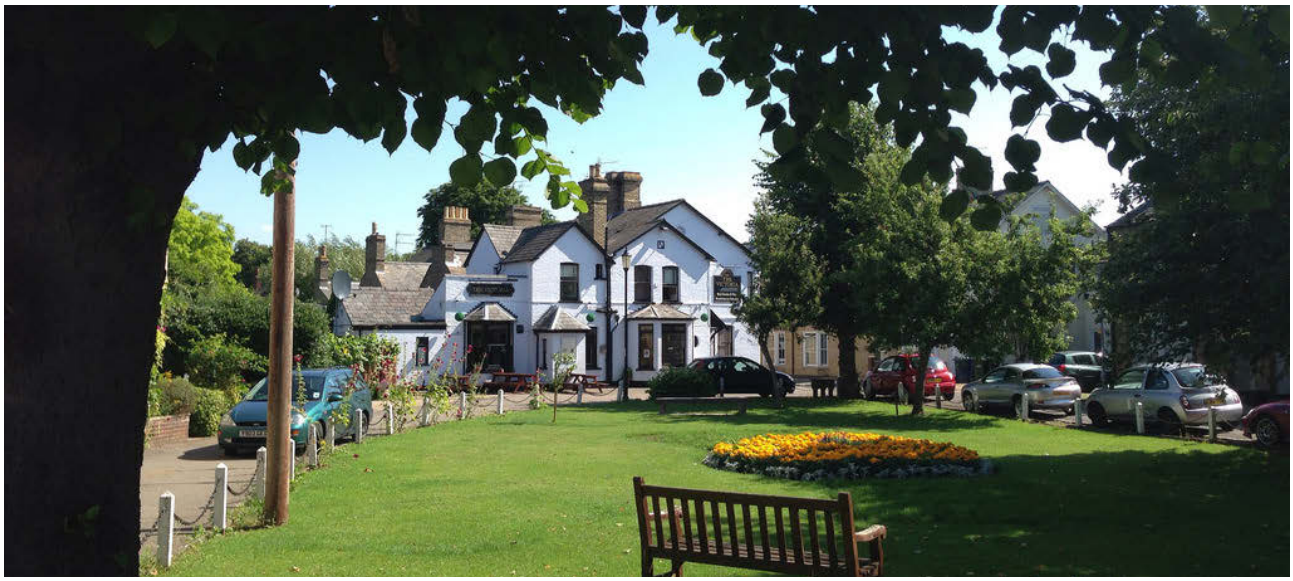


### In very simple terms, the strategy aims to:

Protect the trees of Huntingdonshire, through the use of sustainable management techniques.

Care for the trees of Huntingdonshire, by practising and promoting good tree care.

Plant more trees in Huntingdonshire, by carrying out and promoting appropriate planting of new trees.



## The Tree Strategy has three parts:

### 1 Action Plan

Key aims and objectives for trees in the District and a five-year plan for the work that needs to be carried out to deliver these.

