QLDC TREE POLICY 2023 (TITLE PAGE)

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TREE POLICY

Introduction

Trees are a vital part of our district's sustainable health and wellbeing. They provide wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, shade, and are part of our identity as an active outdoor adventure district with outstanding natural landscape values.

Trees can be significant landmarks, providing an immediate impression to visitors and generate ongoing associations for residents. Stunning natural scenery is a hallmark of the Queenstown Lakes District and trees are an integral part of the landscape. A healthy, abundant, and well-maintained treed environment is vital to the health and wellbeing of the district.

Trees make a significant contribution to the ecological environment. Many species would not be able to survive without the services trees provide, such as habitat or food sources.

The greatest benefits are derived from mature trees.

Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) provides a leadership role in the management of trees on Council land to maximise their social, cultural, environmental, and economic benefits for current and future generations. All landowners are encouraged to contribute to urban greening on their own land.

This Policy is aligned with other QLDC strategies including the QLDC Climate Action Plan, QLDC Vision Beyond 2050, the Parks and Open Space Strategy, the Queenstown Lakes Spatial Plan, and the requirements to maintain membership as a Tree City of the World.

Purpose

QLDC's Tree Policy provides guidance and direction on tree planting, maintenance, working around trees, and tree removals for trees within Council land. It applies to all tree requests that are outside of QLDC's Tree Maintenance Programme.

Policy scope

This Policy applies to all requests relating to trees on Council administered reserves, civic open spaces and other Council-owned property, including QLDC owned land which is licensed and leased to third parties (such as campgrounds), roads and the road reserve (including unformed legal roads). The Policy also applies to all land owned or leased by QLDC which may be designated by another Requiring Authority under the Resource Management Act.

This Policy does not apply to tree planting, maintenance, working around trees, and tree removals undertaken as part of the Council's Tree Maintenance Programme.

This Policy *does not* include trees located:

- On private land not owned or leased by QLDC
- On land within the State Highway corridor only (Waka Kotahi).
- On public land not owned by QLDC (e.g., Crown land, land administered by the Department of Conservation, Land Information New Zealand)

This Policy *does not* apply to the following trees:

- Wilding, noxious and pest plant species that were self-seeded
- Commercial forestry.

Objectives

The principal objective of this Policy is to provide guidance as well as consistency and clarity in decision making when considering requests for planting, maintaining, working around, removing, and replacing trees on Council land.

Objectives:

1. Protect existing trees and support tree planting on land owned or administered by QLDC to:
   a. sustain a high-quality tree environment and tree spaces,
   b. maintain a consistent canopy cover over time,
   c. support biodiversity, flora and fauna; and
   d. contribute to emissions reduction and mitigating climate change impacts.
2. Appropriate trees are planted in appropriate locations.
3. Best practice maintenance and tree protection measures are utilised.
4. Manage appropriate public safety risks from trees.

Policies

1.0 Tree planting

Tree planting is necessary to ensure long term sustainable benefits for the environment. Appropriate tree planting supports biodiversity, climate regulation and a quality-built environment by providing amenity, habitat, shade, a connection to nature, storm water regulation, flood mitigation, and by improving walkability in the urban environment.

Trees planting in the wrong locations, or the selection of incompatible species for the location, can however damage infrastructure, block drains, adversely shade properties and create hazards. Optimum benefits will be achieved by careful species selection and location appropriate to the planting site.

Tree Planting Policies:

1.1

Seek planting opportunities to deliver ongoing social, cultural, environmental, and economic benefits and ensure iconic treescapes are maintained.

1.2

Plant appropriate tree species in appropriate places, ensuring a balanced integration of native and exotic species where ecologically suitable.

1.3

Plan for succession planting in advance of removal of mature trees to ensure a continuity of trees and the benefits they provide.

1.4

Prioritise retaining existing mature trees and the incorporation of new tree planting and planting sites from the outset of the design process, for all projects that occur on QLDC land.

1.5

Require that the planting of new trees meet the minimum requirements of QLDC's Land Development and Subdivision Code of Practice.

1.6

Select quality stock for planting to support longevity and heritage value and incorporate eco-sourced nursery stock where possible.

1.7

Require a Licence to Occupy for the planting of any tree(s) by a private individual, unless otherwise agreed by Council through the Tree Works Application process.

