

Trees and Woodland within the Lincolnshire Wolds.

The Tree and Woodland Advice Sheet series has been produced to help landowners and managers make decisions about tree and woodland management.

Trees and woodlands are identified as an importance resource in the Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and we recognise the need for their sensitive management.

The woodland cover of the Lincolnshire Wolds AONB is low, at about 4%, but is still an important habitat and landscape component of the area. Much of the present day woodland was planted during the parliamentary enclosures of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. They provided a mixture of small game coverts, parkland, tree belts and avenues. Small plantations and clumps of predominantly beech, with some ash, sycamore and pine, are still dotted around the Wolds today and are one of its most dramatic landscape features.



Many of the landmark trees provide important wildlife habitats in their own right, often including niches for mosses, lichens, specialist insects, birds and bats. The woodlands also provide the opportunity to bring socio-economic benefits to the Wolds' communities in the form of field sports, timber products, business skills and local employment.

Many landowners, organisations and members of the public are now working to address the need to conserve and enhance the tree stock for future generations to enjoy.

The Lincolnshire Wolds Tree Group are conscious of the sensitive issues that can relate to tree and woodland management. We are also aware that trees and woodland need active management to ensure that they remain healthy and productive for their timber, landscape and biodiversity value. We hope that this Advice Sheet Series will act as a guide for owners and managers of trees and woodland in the Wolds and assist in making decisions.

The Lincolnshire Wolds Tree Group is comprised of specialist organisations and individuals. For further information, please contact:

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Risk assessments of trees and woodlands.

What is the Risk?

Trees can be very large structures that occasionally fail. However, for a risk to exist there needs to be a target, i.e. if a tree or part of a tree failed would it cause damage and to what extent?

As with all structures on your land, there is a legal requirement that they are periodically checked for safety and any significant defects made safe to avoid a future claim against you for negligence. As long as this is done, any claim should be defensible in court.

Previous legal rulings have considered that landowners / tenants should inspect the condition of trees twice a year. If deciduous; when bare in winter and again when in full leaf.

Clearly trees remote from people and property may need less frequent checking and indeed highways engineers are expected to check highway trees no less than once every five years. It is also recommended that checks are made at other times, e.g. following storms and more regularly where a tree is known to be in decline or damaged.

A tree may be perceived as having defects but this does not mean it is unsafe. For example:

- A tree may have a natural lean but will compensate for those stresses and remain safe.
- Many large trees will have some decay and still be stable. Even largely hollow (up to 70%) trees can be within recognised safety margins, but may require a more detailed safety assessment.



When to take professional advice

You may not have the time, training or confidence to undertake a survey. You may require a more professional assessment to be carried out where defects have been identified close to people and property which includes trespassers where there is a known risk. Insurance companies are increasingly requesting such assessments are undertaken to reduce their own risk. Having a professional report shows that you have taken a responsible attitude and can help defend against future claims.

Whilst realising the greater costs involved, owners are encouraged to use a professional arborist. By determining the level of detail, method of assessment and survey, the costs can be reduced. This will target resources more effectively. However, when taking professional advice there is a greater legal requirement to act on any recommendations made within a reasonable timescale. Also note that any professional advice will be time limited and there will be an ongoing need for periodic re-inspection. Contact details of local arborists can be obtained from your local authority Tree Officer or the Lincolnshire Wolds Countryside Service.

What to discuss with surveyors

Experience and qualifications

An arborist carrying out tree risk assessments must be well trained in biology, tree mechanics and structure. It takes experience to recognise the often subtle signs of potential mechanical failure. Many factors can be involved in formulating a decision, such as the characteristic of the tree, crown size, taper, exposure, location of any defects and decay, type of decay and tree value (both from a wildlife and amenity perspective).

Assessment Method

At present, a number of methods are used to assess trees for risk. All are based on the likelihood of failure, the likelihood that harm will be caused and the possible severity of that harm. Whichever system is used, it should be clearly stated in the report and understood by you. Details are available from the arboriculture organisations listed.

Prioritising areas for survey

For large areas and for large numbers of trees, it is cost effective to prioritise work in the following order; close to domestic buildings, A roads, B roads, minor roads, footpaths and bridleways. This can best be done on a map using local knowledge to inform on the level of usage and value of structures. For example, it is estimated that there is a 9 times lower risk associated with a tree by a minor road compared to an A road.

Procedures and recording format

The procedure for evaluating risk starts with a visual inspection for defects from ground level, which may then require more detailed assessment and evaluation. Other environmental conditions are also considered. The level of recorded detail should be considered and many surveyors have their own recording forms for this. Recording the height, diameter and species can aid future identification and inform an understanding of the health of the tree stock. Brief details of any defects will be recorded and used to inform any subsequent recommendations for remedial action. This can all be recorded in table form within a report.