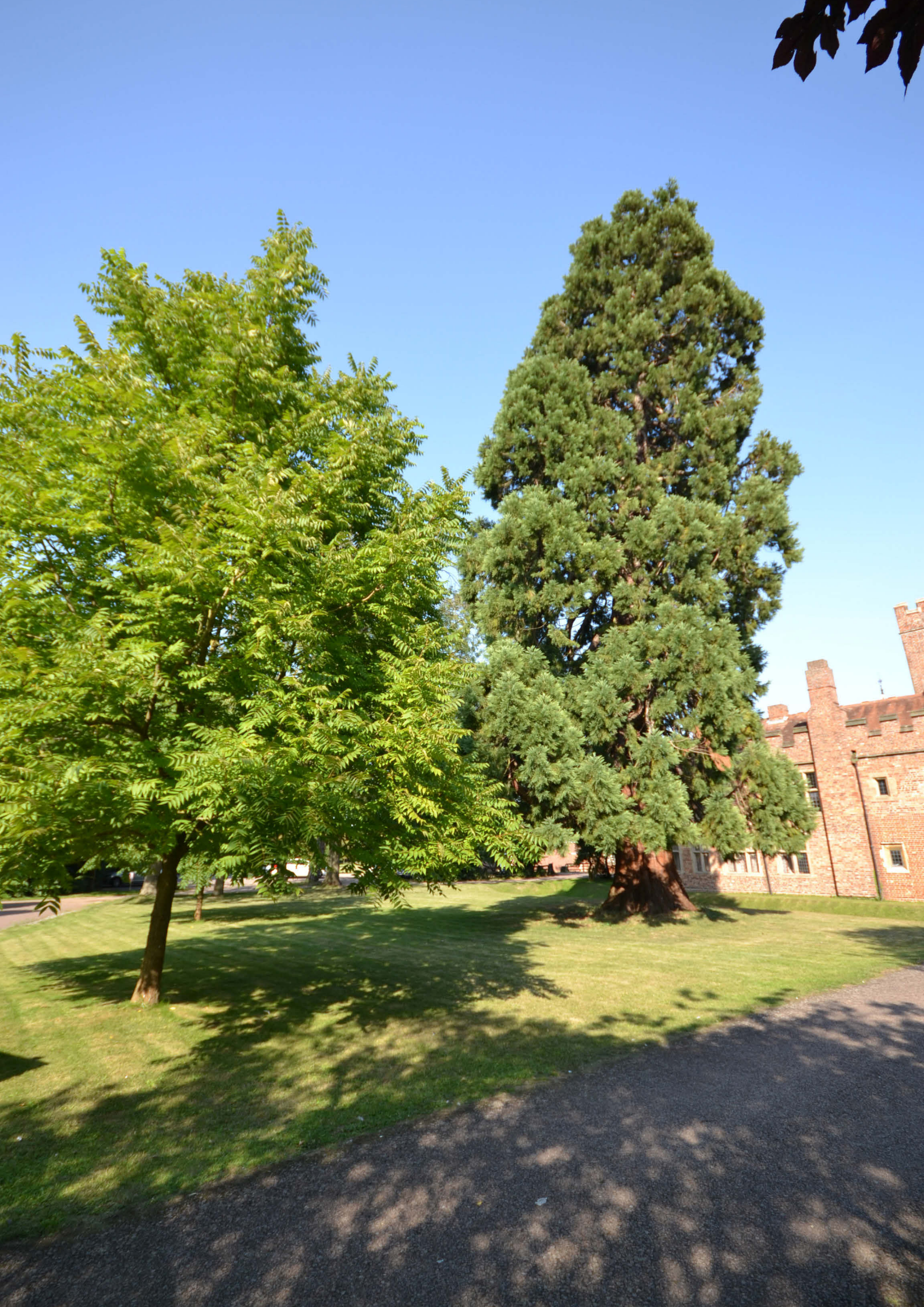
### 2 Tree Policies

The guiding principles on how trees in the District will be protected and cared for, and how new tree planting will be promoted.

