

Tree risk management policy

Context – risk vs benefit

The various woodlands used by Into The Woods (ITW) are wild natural environments. And while they vary in their level of management, none of them are intensively managed for safety, so there is an inherent risk of injury or death from trees or branches falling. Trees, even healthy ones, naturally drop branches from time to time. And it is very difficult to predict which trees will fail completely and fall to the forest floor.

It is important to remember that the woods are a dynamic, natural and relatively unmanaged environment, and are therefore inherently more risky than a tightly controlled environment like an indoor nursery room, although not necessarily less safe.

So why go into the woods? Because most people judge that it is a small risk that is worth taking.

There are well established benefits for the children of being in the woods, in particular in terms of their physical and emotional development and their connection to nature – see the ITW website for a fuller description of the benefits. It is important that children and adults benefit from being in the woods, and this significant benefit means that some low level of risk is acceptable.

The purpose of this policy is to set out the responsibilities of staff and parents and the measures that ITW take to minimise this risk.

Responsibilities

ITW management will assess the risk factors, design measures to mitigate the risk, and then assess the risk on a daily basis and decide what measures to take. They will do this in consultation with wood owners and keepers, and with tree management specialists. Practitioners will implement those measures.

Parents of nursery children must judge, based on this policy and their own general approach to risk, whether the risk is worth taking, and therefore if they want their child to attend ITW.

Level of risk

For the average person, the probability of being injured by a tree or branch falling is incredibly low, and of being killed is almost negligible – about 1 in 10 million for the latter (5-6 people per year die in the UK). This probability lowers still further if high wind incidents are discounted.

Even for frequent wood users, the probability of injury or death will still be very low, in terms of risk analysis, and will be within what the Health and Safety Executive term

‘tolerable’ – meaning that the activity should go ahead with the risks managed down to ‘as low as reasonably practicable’.

However, the probability for frequent wood users, though very low, will be higher. It is not possible to set an accurate figure but nursery parents and staff need to understand that this is the case and that Into The Woods cannot guarantee no injury or death from trees or branches falling, but instead puts in place measures to make the risk as low as possible.

Risk factors and mitigation measures

The risk of any given tree falling at any given time is a combination of two sets of factors – the health of the tree and the external, environmental factors acting on it (the most significant of these being the weather). In general, a healthy tree (healthy roots, no significant defects) will not fall unless due to an extreme event – such as a severe storm. The ITW measures address these areas of risk.

Health of the trees – tree monitoring

It is not practicable for ITW or the wood owners to monitor every single tree in the woods we use. Therefore, we consider the trees from which we are at most risk due to the amount of time we spend in their vicinity – those in and around our camps. These trees are formally and informally monitored to ensure that the tree and its limbs are not vulnerable due to significant defects. This protects the camps to a significant degree, as it means that even with slightly elevated risk due to environmental factors (see below), the trees *should* not be a problem.

It is important to note, however, that tree inspections are not a guarantee that a tree or limb will not fall. They are a formal assessment of a tree’s visible defects, followed up in some cases with a detailed inspection. This gives us a good idea of whether a tree is likely to fail at any time, or in high wind, but it does not offer any kind of guarantee.

Weather

The main weather condition that causes trees and limbs to fall is high wind.

Excessively high rainfall in a short period of time is also a risk factor and can contribute to a tree falling. The tree becomes heavy with water, and the roots can lose their grip if the soil is waterlogged. High wind exacerbates this risk.

Whether a tree has its leaves is a related factor, as trees with leaves retain more water and offer more wind resistance, meaning that they might fall more easily due to wind or waterlogging.

Again, these factors are more likely to cause a tree with defects to fail than a healthy one.

When assessing the risk due to weather, at any given time, ITW practitioners and managers will take into account all of these factors.

‘Summer branch drop’ is a phenomenon when trees lose one of their lower limbs during the Summer months. This usually happens when there has been a hot dry spell, followed by

significant rain which is again followed by a hot dry period, and seems (from what ITW and Highgate wood keepers have observed) to affect mature oak trees, which drop large limbs.

Risk management process

- The business manager maintains a general risk assessment (see below) with general measures (applicable to both nurseries and all locations) to be taken to minimise the risk from trees or branches falling.
- The business manager maintains, also, a location-specific risk assessment tracker. This is a document that lists all the key locations in use at each nursery. For each location it shows helpful information to support the use of and risk assessment of locations:
 - Notes on the latest risk assessment for that location,
 - A status that shows whether the location should be used and any conditions on that use,
 - Dates of last risk assessment and formal inspection,
 - The type of location – camp, stay and play, drop-off, etc.
- The business manager, with the support of the nursery managers, carries out a termly annual risk assessment review, ensuring that all locations in use are on the tracker, have an up to date risk assessment and have been inspected within the appropriate time frame.
- Nursery managers and deputy managers carry out informal risk management on an ongoing basis and are responsible for adhering to any conditions on the site location risk assessment tracker.
- The business manager liaises with wood owners to keep abreast of scheduling of inspections, results of inspections and completion of work listed in the reports, as relevant to ITW; and updates nursery managers as relevant.
- The business manager arranges the bespoke Queen's Wood formal inspections with a qualified arboriculturalist.