Locating trees

In order to relate to the report, trees should be accurately plotted on a plan and ideally numbered, whilst some surveyors may also have access to GPS equipment and electronic maps to plot tree positions. It is worth considering attaching metal or plastic tags to trees, which will serve to make trees easier to find in subsequent surveys.



Undertaking any work required

Prioritising work

Surveyors may use a numerical scoring method to assess individual tree risk. This is useful because it enables targeting of areas for work. This will usually be related to a recommended timescale.

Schedule of works

A detailed schedule and accompanying map is required for contractors where works are required to trees such as felling or surgery. This can be prioritised either by area, if large, or by risk category.

Checking for any constraints

Surveyors should also check with the relevant local authority for any legal restrictions such as Tree Preservation Orders or Conservation Areas. Local Authority Tree Officers will be able to give advice on procedures and other sources of information. Some legally protected species, such as bats, use trees extensively and the correct procedure must be followed to prevent police action.

Where major felling is proposed there may be a requirement for a Felling Licence from the Forestry Commission.



Planning works over a period

Where a lot of tree work is planned, it may be beneficial to phase or schedule the work over a number of years. This could help meet budget constraints and would lessen potential for sudden landscape change. It is important that there is a clear programme of work that addresses the highest risks first. In the event of a claim for damage, a court would most likely rule that an owner was acting reasonably.

Consider the value of old trees

Recently the value of old trees as historic and cultural landmarks has been recognised and these especially benefit some of our rarer wildlife. Where a tree is in a lower risk situation

every effort should be taken to retain it. Tree surgery and crown reduction may be appropriate in some situations and may help to prolong the life of the tree. Contact the Lincolnshire Wolds Countryside Service for possible grant aid towards tree surgery.

The condition of any given tree will depend on numerous factors and rates of decline will vary according to species, growth form and site conditions. Details can be found on the Woodland Trust and Tree Council websites. Natural England also has a free guide: Veteran Trees 'A guide to risk and responsibility'.

Don't forget

Specific wildlife issues to address and timing of works

Surveyors and contractors should be aware of the legislation concerning wildlife found in association with trees. There is strong legislation protecting bats and their roosts, with barn owls and badgers also protected from disturbance. If the surveyor has concerns that these or other protected species are present then detailed advice should be taken from Natural England or their agents. Reports should highlight any constraints that may apply when carrying out tree felling or surgery.

It is recommended that felling or major works not be undertaken during the main bird-nesting season of March to August inclusive, because of the legal protection afforded to birds. If work cannot wait for safety reasons, then a survey for active nests or bat roosts may be undertaken and advice taken from Natural England if any are likely to be affected.



Replanting

In order to maintain our existing tree cover and important landscape trees, we need to be regularly planting trees and this should certainly be considered where trees are felled. There are a number of sources of grant aid and advice available including the Lincolnshire County Council's free replacement tree programme for trees felled near the highway on safety grounds. You may also contact the Lincolnshire Wolds Countryside Service and the Forestry Commission for advice.



Useful contact details and further information.

General Enquires
The Lincolnshire Wolds Tree Group
c/o The Lincolnshire Wolds Countryside Service, Tel 01507 609740
e-mail: aonb@lincswolds.org.uk
website: www.lincswolds.org.uk

Advice about Tree Preservation Orders
Contact your local district or unitary authority council

East Lindsey District Council, Tel 01507 601111
e-mail: trees@e-lindsey.gov.uk

West Lindsey District Council, Tel 01427 676650/676660
e-mail: technicians@west-lindsey.gov.uk

North East Lincolnshire Council, Tel 01472 324273/324271
e-mail: trees@nelincs.gov.uk

Advice regarding arboricultural issues and free replacement trees
Lincolnshire County Council, Tel 01522 782070
e-mail: dev_net@lincolnshire.gov.uk
website: www.lincolnshire.gov.uk

Advice about Felling Licences and English Woodland Grant Scheme
Forestry Commission, Tel 01673 843461
website: www.forestry.gov.uk

Advice on Tree Surveys and Surveyors
International Society of Arboriculture: www.isa-uki.org
Arboricultural Association: www.trees.org.uk
Institute of Chartered Foresters: www.charteredforesters.org

Advice regarding Protected Species and veteran trees
Natural England, Tel 01476 584800
website: www.naturalengland.org.uk

Advice regarding management on veteran trees
The Ancient Tree Forum - care of: www.woodland-trust.org.uk
Ancient Tree Guide No 1: Trees and Farming, available from the Woodland Trust
The Tree Council: www.treecouncil.org.uk