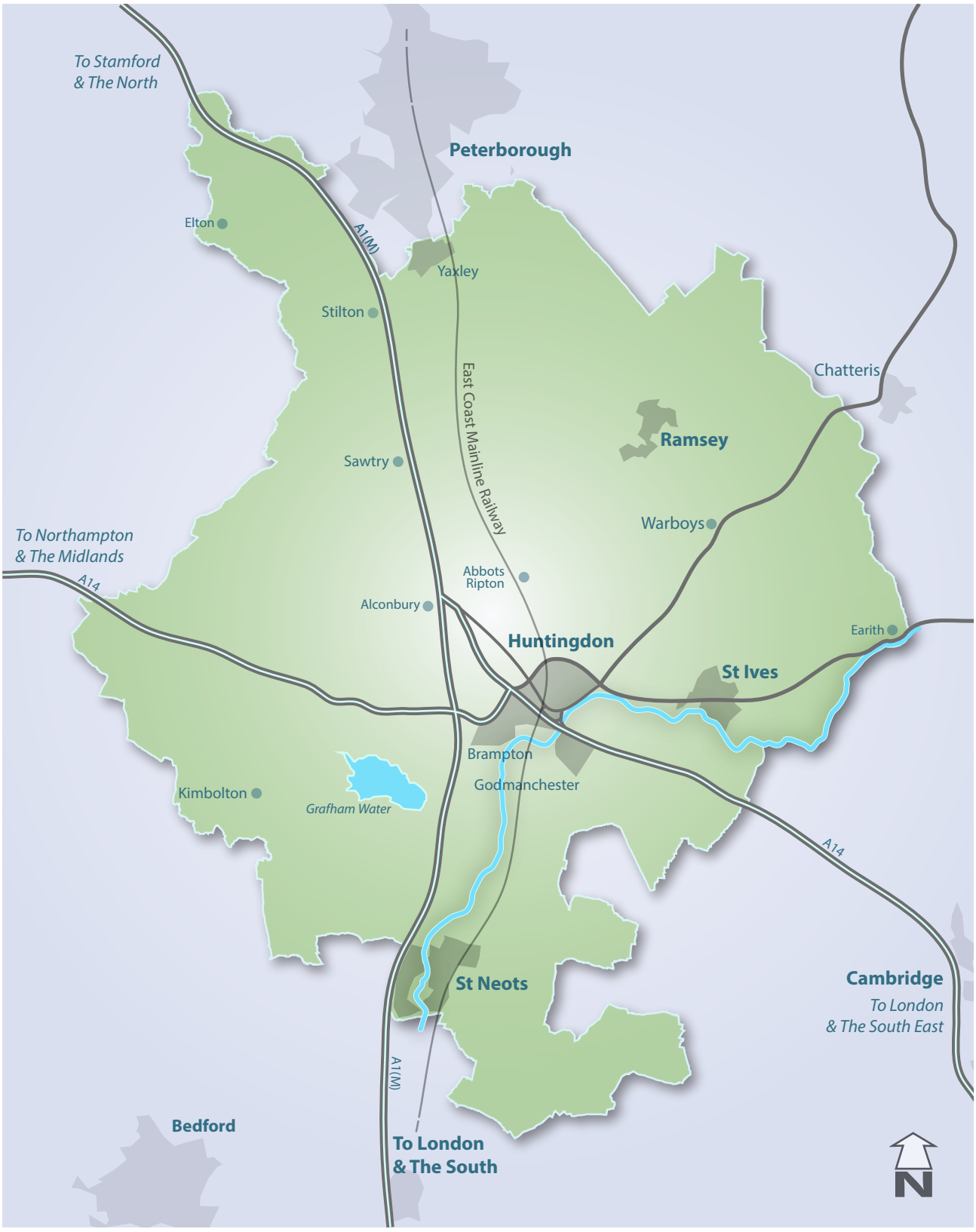
### 3 Tree Guidance Notes

Guidance notes setting out operational standards, and outlining how management decisions are made. These documents will be updated to reflect best practice and legislative amendments as they change.

The aims of the guidance notes, within Part 3 of this document, are to provide information and advice on the management and care of trees. These documents have principally been written for HDC officers who deal with trees. But it is hoped that they will also be helpful to Elected Members and to anyone else who would like to understand what sort of tree work is being carried out, the circumstances when it is necessary and why. It is intended that the detailed policies and guidance will also be of interest to private tree owners and contractors carrying out tree, hedging and woodland operations and to developers considering new development in the District.



## Map of Huntingdonshire



# The case for trees

Trees are a vital part of our natural life support system; cleaning the air we breathe, moderating climatic extremes and contributing to the health and well being of the community. They are without doubt the most significant features in many landscapes and also provide a perfect habitat for many other species. For hundreds of years trees have been cultivated not just for timber, food, shelter and medicine but simply for their intrinsic beauty. They are a part of our history and culture and have been worshipped, celebrated and revered in myth and folklore. The many benefits of trees are broadly summarised as follows:

*St Neots, Market Square - London Plane Trees*

## Quality of Life

Trees are important to the quality of life and have numerous social benefits. They provide a sense of place, history, establishment and continuity. Research shows that trees are associated with enhancing the quality of life through stress relief, improving mental health and a sense of well being. Trees in public spaces provide the opportunities for experiencing these qualities through outdoor activities or by direct public involvement in planting and caring for trees. They also provide a focus for environmental education and raising awareness of the benefits, value and role of trees in the environment, with green and outdoor classrooms enhancing learning opportunities.

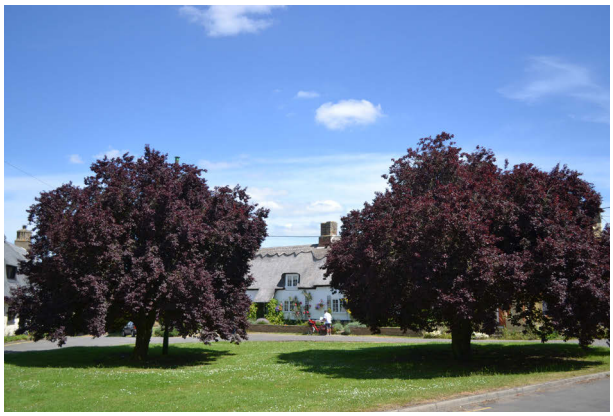
*St Neots, Priory Park - Mature London Plane Trees*

## Amenity

Many people appreciate the intrinsic beauty of trees and their subtle variations through the seasons, but the intrinsic amenity value of trees and how they can strongly influence the way a place feels and how it is used is often overlooked. The amenity value of trees includes providing contact with the natural environment for those without daily contact with green space.

*Chestnut Walk, Hinchingbrooke Country Park*

Mature trees play an important role in the character of historic townscape areas, including Conservation Areas, and complement the built environment. They instil a sense of place by creating an attractive and distinctive environment, often contributing to it by screening unsightly views. When allowed to grow to maturity, they provide a scale that contributes to the overall sense of history, establishment and continuity of a given place.



*Honey Hill, Fenstanton*

Trees are also important landscape elements in the open countryside and around towns and villages. They provide historic continuity by living for centuries, offering a link to past events and historic periods. Within urban areas they often form an important townscape feature, providing identity, orientation and structure to our urban areas and by introducing organic shapes and colours and seasonal change.