1.8

Prohibit the planting of wilding exotic species in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 34 of the Queenstown Lakes District Plan and the Otago Regional Council Pest Management Plan.

1.9

Encourage opportunities to provide habitat for indigenous flora and fauna.

Community tree planting & activities

QLDC supports community care and ongoing stewardship of public open spaces. Community planting is a way residents can become directly involved with the care of their local reserves and neighbourhood.

Community Tree Planting Policies:

1.10
Encourage community involvement and support and enhance community planting and engagement opportunities.

1.11
Require prior approval for all community-initiated tree planting and removal.

Note: Community planting sites are subject to community agreements with QLDC.

Commemorative trees

Commemorative tree planting is generally undertaken to honour a significant person or event.

Policies:

1.12
Ensure commemorative tree planting is undertaken to honour a person or event of significance to the local community.

1.13
Ensure the tree location and species are suitable for the site.

1.14
Ensure the tree species and location are relevant to the commemoration and contribute to the amenity of the surrounding environment.

1.15
Acknowledge that while Council will make every effort to retain a commemorative tree, commemorative trees may be removed.

2.0 Maintenance and Risk Management

Tree maintenance

QLDC has a duty to optimise the quality of trees and manage their safety pragmatically while considering their long-term maintenance requirements and health.

QLDC undertakes an ongoing Tree Maintenance Programme that assesses and identifies the need for maintenance and risk management. Requests are sometimes made for additional maintenance or risk management and these requests are addressed by the below policies.

Tree Maintenance Policies:

2.1
Maintain trees in their natural form as this is best for tree health.

2.2
Prohibit topping of trees due to it being internationally recognised as unsound arboricultural practice.

Note: Tree topping is universally acknowledged by both New Zealand and the international arboriculture industry as one of the most detrimental pruning methods for healthy trees.

2.3
Require all pruning to be undertaken by, or under the supervision of a works arborist or a qualified arborist.

2.4
Avoid pruning for enhancement of views.

2.5
Consider pruning, branch removal or targeted canopy reductions to alleviate boundary encroachment or significant adverse shading, where this will not negatively affect the health or structural integrity of the tree or the environmental, aesthetic, landscape or amenity benefits provided by the tree.

2.6
Maintain tree canopy clearances over footpaths, cycle ways, tracks and trails, carriageways, vehicle crossings, on-street car parks, overhead utility lines and infrastructure where it is practical to do so, including to maintain vehicle and pedestrian sightlines. Where pruning is likely to cause long or short-term detriment to the tree, Council will prune the tree only to the extent required for public safety.

Note: Trees will be maintained to a minimum of 4.5m height clearance above a road and 3m height clearance above a cycle path that is next to a road or highway, as per the QLDC Subdivision Code of Practice.

2.7
Utilise the Visual Tree Assessment and recognised arboricultural industry Tree Risk Assessment methodologies, such as Quantified Tree Risk Assessment, to manage the risk posed by trees in a proportionate and practical way.

2.8
Customise maintenance for trees protected by the District Plan and for trees of significance that are likely to be worthy of protected status in the future.

3.0 Protection

Development, Construction and Activities around trees

Work around trees that is not managed appropriately can be detrimental to their health or structural integrity. This can also occur where construction and activities, such as regular events, are undertaken around trees that are not managed appropriately.
Consideration of a licence, permit or lease for the undertaking of development and other activities, including events will also take into account the below policies to ensure that the health and structural integrity of trees are maintained.

A 'Tree Works Application' form must be submitted for all works around tree root zones.

Note: A Tree Works Application form can be found on the QLDC website or requested from QLDC Customer Services, or the Parks & Reserves Department.
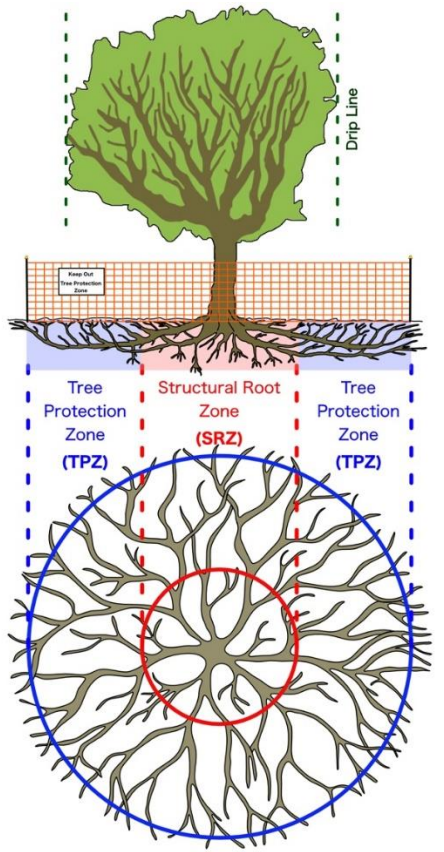
Policy:

3.1
Require a Tree Protection Management Plan (TPMP) for any development, activity or work proposed near a public tree where the works are likely to impact the tree or its root zone prior to works commencing.

3.2
Recognise that any above or below groundwork or activity within the Tree Protection Zone (TPZ) and the Structural Root Zone (SRZ) can potentially damage the tree's root system and compromise tree health and stability.

Refer to Diagram 1 below.

Diagram 1: Tree Protection Zones.

Note: The TPZ is the combination of the root area and crown area requiring protection. TPZ = (12 x Diameter at Breast Height (DBH) + any need for crown protection.

3.3
Establish a Tree Protection Zone (TPZ) in accordance with any required Tree Protection Management Plan (TPMP) for the duration of any works.

3.4
Avoid works within the Structural Root Zone (SRZ) unless there are exceptional circumstances.

3.5
Require arborist assessment where works within a Tree Protection Zone (TPZ) are to exceed 10% of the area of the TPZ.

3.6
Consider root pruning of trees only where it is associated with the installation, repair, renewal, or maintenance of assets near a tree subject to TPZ being followed. This may include arborist consultation during the design, implementation and completion of a project or activity.

3.7
Seek compensation and or replacement where works around trees result in damage or loss to trees in accordance with Policies 4.19, 5.1 and 5.2 below. Damage or loss includes but is not limited to:

- Death or decline of tree(s) health
- Physical damage to the tree(s)

- Damage to the tree(s) roots and/or rooting environment including compaction or contamination of the soil
- Loss of environmental and ecological benefits provided by the tree.

Vandalism

QLDC takes damage, vandalism and unauthorised removal of public trees very seriously. QLDC will investigate and enforce under the appropriate legislation, including the Reserves Act (1977) and the Local Government Act (2002). Matters will be referred to the Police when appropriate.

Note: Damage includes ring barking caused by slacklining.

4.0 Removal

Removal of trees

The benefits of trees must be sustained for future generations.Tree removal is therefore a last resort option.

The removal of trees is subject to the replacement requirements of Section 5.0 of this Policy.

A 'Tree Works Application' form must be submitted for all tree removals.

Note: A Tree Works Application form can be found on the QLDC website or requested from QLDC Customer Services, or the Parks & Reserves Department.

Policy:

4.1
Allow removal of trees in a state of irreversible decline, that are dead and/or which are structurally unsound, as determined by a Council arborist, where they pose an unacceptable risk to the public or property.

4.2
Allow removal of trees that pose an unacceptable safety risk to the public or property that cannot be mitigated through pruning or other engineering solutions.

Note: The unacceptable safety risk is determined by using the Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) or other recognised arboricultural industry Tree Risk Assessment methodology.

4.3
Consider tree removal where the tree is causing, or likely to cause, significant damage to buildings, services or property (both public or privately owned), and the damage cannot be reasonably rectified or mitigated except by removing the tree.

4.4
Consider removal of trees that are impeding consented legal access only when all other alternatives have been explored and are not viable.

4.5
Approve tree removal to carry out repairs or replace underground infrastructure only where all available alternatives have been explored and are not viable.

4.6
Consider tree removal for public works only where all available alternatives have been explored and are not viable.

4.7

Consider tree removal where the necessary pruning clearances for overhead electrical lines (as required by the relevant 'hazards from trees' regulations) are not able to be achieved without causing long-term detriment to the tree and no alternative to removal can be reached with the network utility operator.

Note: Electricity Act (1992) takes precedence over this Tree Policy.

4.8

Allow tree removal in emergency situations where the removal is absolutely necessary for immediate access to critical infrastructure. This will only be undertaken where failure to access critical infrastructure will lead to an unacceptable risk to public health, significant property damage or harm to personnel.

