

Local Council Tree Charter Survey Report

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National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is the body that represents and provides services to town and parish councils in England.

The purpose of this presentation is to run through the result of our recent survey of UK local council members regarding their values around trees, current practice and potential engagement with the Tree Charter. I will highlight what we thought was interesting and informative to the Tree Charter project.



This is the winner of the survey's prize, Paul Matcham: Tree Warden at Todber Parish Council, North Dorset. Paul's completed survey was picked at random from all respondents to win the iPad Mini.

Paul took this picture for promotional purposes. It will feature in a news story about the survey and its findings.

Key Findings

- **Engagement:** We had an impressive 1282 individual responses to the survey. 92% of respondents were not previously aware of the Tree Charter project. 37% of respondents indicated they were willing to engage further with their local Charter Branch while 60% said they did not know. This shows there is a willingness to engage with the Tree Charter project however, in order to translate this potential into reality, we must do more to communicate how local councils can contribute to and benefit from the Tree Charter.
- **Value:** 85% of respondents indicated trees bring one or more benefits to their community. This result is supported by hundreds of open texts describing these benefits and values, aligning with the principles of the Tree Charter.
- **Inconsistency of knowledge:** Just under half (48.5%) of respondents thought their local council's current knowledge was adequate for its role while 33.2% indicated their knowledge was inadequate. This mixed picture is explained by respondents reporting the prior experience of one of their council members or local volunteers as the source of their knowledge regarding trees. This has created a wide inconsistency in local council knowledge regarding trees. The Tree Charter may reduce this inconsistency by being an online resource for expert advice.
- **Lack of guiding policies for extent of involvement:** We found local councils have extensive involvement with their local trees in a variety of different roles. 87% of councils said issues around trees were discussed either frequently or sometimes during council meetings. However, only 22.8% of respondents indicated they have guiding policies concerning trees. The Tree Charter may serve to fill this policy gap by providing guidance and inspiration for local council policy and practice.

This is a summary of the key points that we think the Tree Charter Project and NALC can take away from the survey.

We will go through these in more detail, but crucially we found:

There was a real willingness to engage with the Charter, this is shown both in the high response rate (some 1282 responses UK wide) and in how respondents answered our questions, however we must do more to communicate to local council what the Tree Charter is and how they can benefit from it.

The survey was notable for its high level of qualitative data, with well over 3000 open texts describing various aspects of local council's relationship with trees. Quotes from the survey are used to illustrate points throughout this presentation.

The survey decisively shows local councils value their local trees. 85% of respondents indicated trees bring one or more benefits to their community. This result is supported by hundreds of open texts describing these benefits and values, aligning with the principles of the Tree Charter.

The survey showed a real mixed picture regarding local council knowledge of trees. Just under half (48.5%) of respondents thought their local council's current knowledge was adequate for its role while 33.2% indicated their knowledge was inadequate. This seems to stem from local councils attaining their knowledge from individual experience rather than

more accessible recourses. The Tree Charter may reduce this inconsistency by being an online resource for expert advice.

Perhaps most interesting, we found a lack of guiding policies for extent of involvement with trees. 87% of councils said issues around trees were discussed either frequently or sometimes during council meetings. However, only 22.8% of respondents indicated they have guiding policies concerning trees. NALC should begin to think about how the Tree Charter may serve to fill this policy gap by providing guidance and inspiration for local council policy and practice.

1. Why did we do survey?

- 1) To engage local councils in the Tree Charter project and begin a dialogue.
- 2) To gather insight into how the Tree Charter can best serve the interests of local councils and to inform the development of the Tree Charter.
- 3) Help identify the priority of trees to local councils and help ensure a legacy within NALC and The Woodland Trust.

Local councils are valuable partners to engage with the Tree Charter project. They are a active volunteer led community all across the UK who value their local trees, are highly involved with their local trees and stand to benefit from the Tree Charter as an online resource. If we engage local councils in the charter, this will help ensure the Tree Charter has a legacy.

To this end, our survey served to:

- 1) Engage LC in TC and begin a dialogue.

We used the survey as a platform to raise awareness in the sector about the charter and launch engagement (e.g. 76 CBs already signed up on the back of the survey).

- 2) To better understand how the Tree Charter can best serve the interests of local councils.

Local council Charter Branches may be very valuable for ensuring has a legacy, but to accomplish this we have to make sure the charter is useful and benefits local councils. This survey aimed to do this. We tried to gage what local councils concerns and hopes as to what the charter could be.

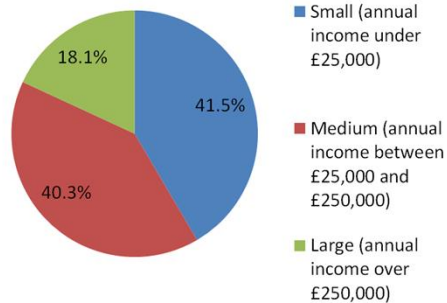
- 3) Finally, to ensure a legacy within NALC and WT as organisations, the evidence provided by our survey serves to represent the role of local councils regarding trees.

Other organisations can access the results within the PSG: will be placed online. Already shared the results with Natural Resources Wales. Obviously, NALC is a England focused organisation, other organisations may find the Welsh or Scottish results more interesting.

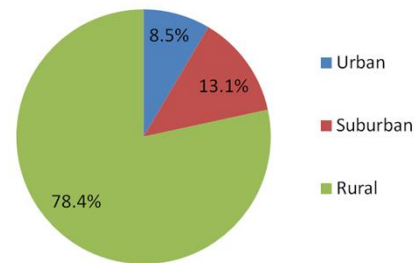
2. Who responded?

