Development Management Tree Guidance

This document forms advice from Suffolk County Council (SCC) for developers and planning authorities as an appendix to the Suffolk Design for Streets Guide (SDSG).

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1. Introduction

This document forms advice from Suffolk County Council (SCC) for developers and planning authorities as an appendix to the Suffolk Design for Streets Guide (SDSG) and supports guidance given in Chapter 2 and Appendix B of the SDSG.

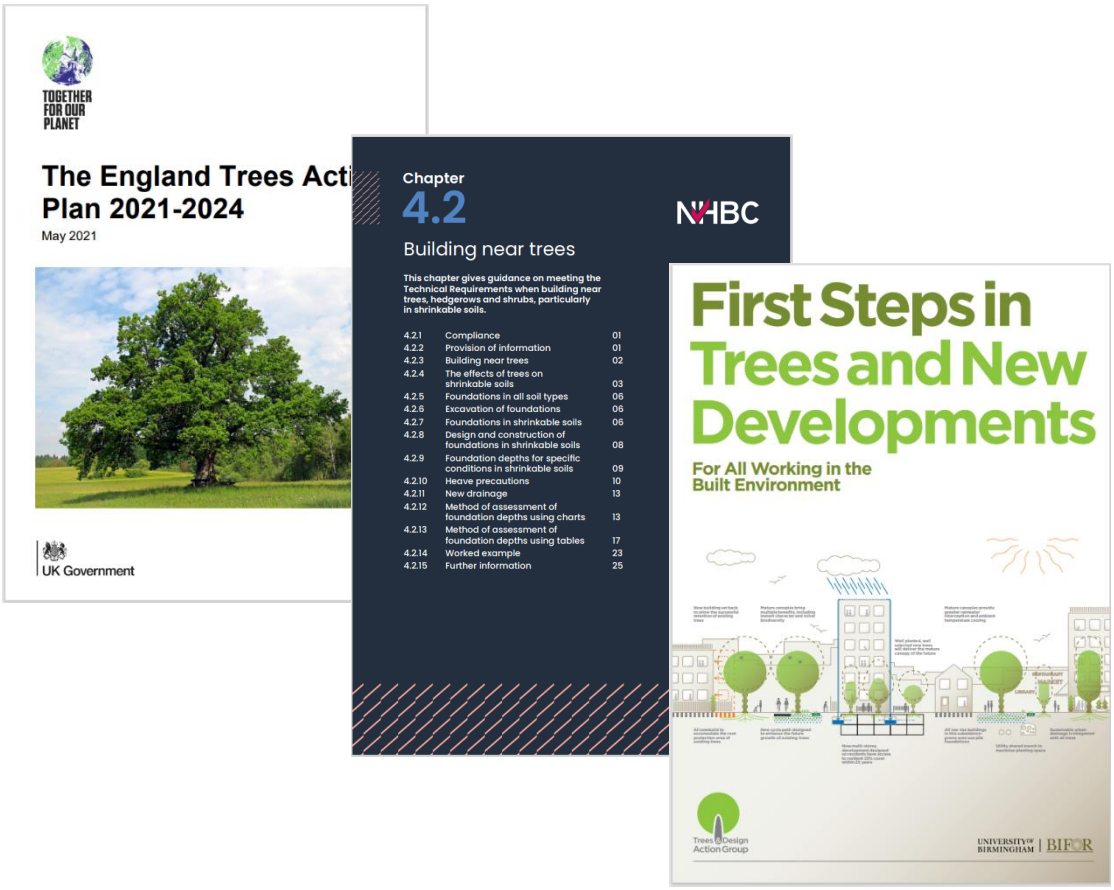
This document is specifically for

- planting trees in or adjacent to new highway (carriageway, verge and footways) that will be maintainable at public expense. These will be within a s38 agreement (Highways Act 1980) for adoption of highways.
- Existing highway trees affected by new accesses, roundabouts, footways associated with developments. The developer will enter into a s278 agreement (Highways Act 1980) to enable permanent changes to the public highway.

