



**Trees and
Development**
Planning advice
PA2023-20

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Purpose of this Planning Advice

This Planning Advice provides best practice guidance to help planning applicants avoid damage to, or loss of, trees on development sites. The advice supports the requirements of Trees and Woodlands policies within Policy PR1 Protecting Important Resources (PR1.7 and PR1.8) of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (LDP) 2023 which establish a strong presumption in favour of retaining trees and woodland on development sites.

The national importance of protecting and avoiding adverse impacts on trees and woodlands is underpinned by National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) under Policy 6 ‘Forestry, woodland and trees’, and the overarching principles of Policy 1 ‘Tackling the climate and nature crises’, and Policy 3 ‘Biodiversity’, to help meet climate targets and reverse biodiversity loss.

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1. Introduction

Trees are a valuable asset in our landscape and help integrate new development into its setting. Retaining trees and woodland on development sites enhances the environment of our towns and villages and makes a positive contribution to quality of life. However, trees on a development site can easily be lost or damaged through lack of consideration. For this reason, the presence of even one tree on

a site is a consideration when a planning application are assessed. This Planning Advice sets out the key factors to be considered for a development proposal, outlining the tree survey and assessments to be carried out, and what information is required to be submitted with a planning application. Appendix 1 provides a practical checklist to guide applicants through the process.

For any proposals involving the removal of trees and woodland, the Scottish Government Control of Woodland Removal Policy¹ will apply.

2. Damage to Trees

Damage to, or loss of, trees during development can be caused accidentally by failing to appreciate how vulnerable trees are. Irreparable damage can be caused to the tree's trunk, branches and roots by site clearance, earth moving, excavation, compaction and storage of materials. Although not generally visible, tree roots are a very important part of the tree, providing moisture and nutrients and are the part of the tree most easily damaged. Most tree roots lie just below the ground but stretch some distance from the trunk.

Appropriate consideration of trees on site during the planning stages and adequate protection of them throughout the demolition and construction phases, will ensure they survive and thrive as a successful part of the new development.

3. Site Assessment and Tree Survey

When planning a development an accurate site assessment and tree survey should be carried out in accordance with BS 5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction.

At a minimum the site assessment and tree survey should include a plan with the following:

- footprint of the proposed development and any buildings to be demolished
- existing and proposed ground levels

¹ See <https://forestry.gov.scot/publications/285-the-scottish-government-s-policy-on-control-of-woodland-removal/viewdocument/285>

- location and root protection areas of all trees on and adjacent to the site
- other relevant site features (e.g., water courses, overhead and underground services).
- proposed new and replacement planting

This should be supported with the following information about the trees on the site:

- species
- size (height, diameter, canopy spread and calculated root protection areas)
- age, health and condition
- category grading as per BS 5837:2012
- proposals for retention or removal

An Ecological Survey may also be required to assess the biodiversity and amenity value of woodland habitat.

The information provided by these surveys will aid the design of the development and allow any potential impacts to be properly assessed.

4. Development Proposal

The constraints imposed by trees, both above and below ground must inform the site layout design. An arboricultural impact assessment is required to evaluate the direct and indirect effects of a proposed design and, where necessary, recommend mitigations. This assessment should be evidenced in the planning application e.g., within the design statement, and be submitted together with the tree survey and a tree protection plan. The tree protection plan must show trees for retention and their protection measures, and detailed within an arboricultural method statement, as per BS 5837.

Appendix 1 of this Planning Advice provides a practical checklist to assist planning applicants with their submission.

5. Tree Protection

If the proposals are considered acceptable the Planning Authority may impose conditions to ensure trees are appropriately protected.

Tree protection measures, including root protection areas and precise locations of protective barriers and exclusion zones, will require to be clearly shown on the site plans.

Approved tree protection measures must be implemented prior to the commencement of any development on site and remain in place until the development is fully completed.

The default specification for a protective barrier as shown in British Standard 5837:2012 is set out in Figure 1 below.