- 1282 individual responses to the survey.
- Approximately 1115 local councils (as bodies) were represented. 576 England (c. 6%). 381 Scotland (c. 30%). 151 Wales (c. 20%). 7 NI (c. 60%).

What size is your council? (England and Wales)



Which of these best describes your community council? (Scotland)



We had an excellent participation rate. The highest ever survey return for NALC. Community Councils Scotland, who helped us, were also very impressed by the Scottish return.

Local council members across the UK were targeted (including both officers and councillors). In England primarily, Town and Parish Councils. In Wales, Town and Community Councils. In Scotland, Community Councils. In Northern Ireland, Local Councils.

It is important to note there is regional variation in statutory powers, responsibilities and advisory roles between the nations. England and Welsh local councils have more powers than Scottish community councils. Except for Northern Ireland, these are generally volunteer lead organisations.

1282 individual responses to the survey. This breaks down to: 663 from England. 433 from Scotland. 171 from Wales. 15 from Northern Ireland.

Approximately 1115 local councils (as bodies) were represented. 576 England (c. 6%). 381 Scotland (c. 30%). 151 Wales (c. 20%). 7 NI (c. 60%).

Another note worthy aspect of the survey was the very high amount (well over 3000) of open text responses describing various aspects of local council's relationship with trees. Quotes from the surveys will be placed throughout the presentation.

We achieved this with the invaluable help of One Voice Wales, Community Councils (in Scotland) and the NIEL in Northern Ireland. These organisations helped to develop and distribute each nations survey. Community Councils in Scotland were particularly interested with the response and ran a news story.

As seen in the above pie chart, there was a good diversity in the size of the councils which replied. Population, and thus funding, of rural councils are generally smaller. Note, I was informed by Community Councils (in Scotland) that the funding metrics used for England and Wales, shown in the above pie graph, correlate to rural, urban, suburban councils.

Surprisingly not too much regional variation in results between nations. Data and trends relatively consistent, and within margin of error. Was not NALC's focus, may be more interesting to other parties.

3. Engagement with the Tree Charter



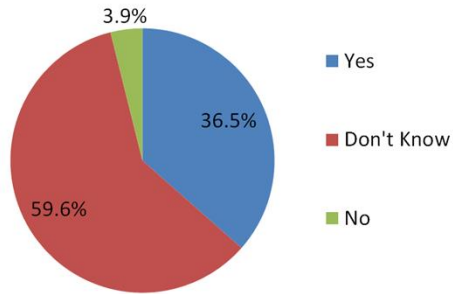
In this section we're going to talk about our findings around potential engagement with the charter.

We have found local council members generally willing to engage with the Tree Charter project. Issues lie in understanding what the Tree Charter aims to be and how to participate. We may overcome these issues this through the distribution of promotional materials and through face to face engagement at local council events, which we have already begun.

Willingness to Engage with the Tree Charter Project

- 92% of respondents were not previously aware of the Tree Charter project.

Would your local council be willing to connect and collaborate with your local Charter Branches?



"This is a very firm start and delighted to participate." Response from Scottish survey

"This survey is a good start." Response from English survey

Respondents were overwhelmingly new to the charter. 92% of respondents were not previously aware of the Tree Charter project. Coupled with the very high participation rates, this shows real interest and support for the charter.

This good start is represented in these quotes.

Encouragingly, 36.5% respondents indicated their willingness to collaborate with their local Charter Branch.

95 (around 7%) respondents indicated their willingness to form a Charter Branch. We have already formed 67 already.

We were able to generate c. 3000 Tree Stories from the open texts of the survey.

639 respondents (c. 50%) indicated their interest in planting a Tree Charter Legacy Tree in their local community.

However, as you can see in this pie chart, around 60% indicated they need more information before deciding if they wanted to participate with their local charter branch.

This tells us we face some issues.



To illustrate how we've mobilised local councils from across the UK to engage with the tree charter here's a map of the 67 local council Charter Branches (note, since this map, we have had more LC CBs).

We have a relatively good geographical spread, although Northern Ireland is conspicuously empty.

What we want to do now is to look for tangible ways we can use these branches and offer opportunities.

Issues engaging with the Tree Charter

- **More information and Awareness – 55%**

“More information, I would be happy to get involved in a local project, I just was not aware,” *Response from English survey*

“Increase public awareness of the Tree Charter.” *Response from Scottish survey*

- **Events and activities – 15%**

“Perhaps attend our parish council to discuss your work.” *Response from English survey*

- **“Make it easy”**

“I have limited time for more meetings.” *Response from Scottish survey*

“Make whatever it is easy to do and also cheap if possible. Local farmers say that some tree planting schemes, even with free trees, they don't have time or resources to adopt. Small parish councils have similar difficulties.” *Response from English Survey*

Returning to the issues engaging, we asked the question of what the Tree Charter Project could do to better encourage local council participation. Here are the suggestions and issues raised:

Supporting the pie chart above, respondents said they were unsure as to what the Tree Charter aimed to be and what it could offer them. Around 55% (70 out of the 127 responses to this question) asked for more information about the Tree Charter and indicated they were unaware as to what the Charter was.

A direct asks were made for promotional materials, including for leaflets, newsletters, advertisements, website posts, blogs, posters, videos and promotional packs.

Around 15% of respondents asked for some kind of local event. For example, respondents asked for presentation explaining the Tree Charter schools, local groups or council meetings. Others suggested planting, cultural or commemorative activities. Restricted to the extent we can do this.

This reflects the local focus of LCs. We have to make the Tree Charter local to accommodate their interests.