SCC acknowledges trees, hedges and shrubs enhance new developments and are important in integrating development within the landscape and urban realm. They are also vital to our health and wellbeing, reducing pollution, providing shade and encouraging wildlife. However, inadequate planning of trees, hedges and shrubs within new developments can have a damaging impact on highway infrastructure and the plants themselves. A balanced approach in creating attractive, well landscaped and accessible developments, whilst also addressing the need for and cost of future maintenance is therefore necessary to create more green and blue spaces for nature. Planting that prioritises tree numbers or canopy alone, without considering location, habitat, species, design, climate change, and long-term maintenance, is unlikely to achieve the intended benefits.

SCC's approach is focused on the right tree in the right place for the right reasons. This guidance has been produced by SCC Development Management, Planning and Ecology Teams. It follows national guidance and appropriate industry codes of practice and

guidance documents such as The England Trees Action Plan 2021-2024 , UK Government, Trees and Design Action Group, National House Building Council and The British Standards Institution.

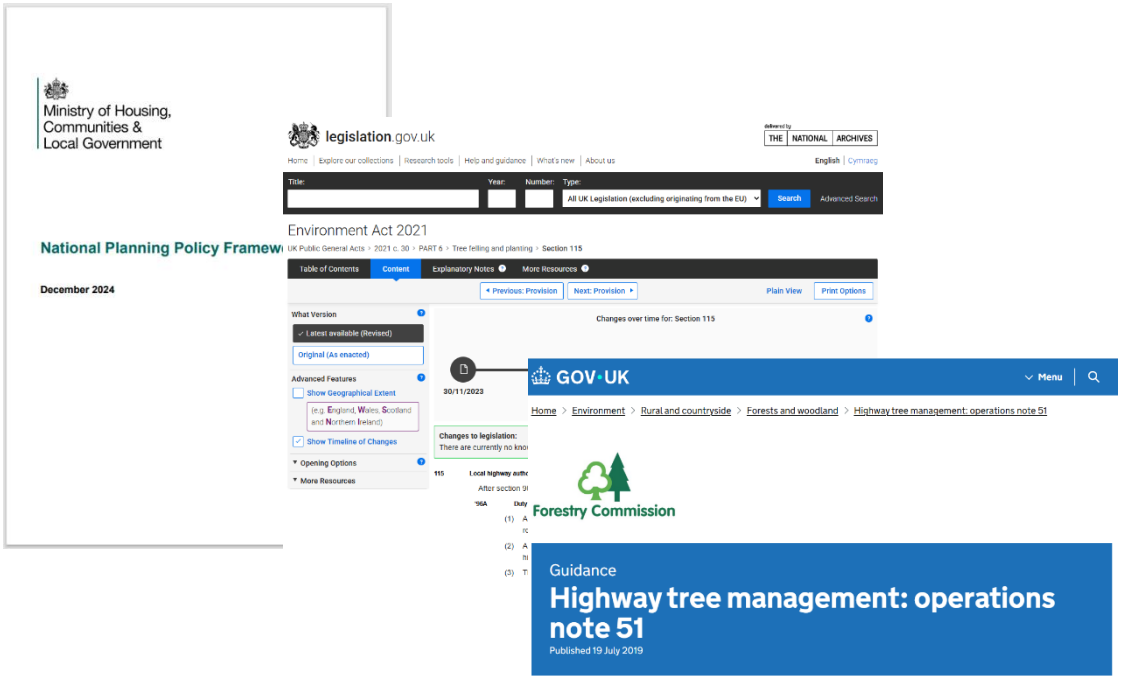


It is important to note that highways only form a small proportion of the area within developments. Planting of trees shrubs and hedges within the remainder of development sites is strongly encouraged. Indeed, planting in public open spaces is likely to provide a greater ecological benefit that can be achieved within the confines of the public highway. However, SCC acknowledges highways can provide excellent corridors to allow movement for wildlife and planting of trees in the highway is beneficial for all. As the highway authority, we do need to balance this against the long-term maintenance costs. Therefore, if tree planting is proposed in the highway, the appropriate environment and space for trees is required to reduce future maintenance costs for both trees and the highway.

