

NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET – TUESDAY, 28 OCTOBER 2025



Title of Report	FORMER COUNCIL OFFICES – REMOVAL OF TREES	
Presented by	Councillor Andrew Woodman Housing, Property and Customer Services Portfolio Holder <div style="text-align: right;">PH Briefed <input type="checkbox" value="Y"/></div>	
Background Papers	None	Public Report: Yes
		Key Decision: No
Financial Implications	No new implications – contingency for tree felling has already been included in the Whitwick Road Council Offices demolition contract sum and the contract sum is within budget.	
	Signed off by the Section 151 Officer: Yes	
Legal Implications	The trees are not listed and there are no legal restrictions on their removal.	
	Signed off by the Monitoring Officer: Yes	
Staffing and Corporate Implications	Management of the tree removal can be absorbed within the existing staff resource allocated to the Council Offices demolition project.	
	Signed off by the Head of Paid Service: Yes	
Purpose of Report	To seek Cabinet confirmation that they wish to proceed with the removal of the Lombardy Poplar trees shown in the area edged red on the plan attached to this paper.	
Reason for Decision	Managing and maintaining health and safety on Council owned land.	
Recommendations	THAT CABINET: APPROVES THE REMOVAL OF TREES SHOWN WITHIN THE AREA EDGED RED ON THE ATTACHED PLAN AT THE FORMER COUNCIL OFFICES, WHITWICK ROAD, COALVILLE.	

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The site of the former council offices on Whitwick Road Coalville contains a significant number of mature and semi mature trees, bushes and planted areas. A number of these planted areas are adjacent to the external walls of the former office building and will not be able to be saved when the offices are demolished.
- 1.2 Many of the other mature trees on the site are positioned far enough away from the building that they are unlikely to be adversely impacted by the demolition works. It is hoped that it will be feasible for these trees to be retained as part of any redevelopment of the former site. Visuals due to be unveiled in early October 2025 as part of the public engagement around the proposed redevelopment will seek to show this.
- 1.3 A row of 27 Lombardy Poplars runs parallel to Whitwick Road along the frontage of the former offices approximately 10 metres from the front wall of the building. These poplars are understood to have been present since before the construction of the council offices. The poplars have been regularly surveyed to determine their condition and health. The last report on record was written in 2023 (see Appendix 1). This states that the trees were exhibiting crown die-back and presented a medium risk.
- 1.4 Given the height and age of these poplars and with demolition of the former council offices pending, it has been considered prudent to update the condition survey for these poplars. There is concern that the roots may extend beneath the former office building and that the act of demolition may have an adverse impact on these trees which are already exhibiting die-back issues. A specialist arboriculturist survey was undertaken in September 2025 involving high level inspection of the trees using a hydraulic hoist (previous inspections are understood to have been undertaken from ground level).
- 1.5 Having completed his survey on 11 September 2025 the arboriculturist immediately contacted the Council by email to provide a warning as to the condition of the trees and the potential for falling branches during periods of strong winds. In reaction to this warning Council officers have placed a 10-metre cordon around the trees using Heras safety fencing. This action was not a permanent solution for the condition of the trees but was a practical action pending receipt of the full written report and consideration of options by Cabinet.
- 1.6 The independent arboriculturist written report was received on Friday 19 September 2025 and states:
 - *“The results of the Mobile Elevated Work Platform assisted aerial inspection revealed numerous instances of mainstem failure, where the main stem had broken and fallen. In addition, many trees exhibited severe dieback and signs of retrenchment in their main stems, along with widespread upper crown dieback and deadwood.”*
 - *“While the exact cause of these conditions remains uncertain, my findings suggest that this line of Lombardy Poplar trees may be entering a natural period of senescence, potentially accelerated by the changing climate conditions currently being experienced. Some sources indicate that Lombardy Poplars located in the UK can begin to enter senescence after just 30 to 50 years, particularly in urban or exposed environments. Therefore, while the precise cause of the trees’ deteriorating condition cannot be categorically confirmed at this time,*

the extensive list of defects, particularly within the upper crowns, leads me to recommend an approximate reduction in height of 50%, bringing the entire line of Poplars to a uniform height of approximately 12 metres. In addition, any deadwood or hanging branches should be removed. These measures are advised as a precautionary approach to mitigate the risk of structural failure and to improve public safety in the vicinity of the trees.” - Senescence is the condition or process of deterioration with age.

