

Tree Guidance

Ancient, Veteran or Significant Trees

Northern Ireland has approximately a 6% tree cover, only 1% of which is broadleaf. Of this 1%, much of it is planted or young woodland. Any individuals or groups of trees that are ancient (over 300 years old) or veteran are scarce and valuable and therefore need to be managed properly. Significant trees aren't quite so old but are significant perhaps for cultural or historical reasons eg The Frosses or have the potential to become veteran trees.

It is important for biodiversity to have a varied tree age structure, which supports more wildlife and provides continuity for varied species' survival. Trees are also important to people and communities and contribute significantly towards a positive image for an area. From Translink's point-of-view, trees have a particular function and relevance as they:

- provide screening between residential areas and business and help with privacy issues;
- provide a protective barrier against both air and noise pollution;
- stabilise embankments and cuttings from slippage and assist in flood defence;

- autumn-time leaf-fall creates problems where SPADs occur in areas with a high density of trees eg Bangor line and around Moira.

- mature trees can cause issues along bus routes where double-decker buses are in operation



Dead standing wood

Threats

- Development eg damage from trenching or removal;
- Damage from felling, cutting and inappropriate pruning;
- Storing materials and equipment under tree canopies compacts the soil inhibiting nutrient uptake and/or damaging the root systems of trees;
- Pollution and illegal dumping.

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Legislation

Under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, it is an offence to disturb nesting or breeding birds from 1st March to 31st August. This piece of legislation effectively protects hedgerows and trees during this period as nesting and breeding sites for birds, unless the operator is sure no nesting or breeding birds are present.

Individual trees or groups of trees may be protected by the Planning (Trees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007, more commonly known as a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). Under this piece of legislation “no person shall, except without the consent of

the Department... uproot, wilfully damage, cut down, top, lop or wilfully destroy or cause or permit the cutting down, topping, lopping, uprooting, wilful damage...” to any tree or woodland.

The Planning Service under the Department of the Environment is responsible for administering applications to place TPOs on trees as well as for applications for consent to undertake work on trees with TPOs.

The Planning Service may also place ‘conditions of planning’ on trees in a development project without the presence of TPOs.

Best Practice

Undertaking remedial work on trees will be a priority if Health & Safety is an issue. However, it is likely that sympathetic options will be available to meet H&S as well as biodiversity needs

For example, it may be possible to change a bus route or have a bus lane moved slightly where overhead branches no longer hit the vehicle. Where new projects are concerned, stress the importance of retaining mature trees on site in contract documents and also protecting these during development. Additionally, if replacing trees that had to be removed, priority should be given to planting locally-provenanced, native trees which help to conserve Northern Ireland’s genetic diversity.



Tree removal on Translink property

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Don't	Do
<p>Works: Remove or work on trees without checking if they are protected first via the Planning Service's TPOs Store materials or equipment under trees Track heavy machinery close to trees Change the soil level around and under trees Use tools that are not properly maintained eg blunt blades which cause unnecessary damage to trees</p>	<p>Commission a tree survey where its needed Consider incorporating significant trees into a project design Erect temporary fencing around trees during work to protect them Ensure all staff and contractors know the area is protected Look for opportunities to retain at least some of the tree eg remove tree crown, retain trunk and use this to develop a community wood sculpture</p>
<p>Remedial/Tree Surgery work: Request/undertake work without checking if the tree is protected first Remove the whole tree without considering biodiversity and mitigation work Remove all debris from site as dead wood has significant value for wildlife</p>	<p>Advise the site supervisor if you feel there are 'softer' ways of dealing with the issue other than removal Aside from TPOs, consider if the tree has any other significance eg bat roost Consider alternatives to removal of the whole tree eg dead standing trunk and wood log habitat piles</p>

Timing

A basic tree survey:	Anytime of the year
Tree planting:	Best undertaken from mid-November to mid-March
Tree surgery:	Outside bird nesting season or if you are sure no birds are using the trees, early springtime when trees can heal most effectively
Bat survey:	Survey ideally May – September when bats are active. For hibernation roosts, November – March. No surveys to be undertaken in the two months of October and April when bats are particularly sensitive to disturbance.

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Useful Web links and information

The Planning Service Northern Ireland www.planningni.gov.uk/

A leaflet is available on TPOs and 'Trees & Development – A Guide to Best Practice'

Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland can provide local, native provenance trees for planting schemes and also act as contractors undertaking planting work www.cvni.org/treenursery/