2. Legal, National and Local Guidance

Many National planning and Acts of Parliament considers trees within their guidance or policies.

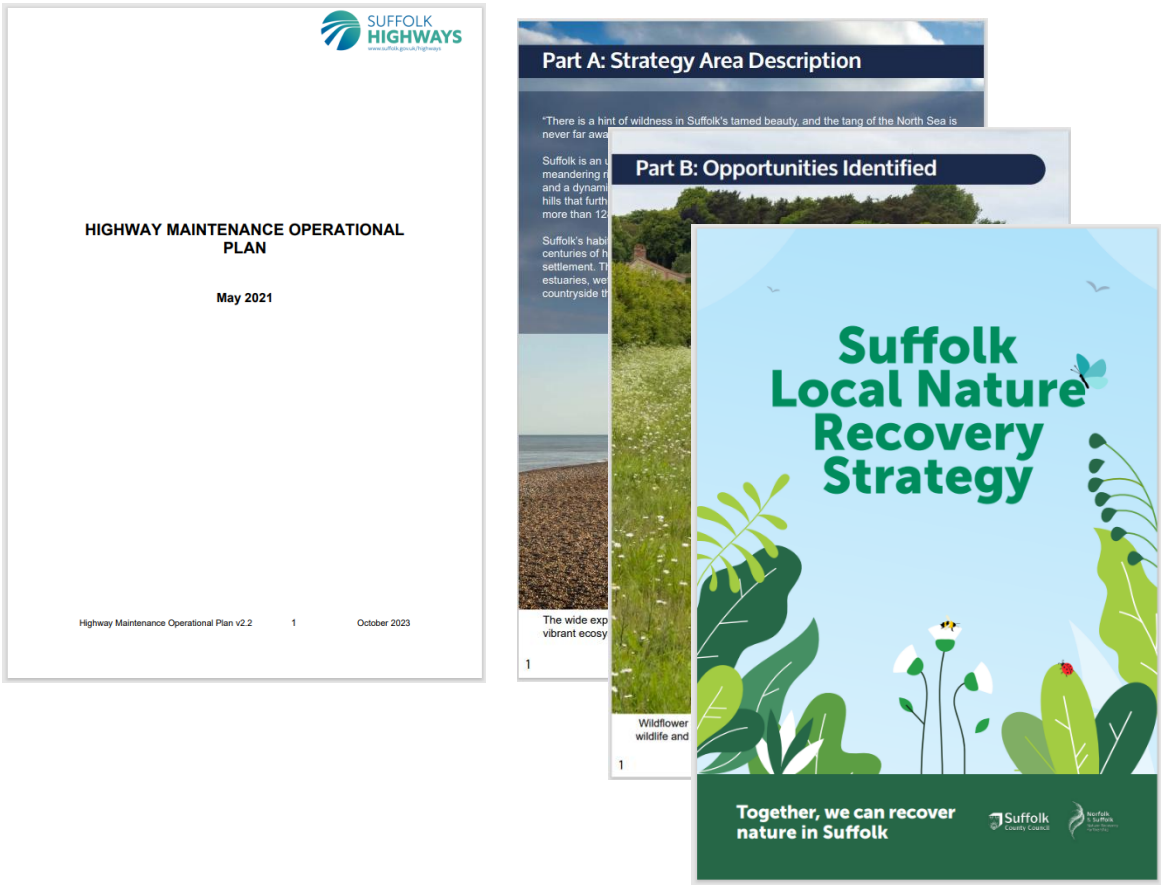
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024 states ‘Trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined. Also, it states, ‘that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible.’
- The Highways Act 1980 gives powers for the provision and management planting in highways giving powers to plant trees, place restrictions on plants in the highway to avoid hinderance to highway users and restrictions of planting within 15 feet (~4.6m) of the centre of a made-up carriageway.
- Section 115 of the Environment Act 2021 requires local authorities in England to consult with the public before felling street trees. This duty aims to ensure that local residents have a voice in the decision-making process regarding tree felling.
- Under the Environment Act 2021, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an approach to development, and/or land management, that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. All planning permissions granted in England (with a few exemptions) will have to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain from November 2023.
- Highway Tree Management: Operation Note 51 is a good practice document with respect to trees growing within the curtilage of the highway.