- 1.7 The arboriculturist also referenced a recent case study where he “observed the removal (by Leicestershire County Council Highways) of a long line of mature Lombardy Poplars growing adjacent to Forest Lodge Primary School and the busy A563 New Parks Way in Leicester. This appears to be a case where the risks associated with aging Poplars in high-footfall areas prompted a proactive decision to remove them.”
- 1.8 Following receipt of the arboriculturist’s report there has been follow up correspondence designed to clarify a number of issues arising from the first draft. In particular officers were keen to understand by how long the life of the trees might be extended by height reduction any other implications of this work.
- 1.9 The following additional advice has been provided.
 - The line of 27 Lombardy Poplars is estimated to be 45–55 years old, approaching the normal upper lifespan for this species in UK urban/exposed conditions (40–60 years).
 - The trees are in the late-mature to senescent phase, with declining health and increasing structural risk.
 - A 50% height reduction is recommended to reduce immediate safety risks to the public, workers, and visitors. It should be noted that post height reduction lifespan is often shortened compared with uncut trees due to decay at pruning points and the species’ inherent brittleness.
 - Residual life expectancy post-reduction is 10–15 years, but repeated reductions may compromise structural integrity and increase long-term maintenance costs.
 - By choosing reduction, the Council retains ongoing duty of care. Should a failure occur, liability may arise if inspections or management are deemed insufficient. Reduction reduces but does not eliminate risk.
 - A phased removal and replanting programme is likely the most sustainable long-term solution.
- 1.10 Options available to Members are:
 - Retain the Lombardy Poplars but reduce their height by 50% (accepting that reducing the height of the trees will impact how they look, won’t entirely remove the risk of breakage, will increase monitoring obligations and may only prolong the trees’ life by 10 to 15 years).
 - Or remove the trees now, complete the demolition of the former offices, and then redevelop the site to include the creation of a new “green edge” as described in

section 7 of this paper.

- 1.11 In coming to a decision, members may in particular wish to note that the arboriculturist states that removal and replanting is the most sustainable option in the long term, and Leicestershire County Council appear to have adopted this approach in the case study set out in paragraph 1.7.

2.0 Financial Implications

- 2.1 The tender for demolition of the former Council offices that the Council has accepted includes a provision for removal of trees and other vegetation. There should therefore be no financial implications beyond existing budget provision.

3.0 Legal Implications

- 3.1 The trees are not the subject of any Tree Preservation Order nor within a conservation order. There is, therefore, no legal reason why the Council may not remove the trees.

4.0 Health and Safety Implications

- 4.1 The Council has a duty to keep its employees and all other persons who might come on to its land safe from those hazards that might reasonably be foreseen or are known about.
- 4.2 The Council also has a duty to ensure that nothing might escape from its land and become a danger to the owners or users of neighbouring land.
- 4.3 As the Council is in receipt of an email from a tree specialist warning of dangers related to the condition of the row of Lombardy Poplars. The Council is under a duty to address the risk.

5.0 Community Response

- 5.1 The row of Lombardy Poplars along Whitwick Road are an established landmark within the town. There is likely to be some public comment if the trees are removed. This should not, however, be allowed to overshadow the Council's duty under health and safety legislation. Community reaction can be managed through the use of a communication strategy that clearly explains reasoning behind the decision taken.

6.0 Local Member Consultations

- 6.1 The condition of the poplar trees has been notified to and discussed with both local ward councillors and the leader of the opposition. The advice received is that they are supportive of removal of the trees on health and safety grounds.

7.0 Mitigation Measures and Tree Replacement

- 7.1 The Council's Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Management Strategy states in section 2.8 of the Strategy that the Council has "committed to plant new trees and where appropriate replace trees that require removal, planting species that are appropriate to the conditions and circumstances". Given this strategic context, should Cabinet decide that it is prudent and necessary to fell the Lombardy Poplars along Whitwick Road, then arrangements for replanting should be made and publicised, with the

emerging redevelopment plans for the Whitwick Road site providing an opportunity.

- 7.2 In addition to the proposed commitment outlined in section 7.1 above members may wish to note that the redevelopment proposals for the former council offices site, which are being taken forward under the title Stenson Gardens, are shortly to commence public engagement (starting early October 2025). The proposals that will be made public include references to creating a new Green Edge (planting) to the Whitwick Road area of the site. Members of the public (through the engagement) will have the opportunity to comment and help the development of this concept. Furthermore, as the redevelopment proposals move to a more mature status (planning applications being made) it will be necessary to develop and agree detailed planting proposals for the new development which incorporate the requirement to achieve 10% Bio-diversity Net Gain (as require under current planning legislation).
- 7.3 The three “provisions” set out in paragraphs 7.1 and 7.2 above should ensure that once redeveloped the former council offices site should have more than provided 1 for 1 mitigation for any current trees that may need to be lost.

Policies and other considerations, as appropriate	
Council Priorities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planning and regeneration - A well-run Council
Policy Considerations:	<p>Council Health and Safety Policies.</p> <p>NWLDC Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Management Strategy.</p> <p>Coalville Regeneration Framework.</p>
Safeguarding:	None
Equalities/Diversity:	None
Customer Impact:	Keeping the community safe.
Economic and Social Impact:	Supports existing planned regeneration of the former Council offices site.
Environment, Climate Change and Zero Carbon:	Will result in the felling and removal of a row of mature poplar trees.
Consultation/Community/Tenant Engagement:	A community engagement process concerning the future of the Whitwick Road site has been ongoing and concluded on 17 th October.
Risks:	<p>The public may react negatively to the trees being removed.</p> <p>Not removing the trees will leave a health and safety risk to the general public unaddressed and the Council in breach of its responsibilities as a land owner.</p>
Officer Contact	<p>Paul Wheatley</p> <p>Head of Property and Economic Regeneration</p> <p>paul.wheatley@nwleicestershire.gov.uk</p>