



Grounds & Tree Maintenance Policy

AST-POL-23-02

December 2024

Draft

0.	DOCUMENT CONTROL		
0.1	SUMMARY		
	The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Torus provides an efficient and effective grounds and tree maintenance service which represents value for money and balances risk and with customer and neighbourhood needs.		
0.2	DOCUMENT INFORMATION		
Role	Name/Position	Date	
Kevin Williams	Group Head Asset Maintenance	~December 2024	
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2.0	20 th July 2020	Colin Knox	Update following consultation
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1. Introduction

Torus is a well-established housing provider in the Northwest with stock, mainly located in Liverpool, St Helens, and Warrington. Torus is the largest landlords in the Northwest, with a stock portfolio of more than 40,000 properties, supporting around than 70,000 customers and their communities.

Torus is committed to ensuring Neighbourhoods, estates, schemes, and shared areas are attractive and safe places to live. Torus wants customers to be proud of their Neighbourhoods and will strive to balance the requirements of health and safety regulations and legislation, while maximising the opportunities for customers to enjoy grounds and external communal spaces.

Torus will ensure, as part of its commitment to fire safety and risk management, that all external communal areas are inspected regularly.

Torus will work closely with Local Authorities across our heartlands, other registered providers, private landlords and other responsible agencies to ensure that Neighbourhoods are well managed.

Torus is regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing and acknowledges and accepts its responsibilities under the primary legislation applicable to this policy: namely the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, the Housing Act 2004 and HSE legislation applicable to the services being delivered under the Grounds and Tree Maintenance Policy.

2. Scope of Policy

This policy ensures the effective maintenance of the grounds and trees managed by Torus. This applies to all properties within Torus Neighbourhoods and estates, across all Torus heartlands including leaseholders who live in mixed tenure schemes. The policy also provides guidance and instructions for all Torus employees and contractors, whilst undertaking associated contract work. This is with the aim of satisfying the service obligations and legal duties imposed on Torus.

Activities in relation to grounds and tree maintenance will conform to the requirements of the following key areas of legislation:

- The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974)
- The Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999)
- Occupiers Liability Act (1957 and 1984)
- The Countryside and Wildlife Act (1981)
- Highways Act (1985)
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions Act)
- Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER8 (PUWER))
- Work at Height Regulations 2005 (WAHR)

Maintenance programmes and activities will be completed to the best horticultural practice, the creation and maintenance of visually pleasing horticultural features and the maintenance of rigorous standards of discipline, cleanliness, and tidiness.

Torus is committed, as far as practical, to ensure compliance with statutory requirements and to protect the safety of tenants, residents, employees, and others who might use be adversely affected by its actions and / or omissions.

Torus is committed to the continual improvement of service delivery and performance across the business and will encourage business partners, stakeholders, and members of the wider community to actively support this objective.

3. Statement of Intent

Torus has set a target of 100% compliance on all associated grounds services and 95% for tree maintenance services. It is assumed there will be no difficulties accessing external and communal spaces.

Torus is responsible for the risk management and maintenance of trees and external communal areas and open spaces. A planned maintenance programme will be prepared each year and will be regularly monitored and updated to reflect efficient and effective performance as required.

- a. Torus will ensure that all external communal areas are managed effectively and kept free from obstructions or hazards to protect the health and safety of residents and other users of our buildings.
- b. Torus will remove the risk of items causing an obstruction to access or exit routes in the event of an emergency.
- c. Torus will maintain the appearance of our Neighbourhoods by effectively dealing with litter, fly-tipping or anything that would cause a negative environmental impact.
- d. Torus will carry out estate inspections to encourage customers and partners to participate.
- e. Torus will work to preserve and enhance the landscape, amenity, and wildlife value of the Torus tree stock. All tree work will be in accordance with best Arboricultural industry practice and all relevant legislation.
- f. Torus will undertake a programme surveys and inspections to all tree stock a minimum of every 5 years, however frequencies will be determined on tree-by basis, based on assessed risk.
- g. Torus will use a nationally recognised tree risk assessment model to categorise and prioritise any remedial work identified during surveys and inspections.
- h. Torus will ensure all detailed tree surveys to open spaces and condition reports are undertaken by suitably trained and competent individuals.
- i. Torus will ensure only suitable competent and trained individuals undertake the work activities. All tree work will be undertaken by NPTC qualified persons working to BS 3998 and the relevant AFAG guidelines.
- j. Torus will recycle as much tree waste as possible onto shrub beds.
- k. Torus will hold accurate maintenance records and dates on a tree management application.
- l. Torus will ensure there is a robust process in place to investigate and manage all RIDDORs issued about all working practices delivered under the ground and tree maintenance service, Grounds Maintenance Services

