

7.2 ADOPTION OF THE STREET TREE POLICY: KAUPAPA HERE RĀKAU TIRITI

File Number:

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Purpose

This report provides the Street Tree Policy: Kaupapa Here Rākau Tiriti for approval following community consultation and deliberations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council:

1. **agrees** to the Hearings Committee recommendation that:
 - a) the Council adopt the proposed Street Tree Policy: Kaupapa Here Rākau Tiriti (Attachment 1) and gives public notice of the making of the Policy;
2. **notes** that subject to adoption, the Street Tree Policy: Kaupapa Here Rākau Tiriti will come into force on 1 July 2026;
3. **notes** that the Street Tree Policy: Kaupapa Here Rākau Tiriti will next be due for review in 2030/31;

In relation to the additional Hearings Committee recommendations:

4. **notes** an Urban Forest Strategy and a district wide canopy assessment will be considered as part of the Environment Portfolio review; and
5. **agrees** to focus on improved communication and engagement regarding street trees; and to explore broader community input and expertise when opportunities arise to support future significant decisions or strategy development relating to street trees.

OR

agrees the Council scopes the establishment of a Tree Advisory Group.

CONTEXT

At its meeting on 18 February 2026, the Council agreed to review the 2010 Street Tree Policy, recognising that it was no longer fit for purpose and did not adequately support the effective planning, planting, or management of street trees.

The 2010 policy lacked clear, up-to-date guidance on selecting and placing street trees, leading to avoidable issues with new plantings. It also provided limited direction for managing established trees, resulting in reactive and inconsistent responses to safety risks, infrastructure damage, maintenance access, and power line conflicts. Many of these issues stem from poor initial selection and placement, combined with ineffective maintenance guidance.

The proposed Street Tree Policy: Kaupapa Here Rākau Tiriti (the proposed Policy in Attachment 1) aims to balance the benefits and challenges of street trees so that Masterton can work towards a well-planned, safe, and healthy street tree network. The underpinning principle and desired outcome of the proposed Policy is "Right Tree, Right Place".

The proposed Policy establishes the strategic direction for how street trees are planned and managed across the District, while the detailed procedures that support its implementation sit at an operational level.

Officers note some minor formatting changes have been made to the proposed Policy since deliberations to align with policy drafting style. These do not affect the intent or application of the Policy.

Consultation

Consultation on the proposed Policy opened on Wednesday 25 February and closed Wednesday 25 March 2026. A total of 74 submissions were received.

The Consultation Document (Attachment 2), the proposed Policy and submission form were available on the What's Up Whakaoriori website, from the Customer Services Centre (161 Queen Street), Waiata House and the Library.

The opportunity for the community to have their say was advertised through direct emails to key stakeholders (including developers, utility providers, businesses in the CBD, arborists, iwi entities, and hapū/marae representatives), Antenno, and local radio.

Information on the proposed Policy and the ways residents could share their views were delivered to streets particularly prone to issues relating to street trees. These streets included Renall, Pownall, Cole, Essex, Worksop, Church, Queen Alexandra, King Edward and Miro streets.

ANALYSIS AND ADVICE

Deliberations

The Hearings Committee (the Committee) undertook deliberations on 15 April 2026 based on a Deliberations Report that can be found [here](#). This report contains feedback from submitters, officer analysis and further investigations, and additional advice on options.

The feedback received through submissions was diverse, with conflicting views on a number of matters. Key themes that arose from submissions, and that were addressed through deliberations included:

- Submitters generally supported retaining healthy, mature street trees but were concerned the policy could make removals easier and that removed trees are not always adequately replaced.
- Many viewed street trees as important public assets or infrastructure.
- Views on removal criteria were mixed, particularly around leaf drop, maintenance costs, shading, streetscape balance, and infrastructure access. Some wanted clearer thresholds, while others opposed certain criteria entirely.
- Submitters highlighted the importance of street trees for climate resilience, cooling, biodiversity, stormwater management, and public wellbeing, with some calling for canopy cover targets of 20–30%.
- Concerns were raised about inconsistent maintenance, limited transparency around planting and removals, and whether maintenance should be prioritised over tree removal.
- Many supported increasing street tree planting and expanding coverage to areas with limited tree canopy.

