



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

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Dear Catherine

Thank you for your joint letter of 18 May with Cllr Mike Hakata, to the Secretary of State, about protecting our urban trees. I am replying as the Minister responsible for trees. I would be grateful if you would share this reply with Cllr Hakata.

Urban trees are the green beacons of our urban landscape and need to be protected, cared for and managed as such, so communities can enjoy the multiple benefits they offer. As you may know, we have introduced a statutory target to increase tree canopy and woodland cover to 16.5% of total land area by 2050, which includes urban trees. This recognises their importance and demonstrates our commitment to ensuring a healthy urban treescape for the future.

In the England Tree Action Plan, we committed to working with engineers, developers and arboriculturists to get more trees on streets and in developments, including by revising the Manual for Streets and potentially amending the National House Building Council guidance on foundations. We also committed work with professional bodies to update guidance for highways and utilities engineers to encourage greater recognition of the benefits of street trees in relation to investment costs. We are progressing on both these actions by providing advice through our experts in the Forestry Commission.

The Forestry Commission has been working with stakeholders to support changes to existing guidance relating to the insurance sector. The guidance includes:

- The Institution of Structural Engineer's guidance Subsidence of Low Rise Buildings
- The National House Building Council's Foundation guidance for building near trees
- The London Tree Officers Association Risk Limitation Strategy for Tree Root Claims
- The Joint Mitigation Protocol, which is a mutually agreed method of tree root claims handling hosted by the London Tree Officers Association

Taken together, this guidance provides local authorities and insurers with sector-wide agreed methodologies for investigating and then dealing with tree related subsidence claims. It provides for due diligence to be followed so that trees are only felled by local authorities when they have considered all options. This should prevent pre-emptive felling and put local authorities in a stronger position to repudiate unwarranted claims, while at the same time encouraging local authorities and insurers to co-operate in resolving claims without the need to fell trees in all cases.

As I mentioned in my speech, we are currently developing appropriate guidance for the new Duty to Consult and will be seeking to commence the measure in the next year. In addition, Defra is also working to ensure that the planning system leads to more trees being planted and better protection of trees.

Our Nature for Climate Fund makes it ever easier to plant trees and I am pleased to have written to you about the funds Haringey Council has received. This totals more than £375,148, plus the support from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund.

We want to see more trees and green spaces close to where people live, not fewer, and I am committed to making this happen.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Trudy Harrison', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

TRUDY HARRISON MP