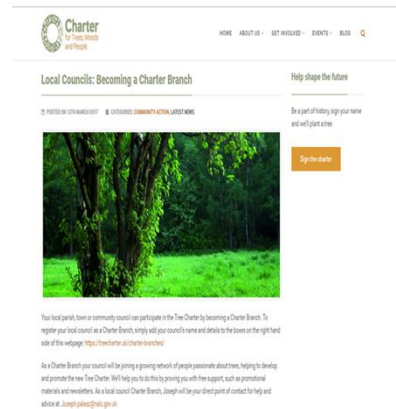
Lastly, a small percentage of respondents stressed their busy workload, lack of funding and fears around engaging with the project. Most of these wished to participate but felt constrained. The message “make it easy” seemed to encapsulate these responses.

Recommendations to Encourage Further Participation

1) Explain the Charter.

2) Local, face to face engagement.

3) Follow up interest.



1) Put work into explaining the Charter.

Explain how local councils may benefit and contribute to the Tree Charter. Resources and promotional material may aim to accomplish this in a simple, tangible and accessible fashion.

We have already begun to spread the message in this way through the production of blogs, news articles and emails – as shown by picture of a recent blog I wrote.

2) The importance of local face to face engagement also came across.

I have recently been to network with people in the local council sector, going to recent events held for All Party Parliamentary group on Local Democracy, NALC Lobby day and Star Council Awards. Do more, go to local association events.

3) We have to follow up interest and think of opportunities we can offer local councils.

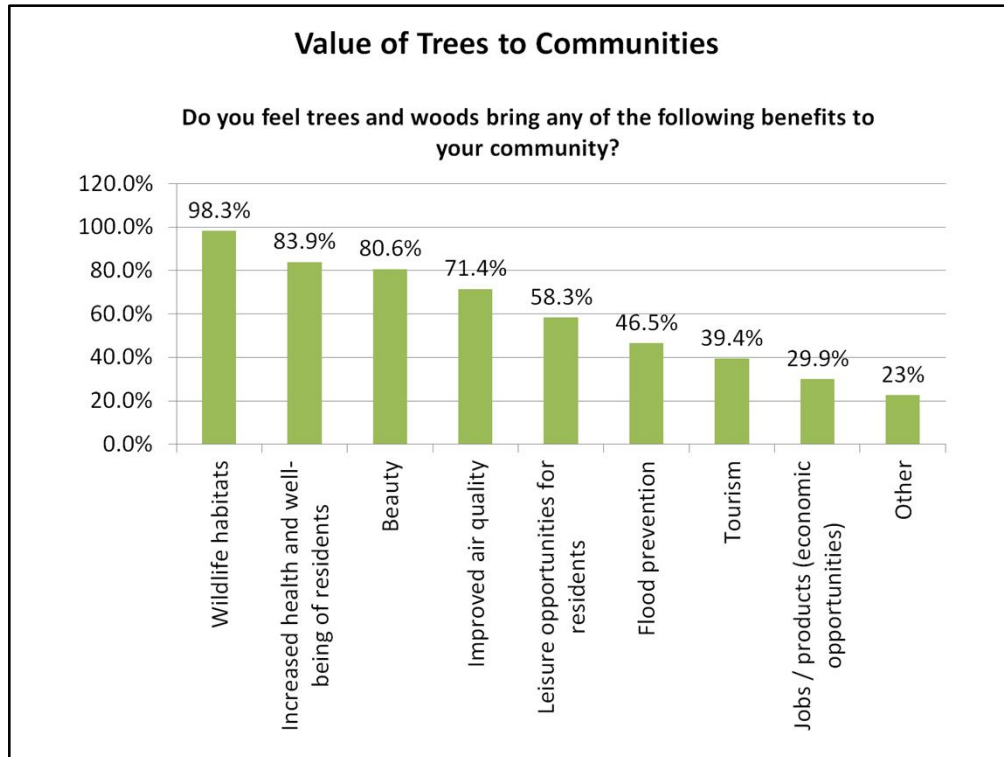
In particular thinking of how to use local council Charter Branches. We are looking to make the most of these local councils, creating an opportunity map.

4. How can Local Council's Current Practice Benefit from the Tree Charter?



Now we're going to talk about how the Charter can serve local councils current practice and values.

We found local council involvement with trees to be extensive however there knowledge and, in particular, their lack of guiding polices do not adequately represent the extent of this involvement. The Tree Charter can aspire to fill this policy gap by providing guidance and inspiration for local council policy and practice.



Our survey demonstrates that local council members believe trees bring value to their local community. This should give us confidence in knowing local councils support the spirit of the charter.

1092 respondents (85%) indicated trees bring one or more of the following benefits to their community.

Results very high, even at the lower end of the scale. (98% of responses to this question indicated the value of trees to local wildlife and almost 50% indicated the value of trees in terms of flood prevention.)

These values chime the 10 principles of Tree Charter and show support for the spirit of the Charter in the local council sector; e.g. Nature, Utility and Livelihoods, Health and Wellbeing, Environment.

One of the ways the Tree Charter may serve local councils is by publicly representing and affirming this value; as it already has in its principles.