There are 2 key SCC guidance documents relating to trees in the highway -

- Highway Maintenance Operational Plan (HMOP) represents Suffolk Highways' interpretation as to how the local highways maintenance service should be provided to both accord with the Council's statutory duties and be aligned to the philosophy of the Code of Practice. This document mentions every attempt to replace trees that are dead, diseased, vandalised or otherwise damaged will be made.
- Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Strategy (SLNRS) outlines measures on how Suffolk can recover natural habitats and biodiversity. For new developments, it aims to increase tree cover in towns by at least 20% and to establish a diverse roadside wooded habitat which could benefit wildlife species such as the dormouse.

As the HMOP mentions 'every attempt to replace trees' it is essential tree-planting designs in new developments must place trees where they won't be damaged by traffic or vandalism and where they won't obstruct street lighting, visibility, or damage footway surfaces.



3. Detailed Design

Existing Highway Trees

When a development affects the existing highway, the developer must enter into a S278 before works on the highway can commence. Before any design work begins, existing highway trees that are healthy should be retained wherever possible. Developers will be required to survey the area affected to establish the biodiversity interest of a site and employ the Ecological Mitigation Hierarchy (Avoid – Mitigate – Compensate – Enhance). Mitigation measures must be included when trees form part of a wildlife corridor to ensure animals can continue moving through the area.

If the removal of healthy trees is unavoidable, a compliant tree survey and constraints plan (compliant with BS5837: 2012 or subsequent publication) must be prepared by an arboricultural professional. The survey will give evidence for the design assumptions. In addition, an arboricultural method statement and tree protection plan is required. This report is to include any trees on the highway boundary where the private trees and their roots could be affected by the works. Please note, permeable paving (both footway and carriageway) is not accepted in the highway. Developers must provide evidence of the site's ecological value, consider existing ecological corridors, and design proposals that protect, connect, and strengthen biodiversity links. As a s278 agreement is exempt from BNG, if a development cannot keep existing highway trees, the developer must replace them at a minimum ratio of three juvenile trees for every mature tree removed. Locations of the new trees to be included in the s278 agreement.

For a healthy tree within an urban environment that has not been included within the planning permission and has a trunk diameter over 80mm (measured 1.3m above ground level) then SCC must consult the public (as outlined in s96A of Highways Act 1980). As previously stated, Highways Act 1980 gives powers for the provision and management planting in highways to plant trees, place restrictions on plants in the highway to avoid hinderance to highway users. S96A outlines the duty of local highway authorities to consult before felling street trees in urban roads. This requirement is designed to ensure that local communities have a voice in the decision-making process regarding 'street trees'.

Although the act only mentions 'street tree' in a urban environment, SCC is taking the view that all trees within the highway require noticing. However, if the removal of trees is part of the planning permission, the separate consultation is not required. It is therefore very important that any trees requiring removal as part of S278 works are clearly identified within the planning permission. All drawings and documents must show these proposals at the planning stage. If SCC technical approval officers consider the information unclear, or if there is any uncertainty about whether the affected trees have been included, the developer will be required to cover the costs of the necessary consultation. Developers should also be aware that this may result in delays to the approval of any agreements.

In exceptional circumstances, where an existing tree within the highway must be removed and suitable local replacement cannot be secured, SCC will require a financial contribution for it to replace the lost amenity of the tree elsewhere. The contribution will be based on the Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees (CAVAT) assessment to enable full replacement and future maintenance.