4.9

Consider removal of healthy and structurally sound trees that are pest or noxious species where they are assessed as being sources of disruption to a specific ecosystem or to manage or prevent the spread of pests and diseases. This includes poisoning of pest trees.

4.10

Restrict removal of trees for health reasons unless there is certification from a medical practitioner or a clinical immunologist confirming that the tree(s) is/are the sole cause of the Applicant(s) condition, and that removal of the tree(s) is the sole option available for improving the applicant(s) condition.

4.11

Prohibit tree removals for the following reasons:
- To minimise obstruction of views
- To minimise obstruction of commercial or advertising signage
- To reduce leaf or fruit litter, blossom, bird droppings and other debris
- To reduce shading
- For contributing to allergenic or irritant responses unless approved under section 4.10.

4.12

Require removal of unauthorised plantings where they do not meet the requirements of this Policy and recover the costs of the removal process where possible.

4.13

Avoid tree removal, other than in exceptional circumstances where the QLDC arborist has assessed the tree as being unsuitable for its location due to species type.

4.14

Ensure ongoing partnership between Council and community groups to manage wilding conifers in accordance with relevant wilding conifer control strategies.

4.15

Require planting and establishment of replacement trees prior to the removal of the existing tree(s) where possible, particularly where a significant tree(s) are proposed to be removed.

4.16

Undertake public consultation where a significant tree is proposed to be removed.

4.17

Require all tree removals to be undertaken by a suitably qualified works arborist or appropriately skilled contractor.

4.18

Ensure that the costs associated with the removal of trees are met by the Applicant.

4.19

Require financial compensation for the loss or removal of trees where they are not able to be replaced in accordance with the policies in Section 5.0 below. Payment is required prior to the removal of the tree.

Note: The Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture's (RNZIH) Standard Tree Evaluation Method (STEM) shall be used as the standard for identifying the required financial compensation, or any other methodology that QLDC adopts in future for valuing trees.

5.0   Tree replacement

This section of the Policy relates to the replacement of trees that are approved to be removed under Section 4.0 of the Policy.

QLDC is committed to ensuring that the canopy cover provided by trees on Council owned and administered land is not only replaced, but appropriate character and stature are accommodated to maintain and enhance a quality treescapes for future generations.

Policy:

5.1
Require the planting of a minimum of two new trees for every tree removed, with the projected canopy cover replacing what is lost within 20 years. This means more than two trees may be required.

Note: Removal and 2-for-1 tree replacement may be dependent upon the submission and acceptance of detailed landscape and planting plans.

5.2
Require the planting of replacement trees in the following locations, in order of priority:

Removals within road reserves:
(1) In the same road corridor where the tree was removed where this is practicable; or
(2) At another location determined by the QLDC arborist.

Removals on land owned or administered by QLDC:
(1) On the same land or in the reserve where the tree was removed where this is practicable; or

(2) At another location determined by the QLDC arborist.

Note: Applicants must ensure trees are successfully established during the specified maintenance period. Unsuccessful planting will necessitate replacement until conditions in the application are met.

Note: Requirement for replacement planting of large groups of wilding pest species, such as works undertaken by Conifer control groups, will be determined by the amenity values the trees provided.

6.0   Application, Decision Making and Undertaking Works

Application

Enquiries regarding public trees are dealt with by Parks Officers, including the Council Arborist.

A 'Tree Works Application' form must be submitted for any work around tree requests, prior to work commencing.

Note: A Tree Works Application form can be found on the QLDC website or requested from QLDC Customer Services, or the Parks & Reserves Department.

Note: Further information and guidance can be found in our Procedure for Working Around Trees in the Queenstown Lakes District document

Decision Making

Decision-making considers:

- The objectives and policies of this document
- The significance of the tree/s
- Outcomes of any consultation with neighbours, community associations or other relevant stakeholders for the removal of significant trees
- Relevant QLDC strategies, such as Vision Beyond 2050, the Climate and Biodiversity Action Plan and biodiversity needs.

Applications for removal of significant trees will require public consultation, a replanting plan and may require a decision by the Community and Services Committee or Wānaka Upper Clutha Community Board.

Decision making will follow the Council delegations.

Undertaking Works

Responsibility for works

It is at Council's discretion as to whether Council or the applicant's works arborist or appropriately skilled contractor undertakes the approved works.