Torus will carry out regular block inspections to ensure external communal areas are well maintained and free from hazards. Where issues are caused on land not owned or managed by Torus and this directly impacts on Torus Customers, Torus will take a proactive role to resolve these issues by working with Customers and other agencies.

4. Grounds Maintenance Services

Trees help support good health and wellbeing, and contribute to local, national, and global environmental sustainability. Torus acknowledges that trees within the built environment can introduce risk, however, will adopt a tree management approach that mitigates and balances the low level of risk with the environmental and quality of life benefits they provide.

Trees within private gardens of Torus Tenants are the responsibility of tenants to maintain within their tenancy agreement under garden maintenance, however Torus will maintain trees on their behalf where there is an increased safety risk or threat to property. This may either be as part of a planned works programme, or responsively as a concern is identified.

Torus will carry out tree surveys every 5 years, or more frequently depending on the location and condition of each tree or tree group. Where issues are caused by trees not owned or managed by Torus and this directly impacts on Torus customers, Torus will take a pro-active role to resolve these issues by working with customers and other agencies. Torus will work to preserve and enhance the landscape, amenity, and wildlife value of the tree stock.

4.1 Schedule of activity

Torus will implement a performance schedule system which will cover all locations for the delivery of grounds maintenance by the appointed service provider.

Services will include all aspects of grounds maintenance from leaf collection/disposal, shrub & lawn management etc. Torus will maintain communal grounds including regularly cutting grassed areas at scheduled intervals and keeping flower and shrub beds neat and tidy. Communal grounds include shared grassed areas, shrubs, and flower beds.

The frequency of services will be influenced by the season and reflected accordingly in the scope of works comprising the maintenance programme. Grounds maintenance annual programme will normally comprise the following activities / frequencies each month or period:

TASK	WINTER			SPRING / SUMMER						WINTER		
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC

Grass Cutting				1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2		
Leaf Clearance											1		
Grass Edging	1												
Litter Clearance	1	1		1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1
Herbicide Application		1						1					
Hedge Maintenance	1			1									

Shrub Border Maintenance	1	1	
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Additional work will be undertaken to address unforeseen aspects of work as and when required, with such being a scheduled item for financial management purposes. Torus will periodically review the performance of the ground’s maintenance service.

4.2 Communal external areas

Communal areas, even those immediately adjacent to a tenant’s property, are not an extension of an individual’s home. As such tenants should not use these areas for their personal effects.

Torus have a duty to ensure all tenants can escape our communal areas in an emergency. This means items which may cause a trip hazard, anything combustible or anything that could shatter must not be stored in our shared areas, even if they are outside a tenant’s front door.

Torus will remove and immediately dispose of items left in communal areas should they be deemed a hazard, a high fire risk or obstruct or block access and routes. The cost of removal will be billed to the owner responsible.

In addition, Torus will consider enforcement action will be taken under the terms of the tenancy or lease agreement.

4.3 Fly tipping

Fly tipping is a criminal offence. Where there are repeat incidents of fly tipping Torus shall work with the Local Authority partners in each of our heartlands to pursue prosecution.

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Local Authority has a duty to ensure that any land in their direct control, to which the public has access or any public highway, is kept clear of litter and refuse.

Where local authority land is adjacent to Torus schemes, Torus will use ‘estate inspections’ to monitor the cleanliness of the land and report any concerns directly to the Local Authority.

4.4 Landscaping

Shared garden or landscape facility for Customers will be maintained and kept tidy. This will be in line with the service contract agreed between our customers and the grounds maintenance contractor.