*Mature lime trees retained at Rowley Arts Centre development*

## Biodiversity

Trees and woodlands are an integral part of the ecosystem providing habitats for many species, some of which are completely dependent on them. Trees are used by birds and bats for nesting and roosting and the fruit and seed produced by trees provides a sustainable food source for various animals and birds. Invertebrates, lichens, moss, fungi and also ground fauna such as bluebells and other woodland species are also dependent on trees. Older and veteran trees are particularly important for biodiversity providing unique and increasingly rare habitats for many specialised species. Dead wood is also important for biodiversity as it can provide a variety of important habitats, either as dead branches that decay within a living tree, as a standing dead tree or on the ground.

*Robinia spp. with Chicken of the Woods fungus (Laetiporus sulphurous)*

*Roadside planting*

## Improving air quality and mitigating climate change

Trees produce the oxygen that we breathe and absorb carbon dioxide, the greenhouse gas, and store it within their wood. They also help to improve air quality by trapping particulates on their leaves and absorbing harmful gases. Woodlands and dense groups of trees can also be effective at reducing noise pollution. In addition, trees can positively affect the local climate by providing shade and shelter from wind and sun, and research has shown that trees can reduce the energy needed to heat or cool properties if they are positioned to provide shade or shelter. Trees within porous surfaces also help to reduce flash flooding by intercepting rainfall and slowing or reducing run off. With a growing understanding of climate change issues and the need to become more fuel efficient, trees will have an increasingly important role to play in this area.

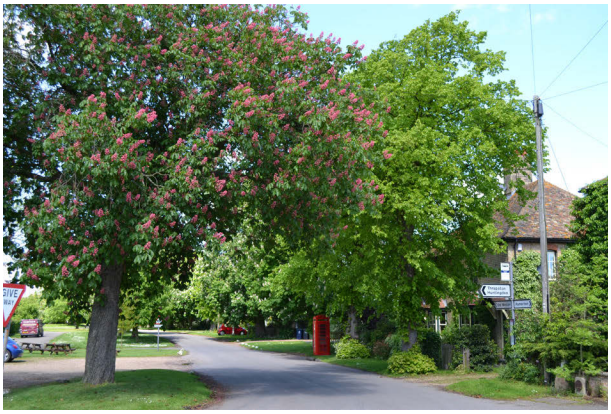
## Financial value of trees

Trees bring economic value in a variety of ways including;

- Producing products and by-products e.g. timber, wood chip, charcoal, compost and mulch, which can be created and sold to generate income
- Providing direct employment of specialists, such as foresters and arboriculturists
- Generating cheaper maintenance costs than grassland and other types of green spaces
- Increasing property values by providing an attractive leafy setting for individual dwellings and/or wider residential areas
- Creating an attractive environment; encouraging inward investment to employment and retail areas as a consequence
- Increasing the value of undeveloped land

In recent years there has been increased interest in quantifying these benefits and translating them into financial terms. A system known as CAVAT (Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees) has been developed to allow authorities to prepare a valuation of their tree stock which can then be used to justify managing the trees as if it were a financial asset of the community. This is a major step forward as traditionally, the management of trees and woodlands by local authorities has been seen solely as a cost, with no acknowledgement of the financial benefits that trees bring. Such an assessment of the value of trees in Huntingdonshire has not been undertaken, although it is recommended as a target for the future and is included within the Action Plan.

