

To help you plan your Tree Council funded project



the
tree
council

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1. Pre-planting site assessment

Before you start planning your tree planting project, it is important to establish:

- a) if your chosen planting site is suitable for tree planting
- b) the type of trees (species and structurally) that are best suited to your site conditions.

The Tree Council is committed to 'the right tree in the right place'. We take a proactive approach to ensuring that the projects we fund achieve a biodiversity gain and do not threaten or degrade pre-existing special habitats or protected species.

When assessing grant applications, we favour those that demonstrate a thorough understanding of site conditions and suitability for tree planting. Applicants should consider: **site ownership, natural designations, existing habitats, soil types, access arrangements, public rights of way** and the **presence of utilities and services**.

The application form provides opportunity for you to tell us about the pre-planting site assessment you have completed. If you don't have expertise in house to complete an assessment we recommend getting in touch with your local Tree Warden Network, wildlife group, Wildlife Trust or county ecologist.

If your site already has information like species records, habitat surveys, or an existing site management plan, please attach it to your application in the "supporting documentation" section.

Essential site assessment considerations



Access arrangements

Resources access and PROWs



Protected species

Existing species of interest



Soil type

Understanding texture and nutrients



Natural designations

Special sites with existing protection



Services & utilities

Both under and above ground



Existing habitats

Where trees may not be appropriate

» Soil type & drainage

It is important to have a good understanding of the soil characteristics of your planting site(s) and to remember that soil type and condition can vary across a site, particularly if you are planting over a large area.

Existing trees and other plant communities will often be a good indicator of your soil type and conditions, but we strongly recommend that you dig a number of soil test pits across your planting area to establish the type(s) of soils you have, including depth and texture. With hotter and drier summers becoming more frequent, it can be particularly useful to improve the structure and water-holding capacity of your soils if they are showing signs of compaction or poor quality.

Forest Research's [Tree Species Database](#) provides information on suitable soils for over 60 common tree species and is a useful resource to aid in tree selection. This [Woodland Trust guide](#) also offers valuable insights into various tree species, presented in a user-friendly format.



» Site access

We ask applicants to consider site access arrangements as part of your pre-planting site assessment. It is good practice to have a clear understanding of whether special access arrangements or equipment will be required to get your planting resources (such as mulch or fencing) to where they are needed.

The presence of public rights of way, including bridleways and footpaths, are also important to note as these may dictate where new trees/hedgerows can be positioned. These may also impact health and safety considerations for your project.

» Services & utilities

Understanding the presence and location of both aboveground and underground utilities on your planting site is crucial. We recommend obtaining service plans and, when needed, conducting scans if you suspect water, gas, electricity, or telecommunications lines. Damage to underground utilities can lead to unexpected costs and significant health and safety hazards. You may like to use [LineSearch](#) to check your site.

When planning where to plant your new trees, ensure they are positioned away from utilities. This will minimise the risk of root or canopy growth breaching utilities in the future.

» Protected habitats and species

It's important that your tree planting project does not harm existing special habitats or protected species. We therefore ask applicants to check whether any such habitats or species are present on their site.

If you're unsure, you can contact your local Biodiversity Records Centre, a local ecologist, or your nearest Wildlife Trust for advice.

For more information, please refer to the attached list of habitats and species of principal importance in England [here](#).



» Protected status

It's also important to check whether your site falls within a designated area, such as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or a National Landscape. Additionally, find out if there are any existing natural or heritage designations on the land, such as Scheduled Monuments, that may be impacted by tree planting.

A helpful resource for this is MAGIC Maps (Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside), a free tool provided by the UK government. It offers detailed spatial data about the natural environment and is especially useful for evaluating land suitability for projects like tree planting.

You can access MAGIC Maps at: <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/> and use the interactive map to explore any designations relevant to your site.



2. Site preparation

Improving the structure and water-holding capacity of your soil can significantly improve tree establishment.

Is preparation needed?

Investing in the preparation of your planting site before starting tree planting is essential. As the climate warms and we experience drier summers in the UK, good ground preparation can make a huge difference in the successful establishment (or failure!) of newly planted trees.

If your site is overgrown, you may need to remove vegetation using a strimmer or mechanical flail. The Tree Council does not support chemical weed control, so if you plan to use herbicide, please note that your project will not be eligible for our grants

We also recommend removing turf, either by hand or mechanical means. This removes competing growth and provides you with the opportunity to carry out soil cultivation, aeration and enrichment (if required). For extensive schemes like shelterbelts, where turf removal is impractical, consider incorporating grass into the soil using a tractor and cultivator. We may be happy to consider these costs for larger planting schemes that are funded through Network Rail or Scottish Power Energy Networks.

if your project is located in parks or urban settings, involving volunteers in site preparation can be practical.. We love to see the local community involved in the projects we fund and favour applications that involve volunteers, or which provide training, skills development or pathways to employment.