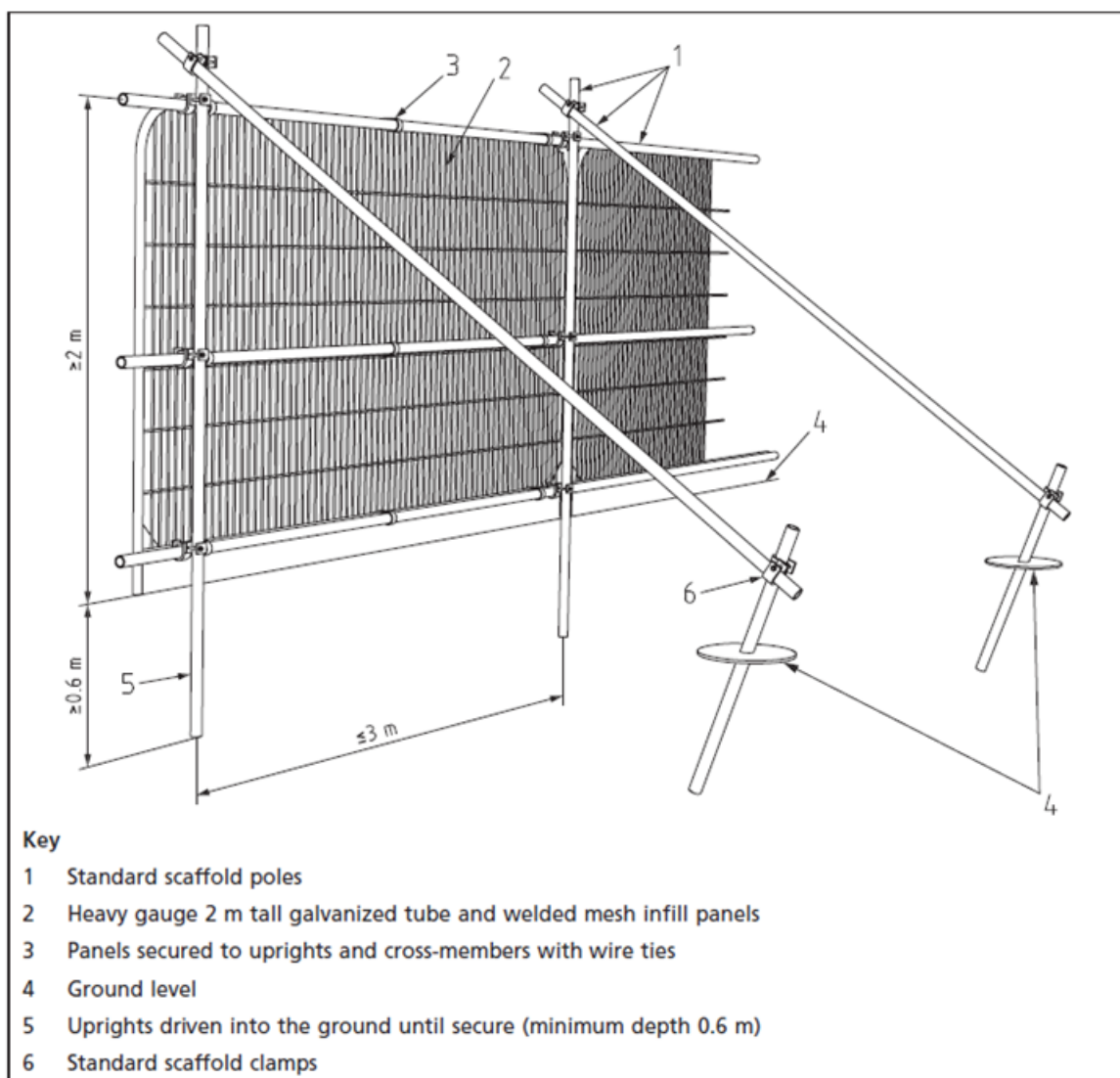


Figure 1 Default specification for a protective barrier

6. Planning Informatives

Informatives are advisory notes included in the decision notice of a planning permission. These provide guidance on matters such as other statutory consents. For example, Informatives may be used to advise that trees on or immediately adjacent to the application site are protected by virtue of a Tree Protection Order or being sited within a Conservation Area. These trees, being outwith the scope of the planning approval, would require separate consent for tree works from the Planning Authority. Further information on how to apply for consent is available on Aberdeenshire Council's website at:

<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/environment/natural-heritage/trees/>

7. New and Compensatory Planting

A scheme of replacement planting, to include details of tree numbers, species and planting sizes and program for establishment will be required. New planting should be located to ensure there is good connectivity with existing and proposed tree and other landscape planting.

Appendix 1: Trees and Development Checklist

1. Meeting Policy Requirements

- Have you made early engagement with the Planning Authority? Planning officers can advise on the surveys and assessments required, as well as the planning process.
- Minimum requirements for site assessments and tree survey as set out in BS 5837:2012 must be met in relation to design, demolition and construction.

2. Site Assessment and Tree Survey

- Have you carried out a topographical survey and soil assessment at a preliminary stage of the planning and design process? If clearance of undergrowth is required for the survey process, specialist advice must be sought e.g., from an arboriculturist.
- Have all trees on and adjacent to the development site been surveyed and plotted in a scale drawing in a recognised digital format? A tree survey must be carried out in accordance with BS 5837:2012 'Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction'.
- Has a schedule for the tree survey also been included? This is required to list all trees or groups of trees using a sequential numbering system, and using the measurement conventions and tree categorization method identified in the BS.

3. Tree Constraints and Impacts

- Was the tree survey completed and made available to designers prior to and/or independently of any specific proposals for development.
- Have the results of the tree survey and arboricultural impact assessment informed the feasibility studies and early design options?
- Have root protection areas been calculated in accordance with the BS.

- How did the constraints imposed by trees, both above and below ground, inform the site layout design?
- Have you identified the presence of tree preservation orders, conservation areas or other protections?
- Has there been early consideration of incompatibilities between the potential design layout and trees proposed for retention?
- Has the working and access space needed for demolition and construction been factored in?
- Have you considered the proposed routing of underground services and any impact on trees on and adjoining the site?
- Has a tree protection plan been drawn up? This must be a scale drawing with descriptive text as necessary showing trees for retention and illustrating tree and landscape protection measures and detailed within the arboricultural method statement.
- Have the particular requirements of large and mature trees been considered both during construction and in terms of allowing for their long-term retention and future maintenance?

4. Demolition and Construction in Proximity to Existing Trees

- Tree and soil structure must take priority. Has the root protection area and precise locations of protective barriers and exclusion zones been clearly shown on site plans and a method statement prepared for the identification of these areas?
- The design should not require excavation into the soil in the root protection area. Have existing ground levels been retained within the root protection area?

5. New and Compensatory Planting

- Early consideration of the detailed design of new planting is important to inform decisions regarding location and species. Has advice been sought from a landscape professional?
- Has adequate space been allowed for future growth of root systems?

- Have you considered technical options for integrating trees into constrained spaces or within areas of hardstanding, in order to ensure quality establishment? Information on this can be sought from 'The Trees and Design Action Group' (TDAG)².
- Have you considered the obstruction of light and views, and creation of shade by new trees when fully grown in relation to adjacent buildings?

² See <https://www.tdag.org.uk/our-guides.html>