*Mature lime trees retained at Rowley Arts Centre, St Neots*

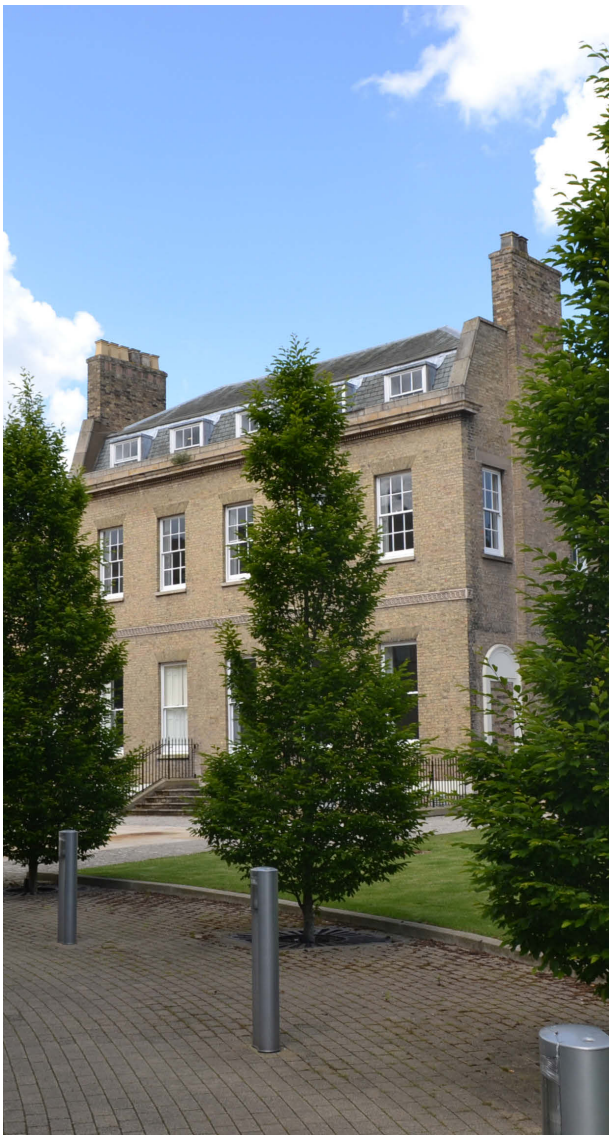


*Leighton Bromswold*

## Health

Health and social benefits of trees include:

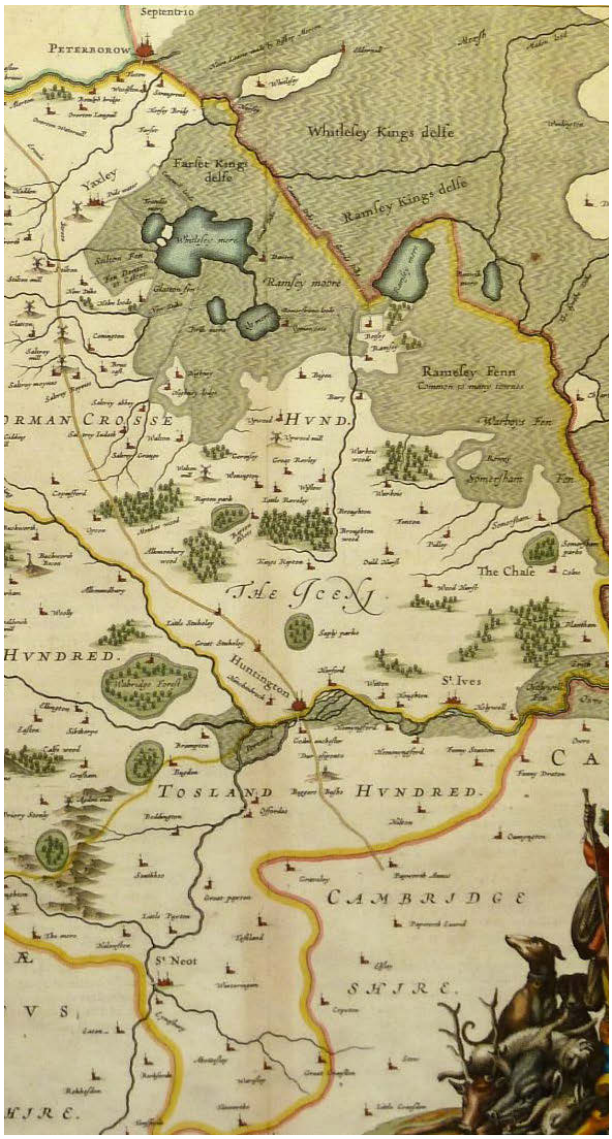
- Providing a variety of sensory elements e.g. to those with visual impairment, through hearing a breeze or smelling a scent
- Enhancing quality of life through stress relief, improving mental health and emotional well-being
- Supplying cleaner air which decreases the incidence of asthma
- Reducing the occurrence of skin cancer by providing shade
- Speeding up patients' recovery times when trees are visible from hospital beds



*Capinus betulus at Pathfinder House*

## Overview of the District's tree stock

Tree cover in Huntingdonshire has been slowly decreasing since Saxon times. Today, the main types of tree cover are: woodlands, hedgerow trees, street trees, trees on public land (parks, schools etc.), trees on private land and orchards.




*Excerpt of a 1645 map of Huntingdonshire*

## Woodlands

The majority of natural woodland in Huntingdonshire is owned and managed by statutory agencies such as English Nature or charities such as the Woodland Trust or the Wildlife Trust.

Woodlands of note include:

- Monkswood near Abbots Ripton, owned by English Nature
- Archers Wood and Aversley Wood, owned by the Woodland Trust
- Brampton Wood, Ladys Wood and Raveley Wood owned by Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust

The District Council's Countryside Services manage woodland contained within Hinchingbrooke Country Park and Paxton Pits Nature Reserve. The Thicket, between St Ives and Houghton is a small area of ancient woodland with public access; whilst Holt Island, at the western end of St Ives is now wooded, being a disused Osier bed.