Essential site preparation considerations



Soil cultivation

Use of a small rotovator



Turf stripping

Removal of turf over a larger area



Large scale cultivation

Improving soil structure



Adding conditioners

Improving soil structure and fertility



Preparing by hand

Hand cultivation for smaller projects



Vegetation removal

Pre-planting weed clearance

»» Use of contractors

If your project area is large, you may need to consider using a contractor for site preparation, particularly if your group lacks the skills or training to operate the required equipment.

The Tree Council is happy to consider appropriate contractor costs (Network Rail and SPEN only), but we also expect to see community/volunteer involvement.

»» Equipment hire

For larger more extensive projects, we may be happy to consider the cost of hiring machinery and equipment to assist in preparing your site, but this is grant dependent. This could include hire of a strimmer, mower, rotovator or turf cutter, for example.

If you require any of this equipment for your project, we recommend ensuring that anyone operating the equipment has the appropriate level of training, experience, and competence to operate it safely and to meet your insurance policy requirements

»» Soil conditioners

If your soil is fertile, you may not need to add fertilisers before planting. However, we recommend cultivating your soil beforehand to improve its structure and water holding capacity. You may choose to incorporate some coarse organic matter, particularly if your soil is compacted or degraded.

You may wish to consider other methods to improve the condition of your soil before planting, such as using a green manure crop, or the additives and soil conditioners like rotted woodchip, worms, mycorrhiza, or biochar. We encourage groups to provide a rationale for using soil conditioners as part of your funding application.





3.

Tree planting

↻ establishment

Tree planting

Planting trees correctly and using appropriate establishment methods, such as tree protection and mulching, are crucial to giving trees the best chance of survival.

Proper planting encourages the development of strong root systems, which are essential for absorbing water and nutrients. Timing also plays a key role; we recommend planting between late October and the end of December, whenever possible.

The best planting technique will depend on the type of tree you're planting - for example, standards, whips, or hedge plants - so it's important to consider this in your planning.

We encourage you to review our latest guidance on tree planting and establishment to help plan your project.

🌱 [Tree and hedge planting: a step-by-step guide](#)

🌱 [Hedge planting and growing](#)

🌱 [Drought and tree care](#)

🌱 [Protecting young trees](#)

🌱 [Selecting, planting and taking care of fruit trees](#)

🌱 [Caring for newly planted trees](#)

A photograph showing two people in outdoor gear working on a tree guard. One person is using a mallet to drive a wooden stake into the ground, while the other holds the structure steady. The guard is made of several wooden stakes and horizontal rails, forming a rectangular frame around a young tree. The background shows a grassy field with bare trees under a cloudy sky.

Coppiced sweet chestnut or hazel make great material for tree protection, frames, stakes and fencing

Tree protection & staking

The Tree Council favours applications that prioritise sustainability by using more sustainable, recyclable, non-polluting, and low impact resources and materials.

While traditional tree establishment materials are acceptable, demonstrating a commitment to sustainability and environmental impact in your procurement choices will make your application more favourable.

We are happy to consider different approaches to tree protection and staking. For example, you may prefer to plant your hedging at higher densities as an alternative to using tree guards. Equally, if livestock grazing or deer browsing could influence the successful establishment of your trees, we will be happy to consider fencing for more extensive planting schemes, where you can demonstrate good value for money.

We encourage the use of locally sourced resources to support local businesses and reduce carbon emissions associated with transporting materials.

Projects that align with broader environmental initiatives, like using materials from UK coppice woodland or recycling from previous planting schemes, are welcomed.

» Tree stakes & ties

We prefer using sustainable and biodegradable materials for staking and securing trees, such as coppice posts, tree frames, and hessian or non-plastic tree ties.

We are happy to fund more traditional staking and ties, such as standard machined tree stakes (FSC certified) and rubber tree ties and spacers, where these are demonstrably the best options for successful tree establishment (Network Rail and SPEN only). We also encourage projects to develop an establishment and aftercare plan for recycling, reusing, or disposing of tree protection materials when no longer required.

» Fencing & protection

For extensive planting schemes where livestock grazing or deer browsing could impact tree establishment, we can consider fencing, where you can demonstrate that it is the best option.

Fencing may be particularly appropriate for agroforestry schemes, mini forest creation (Miyawaki method) or projects in areas with invasive deer populations. We prefer to fund either coppice-based fencing or the use of materials with a long lifespan that can be recycled for multiple projects. Electric fencing can also be considered in particular situations.



» Tree guards

We will not fund plastic tree guards. We believe that there are now enough alternatives to plastic available across the UK and we aim to reduce plastic use in the tree sector and wider environment.

We encourage the use of biodegradable tree guards, including bio spirals, cardboard guards, and starch/wool-based guards. Consider these options during your project planning stages. When assessing applications, we seek a balance between value for money and environmental protection in our assessments and may recommend alternatives if tree protection costs are excessive.

Take a look at our [Protecting Young Trees](#) guidance for further information.

Types of tree protection



Fencing

For projects at scale, when cost effective



Weld mesh protection

In particular situations



Robust staking

For larger trees where appropriate



Bio spirals

We will only fund non-plastic guards



Cardboard guards

Fully biodegradable preferred



Sustainable resources

More sustainable alternatives welcomed