Torus will ensure all open grassed areas and communal lawns we own are cut regularly during the growing season, with grass cuttings left to mulch for environmental benefits. Torus will remove grass cuttings from sheltered schemes for elderly residents, and extra care schemes.

Torus will review all contractors’ performance at least annually regarding the ground maintenance service performance.

4.5 Winter Gritting and Snow Clearance

Torus will prioritise older people sheltered housing schemes and extra care schemes for gritting services and snow clearance in response to weather warnings. Gritting will be targeted to main access

pathways between internal communal facilities, individual external entrances, bin stores and to the scheme boundary, however Torus cannot guarantee that every pathway will be gritted.

Torus will respond to requests to grit non-priority locations on a case-by-case basis depending on the conditions, vulnerability of residents and availability of resources to ensure priority locations are completed. Completing responsive grit-spreading to a location does not imply that the location will be added to future gritting schedules.

Gritting and snow clearance will take place between usual grounds maintenance service hours (8 a.m. to 4.p.m. Monday to Friday and excluding national bank holidays).

Torus has a duty of care to employees and contractors in addition to residents, therefore in the event of extreme winter conditions gritting and snow clearance may not be provided, in which case residents of prioritised schemes will be informed via their supported housing channels.

5. Tree Maintenance Services

5.1 Risk Assessment and Survey Schedule

Torus will follow industry best practice guidelines to tree management as recommended by The National Tree Safety Group - Common Sense Risk Management of Trees, 2011. Frequency of planned tree surveys is determined by a zoning system to prioritise trees that pose a greater risk to people and property, based upon tree height, position and condition or circumstance.

Trees assessed within the highest three zones will be inspected within their recommended frequency and at least every 2 years. All trees in lower priority zones will be inspected at Arborist recommendations and will be at least every 5 years and will not include trees in tenanted gardens.

Torus will use a nationally recognised tree risk assessment methodology such as THREATS within tree surveys in order to prioritise any remedial works. Surveys will be completed by competent professionals with an Arboricultural degree or equivalent to a level 4 certification on the Arboriculture Association qualification scale. If the risk assessment methodology produces spikes in workload, zoning priorities will be used to determine priorities within overdue works, rather than complete in date order.

Individual tree records will record the history of activity against each tree or tree group and will be stored to form a tree management database that will provide performance and compliance data, including felled trees.

5.2 Responsive Inspections and Tree Work Requests

Torus will survey trees in individual gardens when a concern is raised by the tenant, a resident, Torus colleague or elected representative and the contact information indicates that the tree meets the following response criteria:

- Is within priority zones 1 – 3
- Diseased, in serious decline or dead
- Dangerous (for example, storm or wind damaged)
- Causing damage, or likely to cause damage e.g. branches touching a roof.
- Causing an obstruction to public footpath or highway

A responsive tree survey will be completed within 20 working days following the request. Trees that are at immediate risk of falling, or dropping large sections of wood will be attended to within 4 hours. Any recommended works meeting the response criteria above will be arranged by Torus within the timescales

provided by the Tree Surveyor. Any work recommendations that are deemed routine maintenance will be referred to the tenant to arrange works.

Responsive requests that concern damage to fencing, lawns, pathways and other landscaped surfaces will be assessed by a Responsive Repairs surveyor and any tree works necessary to enable responsive repairs will be completed by Torus.

5.3 Tree Nuisance

In striving to balance the benefits of trees with statutory requirements and residents' enjoyment of gardens and open spaces, Torus refers to legal precedent and as such will not arrange tree works for common nuisance from trees including:

- Effects on TV or mobile phone reception.
- Obstruction of views.
- Interference with private vegetation.
- Honeydew (dripping sap).
- Bird Droppings.
- Squirrels gaining access to properties from trees.
- Leaf, fruit, or flower fall.
- Smells generated by trees
- Loss of light/reduced light to properties.
- Effects on TV or mobile phone reception.
- Obstruction of views.
- Interference with private vegetation.
- Loss of light/reduced light to properties.
- Branches overhanging from neighbouring gardens or land

5.4 Tree Work Exemption

5.5 Individual Household needs

Torus recognises that some tenants may need additional support with routine tree maintenance or tree nuisance based on individual household need. In this case Torus will support tenants based on medical advice and recommendations from other relevant professionals such as Occupational Therapist where appropriate, and a range of tenancy support measures will be considered including tree works.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

The Board

Overall governance responsibility for ensuring the Policy is fully implemented to ensure full compliance with the required standards. As such the Board will formally approve this policy and review it every two years (or sooner if there is a change in regulation, legislation, or approved codes of practice).