*Hinchingbrooke Park, Beech and Pine woodland*

*Monks Wood*

In St Ives there are two areas of woodland bordering Hill Rise Park: Top and Long Plantations. Both are pleasant areas of mature woodland with informal access.

Oak and ash are the predominant canopy species with an understorey of shrub, including hazel, elder, hawthorn and wild cherry in less dense areas. In places, the conservation value of woodlands has been reduced due to the replacement of deciduous trees with non-native conifers, to create mixed plantations.

The District contains several areas of Ancient Woodland, and several areas of Ancient Replanted Woodland (areas where Ancient Woodland has been felled and replanted). Some notable and popular Ancient Woodlands in the District include:
**Brampton Wood** (north east of Grafham Water), **Monks Wood** (south west of Wood Walton), **Aversley Wood** and **Archer's Wood** (just south of Sawtry), and **Raveley Wood** and **Lady's Wood** (south of Ramsey). Ancient Woodlands are the most important type of woodlands in the District and it is important to manage them and protect their historic features and diverse wildlife, to ensure their protection as key components of the local landscape character. Some areas of Ancient Replanted Woodland in the District include: areas of **Brampton Wood**, **Bevill's Wood** (adjacent to Monks Wood), **West Wood** and **Diddington Wood** (both near to Grafham Water).

## Hedgerow trees

The agricultural landscape of Huntingdonshire includes both arable and pastoral farmland divided by hedgerows, with trees and farming still representing the predominant land use within the District. From the end of the Second World War until the mid 1990s the increased mechanisation and efficiency of farming led to changes in landscape character across the District with significant loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

The presence of hedgerows and hedgerow trees varies across the District, changing with the different landscape character areas. The areas of fen margins have small fields with hedges, trees and woodlands which creates an intimate scale to the landscape, while the large scale field patterns of the central claylands have few hedgerows or hedgerow trees. The south-east claylands have heavy clay soils supporting cereal crops and arable production, with tall hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees in the central part of the area. In the northern Wolds the plateau or ridges are in arable production and have a relatively open feel, with long views and few hedgerow trees. In contrast, the valleys have a higher proportion of pastoral land and are more vegetated, with large mixed hedgerows containing ancient and young oaks. In the southern Wolds, hedgerows and hedgerow trees also make an important contribution to the well vegetated character of the landscape however this is under pressure from the effects of intrusive and insensitive development and the gradual loss of traditional features of the agricultural landscape.