Value of Trees to Communities

"Trees and woods make the village. The wildlife is second to none, we have all the usual wildlife plus otters, deer, many additional bird species over and above the regular garden birds, dog walking is a major attraction and the trees make this more pleasant. Many a tree surgeon gets a livelihood from the village." *Response from English survey*

"Local councils are best placed to reflect the interests, needs and concerns of their residents. Residents of this parish value and respect the trees, woods, and open spaces available to them and the Parish Council works to ensure their preservation." *Response from English Survey*

"Better communication of how trees benefit us all." *Response from Welsh survey*

"Ancient trees, in particular, should not to be considered a nuisance to built development. They should be protected and take priority over poorly sited building and plans for new development. Advice on how to achieve this would be helpful." *Response from English Survey*

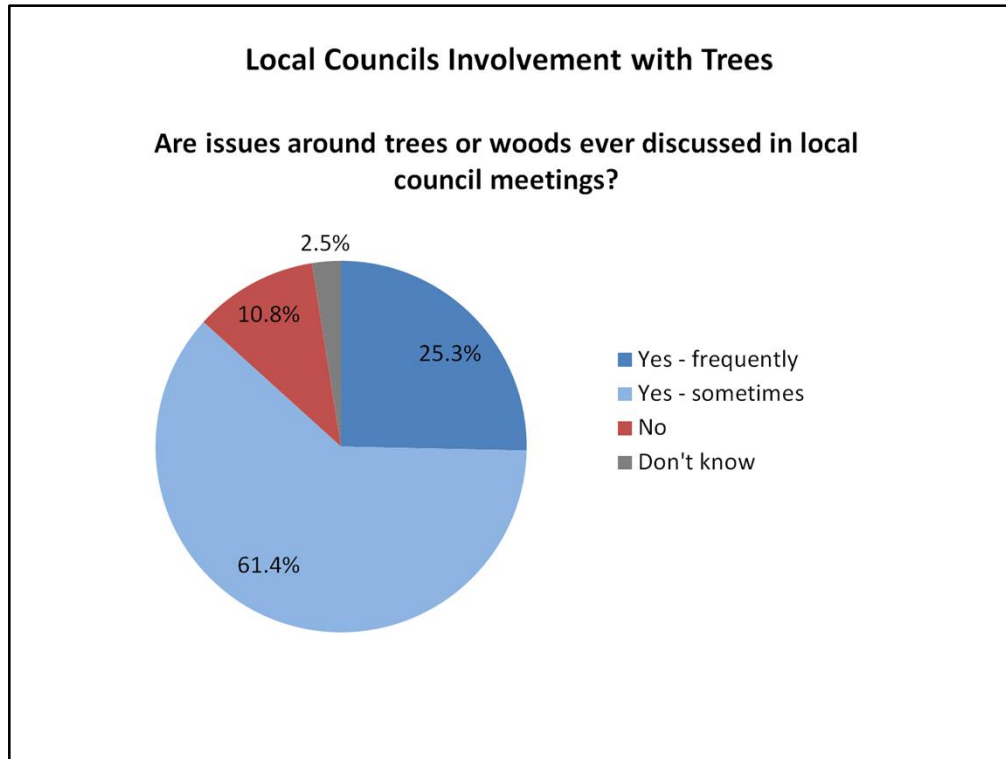
246 responses chose to add their own benefit or describe how their community benefits from trees.

Hundreds of respondents during other open texts expressed the value they feel trees have to their community and the wish for more effective local council involvement in preserving this value. These texts often showed insight into key issues facing trees.

Respondents also indicated their belief that the value of trees deserved greater public awareness and suggested local councils had a role to play in achieving this publicity.

These quotes have contributed to the Tree Stories, but further more NALC can use these quotes in publicity and communications

The Tree Charter, at its core, will act to publically affirm these values.

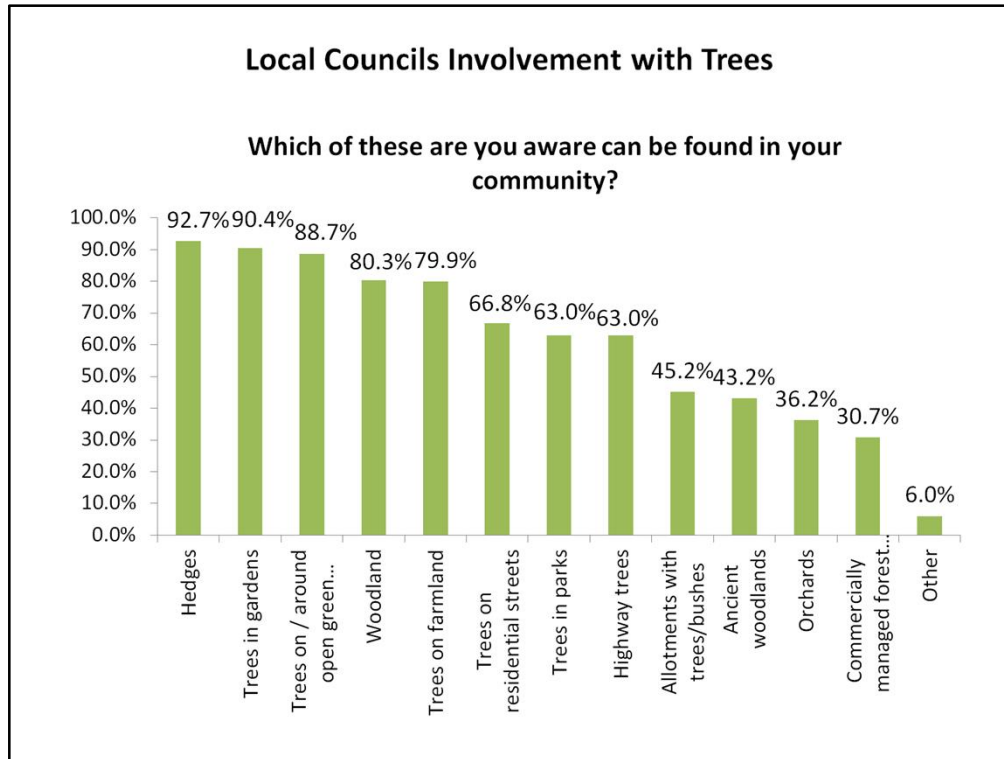


Now I am now going to talk about the extent of local council involvement with trees.