Proposed Highway Trees

Any proposal for new trees in the proposed highway needs to consider the existing environment as with existing trees in the highway, developers will be required to survey the area affected. Also, the ground conditions are critical to both the long-term success of trees and protecting nearby infrastructure. It is therefore vital that a suitable ground investigation is undertaken to determine at an early stage if shrinkable clays or other problematic soils are present.

Planting of trees will be part of s38 agreement.

Highway Tree Management: Operation Note 51 states ‘trees do not remain static, they grow, enlarge over time both above and below ground.’ The note goes on to advise highway authorities on how to engineer highway solutions when trees do outgrow its environment. These solutions such as pruning (including roots), installing barriers, replacing rigid surfacing for rubberised materials etc which removes trip hazards and enables the tree to continue to thrive. While these measures help trees continue to thrive, they also require funding and place additional pressure on the county’s maintenance budget.

Table 1 sets out the minimum required distances between trees and highway infrastructure. If these minimum distances cannot be met—for example, when existing trees remain within the highway—then a bespoke, site-specific design must be developed and agreed with the highway authority.

Table 1

Description/ Infrastructure	Minimum distance from centre of tree trunk	Minimum distance from centre of private hedge	Other Guidance	Further Details
Street light column	5.0m	1.0m (1)		SCC will require a plan (for approval) showing location of streetlights and planting Ensure private hedge does not hang over footway and around column
Traffic sign (edge of sign)	5.0m (2)	2.0m	TSRGD	For upright species such as columnar or fastigiate trees in form may be reduced when supported with evidence on the mature tree canopy width.
Footway/cycleway and metaled public rights of way (outside edge)	1.5m with root protection*	1.0m		Minimum Canopy height 2.6m Footway/Cycleway – Clear stem height of 2.0m at planting Hedgerow mixes should avoid the use of thorned/spiked species where immediately adjacent to cycleway
Carriageway - where there is no adjacent footway/cycleway (kerb line or channel)	2.0m with root protection* 5m in moisture susceptible soils	2.0m 5m in moisture susceptible soils	DMRM MfS	Canopy not lower than 5.2m over metalled carriageway and not within visibility splays when mature.
Permanent access visibility splays	No trees or hedge/vegetation within junction and forward visibility splays.		DMRM MfS	Note – species of vegetation that will not grow above 0.6m from carriageway channel can be considered
Temporary / construction access visibility splays	Hedge/vegetation to be coppiced to height 0.6m from carriageway channel		DMRM MfS	If mature trees within the visibility splay, temporary traffic management such as traffic signals to be used, reduced speed limits.
Public Rights of Way (unmetalled)	Not applicable	1.0m		Canopy not lower than 3.4m (bridleway) 2.6m (footpath)
Buried services	Use NJUG guidelines and HAUC specifications		NRSWA	See guidance from each specific utility company.