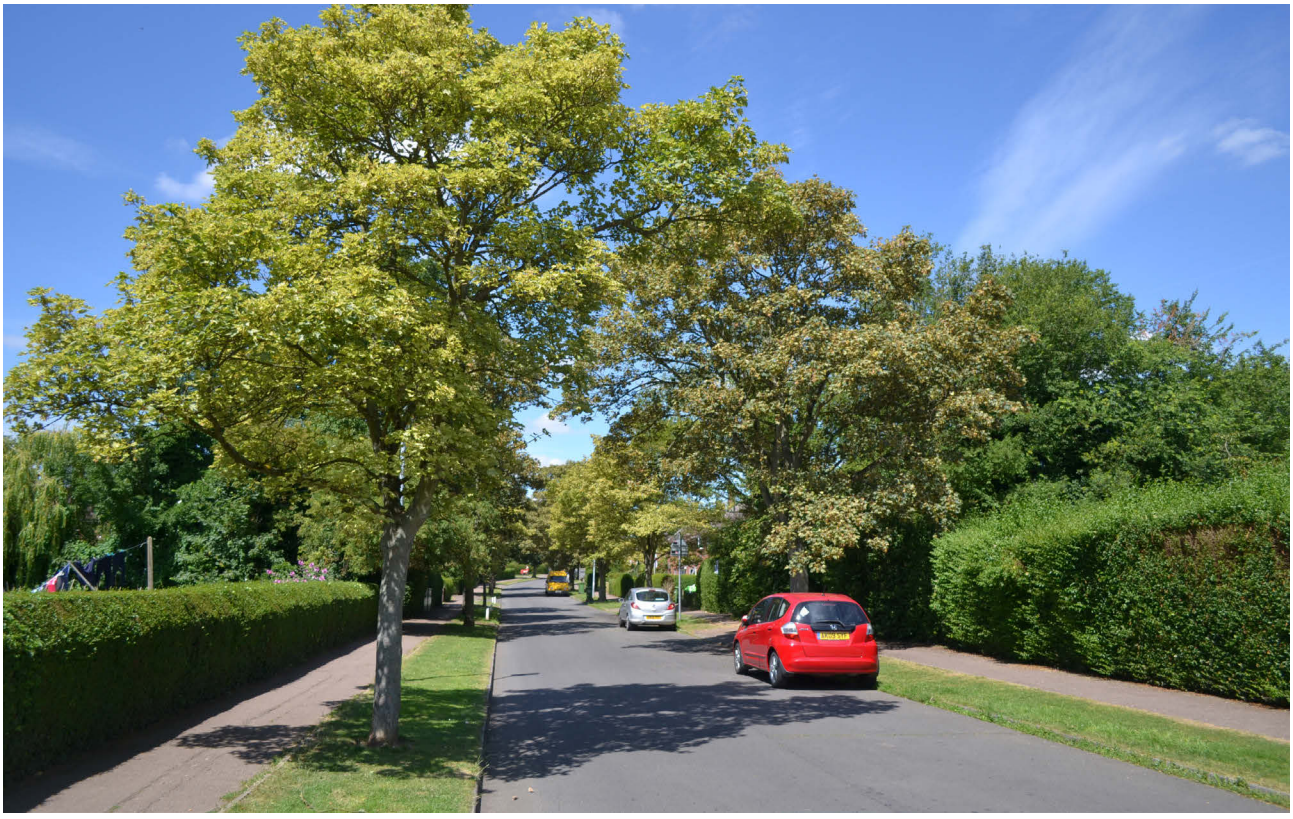
*Hedgerow Elms*

## Street trees

The District has a particularly low coverage of street trees within its built up areas. There are few residential areas with tree planting and few of the main through-routes are lined by trees. Street trees are particularly sparse in the areas of late twentieth and early twenty-first century developments in the District. Although vegetation in private gardens and public open spaces adjoining the road often assists in softening the built-up areas, most trees are small or medium-sized which bring limited benefits. The scarcity of street trees within the District's built up areas is a cause for concern and there is potential for significant improvements to be made to the quality of the townscapes and villages by the introduction of more tree planting where space permits.

There are a few notable areas or streets with trees, as listed more specifically below:

- Huntingdon – Victoria Square has a variety of different trees along the streets
- St. Neots – Several London plane trees along the Market Square
- St. Ives – Streets including and around Green Ley's have a number of mature street trees
- Ramsey – Significant row of lime trees on Wood Lane
- Godmanchester – Several notable mature trees along the side of West Street



*Green Leys, St Ives*

## Privately owned trees

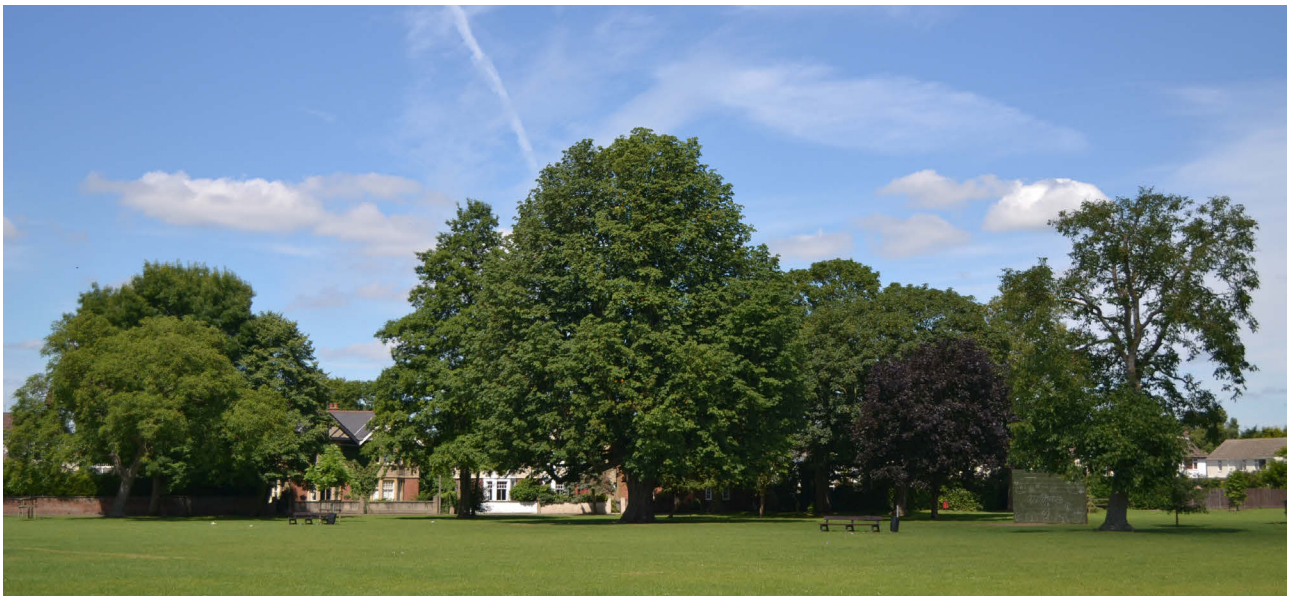
The majority of trees within the District are privately owned and are located either within private gardens, country estates/parklands or on agricultural land. Parkland areas include country estates around Kimbolton and Elton, including Elton Park and the parkland setting to Kimbolton village and school which contain distinctive groups of parkland trees. The Abbots Ripton Estate to the northern edge of Huntingdon is set within one of the few remaining substantial areas of woodland in Huntingdonshire. Abbots Ripton and surrounding villages in the estate are of particular importance and interest due to the survival of many elm trees. The devastation of Dutch Elm Disease was greatly reduced by many factors. Today there are over a thousand living mature elms in this part of the District.