We were quite surprised by the level of involvement Local Councils reported.

87% of councils said issues around trees were discussed either frequently or sometimes during council meetings.

This clearly demonstrates the overwhelming majority of local council are involved with trees and woods to some extent.



This graph further demonstrates the awareness of the trees among local council members.

This graph shows the awareness levels for 1113 (86%) responses. It proves there is high awareness of trees and woods amongst local council members.

This indicates a high level of involvement and the Tree Charters high level of relevance to local councils, even for trees that are often overlooked, such as hedges and ancient woodlands.

Several of these items, such as trees in allotments and orchards, local councils often have direct responsibility for. Other levels are surprisingly high, such as woodlands.

Local Councils Involvement with Trees

- **Management - 85%**

*"Ensuring trees are safe and that woodland is managed sustainably."
Response from English Survey*

- **Planning – 25%**

"Regularly discussed at planning meetings," Response from English Survey

- **Protection – 25%**

- **Planting – 5%**

- **Access – 5%**

- **Vandalism and Disease – c. 1%**

- **Disputes – c. 1%**

"We have had to remove 2 diseased trees this year on parish owned land. We have discussed planting trees on a disused area of village green. Overhanging trees next to highways," Response from English Survey

817 of respondents (c. 63%) chose to describe the issues discussed around trees in their local council meetings in an open text. This allows us to break down council involvement a bit more and reveals a wide and diverse involvement with trees.

Around 85% (701 of 817) responses to this question mentioned some aspect of management. Local councils are involved managing trees under their direct ownership, the principle authority's ownership or in private ownership.

A similar percentage, around 25%, explicitly mentioned their regard for trees in the planning and development process.

Around 25% (c. 200 of 817) mentioned activities around protection. A significant proportion of these (around 18% c. 150 of 817) more precisely mentioned activities around TPOs. Although local councils do not have the power to issue Tree Preservation Orders, many respondents claimed to enforce TPOs and submit applications for TPOs.

Planting was mentioned as a significant topic; around 5% - with 4% mentioning their council had created a community orchard.

c. 5% of respondents highlighted their responsibilities around access. Having responsibility for maintaining, and sometimes developing, highways, public footpaths and woodland paths.

A small percentage mentioned their concern with vandalism, disease and disputes regarding trees.

We should observe that this involvement mirrors the principles of the Tree Charter; e.g. planting, protection, planning, access, coping with threats (management). This serves as more evidence to NALC that the Tree Charter is of value to their membership.

Perceived Role	
Protection – 53%	
	<i>"To protect trees as far as possible" Response from English Survey</i>
Management – 50%	
	<i>"They should have a large role, they have powers to create and maintain woodland and trees, and almost certainly a duty to manage existing tree stocks." Response from Welsh Survey</i>
Awareness – 14%	
	<i>"Raising awareness of the positive benefits and promoting events to celebrate and encourage greater access/use." Response from English Survey</i>
Access – 9%	
	<i>"To keep public access open for the benefit of all," Response from English survey</i>
"Unsure" – c. 2%	
	<i>"I don't know what I should know!" Response from Welsh Survey</i>
Fears – 5%	
	<i>"Not all councillors know a great deal about trees and woodlands and they take hedges for granted" Response from Welsh Survey</i>

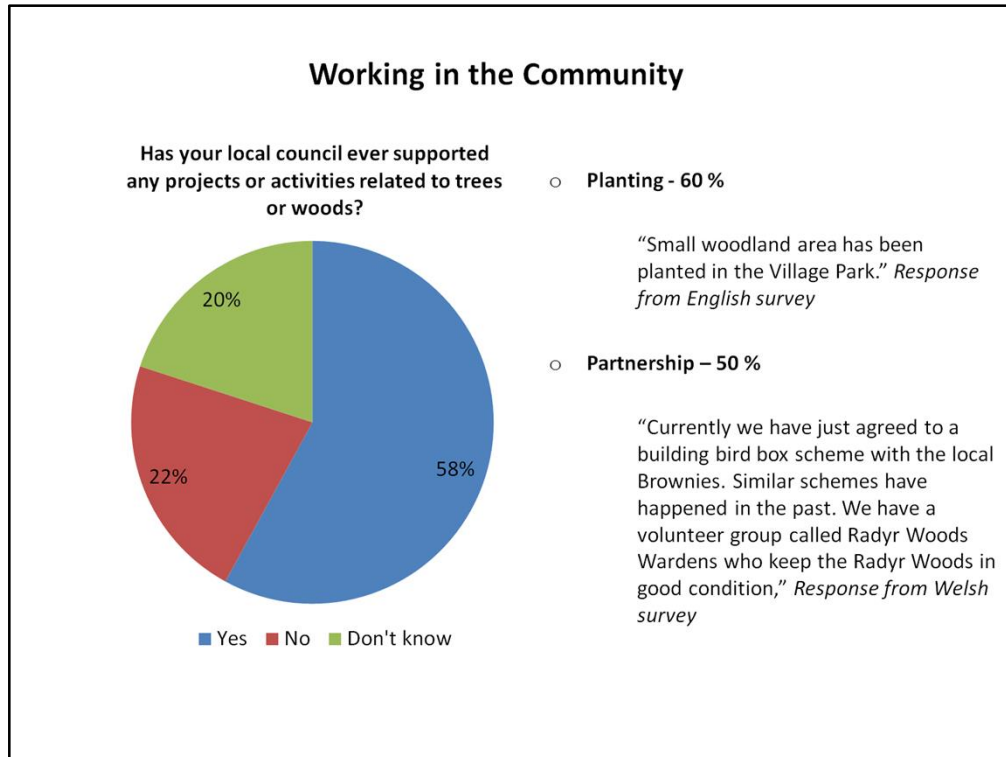
We asked respondents of the role they perceived local councils as playing regarding the access to trees and their benefits.

