

**Community & Services Committee**

21 September 2023

**Report for Agenda Item | Rīpoata moto e Rāraki take [3]**

**Department: Community Services**

**Title | Taitara : Tree Policy Review 2023**

**Purpose of the Report | Te Take mō te Pūroko**

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The purpose of this report is to present the draft Tree Policy 2023 before seeking public feedback.

**Recommendation | Kā Tūtohuka**

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The Community & Services Committee:

- **Note** the contents of this report.
- **Approve** the draft Tree Policy 2023 for public feedback.

**Prepared by:**



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**Title:** Parks and Reserves Planner

24 August 2023

**Reviewed and authorised by:**



**Name:** Ken Bailey  
**Title:** Community Services  
General Manager  
1 September 2023

**Context | Horopaki**

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1. The Queenstown Lakes District Council Tree Policy 2022 (Tree Policy) was adopted at the 11 August 2022 Full Council meeting, with a resolution to undertake a review of the Policy and report back to the Community and Services Committee in 12 months' time. This was due to the high level of public interest around how the policy would be implemented.

2. The purpose of the Tree Policy is to ensure existing trees, tree spaces, canopy cover and succession planting meet the needs of the community, can provide for growth, and continue to be protected and enhanced.
3. Staff have commenced the review to determine how the policy is working.

#### Analysis and Advice | Tatāritaka me kā Tohutohu

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4. In general, the Tree Policy is working well. Public interest in trees is high and the Tree Policy has been successful in helping QLDC manage trees to meet community aspirations and provide guidance to ensure appropriate trees are planted in the appropriate places.
5. In the 12 months since the adoption of the Tree Policy 2022, Parks Officers have received 187 requests for tree works. Of these, 55% were approved and 28% declined. The remainder are pending or withdrawn. The table below shows the request type.

Request Type	Total	%
Removals	142	76%
Pruning	23	12%
Relocation	12	6%
Work in Root Zones	5	3%
Planting	5	3%

*Table 1: Tree works request types.*

6. Review of these applications and how they were administered under the policy has provided an opportunity to assess where the policy is effective but has also highlighted some challenges in implementation.
7. **Key aspects of the Tree Policy that are working well:**
  - Greater transparency of QLDC's decision-making process;
  - Asset management and data collection for QLDC trees is improving;
  - There is a clearer process for Councillor involvement and public input for significant tree removals;
  - Applications for tree works are being received;
  - Increased engagement and support from arboriculture contractors;
  - There is now a requirement for mitigation for tree removals; and
  - Effects on canopy cover are being considered.

**Key challenges with the Tree Policy and suggested improvements:**

***Staff time and information***

8. Most applications were requiring significant staff time due to a lack of information from the applicant. The Tree Policy now has a clear statement that all required reporting and consents must be provided by the applicant at the applicant's cost so that staff time on applications is reduced.
9. Detail on tree works within root zones and the requirement of Tree Protection Management Plans (TPMP) was lacking. The Tree Policy now outlines better policies for directing when a TPMP is required and what information should be required.

***Cost and value***

10. Under the previous policy, it was not clear who would be responsible for paying for tree removal or alteration works. There is now clearer wording that gives Council the ability to seek costs from the applicant.
11. The current tree valuation process in the Tree Policy 2022 is the Standard Tree Evaluation Method 1996 (STEM), which is used to help identify the value of trees. However, this method has some limitations, and evaluations have a level of subjectivity which can result in different conclusions and financial values. STEM will continue to be used, but Council will look to adopt more widely used, accessible and modern tree valuation methods that also include ecosystem services, such as iTree<sup>[1]</sup>

***Significant trees***

12. The definition of significant tree was not clear, resulting in unnecessary applications going to the Community & Services Committee and the Wānaka Upper Clutha Community Board. A clearer definition has been included, stating the 'significance' of a tree is determined by the Council Arborist and/or Parks Officers based on factors such as long-term life expectancy, amenity, heritage, location, number of trees identified and landscape and wildlife effects.

***Individual trees vs large-scale infrastructure projects:***

13. The previous policy did not distinguish between individual trees and large-scale infrastructure projects and Council is currently using the same process for both, resulting in some confusion when applying the Tree Policy to large projects. There is now better clarification around how Council will assess large-scale projects that require the removal of a large number of trees for public works.