- Submitters expressed varied views on species selection, including climate resilience, planting under powerlines, native versus exotic species, evergreen versus deciduous trees, tree size, fruit trees, cultural values, and use of local nurseries.
- Submitters supported the involvement of qualified arborists and called for greater transparency and community engagement in decision making, including notification of removals and interest in reinstating a Street Tree Advisory Group (or similar).

The Committee considered all submissions received, along with additional information and officer analysis. Overall, the Committee concluded that the proposed Policy, with minor amendments, was sufficient to address submitter concerns. The changes included:

- Amending wording so native species are “considered” rather than “prioritised” (New Trees – policy statements).
- Including a statement that trees would be sourced locally where possible (New Trees – policy statements).
- Retaining the removal criteria framework but strengthening wording to clearly prioritise retention of healthy, mature trees (Existing Trees – policy statements).
- Removing references to leaf litter and high maintenance from removal criteria (Existing Trees – policy statements).

The Committee discussed the removal of the Street Tree Advisory Group (STAG) under the proposed Policy, and the potential to explore a strategic level document that could address aspects such as canopy cover goals for the District. These two aspects are discussed below.

HEARINGS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AND OFFICERS’ ASSESSMENT

Tree Advisory Group – Officers’ Assessment and Recommended Approach

At the Deliberations Meeting the Committee recommended the Council scopes the establishment of a Tree Advisory Group. The Committee noted that the intention of an advisory group would not be to make decisions on health and safety matters or general (business as usual) operations regarding trees.

Officers acknowledge there is interest and knowledge regarding trees and their management in the community. However, officers consider that community input into street tree decisions is best achieved through shaping policy via consultation processes such as this; and via targeted notification and consultation relating to specific street tree issues.

Experience also indicates that advisory groups are generally more effective (for both the Council and participants) when they are clearly tied to specific projects, initiatives, or decision points, rather than operating as standing groups without a defined purpose or work programme.

If an advisory group were established, its role would therefore need to be clearly defined and focused on providing high-level input to inform strategic direction (where appropriate), rather than advising on operational or site-specific matters. Any external professional expertise required would continue to be obtained through appropriately procured and qualified contractors.

Contractors engaged by Council must meet the definition of a “Qualified Arborist” as set out in the Policy:

Means a person suitably experienced and competent in arboriculture, having acquired through training, qualification (a minimum of a level 5 NZQA advanced certificate in arboriculture or equivalent arboriculture qualification) and/or equivalent experience, the knowledge and skills enabling that person to perform the required tasks.

The current contract is reviewed annually to reflect changes in service scope and is scheduled to expire in the 2028/29 financial year, with a formal Section 17A review and procurement process planned for 2027/28 to inform future delivery arrangements and market approach.

Once adopted, all decisions will be made in accordance with the new Street Tree Policy, which has been through the appropriate community consultation process. If an advisory group was established, it would also be required to operate in accordance with the policy.

Officers recommend continuing to strengthen communication and community engagement regarding street tree works. Where decisions of greater significance relating to street trees are required in future, broader community input and expertise could be sought to support that specific decision; and an advisory group could be considered to support the development of an Urban Forest Strategy (see below) if that was to proceed. The significance of decisions is assessed in alignment with Council's Significance and Engagement Policy.

This decision is consistent with the decision Council made in November 2025 when it agreed to not establish some advisory groups for this triennium (Climate and Rural), instead focussing on targeted engagement or mobilisation around specific issues as needed.

Urban Forest Strategy – Hearings Committee Recommendation and Officers' Response

At the Deliberations Meeting the Committee recommended the Council undertakes a district wide canopy assessment and scopes an Urban Forest Strategy.

