

Marhamchurch Parish Council Statement Regarding Tree Surveys at the Hele Valley Trail

July 2026

Background

August 2025

A tree survey of the Hele Valley Trail was commissioned following advice relating to the Parish Council's insurance requirements. Four councillors voted in favour of appointing a supplier who was able to complete the survey within the required timescale, with one councillor voting against. The appointed supplier had no links to the Parish Council and was recommended by another provider.

The Parish Council's insurance provider advised:

"The requirement is that we must follow industry guidance, which is a tree survey needs to be completed between every 3 to 5 years. The frequency of inspection depends on the potential risk posed by the trees and so for example needs to consider disease and location, which will be partly informed by the survey. Between surveys, visual inspections should be carried out and if anyone reports a concern regarding the trees it must be acted upon. If there was an incident, the insurance company would ask to see the most recent tree survey."

December 2025

The purchase of the Hele Valley Trail was completed. Following periods of adverse weather, concerns were raised regarding the condition of trees within the site and whether they posed a safety risk. Photographs highlighting those concerns were submitted to the Clerk. In response, Marhamchurch Parish Council issued a public statement regarding the matter.

April 2026

The Clerk sought advice from the Cornwall Association of Local Councils (CALC) regarding concerns about potentially unsafe trees. CALC advised:

"Concerns regarding unsafe trees, whether raised by a Councillor or a member of the public, must be referred to the Parish Council, who will instruct a qualified contractor to assess the trees and determine the level of risk. The contractor's report will inform works that may be needed and also inform any future insurance claims."

Tree Safety Inspection Considered at the Meeting of 16 June 2026

At the Parish Council meeting held on 16 June 2026, councillors considered whether to commission a further tree safety inspection of the Hele Valley Trail. The previous inspection had been completed in August 2025 by Evolve Tree Consultancy. In light of recent comments concerning trees at the site, it was considered appropriate to obtain a further professional assessment. To ensure the matter could be considered promptly, the Clerk obtained quotations in advance of the meeting.

The quotations received were:

- Evolve Tree Consultancy - £696
- Trudy Polkinghorn Tree Consultant - £975
- Jason Bellenger Professional Tree Surveys and Arboricultural Consultancy - £1,200
- Oak Valley Tree Surveyors - £1,600

Following consideration of the quotations, councillors agreed that it would be beneficial to appoint a different provider from that used previously in order to compare reports. The Council therefore resolved to appoint Trudy Polkinghorn Tree Consultant. The proposal was proposed by Cllr Biddick-Bray, seconded by Cllr Perry and carried with three votes in favour. Cllr Polkinghorn abstained.

Cllr Polkinghorn had declared an interest in the item because she had submitted a quotation for the work. Although she was initially due to leave the meeting, her departure would have rendered the meeting inquorate. A dispensation request was therefore submitted, allowing her to remain present. She took no part in the discussion or decision-making process and abstained from the vote.

Additional Information

All councillors received the quotations and supporting information before the June meeting. No objections or concerns regarding any of the quotations were raised with the Clerk or councillors prior to the meeting.

Separately, a Code of Conduct complaint relating to newly co-opted Councillor Polkinghorn was considered and determined to be an inadvertent breach. It was noted that her intentions were positive, but that councillors should avoid mixing council and professional business. The matter was regarded as an administrative error that nonetheless constituted a breach of the Code. The findings also confirmed that a councillor may submit a quotation for work to be undertaken on behalf of the Parish Council, provided a declaration of interest is made and the appropriate procedures are followed.

In reaching its decision, the Council noted that the successful quotation was the second most competitive received, that the contractor held relevant expertise and qualifications, was familiar with the locality and site, and that obtaining a report from a different provider would assist comparison with the previous survey.

For further information, please contact the Clerk at clerk@marhamchurch-pc.gov.uk