Board will receive regular updates on the implementation of the policy and performance along with notification of any non-compliance issue which is identified. This is so they have assurance that the policy is operating effectively in practice.

6.1 Chief Executive

Responsible for effective operation of this policy across Torus and will ensure that effective procedures are developed to implement the policy within Torus. The CE will also be responsible for ensuring adequate resources are made available to both develop and implement appropriate procedures and training, enabling responsibilities to be effectively delegated to key personnel as described in their statement of intent and key responsibilities.

6.2 Chief Operating Officer

Responsible for the effective operation of this policy across Torus and ensure that effective procedures are developed to implement the policy within the Torus. They will also ensure that adequate resources are made available to both develop and implement appropriate procedures, enabling responsibilities to be effectively delegated and that key personnel have received training.

6.3 Group Assets Director

Responsible for ensuring that this policy and the associated procedures are robust and effective and to regularly confirm that the persons currently in roles of responsibility can commit to the statements of intent. They will report to the Chief Operating Officer on all service delivery aspects of this policy relating to these properties. They will act as an interface with Executive and Operational Management Teams.

6.4 Group Head of Asset Maintenance

Responsible for the operational management and for day-to-day performance and budget management and to ensure suitable skills and resources are made available to deliver ground and tree maintenance and management programmes. They will monitor the quality of services provided by contractors, ensuring compliance with contract conditions.

6.5 Asset Maintenance Management Team

Responsible for policy setting, procurement of competent contractors, quality analysis, assurance and compliance for grounds maintenance work carried out for Torus. They will hold appropriate competencies and monitor the performance and quality of services provided by contractors, ensuring compliance with contract conditions for all work undertaken. They will provide day-to-day performance management and ensure suitable skills and resources are made available to deliver management and maintenance.

They will ensure systems and procedures are in place across all Torus work streams, and will develop effective management information systems, establish, monitor, and review performance indicators for effective ground and tree management. They will verify and ensure that all parties engaged in ground and tree maintenance works are suitably qualified and competent.

6.6 Group Housing Director

To support the effective delivery of grounds and tree maintenance programmes and ensure that end users, staff, and tenants of Torus properties in supported housing and properties designated for older people adhere to the requirements of this policy.

Ensure that their managers and team(s) monitor the correct operation of grounds and tree

maintenance services and report any issues as appropriate to Assets Management Team and/or appointed contractors and suppliers. To seek further advice from either the Assets Management Team or Safety Team where specific assistance is required.

6.7 Main Contractor

Responsible for ensuring and reporting on all relevant servicing and maintenance delivery aspects of this policy in relation to the work they are contracted to provide. They will ensure effective delivery of this policy through safe systems of work.

6.8 Heads of Service and Torus Managers

- Ensure they and their staff are aware of this policy and its content - then comply with it
- Responsible for ensuring the implementation and monitoring of this policy as appropriate throughout their directorates / service areas.
- Responsible for ensuring the implementation and monitoring of any applicable recommendations arising from grounds and tree maintenance in their areas of responsibility.
- Each of their teams is aware of any grounds and tree maintenance risks in the areas in which they operate.
- Ensure training is provided for teams. Ensure attendance is monitored.
- Ensure incidents and 'near misses' are reported as per Torus' agreed protocol and are fully investigated – initially by their managers but in conjunction with the Safety Team and/or Asset Management team as appropriate.

7. Competent Persons and Arrangements

7.1 Qualifying Contractors and Operatives

This relates to the duties placed on Torus by the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, section 3(1) Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and other associated legislation. Torus must ensure that its employees, or the appointed contractors it uses, are suitably qualified and have competencies in the categories of work they undertake. Before any work is done, the contractor must have procedures in place for suitable recruitment, induction, and probationary periods, along with carrying out HSE checks for outstanding enforcement notices (improvement or prohibition).