Supporting the previous data. Management, protection, access. Common words included "safeguarding" (c. 4%) and "Custodian" (2%)

More surprising, a significant portion of respondents (c. 14%) believed the role of local councils was to raise awareness and educate the public about trees.

A small portion of responses indicated they did not know what their role was supposed to be.

Pre-empting our findings around knowledge, c. 5% of respondents used this question to indicate their fear that local councils did not know enough to fulfil their role around trees.



We also looked at the role local councils played in the wider community. Responses show well over half of local councils support local projects and activities around trees and woods.

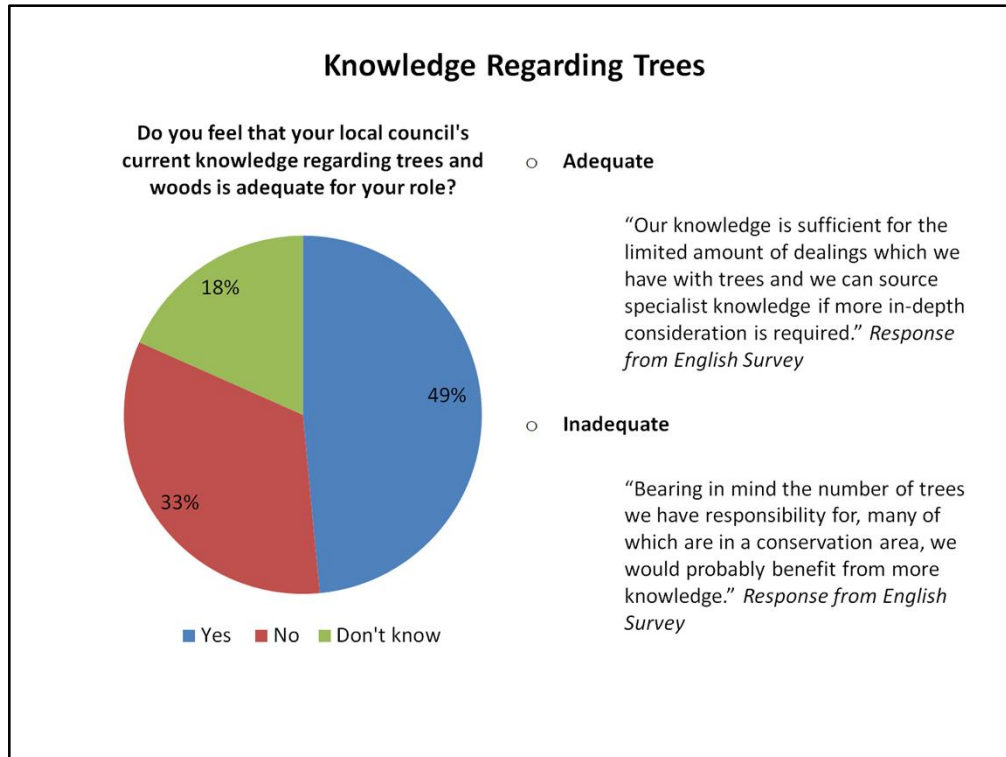
598 responses chose to describe these activities.

Planting was by far the most common activity local councils supported. Around 60% (350 of 598) mentioned planting in their description of the projects they support.

Partnership between local councils and other organisations was also common, with c. 50% (290 of 598) mentioning a partnership. Respondents often reported working with volunteer conservation groups (c. 10%), schools (c. 20%) or national bodies.

Local councils were involved at every stage of these projects: providing grants (c. 4%) , organising, offering advice and carrying out the activity.

This shows local councils have a real potential to preserve the local legacy of the Tree Charter.



Although respondents generally rated their local council's knowledge regarding trees as adequate, our survey revealed this knowledge was often dependent on the previous experience of local council members and their access to external advice. The result was a wide inconsistency in the level of knowledge between councils and councillors.

Just under half (48.5%) of respondents thought their local council's current knowledge was adequate for its role. While 33.2% indicated their knowledge was inadequate. This is a mixed picture.

487 respondents chose to elaborate on their answer.

As represented in the pie chart, many respondents expressed their belief that their local council had enough knowledge to perform its current role.

A significant minority of councils expressed their wish for more knowledge to fit their role.

This mixed result becomes interesting when we integrate it a little more.

Sources of Knowledge – A picture of inconsistency

- **Tree Warden – 10%**
- **External bodies – 30%**

"We are not experts and rely on the advice of professionals from our local district council."
Response from English Survey
- **Experience of council members or local volunteers – 33%**

"Individual Councillors have a good knowledge of trees." *Response from Welsh Survey*

"We have villagers with good knowledge that we fall back on, but my personal knowledge is mediocre but keen." *Response from English Survey*
- **Lack of experience - 15%**

"No Councillor is an expert on types of tree or tree management" *Response from English Survey*

"We did have a member who was heavily involved in trees and woodland and on committees but, since he died, no one has taken over." *Response from Scottish Survey*

"Knowledge amongst councillors and employees will vary." *Response from English Survey*

Only about 10% of respondents claimed their knowledge came from a local Tree Warden or Officer.