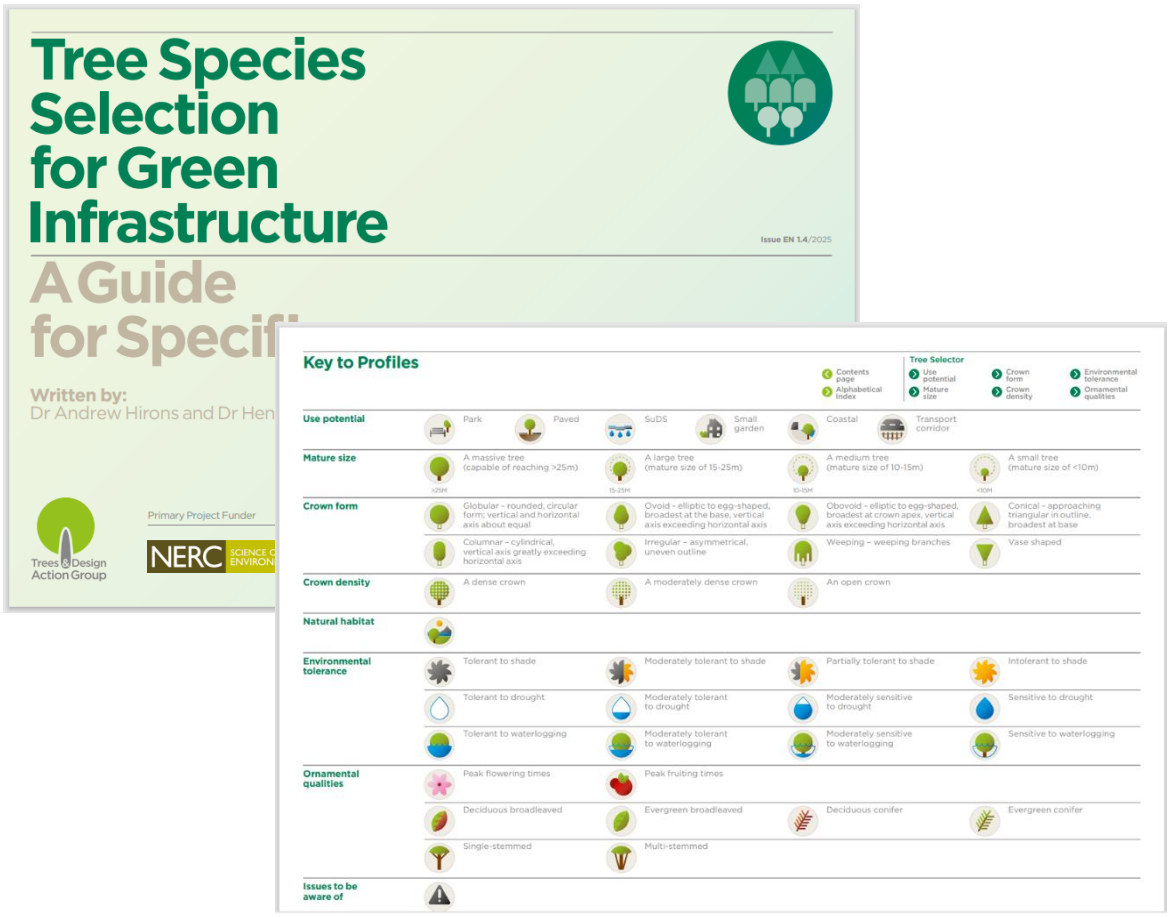
* root protection to be agreed with SCC

Species Selection

Planting unsuitable tree species near highways can cause long-term problems, including damage to the road or nearby property, higher maintenance costs, and complaints from the public. The following points regarding tree species need to be considered when planting in or near carriageways and footways-

Tree Type	Negative	Positive
Species that develop basal suckers/stem shoots	causing obstruction when adjacent for footways or obstructs visibility splay near junctions	Can be planted away from the edge of carriageway/footway
trees with sap and soft fruiting trees such as cherry	can cause slips on the footway when fruits land on the surface	Can be planted within wide verge so fruits/sap land on grassed areas
blossom or large leaf drop	can block drainage gullies causing flooding	If planted adjacent to drainage swales, leaves degrade and do not cause excessive drainage issues

The document 'Tree Species Selection for Green Infrastructure' is a useful resource for choosing suitable tree species. It provides species profiles to help designers select trees appropriate for transport corridors and emphasises choosing species that reflect their natural heritage so they can thrive in the local planting environment.