***Wilding trees***

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<sup>[1]</sup> iTree is a simple international web-based tool for valuing and estimating the benefits of individual trees.

14. The Tree Policy now states that any wilding, noxious and pest plant species that were self-seeded are excluded and do not apply to the policy.

**Minimum 2:1**

15. There was some confusion around what 2:1 meant and what it was trying to achieve. The Tree Policy now provides better direction on where and when mitigation planting is required.

**Process**

16. A new section 6.0 has been included that clearly sets out the process for application, decision making and undertaking works.

17. The full suite of changes is included as **Attachment B**.

18. The draft Tree Policy 2023, **Attachment A**, incorporates these improvements and other minor changes that ensure a simplified policy.

19. This report identifies and assesses the following reasonably practicable options for assessing the matter as required by section 77 of the Local Government Act 2002.

20. Option 1 Recommend the draft Tree Policy 2023 for public feedback with the recommended changes.

*Advantages:*

- The District will have a more relevant, user-friendly policy that will ensure the existing public trees and new tree planting meet the needs of the community, can provide for growth, and will continue to be cared for and enhanced.
- The draft Tree Policy 2023 will ensure improved protection and management of QLDC trees.

*Disadvantages:*

- Some people may not be supportive of the proposed changes.
- Tree scenarios may arise that are not covered within the policy.

21. Option 2 Do not recommend the draft Tree Policy 2023 for public feedback.

*Advantages:*

- None

*Disadvantages:*

- Members of the public will not get an opportunity to input on proposed changes.

- The current Tree Policy 2022 does not address the challenges as set out above and several aspects of the policy will remain confusing.

22. This report recommends **Option 1** for addressing the matter as it will ensure a clearer policy direction for the protection and management of QLDC trees for both council staff and the public.

#### Consultation Process | Hātepe Matapaki

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#### Significance and Engagement | Te Whakamahi i kā Whakaaro Hiraka

23. This matter is of medium significance, as determined by reference to the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy because it involves a high level of community interest.

#### Risk and Mitigations | Kā Raru Tūpono me kā Whakamaurutaka

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24. This matter relates to the Community & Wellbeing risk category. It is associated with RISK00009 Current and future development needs of the community (including environmental protection), as documented in the Council's risk register. The risk is classed as moderate within the [QLDC Risk Register](#).

25. The recommended option considered above mitigates the risk by providing a current and relevant policy that provides clear guidance for how tree decisions and canopy will be met.

#### Financial Implications | Kā Riteka ā-Pūtea

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26. There will be no immediate impacts to the Annual or long-term plans. here should be workflow streamline improvements for processing tree works applications.

#### Council Effects and Views | Kā Whakaaweawe me kā Tirohaka a te Kaunihera

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27. The following Council policies, strategies and bylaws were considered:

- Reserves Act 1977
- QLDC Vision Beyond 2050
- QLDC Tree Policy 2022
- QLDC Climate & Biodiversity Plan 2022
- Local Government Act 2002
- Parks & Open Spaces Strategy 2021

Refer to online documents here: <http://www.qldc.govt.nz/policies>

28. The recommended option is consistent with the principles set out in the named policies.

This matter is not included in the Ten Year Plan/Annual Plan and will not have any impact on it. There is a risk of increased public and internal project costs due to requiring more accurate tree survey data and

minimum replacement planting, which may be offset by the quality of the outcomes. There may be internal process time and communication efficiencies due to requiring information via the 'Tree Works Application' form.

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#### Local Government Act 2002 Purpose Provisions | Te Whakatureture 2002 o te Kāwanataka ā-Kīaka

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#### 29. The recommended option:

- Section 10 of the Local Government Act 2002 states the purpose of local government is (a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and (b) to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities in the present and for the future. As such, the recommendation in this report is appropriate and within the ambit of Section 10 of the Act;
- Can be implemented through current funding under the Ten-Year Plan and Annual Plan;
- Is consistent with the Council's plans and policies; and
- Would not alter significantly the intended level of service provision for any significant activity undertaken by or on behalf of the Council or transfer the ownership or control of a strategic asset to or from the Council.

#### Attachments | Kā Tāpirihaka

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A	Draft Tree Policy 2023
B	Table of changes made to the Tree Policy 2022