Policy review

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Next review: April 2026

See below for detail of measures.

Appendix 1 – General tree safety risk assessment

HG = Queens Wood and Highgate / KW = Kenwood / BM = deputy manager (office) / HoN = head of nursery

Risk factor	Measure	Person
Significant defects on trees in and around camps	Formal monitoring of trees, with detailed monitoring of any suspect trees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Every 10–12 months in Queens Wood (variable to allow for seeing different natural phenomena) - Annual (or according to owner’s schedule) in Highgate Wood (see appendix Highgate Wood monitoring) - Annual (or according to owner’s schedule) in Kenwood - Carried out by a certified specialist (arboriculturist or experienced wood keeper) - Specialist to report back in person to management, to ensure clarity of reporting and for professional development 	BM
	Move camp site if problem or suspect tree identified. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Notify wood owner. - Inspect new camp informally straight away and formally ASAP. - If remedial work is undertaken in previous camp, return after checking by specialist. 	HoN
	Informal monitoring of trees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thorough informal check of camp site areas by ITW staff or woodkeepers after all high wind events - Staff are encouraged to check trees on an ongoing basis to look for any obvious defects that a lay person could spot. - Staff report any suspect trees to management who request a visit from a specialist. - Training to develop staff knowledge of obvious defects held at staff meetings. 	ALL STAFF BM HoN
	Hanging deadwood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff check camp sites at the start of every day (at setup) for hanging dead wood. If dead wood identified that cannot be removed, HoN informed and group moves to a different camp. - Staff check trees above areas where their group stays and plays when on walks, for hanging deadwood. They move on immediately if any seen. 	ALL STAFF
Dangerous weather conditions forecast: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High wind - Excessive rainfall in a short period - Combination of both factors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HoN assesses the weather conditions on a daily basis to judge if it safe for the children to be in the woods. - The nursery does not operate in the woods* when the wind is forecast to gust at or above certain speeds, as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kenwood – above 30mph – no use of woodland areas, nursery operates from meadows not within range of trees; - Kenwood – above 40mph – outdoor nursery ceases, no use of any outdoor area; - Highgate Wood – above 35mph – outdoor nursery ceases, no use of any outdoor area; - Queen’s Wood – above 30mph – no use of Queen’s Wood – nursery relocates to Highgate Wood if 35mph or below. - If the wind is due to gust below these speeds, the HoN takes into account the wind and recent rainfall, condition of the trees (leaves or not) to judge a combined risk level and decide if it safe. If it is deemed not safe, the nursery does not operate from the woods. - In either case, alternative arrangements are made to take the children indoors or the nursery is closed (see closures policy). - Parents will be given an explanation of why the HoN judges the risk to be too high. 	HoN
High wind develops unexpectedly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HG: all groups of children and staff immediately move into Highgate Wood (unless already there) and walk to the field, staying on main paths the whole way. They stay and play on the field, away from the edges. - KW: all groups of children and staff immediately move into the open meadows, away from the trees. They stay and play on the field, away from the edges. - HoN assesses whether the session should continue, based on current and recent conditions and the forecast. 	ALL STAFF HoN
Summer branch drop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - During the months May–July, camps are not situated directly beneath large low oak limbs. HoN checks this. - During the months May–July, groups do not linger (stop and play) beneath large low oak limbs when out of camp, on walks. 	HoN ALL STAFF

* For the purposes of these descriptions, 'woods' means any of the natural outdoor areas used as locations for the normal running of the nursery sessions. – Queens Wood, Highgate Wood and the Kenwood estate

Appendix 2 – Management of woods used by ITW

Highgate Wood

Highgate Wood is actively managed by City of London woodkeepers, who are very knowledgeable in terms of tree safety and tree condition, with support of arboriculturists.

There are four designated zones in the wood, with the trees being regular surveyed after different intervals:

- Zone 1 – surveyed every 6-7 months.
 - Paths such along Muswell Hill Road
 - The playground
 - Edge of the field
- Zone 2 – annual survey
 - Main pathways
 - Forest school areas (also checked after high wind events)
- Zone 3 – surveyed every 2 years
 - Areas access by people, but infrequently, off pathways

Kenwood Estate

The woodlands of the Kenwood Estate are actively managed by the Kenwood gardeners, who are knowledgeable in terms of tree safety and tree condition, with support of the wider English Heritage team and contracted arboriculturists.

Formal tree surveys are carried out annually, and always include possible and current ITW camp sites.

Queens Wood

Queens Wood is relatively unmanaged for safety. The wood is owned by Haringey, and the trees are surveyed periodically, but with long intervals between. ITW makes its own arrangements for tree inspection in QW, employing an arboriculturist to conduct formal surveys.

*Note from phone call with Alex Fraser (Haringey Trees & Nature Conservation Manager)
26apr23:*

His team aim to aim is to inspect just the trees along the main paths and boundaries every 18–24 months. He thought the last one had been within the last 18 months but wasn't sure. No future inspections scheduled.