Around a third of responses (c. 30%) reported relying on external bodies, such as district councils (c. 10%), paid professionals (c. 4%) or charities, for advice regarding trees. Worth noting NALC's legal department advises this.

"From a legal perspective, councils that own or occupy land on which trees are situated have duties as occupiers/ owners to ensure trees are safe, maintained etc. LTNS deal with these issues. What is "safe" a matter for expert opinion. It is hard to generalise about what councils require as councils will have different needs depending on the nature of the land they own. If a tree survey recommends that works be taken, the relevant council would need to follow such advice. Councils' insurers should also be notified of tree safety issues." Jane Moore, Head of Legal Services and Solicitor, NALC

Frequently, again around a third (33%), respondents pointed to the prior experience of one of their council members or local volunteers as the source of their knowledge regarding trees.

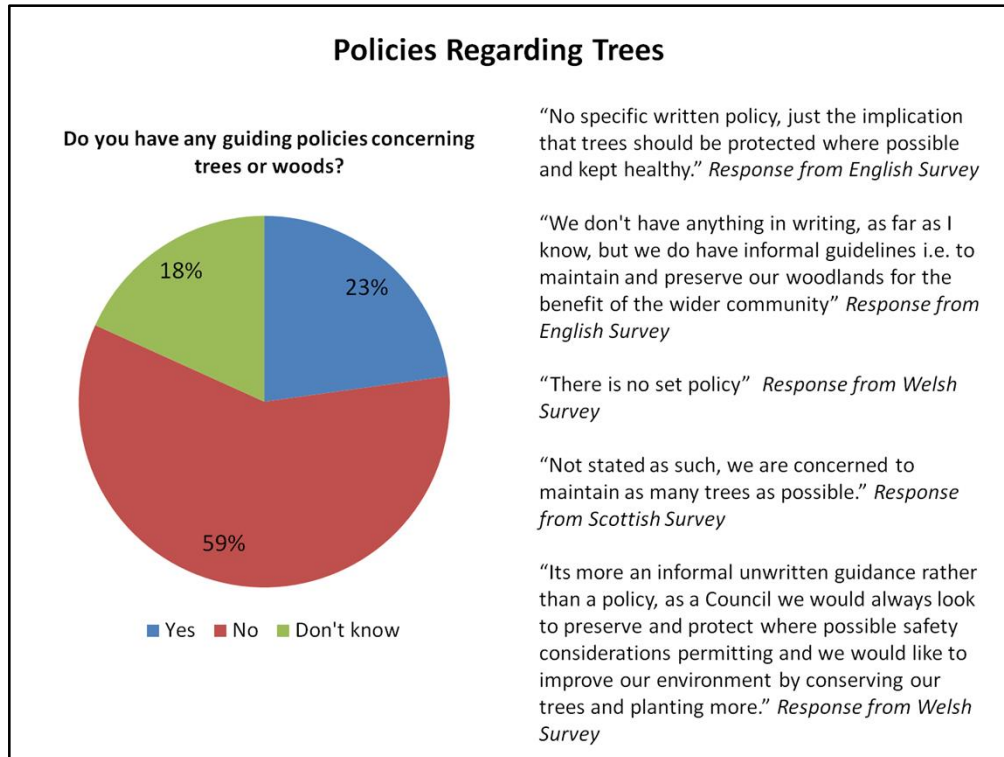
Around 15% of responses pointed out their council has little knowledge of trees because councillors lack experience/interest in the area and/or a recent council member, who did have the experience/interest, had died. This picture is supported by the mixed answer to our question, as represented on our pie chart (33% said no, to 48% yes)

“No experts on council” Response from Scottish Survey

“Not always - specialist knowledge lacking” Response from English Survey

What emerges is a picture of inconsistency in knowledge between councils, councillors and local communities.

Side note, lack of training.



Our survey found the majority of local councils, c. 60%, have no formal guiding policy regarding trees.

This was represented in the 319 respondents who chose to give further details of their policies or lack there of. As seen in these examples, many explained they had no formal written policy regarding trees and took an *ad hoc* approach, relying on "common sense"

When we compare this with the extent and diversity of involvement demonstrated in a previous section, it would seem there is room for a guiding policy for Trees, which the tree charter may provide.

Current Policies Regarding Trees

- **Tree Surveys – 7%**

“Annual survey with comprehensive report” *Response from English Survey*

- **Tree Preservation Orders - 10%**

“We argue for tree protection orders in certain locations, particularly where building development may take place.” *Response from Scottish Survey*

- **Neighbourhood Plans – 5%**

“We are discussing how we can recognise significant trees in the new Neighbourhood Plan.”
Response from English Survey

“I believe as part of our neighbourhood plan we will include this but at the moment we are reactive rather than proactive” *Response from English Survey*

- **Tree Wardens and Officers – 3%**

- **Management Plans – 2%**

- **Conservation Areas and District Council Partnership – 6 % & 3%**

The policies that were reported varied considerably.

Around 7% of responses commented on having a policy of regular tree surveys. Although this period over which these were conducted varied.

c. 10% mentioned applying for and/or enforcing tree preservation orders was reportedly a key part of many council's policy around trees. TPOs were mentioned consistently throughout the whole survey, although local councils only have limited powers around TPOs. This may be considered surprising.

Around 5% talked about incorporating a tree policy into their neighbourhood plans.