A review of the Environment Portfolio (the Portfolio) has commenced, as signalled in the last report to the Finance, Risk and Assurance Committee. An Urban Forest Strategy (including a district wide canopy assessment) would be best considered as part of the Portfolio review.

Any proposed strategy will require careful consideration of servicing and budget implications, as well as the impact of prioritising this work on other key deliverables within the Portfolio. It will also need to take into account the emerging strategic direction of the Development Plan, which is being developed with the community.

We expect to discuss the portfolio in a workshop with Elected Members in August. The workshop will provide Councillors with a broader understanding of the Portfolio and emerging environmental and climate issues in the district. This will assist officers in understanding Council priorities and implications before committing to detailed scoping of a proposed Urban Forest Strategy.

As part of that scoping, officers will also consider whether establishing a time-bound or purpose-specific advisory group (such as a Street/Tree Advisory Group) would add value to the development of the Urban Forest Strategy. Consistent with Council's approach, any such group would be focused on supporting a defined project or decision-making process, rather than operating as a standing advisory body.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Council prioritise strengthening communication and community engagement in relation to street tree management and seeks broader community input and

expertise to support future significant decisions on street trees, where appropriate. This recommendation is consistent with recent decision on advisory groups and Significance and Engagement Policy.

It is further recommended that the development of an Urban Forest Strategy, including a district-wide canopy assessment, be considered as part of the Environment Portfolio Review to ensure alignment with broader strategic priorities, resourcing, and budget considerations. Officers will report back to Council over the next few months.

.OPTIONS CONSIDERED

A summary of the options considered is included in the table below.

	Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Council adopts the Policy with minor amendments; agrees to consider an Urban Forest Strategy as part of the Environment portfolio review; and agrees to consider establishing an advisory group for significant decisions and/or to support the progression of strategic work, such as an Urban Forest Strategy if that proceeds.	Aligns with the Committee's recommendation regarding the policy. Provides a fit-for-purpose policy to guide the management of street trees that seeks to balance community aspirations and operational constraints. Incorporates changes in response to submitter feedback where relevant (e.g. changes to the removal criteria) Preferred approach for some submitters. Enables Council to consider whether to progress an Urban Forest Strategy in the context of understanding all environment portfolio priorities. Enables Council to consider issue or project specific advisory groups where there is an opportunity to influence and/or support significant decisions and/or strategic direction.	Submitter feedback was broad and included conflicting views. The new policy and proposed approach for an advisory group may not be supported by some submitters.

	Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
2	Council does not adopt the proposed Policy (with or without amendments) and continues with the 2010 Policy noting this maintains a Street Tree Advisory Group; and agrees to consider an Urban Forest Strategy as part of the Environment portfolio review.	Preferred approach for some submitters. Enables Council to consider whether to progress an Urban Forest Strategy in the context of understanding all environment portfolio priorities.	The 2010 policy was identified as a priority for review through the 2024 LTP process. Continuing with the management of street trees under the 2010 policy would not provide sufficient, up-to-date guidance for decision-making. Retains STAG which may: • introduce additional complexity and extend decision-making timeframes. • be affected by diverse community views, limiting the ability to form clear and consistent positions. • create overlap with contracted service providers, leading to unclear roles and potential impacts on delivery of contractual obligations. • be affected by variability in expertise, which could limit full consideration of technical requirements and interactions with infrastructure, potentially resulting in unintended maintenance or cost implications.

RECOMMENDED OPTION

Option one is recommended, which aligns with the Committee's recommendation. The current Street Tree Policy adopted in 2010 is no longer fit-for-purpose. It is administratively unhelpful and contributes to costly ongoing maintenance requirements.

The proposed Street Tree Policy (Attachment 1) has been developed to provide clear guidance for the planning, planting, maintenance and removal of street trees over the long-term for the Council. Changes have been made, as outlined in this report, in response to community feedback through the consultation process.