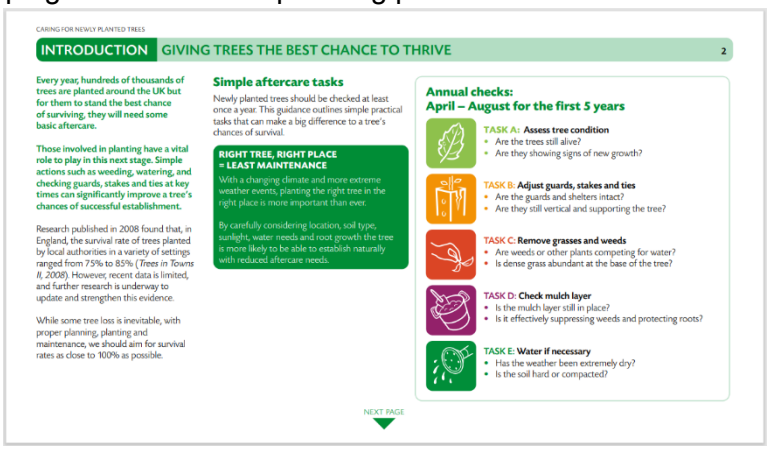


4. Construction, Planting and Aftercare

All contractors undertaking planting of trees or shrubs in the public highway or areas that will be adopted into the public highway should comply with New Roads and Street Works Act (NRSWA) 1991 with BS8545 2014.

Contractors working on existing trees within the public highway should follow the recommendations given in BS3998: 2010

The developer will be expected to fund and deliver appropriate maintenance of trees and other planting that they wish to be adopted until adoption. A minimum ten-year maintenance programme from the date of planting will be required to be agreed in writing with the highway authority before any tree or shrub is adopted into the public highway. This is to enable the developer to meet the typical period that trees are required to be maintained by the landscaping condition to the planning permission.



CARING FOR NEWLY PLANTED TREES

INTRODUCTION GIVING TREES THE BEST CHANCE TO THRIVE 2

Every year, hundreds of thousands of trees are planted around the UK but for them to stand the best chance of surviving, they will need some basic aftercare.

Those involved in planting have a vital role to play in this next stage. Simple actions such as weeding, watering, and checking guards, stakes and ties at key times can significantly improve a tree's chances of successful establishment.

Research published in 2008 found that, in England, the survival rate of trees planted by local authorities in a variety of settings ranged from 75% to 85% (*Trees in Towns II, 2008*). However, recent data is limited, and further research is underway to update and strengthen this evidence.

While some tree loss is inevitable, with proper planning, planting and maintenance, we should aim for survival rates as close to 100% as possible.

Simple aftercare tasks

Newly planted trees should be checked at least once a year. This guidance outlines simple practical tasks that can make a big difference to a tree's chances of survival.

RIGHT TREE, RIGHT PLACE = LEAST MAINTENANCE

With a changing climate and more extreme weather events, planting the right tree in the right place is more important than ever.

By carefully considering location, soil type, sunlight, water needs and root growth the tree is more likely to be able to establish naturally with reduced aftercare needs.

Annual checks: April – August for the first 5 years

TASK A: Assess tree condition
- Are the trees still alive?
- Are they showing signs of new growth?

TASK B: Adjust guards, stakes and ties
- Are the guards and shelters intact?
- Are they still vertical and supporting the tree?

TASK C: Remove grasses and weeds
- Are weeds or other plants competing for water?
- Is dense grass abundant at the base of the tree?

TASK D: Check mulch layer
- Is the mulch layer still in place?
- Is it effectively suppressing weeds and protecting roots?

TASK E: Water if necessary
- Has the weather been extremely dry?
- Is the soil hard or compacted?