HDC has little control over privately owned trees except the most notable trees, most of which are covered by Tree Preservation Orders. Privately owned trees are an important asset for the District making a very significant contribution to the character and quality of the District's landscape and the settlements within it. The Council can influence the management of some of the most notable privately owned trees in the District through its statutory powers for Tree Preservation Orders and Conservation Areas. The remaining privately owned trees are outside their immediate scope and responsibility, although guidance on best practice can be given to encourage positive management and planting works.

*Kimbolton Castle, Wellingtonia trees*

## Trees in Public Open Spaces

There are a number of established parks in built-up areas around the District, many simply taking the form of grass lawns and a variety of mature and newly planted trees. HDC directly owns and actively manages Riverside Park and Priory Park in St Neots, together with Riverside Park and Sapley Park in Huntingdon and Hill Rise Park in St Ives. Some of these parks are historic, and contain mature trees of species traditionally associated with parkland planting, including lime, sycamore, oak, cedar of Lebanon and giant redwood.



*Warner's Park, St Ives*

## Orchards

There are a notable number of orchards in the District, predominantly recognised for growing a variety of apple and plum species. The number and extent of orchards has declined rapidly in the last fifty years and is now a threatened habitat. This is the result of increased competition from foreign imports and a reduction in locally available labour. Although fewer than previously, there still remains a high density of orchards in the eastern part of the District, in particular around Somersham, Bluntisham and Colne approximately 5 miles north-east of St. Ives. Orchards support a rich variety of wildlife, particularly in the grassland beneath the trees.

*Apple Orchard*

## Key tree issues in Huntingdonshire

Although trees are undoubtedly an asset for the District, they can also cause (or be perceived as causing) problems which can be costly to resolve. The following is a summary of the key issues which are currently experienced in the District:

## Technical and planning issues

- Dangerous trees and tree limb falls causing personal injury or damage to properties
- New tree planting of appropriate species needed to address the gradual decrease in tree cover across the District since Saxon times
- Outdated Tree Preservation Orders with some average or poor quality trees inappropriately covered by TPOs whilst other high quality trees are not covered
- Ad hoc system of tree management works on HDC-owned trees and absence of programme of regular tree works or prioritization system for tree works
- Absence of appropriate computerised tree management database for tree survey data
- Absence of protocol for investigating potential infringements of Tree Preservation Orders and Conservation Area regulations
- Incomplete survey information for Council owned trees (including incomplete register of higher risk Hazard trees)
- Absence of protocol for the management of claims against the Council for damage to property allegedly caused by root damage from Council owned trees
- Lack of information on historic or current percentage tree cover across the District, resulting in difficulty of monitoring changes in tree cover over time
- Requests from the public for tree pruning due to complaints about loss of light, obstruction of view, etc.
- Replacement trees are needed to replace trees removed to accommodate new development or due to being diseased, dying or dead
- Litter collection, dog fouling, and weed and sucker growth in tree pits around base of trees

*Riverside Park, Huntingdon*

## Public awareness and understanding issues

- Lack of public information on the Council website about trees and advice on tree risk and best practice guides for tree planting and management
- Absence of a strategic approach to both public and private tree planting across the District
- Lack of understanding of tree pruning by the general public (frequency, types of pruning works etc)

*Beech tree with extensive decay*

## Species specific issues

- Large number of ash trees likely to be affected by Chalara fraxinea (ash die-back) in the next 5 – 15 years resulting in further significant reduction in tree cover and the loss of notable landscape features.

## Street tree issues

- Tree root damage by street trees to adjacent properties resulting in costs arising from subsidence claims
- Damage to pavements and highways by tree roots lifting surfacing and creating a trip hazard
- Complaints about fruit, sap and bird mess from trees on vehicles, pavements and properties resulting in slip hazard
- Trees in pavements can cause obstructions to the visually impaired and pedestrians with buggies
- Obstruction of CCTV sight lines and satellite dish reception lines by trees
- Scarcity of street trees in many of the urban areas in the District (particularly the more recent residential developments)

*Public realm street trees*