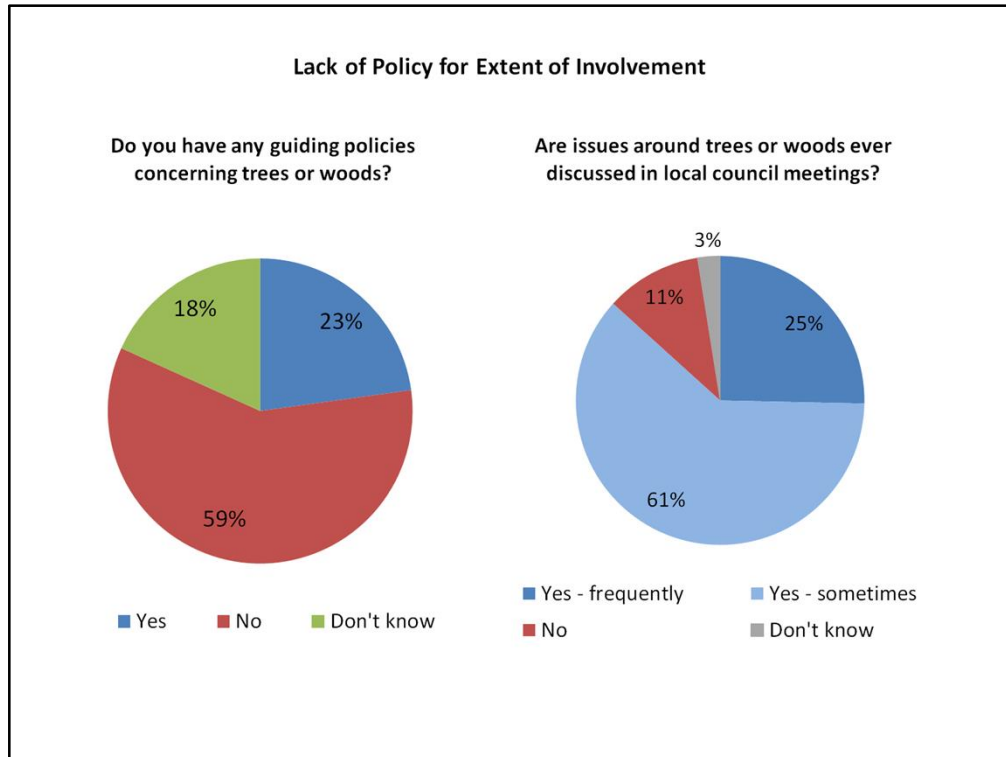
Only 3% of responses reported having a tree officer or warden.

As little as 2% mentioned a management plan regarding woods, allotments and hedges.

“Detailed management policies have been drawn up and adopted by the council, which reviews a management plan annually.” *Response from Welsh Survey*

6% mentioned their local conservation area and 3% mentioned working in partnership with district councils.

We must ask the question of how the Tree Charter can improve these practices.



When we add all this up, we may conclude the extent of local council involvement calls for a guiding policy and greater access to knowledge.

87% of councils said issues around trees were discussed either frequently or sometimes during council meetings. However, only 22.8% of respondents indicated they have guiding policies concerning trees. NALC should begin to think about how the Tree Charter may serve to fill this policy gap by providing guidance and inspiration for local council policy and practice.

Issues Local Councils would like to see addressed in the Tree Charter

- **Guidance on protection & management – 42%**
 - “Advice on appropriate tree management and advice on best practice concerning tree surgery.” Response from English Survey*
 - “How to initiate and enforce TPO's.” Response from English Survey*
- **Possible policy and role – 5%**
 - “A clear policy statement for councils to follow” Response from Welsh Survey*
- **Advice on Funding – 2%**
 - “Possible sources of grant aid.” Response from Scottish Survey*
- **Training – 2%**
 - “Volunteer training on wood management” Response from Welsh Survey*
- **Affirmation of Values – 10%**
 - “Public education concerning the value of trees” Response from Scottish Survey*

Beginning to think about how the Charter can help local councils overcome these issues, we asked what issues respondents would like to see addressed in the new Tree Charter.

Around 42% asked for advice on protection and management. In particular local issues, around disease for instance, were mentioned. We should aim to enhance current practice, such as around TPOs.

Around 5% asked for advice on possible policy and role: Several respondents asked for clarification as to what their responsibilities for trees were as local councils and what policies they could adopt. Several asked us to lobby for more powers or policy change.

“I think an information pack that explains the responsibilities of councils in relation to trees and woodland would be a good idea.” Response from English Survey

Around 2% mentioned the need for more funding: respondents asked for advice on where to go for funding for tree projects.

“Support with funding” Response from English Survey

“If the Tree Charter can advise on grants or funding to ensure maintenance of existing woodland etc. this would be beneficial.” Response from English survey

Another 2% mentioned the need for more training opportunities.

“Training sessions” Response from Scottish Survey

What became clear was the demand for the value and many benefits of trees to be represented.

“Public education concerning the value of trees” Response from Scottish Survey

How can the Tree Charter Serve Local Councils

- 1) Represent and affirm value of trees.
- 2) Connect local councils to expert advice
- 3) Provide a guiding policy around trees



Local council members believe trees bring value to their community. The Tree Charter may serve local councils by being a public affirmation and promotion of this value.

Connect local councils to expert advice and guidance regarding good practice around trees. This should include a range of issues such as general management, funding, planting, training and other issues. A key next step will be to source this advice.

The Tree Charter may serve to fill this policy gap by providing guidance and inspiration for local council policy and practice, in particular for Tree Surveys, Tree Preservation Orders, Tree Policy in Neighbourhood Plans, Tree Wardens, Tree Officers, other possible policies. A greater ambition is to have “drag and drop” easy policy templates for these options.