

Assessment guide: ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees

Use this template to help you make planning decisions and keep a record of your assessment.

Follow the Natural England and Forestry Commission [standing advice](#) to help you make decisions on planning proposals that could affect ancient woodlands, ancient or veteran trees. Use this template to record the direct and indirect effects of a development proposal and any planning decisions you make.

Section 1: Has the developer provided all relevant information for you to make a planning decision?

This could include:

- environmental impact assessment
- ecological baseline survey
- specialist species ecological survey
- tree survey
- soil survey
- hydrological survey
- historic environment survey
- landscape character assessment
- ancient woodland inventory status
- statutory and non-statutory protected sites search
- land management information, such as woodland management plans

1.1 Record the assessments and surveys provided, and any extra information you need from essential surveys that are missing or inadequate.

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Section 2: Is there an alternative location for the proposal?

Can the proposal be relocated or redesigned to avoid the ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees?

Also consider alternative sites if the proposal is next to, or close to ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees.

2.1 Record your findings

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Section 3: To what extent would the development proposal affect ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees?

Assess the loss or damage of ancient woodland. What is the loss or damage in hectares or as a percentage of the whole, or the number of ancient and veteran trees affected?

The size of ecological loss is not always the overriding factor. A small loss from a small woodland could be more significant locally and ecologically than loss from a larger woodland. The loss of a single tree in a wood pasture or parkland could cause local extinction of rare wood-decay insects.

Does the ancient woodland or ancient and veteran tree provide habitat connections for woodland plants, birds and animals?

Small ancient woodlands might be remnants of larger woodlands and have a higher biodiversity importance than first assumed.

3.1 Record your findings

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

3.2 Record any proposed mitigation or enhancement measures, or local planning authority (LPA) requirements

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Section 4: How well connected is the ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees to the surrounding landscape?

Is the site isolated or connected to other woodland?

Isolated woodland and trees are likely to be more vulnerable to the effects of development than connected woodland and trees.

Will the development proposal damage the connectivity?

Will there be a loss of adjacent semi-natural habitats and existing buffers with the ancient woodland or ancient and veteran trees?

Could you retain connecting habitats, such as hedgerows and copses? How could you maintain and enhance long-term protection?

An ancient woodland in a sparsely wooded area could be more vulnerable to the effects of development than ancient woodland in a more wooded area.

4.1 Record your findings

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

4.2 Record any proposed mitigation or enhancement measures, or local planning authority (LPA) requirements

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Section 5: Has the developer included a protected species survey with their application?

Are protected species affected by the development proposal?

Ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees and adjacent semi-natural habitats are important to species, such as: dormice, bats, rare insects, lichens and fungi.

You may also need to assess the effect of noise and light pollution of the proposal on protected species.

Has the developer included avoidance and mitigation measures in their proposal?

See Natural England's [standing advice for protected species](#) for more information.

5.1 Record your findings

Click or tap here to enter text.

5.2 Record any proposed mitigation or enhancement measures, or local planning authority (LPA) requirements

Click or tap here to enter text.

Section 6: Will the construction or operation of the development proposal directly or indirectly affect ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees?

Effects to consider include:

- changes to woodland and tree habitat, including understory, ground flora and roots
- changes to functional habitat connections
- damage to soils, such as compaction
- changes to air quality, such as traffic and other pollution
- changes to ground water, from pollutants or changes in hydrology
- increased light pollution
- increased noise and vibration
- damage to archaeological features or heritage assets
- changes to landscape character
- risk of garden encroachment, including potential invasive species
- risk of damage to people and property by falling branches or trees requiring tree management that could cause habitat deterioration

Have the relevant assessments been carried out?

Has appropriate mitigation been proposed?

The effects of air and water pollution and hydrological changes can occur at significant distances away from the proposal site.

6.1 Record your findings

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

6.2 Record any proposed mitigation or enhancement measures, or local planning authority (LPA) requirements

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Section 7: Will the proposal increase formal or informal public access to ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees?

A development proposal has the potential to cause damage from residents, visitors, domestic pets and new gardens. You should consider effects, such as:

- disturbance to wild birds and other protected species
- predation and soil enrichment from domestic pets
- trampling woodland flora and compacting soil around tree roots
- fly tipping and vandalism

7.1 Record your findings

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

7.2 Record any proposed mitigation or enhancement measures, or local planning authority (LPA) requirements

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Section 8: Does the development proposal include an appropriate buffer of semi-natural habitat between ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees and the development?

Follow Natural England and Forestry Commission [standing advice](#) on the use buffer zones and their recommended types and sizes. No part of the development should be included in the buffer zone.

A tree survey is required to assess [root protection areas](#).

8.1 Record your findings

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

8.2 Record any proposed measures, or local planning authority (LPA) requirements

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Section 9: Does the proposal include a landscaping scheme?

Does a landscaping scheme include (preferably local) native species suitable for the proposed development site?

Exotic species can escape from gardens into adjacent woodland and compete with local, native species.

Does the landscaping scheme retain semi-natural features, such as mature trees and hedgerows?

Does the landscaping scheme include proposals for a buffer zone?

9.1 Record your findings

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

9.2 Record any proposed measures, or local planning authority (LPA) requirements

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Section 10: What is the current condition of the ancient woodland or ancient and veteran trees, and can it be improved?

Will the proposal lead to woodland or tree deterioration?

Ancient woodland can be improved by replacing non-native trees with native broadleaved trees and shrubs suitable for the area. Ancient and veteran trees can be improved by removing other trees growing within their canopy or removing access to them, for example.

You should not base your decision on the existing state of the woodland.

10.1 Record your findings

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

10.2 Record any proposed mitigation or enhancement measures, or local planning authority (LPA) requirements

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Section 11: Have all opportunities for enhancement been considered?

Consider if:

- the woodland or tree condition can be improved
- connectivity is enhanced
- long-term management is secured
- adjacent or nearby sites can be enhanced

11.1 Record your findings

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

11.2 Record any local planning authority (LPA) requirements

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Section 12: Summary of assessment

Summarise:

- all likely effects of the development proposal on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees
- any avoidance or mitigation measures included in the proposal

Decide if the proposal is in line with the NPPF 180(c). For more guidance, follow:

- the Natural England and Forestry Commission [standing advice](#) for more information about avoidance, mitigation and compensation
- paragraphs 33 and 34 of the [planning practice guidance](#)

12.1 What are the likely effects of the development proposal on ancient woodland or ancient and veteran trees?

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

12.2 Have all the likely effects of the development proposal been avoided or adequately mitigated, if so, how?

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

12.3 Will the proposal result in loss or deterioration of ancient woodland or ancient and veteran trees?

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12.4 Are there wholly exceptional reasons to grant planning permission?

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12.5 If exceptional reasons exist, is there an appropriate compensation strategy, secured through planning conditions or obligations?

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