Costs

If the Council is undertaking the works on behalf of the applicant, the requirement to pay for all of the costs is at the discretion of the Parks Manager or relevant Committee or Council subject to the following guidance:

- Council will require the applicant meet(s) all the financial costs where the benefits of the works are considered to be solely beneficial to the property owner(s). Expected costs will be provided prior to any works being undertaken.

- All required reporting and consents must be provided by the Applicant at the Applicant's cost.

- Council will invoice for costs.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Amenity	Means those natural or physical qualities and characteristics of an area that contribute to people's appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes. Includes usefulness, not just 'beauty'.
Canopy cover	The area taken up by the tree canopy.
Commemorative trees	Includes memorial and sponsored trees.
Commercial forestry	Commercial Forestry is as defined by the Resource Management (National Environmental Standard for Commercial Forestry) Regulations 2023.
Council/we/our/us	Means the Queenstown Lakes District Council or its authorised delegate.
Council land	Land that council owns or administers
Critical infrastructure	Infrastructure or assets that if damaged or obstructed would create a hazard to widespread public health, safety, or wellbeing.
Eco-sourced	Refers to the use of locally sourced plant material for restoration plantings. Eco-sourced plants are those grown from seeds collected from naturally occurring remnant vegetation in the same region as those to be planted.
Emergency	Means a situation that: 1. is the result of any happening, whether natural or otherwise, including any accident, explosion, earthquake, eruption, tsunami, land movement, flood, storm, tornado, cyclone, fire, leakage or spillage of any dangerous gas or substance, technological failure, infestation, plague, epidemic, failure of or disruption to an emergency service or a lifeline utility, or actual or imminent attack or warlike act; and

	2. causes or may cause loss of life or injury or illness or distress or in any way endangers the safety of the public or property in New Zealand or any part of New Zealand
Exotic	Species which are not indigenous to New Zealand.
Irreversible decline	The decline of a tree's health which is to such an extent that it is unlikely to recover.
Mature	A tree reaching its ultimate potential size, whose growth rate is slowing down, with limited potential for any significant increase in size.
Native	Species which are indigenous to New Zealand.
Noxious and pest plants	The pest species identified in QLDC's District Plan Wilding Exotic Trees Chapter (Chapter 34 of the Proposed District Plan) and Otago Regional Council Pest Management Plan.
Provide habitat for indigenous flora and fauna	This could be achieved by allowing dead trees to remain or keeping trees with cavities. The retention of dead wood and stubs could also be seen as providing habitat for indigenous flora and fauna.
Public consultation	An opportunity for the public to have input on a proposed significant tree removal via QLDC's communication channels. A description of the tree removal request will be published on Let's Talk, along with a feedback form, for one month. Once consultation closes, the feedback will be collated and included in a report to be considered by the Community and Services Committee or Wānaka Upper Clutha Community Board, who have the delegation to approve or decline tree removal requests.
QLDC Land Development and Subdivision Code of Practice	Is a set of guidelines determining the standards required for the creation or enhancement of infrastructure assets either owned or to be owned by Council. Includes provisions for the protection and planting of trees.

Qualified arborist	A person who has a recognised arboricultural qualification (minimum of NZQA Level 4 Certificate in Arboriculture or similar), industry experience and is competent to carry out a specified task.
Quantified Tree Risk Assessment	The Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) is a systematic method used to calculate the annual risk of harm resulting from tree or branch failure. By combining the likelihood and consequences of failure, it produces advisory thresholds. These thresholds enable clear prioritisation and decision-making in tree management.
Significant damage	Damage that renders a place or a part unusable for the purpose it was intended.
Significant tree	The 'significance' of a tree is determined by the Council arborist and/or Parks Officers based on the following factors: • Age and condition, including long-term life expectancy; • Amenity, heritage (including whether it is a commemorative tree), location, whether it is part of a group of trees, and landscape and wildlife effects; • Historical, cultural, scientific or botanical significance; • Special significance to Tangata Whenua; and • Whether the tree has been identified in the District Plan or a Reserve Management Plan or has been listed as a Notable Tree on the NZ Tree Register. *Note: The New Zealand Tree Register is supported by the NZ Arboricultural Association and the NZ Institute of Horticulture. There are 152 registered trees in Otago and of these, 16 are in Queenstown, 14 in Wānaka, 3 in Arrowtown, 3 in Lake Hayes and 2 in Frankton. As with the rest of the policy, Council's Tree Policy would only apply to a registered notable tree if it was in a Council reserve or on council road or land.*
Structural Root Zone (SRZ)	Is an area considered essential for tree stability. If larger roots in this area are damaged, it is likely to compromise the tree's structural integrity and become compromised.
Structurally unsound	The tree's structure has been compromised to a level which is it likely to fail during normal weather conditions.
Targeted canopy reduction	The targeted pruning of selected branches within the tree canopy to shorten their length.

