



SUFFOLK
HIGHWAYS
www.suffolk.gov.uk/highways

Trees and Hedges Quick Guide

Our commitment to maintaining and managing trees and hedges along roads, footways, and public spaces, ensuring safety and environmental benefits

About trees and hedges

Trees and hedges are an important amenity for both the public and wildlife; however, they can pose a risk to highway users if they become weakened or damaged, or if they encroach onto pavements, roads, or visibility splays.

Trees and hedges are natural features that will shed leaves, pollen, berries, fruit and seeds as part of their normal growth. This is not considered a defect. There is also no legal right to light where trees cause shading. Works are prioritised where there are safety concerns, obstructions, or damage.



What we do

Suffolk Highways manages trees and hedges that grow on or alongside public roads, footways, and cycleways. We recognise their importance for public amenity and wildlife, but also that they can pose hazards if they become weakened or encroach onto public routes.

Many roadside hedges are the responsibility of the adjacent landowner. Where there is a potential safety issue, we will work with landowners to ensure appropriate action is taken.

Our key responsibilities include:

- **Regular Inspections:** Trees are inspected on a routine basis to monitor their condition. Specialist arboricultural advice may be sought where there are specific concerns.
- **Maintenance Works:** We carry out necessary maintenance to manage risk, which may include pruning or, in some cases, removing trees that present a safety concern.

In urban areas, trees can outgrow their space if left unchecked, potentially causing damage to roads, footways, drainage systems or nearby property. Maintenance may therefore be required from time to time to manage these impacts and maintain tree condition.

Where a tree on private land is identified as a risk to highway users, we will contact the landowner to agree the necessary works, which remain the responsibility of the landowner.

Protected trees and permissions

If a tree is protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) or is in a conservation area, specific permissions are required from the relevant district or borough council before any work can be carried out.

This includes pruning or removing branches. Residents must give notice to the council before undertaking any work to protected trees, allowing the relevant council to assess the situation and determine if further measures are necessary.

Bird nesting

It is a legal requirement to avoid disturbance to nesting birds and as far as possible, property owners should plan to cut their trees and hedges to avoid the bird nesting season.

As a guide, bird nesting is generally between 1 March to 1 September. However each season is different and some birds can nest at any time.

We will not normally undertake work on our trees or issue hedge notices during this period, but there may be occasions where a tree or an overgrown hedge is causing a safety problem, requiring urgent action. In these circumstances it will be the property owner's responsibility or whoever is organising the work to check for nesting birds and avoid cutting or trimming in the vicinity of any nests until the fledglings have flown.

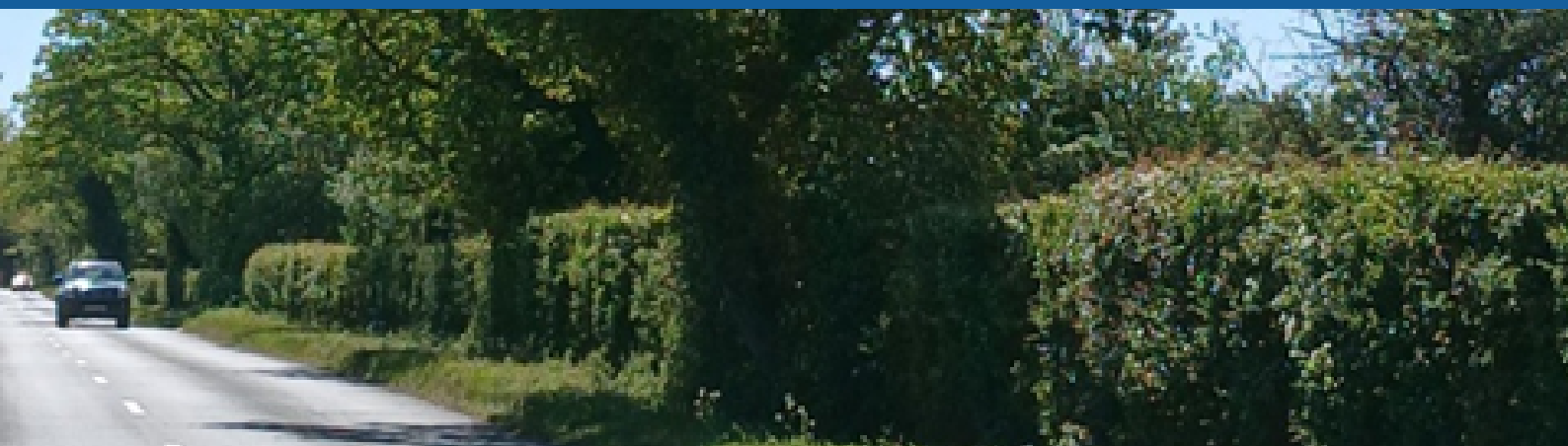
Hedges

Almost all hedges are owned by the adjacent property owner.

Routine or cosmetic trimming is not undertaken by Suffolk Highways, but hedges and vegetation may be cut back where they obstruct the highway, reduce visibility at junctions or bends, or present a safety risk.

Where a problem is identified the property owner will be contacted and asked to cut back branches which are overgrowing the public highway. (The public highway consists of any verge, footway, road, bridleway or public footpath whether or not maintained at public expense and over which the public has a right of way.)

If the owner fails to undertake this work within a reasonable period (usually 21 days), we may require the owner to undertake this work by serving notice in accordance with the provisions of Section 154 of the Highways Act. If this work is not completed within 21 days then we may undertake the work ourselves and seek to recover any costs from the property owner concerned.



Report It

You can report a tree or hedge affecting the highway quickly and easily using our online reporting tool:

www.suffolk.gov.uk/report-a-highways-problem