**Tree Policy for West & Middle Chinnock Parish Council**

**Why should a Parish/Town Council take positive actions to protect and plant trees?**

Somerset’s dominant tree used to be the elm. However, the Dutch Elm Disease (DED) epidemic, which started in the 70s, has devastated the elm population. DED has killed millions of trees in Somerset over the last few decades. The current epidemic is Ash Dieback Disease (ADD), the effects of which are to become more obvious over the coming decade. We are likely to see many more dead ash trees in our area. Ash is the most common species over much of England and Somerset is no exception.

The tree canopy in Parrett Ward (West Chinnock & Haselbury) is currently 13.8% (source: <http://forestry.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d8c253ab17e1412586d9774d1a09fa07>). The Committee on Climate Change has recommended that the UK aims for a coverage of 17% in order to tackle climate change.

In the new (October 2019) Environment Strategy, SSDC highlights protecting and improving tree coverage as a means of offsetting carbon emissions and sequestering CO2 in order to combat climate change.

There follows a set of policies that West & Middle Chinnock have devised in order to safeguard their existing tree coverage, and to promote the expansion of the same within the Parish.

**Policies adopted by West & Middle Chinnock Parish Council to (1) safeguard existing tree coverage, and (2) promote tree planting within the Parish:**

1. **Tree Warden**

The PC will endeavour to establish and maintain a new role: Parish Tree Warden. This new role could be filled by someone who is not a member of the PC, and should ideally be a member of the wider community. The Tree Warden role could be shared, or combined with another community role such as the Footpath Warden role.

**Policy detail(s):**

* 1. **The Parish Council will advertise for and appoint a Tree Warden whose role will be informing the Council about tree matters, advising on suitable actions and taking a lead on the coordination of tree planting projects and volunteers**
	2. **If the role cannot be filled by a third party, then PC Members will collectively assume the role**
1. **Safeguarding existing tree coverage**

The PC will work to promote a tree-safeguarding culture within the Parish. The PC will seek to inform parishioners of the importance of protecting our existing tree coverage.

The PC must accept that it is neither possible nor desirable to obligate private landowners to replace trees. However, the PC ought to be doing all that is reasonably and practically possible to encourage parishioners to ‘buy in’ to the idea of safeguarding the tree coverage in the Parish.

**Policy detail(s):**

* 1. **The Parish Council will work proactively to safeguard existing tree coverage in any planning applications made within the parish. The Parish Council will engage early with any developments within its parish, to ensure that developers are aware of our interest in protecting our tree coverage.**
	2. **The Parish Council will work proactively to safeguard existing tree coverage in any planning applications made within the parish. The Parish Council will engage early with any developments within its parish, to ensure that developers are aware of our interest in protecting our tree coverage.**
1. **Expansion of tree coverage**

To increase the existing level of tree coverage by (1) investigating the availability of sites for the planting of new trees within the Parish and, (2) establishing an annual tree and shrub planting programme (in liaison with the new Tree Warden role). The cost of (2) could be met from a variety of sources including the Free Trees for Schools and Communities Project run by the Woodland Trust, the Parish precept, Community Infrastructure Levy, or S106 funds. Parish Councils are close to the ‘grass roots’ of local affairs, and we are well-placed to lead any tree planting initiatives.

**Policy detail(s):**

* 1. **Only ever with the explicit cooperation of land-owner, the Parish Council will seek to identify locations for annual tree planting upon land across the Parish. The Parish Council will lead by example and conduct a survey of its own land as a priority.**

**The following conditions will apply to the planting of trees organised by the Parish Council**3.1.1. Tree planting must only include native UK species

3.1.2. Trees for planting must be responsibly sourced from within the UK and disease-free

3.1.3. If more than 3 trees are to be planted in a single area, then a competent person (such as the Tree Warden) will conduct a survey of the land to ensure that it is appropriate for planting and that pre-existing ecosystems will not be irreversibly damaged.

* 1. **The Parish Council will actively promote the current financial incentives that exist to encourage private landowners to plant trees on their land.***For example, The Forestry Commission’s Woodland Creation and Woodland Carbon Code scheme (which offers grants up to £8,500 per hectare of new woodland to land-owners).*
	2. **The Parish Council will help with the sourcing of funding towards tree planting within the Parish, including allocating Parish funds towards tree planting.**
	3. **In the event of a felled tree (lightning strike, accidental, damaged, vandalised, diseased or otherwise) on Parish owned or leased land, the Parish Council will (subject to landowners’ permission, if required) replace the lost tree with at least two appropriate saplings.**