

Supplementary Planning Guidance

To be reviewed

Advice Note: 14

Tree protection on the building site

Trees have a valuable role to play in both town and country landscapes. They can lead the eye to or focus a vista, screen otherwise obtrusive structures and soften the hard lines of roads and buildings. Most trees, however, are slow growing and therefore it makes sense to incorporate existing trees into any development plan. The most vital aspect of such a choice is the protection of the tree during the building process. This leaflet provides advice and guidelines which should be followed to ensure the survival of trees on building sites.

The Natural Requirements of Trees

A tree breathes through its leaves and obtains water and nutrients by absorption through its roots in reasonably aerated soil. Any change in the supply and purity of those elements is likely to harm the health of the tree. Physical damage, either above or below ground, will similarly affect the tree.

The Planning Stage

Before proceeding with detailed design work, checks should be made of restrictive covenants, Tree Preservation Orders or conditions of the Planning Permission which relate to trees, shrubs and hedgerows on the site.

A detailed survey and report on the condition of the existing trees and shrubs on the site is necessary before design work begins. The survey, which is best undertaken by a qualified Arboriculturalist, should include a plan showing the location of all trees, shrubs and hedgerows on the site giving details of species, spread, height, girth, physical condition, ultimate size and existing ground levels at the bases of the trees and other vegetation. The subsequent layout should provide for the retention of all healthy trees and other vegetation.

Pruning and Felling

All trees to be retained should be marked with a metal tag above normal arm reach at the time of survey. All trees to be felled should be clearly marked with a yellow cross. Pruning and felling must be carried out by a qualified tree surgeon before any construction work commences.

Fencing

Before any work commences trees and shrubs to be retained should be fenced off from the working area with a 1.2m high chestnut (or similar) fencing. These fences should be retained for the whole of the construction period and any damage to them should be repaired immediately.

Storage of Materials

All materials, bricks, soil, cement, etc, should be stored outside of fenced areas away from trees. Particular care should be taken with liquids, fuel and chemicals which, if spilled, could affect trees at a distance from the incident.

Machinery on Site

Vehicles and machinery should be parked or routed away from trees because of the risk of soil compaction.

Fires

No fires should be lit near trees or shrubs because scorched leaves and bark may initiate insect or fungal attack, or cause worse direct effects. Fires should be at least 3m from branch tips of any tree and always on the leeward side of the tree.

Site Hut Location

Site huts should be located away from trees whenever possible. Otherwise they should be raised on blocks to allow roof water to run beneath them and to prevent deterioration on the soil and the death of surface roots.

Water table

Trenches, ground level changes, artificial drainage systems and impermeable surfacing may cause changes to the natural water table levels. Care should be taken to ensure minimum fluctuation especially when mature oaks are to be retained. As with so many effects on trees, the results of careless actions may not be evident for several years (when the contractor has gone from the site) so it is essential to follow the expert advice on care at all stages of the construction process and deal with any problems immediately.

If in doubt, the advice of a qualified Arboriculturalist should be sought.

Check List

1. At the Design Stage

- (i) Check legal restrictions.
- (ii) Aboriculturalist survey and report on the existing trees and shrubs.
- (iii) Design should avoid changes in level, excavations and service runs near trees and shrubs.

2. Before the Construction Stage

- (i) Produce detailed drawings to show all trees to be retained and all trees to be felled. Drawing should also show locations of all temporary buildings, roads and storage areas and these locations should be strictly adhered to throughout the construction period.
- (ii) Qualified tree surgeon to carry out all necessary tree work.
- (iii) Erect protective fences around all the trees and shrubs to be retained.

3. At the Construction Stage

- (i) Site supervision to ensure that there is no encroachment into the fenced areas and that everything possible is done to preserve the trees in good condition.
- (ii) Ensure that all accidental damage is treated immediately by the tree surgeon.
- (iii) If in doubt consult a specialist.

These basic guidelines, if observed, will give trees retained on development sites a better chance of survival. By altering as little as possible the original environment of all such trees, they should continue to thrive and will enhance the final appearance of the development.

Useful Publications

Published by the Aboricultural Association:
The Care of Trees on Development Sites.
Trees – Site Preparation and Planting.