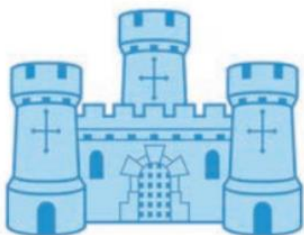




Appendix 2

Storm Darragh Impact & Response Report

Sustainable Environment
January 2025



NEWCASTLE·UNDER·LYME
BOROUGH COUNCIL

An example of a practical response to recent severe weather event in December 2024 following procedure set out in our Tree Risk Management Strategy

At 16:00 on 5th December 2024 Kidsgrove woodland at Kidsgrove and Clough Hall Park experienced reported destructive tornado type winds. On 7th and 8th December 2024 a further significant weather event, storm Darragh, was experienced and had effects across the borough causing considerable destruction of trees Borough wide. The events took place mostly within the hours of darkness creating additional difficulties for our teams in relation to assessing damage and dealing with the effects as safely as possible.

The level of damage and destruction to our trees, particularly within the Clough Hall area was unprecedented for the borough.



Our Response

Tornado

Our initial response was dealt by the Borough Councils on call officer, who attended the site along with the Police and Staffordshire County Highways following multiple reports of tree damage to property and gardens fences.

Our on-call Arborist was called out, and out of hours support was then obtained from all of the remaining team members who were available to assist at the time when the significance and scale of the damage started to emerge.

Soon after the tornado type event passed, during the hours of darkness, the Arboriculture team felled a dangerous tree, and other team members assessed damage to remaining trees. Clough Hall Park was close due to concerns of unstable and damaged trees in addition to closing footpaths through

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adjacent woodland. Staffordshire County Highways activated two road closures (Boat Horse Road and The Avenue) and instructed their highways contractor to clear fallen trees.

On 6th December 2024, post storm tree inspections were completed by all available BTI (Basic Tree Inspection) trained staff.

Storm Darragh

Storm Darragh was a national storm weather event impacting on a large swathe of the UK with Yellow, Amber and Red warnings being issued by the Met Office prior to and during the weather event. The storm was experienced in the Borough on the weekend of Saturday 7th and Sunday 8th November. Additional Officers and Arboriculture team Operatives were mobilised respond to live weather impacts and to continue post tornado inspections, as per our Tree Risk Management Strategy and complete urgent tree works when conditions were safe to do so. We were additionally supported by our consultant contractor to undertake additional surveys.

In the week following Storm Darragh BTI (Basic Tree Inspections) were carried out Borough wide by trained staff across Streetscene and Landscape teams. Damage was recorded in multiple locations across much of the Borough including:

- Newcastle cemetery, where services were scheduled in locations of large fallen trees,
- Knutton cemetery, fallen trees prevented access
- Clough Hall Park – significant and wide scale fallen, uprooted and/or structural tree damage.
- Clough Hall woodland – large woodland decimated.
- Former Chapel at Kidsgrove – fallen tree damage
- Multiple road fall locations.

Post Storm Inspections

One of the Mandatory Requirements of our Tree Risk Management Strategy is to train officers and managers in BTI (Basic Tree Inspection). In November 17 members of staff across Streetscene and Landscape Teams were trained and received their qualification in BTI.

After major storm events there is a risk that trees may have become subject to partial windthrow, or canopy breakages resulting in potentially unstable trees or partially detached limbs. Once severe weather warning has passed, a list of routes will be inspected for obvious damage.

Our post storm inspections identified over 100 fallen and/or dangerous trees across 27 of our sites.

Informal reporting by members of the public and staff through the Borough Councils 'Report a Tree Issue' was incredibly helpful with an additional 50+ tree related reports received in the week following the storm.

Direct reporting and subsequent reactive inspections significantly contribute to public safety. Improvements in the online reporting system and its mapping system have increased considerably reduced officer time in locating trees.

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In the calendar year up to storm Darragh 72 locations were raised that were high or immediate priority. In the 4 day period of the tornado and storm Darragh 21 high and immediate locations for priority jobs were recorded, this created a significant work load being incurred and dealt with by our inhouse team, each location will include multiple jobs, which may include fells, major limb removals etc. Additional support, as per the Tree Risk Management Strategy, has been sought and secured (during a period of peak demand for regional Arboriculture Teams) from two contractor teams, employed for 6 weeks to date and projected for an additional 4/5 weeks.

As per the Tree Risk Management Strategy works identified during inspections are prioritised according to need. Remedial action is taken where they present sufficient risk or hazard and the identified categories illustrated within the strategy are used, including the 'Immediate' category. Much of the storm damage was identified as 'immediate' priority.

During the past three years annual routine inspections have been undertaken to our red route's, locations where trees of significance in relation to their location and condition are subject to a Quantified Tree Risk Assessment. Utilisation of these routine inspections has likely reduced our litigation exposure significantly.

Current Position

Arboriculture work is ongoing in relation to the two recent storm events reported above, which is largely in addition to programmed work to other high priority trees identified prior to the recent damage. The contractor input has been essential to assist in the current and ongoing recovery to ensure we position the Council in as reasonable safe position as possible in relation to our tree stock.

Immediately following the storm events and over the past several weeks the use of social media has been a useful tool in updating members of the public in relation to immediate dangers and our measured approach in dealing with minimising the risk to residents. This has been particularly useful in relation to the closure of Clough Hall Park and our liaising with SCC in relation to a footpath closure to Clough Hall Woods.

Damage caused by the storms has been recorded on our Tree Risk Management system and on our corporate risk management register, T100, which is accessed by our insurance team to collate information where claims are registered. The information captured is crucial to aiding an appropriate response to any claim for damages or otherwise.

Intervention in the recovery of the woodland will be restricted to completing works where safety issues are a concern. This will allow the regeneration (already visible) to flourish. Felling dead or damaged trees will be regarded as a last resort, as these are often uniquely valuable as habitat for wildlife, even if the physical condition of the tree is poor.

Summary

Implementation and alignment of our approach to managing tree risk throughout the year and during and post severe weather events significantly reduces risk to residents, employees and reduces litigation claims during normal weather conditions and stress tested circumstances such as the recently tested severe weather events.