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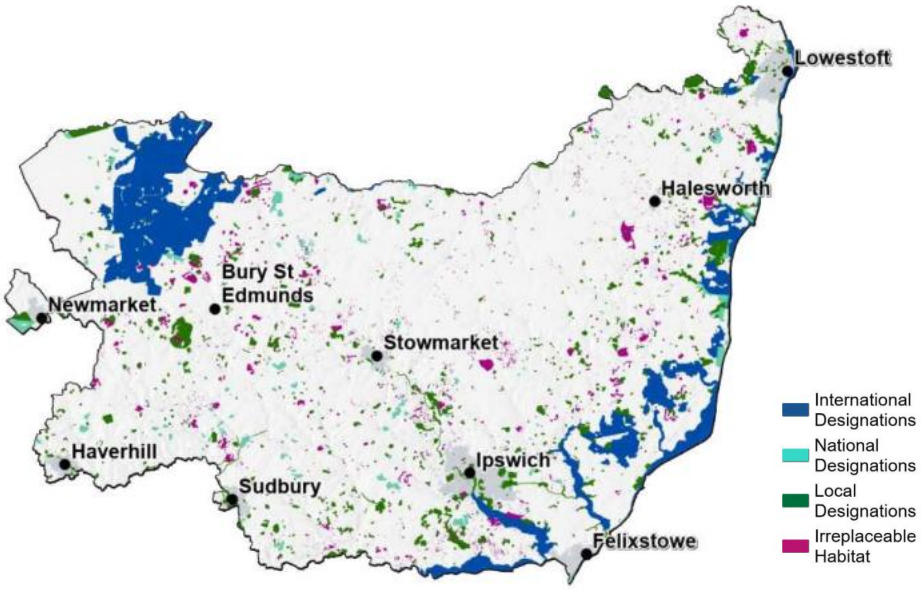
Post-planting care is essential for long term success. A full maintenance programme is required. This plan should include monitoring as well as watering and pruning.

SCC will require payment of a commuted sum for maintenance of planting after the maintenance period or adoption (whichever is the later), and on its discretion, a sum for future replacement.

5. Summary

SCC recognise that trees are beneficial to the environment, although this must be balanced against the need to reduce future maintenance costs. Commuted sums will be required when entering s278 or s38 to fund tree maintenance.

SCC expects developers and their consultants to work with its Development Management Engineers and Local Planning Authorities to ensure that trees are considered at an early stage of residential design to ensure that the maximum number are provided, in the right location within the development. Where trees or hedges are proposed adjacent to or in the public highway this guidance must be followed.



Suffolk's Areas for Particular Importance for Biodiversity (APIB) map.

6. References

Suffolk Design: Streets Guide (https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste-and-environment/planning-and-development-advice/suffolk-design-guide-for-residential-areas)

Subsidence Handbook (4th Ed) 2013. Royal Sun Alliance, London

British Standards

- BS1377 Pt 2:1990. Methods of test for soils for civil engineering purposes. Classification tests
- BS3998: 2010 Tree work: recommendations
- BS5837: 2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction. Recommendations
- BS8545 2014 Trees: From nursery to independence in the landscape recommendations

Trees in Hard Landscapes: A guide for Delivery.

The Tree Council Caring-for-newly-planted-trees-2025.pdf

So You Want to Plant More Trees

Trees and Design Action Group 2014

Trees in the Townscape: A guide for Decision Makers. Trees and Design Action Group 2012

No Trees. No Future. Trees and Design Action Group 2010

NHBC Standards Part 4 2020: Foundations https://nhbc-standards.co.uk/

NJUG Guidelines

- Volume 4: Street Works UK Guidelines For The Planning, Installation And Maintenance Of Utility Apparatus In Proximity To Trees (Issue 2)
- Volume 4: Street Works UK Guidelines For The Planning, Installation And Maintenance Of Utility Apparatus In Proximity To Trees (Issue 2) – Operatives Handbook

Highway tree Management: Operations Note 51

BRE Subsidence damage to domestic buildings: a guide to good technical practice R. Driscoll and H. Skinner 2007

Trees and Design Action Group (https://www.tdag.org.uk)

SCC's Local Nature Recovery Strategy document (https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/asset-library/suffolk-local-nature-recovery-strategy-20mb.pdf))

CIRIA - The Sustainable Drainage Systems SuDS Manual (C753) 2015.

Appendix A

The following photographs show examples of poor design with regard to tree planting within the highway.

Large variety of tree very close to the carriageway; canopy over carriageway requiring maintenance to ensure sufficient canopy clearance.


Poor ground conditions, vehicles parking over areas thus compacting soil and restricted root area so dead trees removed and not replaced.


Damage to the footways and carriageway from the tree roots.



Appendix B

The following photographs show examples of acceptable design with regard to tree planting within the highway.

Well established trees planted 3m wide verge at least 5m from a streetlight