Torus will appoint a suitable 'main contractor' who will have appropriately trained and skilled staff to carry out various works activities covered by this policy. All of Torus's contractors and sub-contractors will have been financially vetted and will have signed up to Torus's policies and procedures or produced their own policies and procedures in respect of confidentiality, data protection, Health & Safety, Equality and Diversity and code of conduct and will be approved by Torus. Torus will work within the principles of partnering with all its contractors to explore innovative and best practice initiatives such as standardisation, value for money and joint procurement methods.

All tree maintenance work will be carried out by NPTC qualified arborists. All equipment will be

suitable for the use for which it is intended and will be inspected and maintained in accordance with current legislation.

All work will be carried out in compliance with relevant British Standards for grounds and tree maintenance activities.

7.2 Quality Control ('QC')

Torus will adopt a risk-based approach to QC with findings documented and action taken. This will be done by undertaking a combination of post-completed work in progress and desktop/visual inspections, which will ensure work carried out on behalf of Torus is carried out to industry standards. The results of these inspections will culminate in regular Quality Control Reports and shared with contractors at Quality Control meetings.

QC Inspections will be on a risk-based approach as above and include the following:

- 1.Assets Team quality control checks (post-completed, work in progress and desktop/visual audits) on a minimum of 1% of the work
- 2.Service provider (post-completed and work in progress) quality control checks on a minimum of 10% of the work and includes subcontracted work.
- 3.Customer satisfaction survey.

8. Performance Reporting

Torus will control and monitor grounds and tree maintenance with performance reports and KPI's.

Performance information will as a minimum be produced and monitored at the Repairs & Maintenance Performance Meetings which are held monthly.

Performance may also be reported quarterly to the Landlord Operations Committee, who in turn provide feedback to the operational teams. The Committee will also be involved in the review and development of this policy.

Performance indicators will be monitored, reviewed, and amended regularly to ensure they are relevant and appropriate.

9. Issues of service failure and non-compliance

Torus will monitor service delivery and performance and ensure appropriate courses of corrective action are implemented to address any issues of service failure and non-compliance.

Torus will ensure there is a robust process in place for the management of any follow-up work required following the completion of surveys and inspections. Torus will ensure that there is a robust process

in place to collate and store any warning notices and all associated records of completed remedial works.

10. Training and Awareness

This policy and the procedures that support it will be, where appropriate, subject to a range of training across Torus and will involve all relevant stakeholders. The training will be bespoke to the individual stakeholders and refresher training will be provided as appropriate.

11. Diversity & Inclusion

A key aim of the Torus approach to diversity and inclusion is to ensure that it is embedded in service delivery policies and procedures.

In recognition of this Torus aim to deliver services that are.

- relevant and fully accessible to all
- tailored to meet both the specific needs of the individual, including those with additional support needs, and the diverse needs of the wider community.
- compliant with all aspects of Equality and Diversity legislation

12. Monitoring and Review

The Torus Asset Maintenance Team is responsible for reviewing this policy as a minimum on a biennial basis, or prior to this where legislative change or amended work practices are introduced, or to comply with best practice.

Review date: December 2024

Prepared by:

name: Kevin Williams
role: Interim Group Head Asset Maintenance

signed:

date:

Reviewed by:

name: Margaret Goddard
role: Group Assets Director

signed:

date:

13. Appendices

Appendix 1

Performance information will as a minimum be produced and monitored at an operational management level each month. Key performance indicators will be provided at Executive Management Team level monthly and to the Landlord Operations Committee on a quarterly basis.

Performance indicators will be monitored, reviewed, and amended regularly to ensure they are relevant and appropriate. Typically, they will consist of the following measures:

Grounds maintenance - % of pre-planned grounds maintenance activities completed against programme
Trees - % of pre-planned programme surveys and inspections completed within target date - Completed Vs due
Trees - % of identified remedial actions completed within target period - Completed Vs due
All assets - RIDDORs - total number of RIDDORs within the reporting period

Where performance is non-compliant / below target, a narrative explanation will provide:

- Explanation of Current Performance

- Corrective Action to be Taken.
- Impact of Actions and Timescale

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