Topping	Tree topping involves cutting off tree tops or major branches, leaving behind stubs or insufficient lateral branches. This practice leads to open wounds on the tree, increasing vulnerability to pests and diseases, and can result in decay and stability issues. Topping, while it may provide a short-term solution for lost views, ultimately exacerbates the issue by leading to more vigorous and problematic growth.
Tree	A single woody plant with the potential to reach at least 5 metres in height and have a stem diameter of, or exceeding, 150mm measured at 1.4 metres above ground. *There are certain species, which could include fruit, nut and endemic species, which may not always fit within the definition of a tree. In these situations the decision as to whether or not to include the species, or individual tree, as a tree will be determined by a Council arborist.* *Assets that are currently recorded as trees but do not fit the definition of a Tree will continue to be managed as a Tree throughout their life cycle until they are replaced.*
Tree Maintenance Programme	QLDC has a Tree Maintenance Programme which includes: • Visual tree inspection, maintenance and pruning of trees on a scheduled programme • Strategic removal and planting planning informed by the objectives of this Policy
Tree Protection Management Plan (TPMP)	Where it is not possible to complete the works without encroaching within the Tree Protection Zone, a proposed methodology in the form of a Tree Management Plan shall be produced by a technician arborist as per the specifications within the relevant sections of the CSS.
Tree Protection Zone (TPZ)	The combination of the root area and crown area requiring protection. TPZ = (12 x Diameter at Breast Height (DBH) + any need for crown protection.
Value of a tree	A monetary value determined by a council recognised system such as the Standard Tree Evaluation Method 1996 (STEM) *or any other methodology that QLDC adopts in future for valuing trees, such as iTree Eco and City of Melbourne (CoM) methods.*
Visual Tree Assessment	Visual Tree Assessment (VTA) is an inspection method used by arborists to assess a tree's health and structural stability. Through a visual examination, it identifies

	potential signs of disease, decay, or weaknesses that might indicate hazards, often serving as the initial step in tree risk evaluation and management.
Wilding tree	A self-sown tree growing wild or escaped from cultivation and growing wild and not planted for any specific purpose (eg shade or wind screening).
Works arborist	Means a person who: a) by possession of a recognised arboricultural degree, diploma or certificate and on the job experience, is familiar with the tasks, equipment and hazards involved in arboricultural operations; and b) has demonstrated competency to Level 4 NZQA Certificate in Horticulture Services (Arboriculture) standard (or be of an equivalent arboricultural standard).
Works within the Structural Root Zone	Includes paving, excavation, trenching, ground level changes, storage of materials, or chemicals, vehicle traffic and parking, soil compaction and construction activity, whether on the same site or not as the tree.
Unacceptable risk	A level of risk determined through a recognised council approved method (e.g. Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) or Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ)) which is elevated beyond what the Council considers acceptable.

Other tree, vegetation and wildlife related policy and resources:

- Local Government Act (2002)
- Reserves Act (1977)
- Wildlife Act (1953)
- Electricity Act (1992)
- Civil Defence Emergency Act (2002)
- National Policy Statement - Biodiversity
- National Policy Statement - Fresh Water
- Otago Regional Council Pest Management Plan
- Otago Regional Council Biodiversity Strategy
- QLDC District Plan - Protected Trees Chapter
- QLDC District Plan - Wilding Exotic Trees Chapter
- QLDC Vision Beyond 2050
- QLDC Wilding Control Strategy
- QLDC Climate & Biodiversity Plan
- QLDC Reserve Management Plans
- QLDC Generic Tree Protection Management Plans & Working Around Trees
- QLDC Plaques & Memorials Policy
- QLDC Cemeteries Handbook
- QLDC Spray Policy

- QLDC Verge Policy
- QLDC's Tree Risk Management Procedure
- QLDC Land Development and Subdivision Code of Practice
- QLDC Trail Design Standards & Specifications
- QLDC maps