IMPLEMENTATION

If the Policy is adopted, it will replace the current Street Tree Policy 2010 and will be due for review in five years (2030/31).

Officers will finalise the draft procedures that will be the primary mechanism used to implement the Policy. Feedback relating to procedural elements provided in this consultation will be taken into consideration as the procedures are finalised. The procedures will sit with Council's operational staff, and the approved species list will be made publicly available once finalised.

SUMMARY OF CONSIDERATIONS

Strategic, Policy and Legislative Implications

The need to review the 2010 Street Tree Policy was identified as a priority in Council's Long-Term Plan 2024–2034. The proposed Policy must align with the Proposed Wairarapa Combined District Plan (Appeals Version 2026). Relevant legislation, including the Resource Management Act 1991 and Land Transport Act 1998, provides the authority for managing trees on public land, while national standards and regulations set applicable technical and safety requirements.

Significance, Engagement and Consultation

Consultation followed the requirements of section 82 and 83 of the LGA and provided a one-month consultation period. The Consultation Document, proposed Policy and information about how the community could have their say and present their views was widely advertised and available.

No further consultation is required on the Policy.

Financial Considerations

Costs for the review and consultation are being met through existing budgets.

The costs for tree maintenance, removal and replacement plantings are assessed on a case-by-case basis and are typically met within budgets allocated within the Long-Term Plan, or through specific project costs if associated with a project.

Providing funding to replace and add to the street tree network is a level of service and funding prioritisation decision for Council through its budgeting and planning cycles.

In terms of Council's funding policy, the provision of street trees has no real opportunity to charge on a user pays basis. Street trees are a 'public good', so their maintenance is funded from rates. More street trees generally mean higher costs of maintenance over time and therefore will result in rates increases.

Implications for Māori

The proposed Policy is an operational policy aimed at improving the planning and management of Masterton's street tree network, which has high community interest. A key principle of the Policy is to recognise and take into consideration the cultural values of Masterton when making decisions on the removal and planting of street trees, including the whakapapa connections of mana whenua. This is reflected in the following Policy statement:

New Street Trees must recognise cultural values and mātauranga Māori, with native tree species considered where appropriate to reflect local identity and cultural significance.

Under the LGA, Council has obligations to consider the views of Māori and to provide opportunities for Māori participation in decision-making processes. In line with these obligations, iwi entities, hapū and marae representatives were directly invited to make submissions on the proposed Policy.

Should Council proceed with the development of an Urban Forest Strategy, this work would include appropriate engagement with mana whenua to ensure cultural values and mātauranga Māori are reflected in the strategy's development. Officers will report back to Council on engagement approach and outcomes as part of the scoping and development process.

Communications/Engagement Plan

As stated, consultation met the requirements of the LGA. This involved making a proposal available for one month and providing an opportunity for the public to present their views to the Council.

If adopted, the Council will issue a Public Notice and publish the Policy on its website.

Environmental/Climate Change Impact and Considerations

The proposed Policy recognises the environmental benefits that trees provide in an urban environment as well as the positive impacts they have on the climate. There are no environmental/climate change impacts or considerations arising from the receipt of this report.

NEXT STEPS

Subject to Council agreement, the Street Tree Policy: Kaupapa Here Rākau Tiriti will come into force on 1 July 2026.

Officers will finalise the supporting procedures for approval by the Executive Leadership Team. The list of approved street tree species will be made available and will be updated as approved species that meet the Policy and are considered and reviewed by a Qualified Arborist.

A Public Notice will be issued, and the Policy will be published on our website. The Policy will be due for review in 2030/31.

ATTACHMENTS

1. **Street Tree Policy: Kaupapa Here Rākau Tiriti** [↗](#)
2. **Consultation Document: Street Tree Policy: Kaupapa Here Rākau Tiriti** [↗](#)