

Assessment Guide: helping to assess the impact of planning development proposals on ancient woodland and veteran trees

The planning process seeks to identify and protect ancient woodland and veteran trees from the adverse effects of developments. The revised Natural England and Forestry Commission [‘Standing Advice on Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees’](#) published in April 2014 provides advice to help Local Planning officers.

Planning officers and others may wish to use this ‘Assessment Guide’ when making a comprehensive assessment of the potential effects of a development on ancient woodland and veteran trees when referring to the standing advice. A development may have the potential to adversely affect ancient woodland or veteran trees even if it is some distance from the proposed site.

	Subject to be assessed	Record here the answer to the question	Record here any mitigation/compensation measures proposed by the applicant, and what else the Local Planning Authority might require
1	<p>Is the site of the ancient woodland the only possible place for this proposal? Does it <i>have</i> to be on the ancient woodland site (i.e. is it location dependent) or can it go anywhere else?</p>		
2	<p>What size of ancient woodland will be affected? Ideally this will be recorded in hectares. The importance of diversity of habitat and species in</p>		

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	<p>small woods must not be underestimated, and also their function as stepping stones for the dispersal of species. Small ancient woodlands may be the remnants of formerly larger areas, and thus have a higher biodiversity importance than might be assumed. Ecological diversity in woodlands is not solely linked to the size of the woodland. See Standing Advice sections 1.5, 3, 4, 4.8 & 5.</p>		
<p>3</p>	<p>Will an area of woodland be lost? See Standing Advice sections 3, 5.2 & 6. If so what are the likely implications of this? A small loss from a small woodland or veteran tree loss could be more significant in its wider impacts than a large loss from a large woodland. Consider the nature of the woodland that will be affected.</p>		

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4	<p>How well connected is the woodland? Is it isolated or connected to other woodland blocks? Will connectivity be damaged? Consider the retention of connecting habitat such as hedgerows and copses and attempt to maintain and enhance long term protection secured through the planning process.</p>		
5	<p>Will there be damage to the Root Protection Area of the woodland or individual trees? See Standing Advice sections 5.2, 6.4 & 6.5. The Root Protection Zone (as specified in British Standard 5837) is there to protect the roots of trees, which often spread out further than their canopy. Protection measures include taking care not to cut tree roots i.e. by trenching or causing soil compaction around trees i.e. through vehicle movements; or contamination from poisons e.g. site stored fuel or chemicals.</p>		

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6	<p>Has a survey for protected species been included in the application? See Natural England's Standing Advice for Protected Species:</p> <p>Ancient woodland and veteran trees can be particularly important for certain protected species such as dormice and bats. If protected species are present then additional assessments of noise and light pollution particularly for bats may be necessary.</p> <p>Many species live partly in woodland but also use other adjacent semi-natural habitat for feeding or breeding. Will the development result in the change or reduction of important habitats adjoining the woodland?</p>		

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7	<p>Does the development have the potential to affect the woodland through changes to air quality or to ground water (through pollutants or changes in hydrology)? (See Standing Advice section 5.2) If so, has an assessment been carried out and appropriate mitigation proposed?</p> <p>Impacts from air and water pollution and hydrological changes have the potential to occur at significant distances from the source.</p> <p>Consider a Hydrological Impact Assessment to assess any change in hydrology (quality and quantity of water) and any potential effects. This is of particular importance to ancient gill woodlands as they often contain important communities of lower plants (mosses, liverworts, and lichens). Is there a need for a tailored assessment of pollutants on industrial developments?</p>		

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8	<p>Will access to the woodland increase?</p> <p>There is the potential for the remaining woodland to be damaged by visitors, new gardens, and domestic pets. Impacts to consider include disturbance to birds, protected species, woodland flora and soil; fly tipping; garden encroachment, and cat predation. Also consider the impact of increased public use near veteran trees. See Standing Advice section 5.2.</p>		
9	<p>What is the current function, and planned function, of the land to be lost to development?</p> <p>Consider a full assessment of the land to be lost for its function in enhancing and or supporting the adjacent ancient woodland. For example, is the proposal located in a network of ancient woodland blocks? Could the development have a knock-on effect on a number of areas of ancient woodland?</p>		

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	<p>The application site could include areas of scrub and grassland which contribute to supporting species within the ancient woodland and thus contribute to its biodiversity.</p>		
<p>10</p>	<p>Does the landscaping scheme include native species, preferably of local provenance? Consider whether the landscaping includes native species preferably of local provenance. Exotic species can escape from gardens into the adjacent woodland and compete with native species. This process will degrade the woodland over time. Is the landscape proposal sympathetic to the surrounding habitats?</p>		

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11	<p>Conclusions</p> <p>This section is for summarising the likely impacts on the ancient woodland and the avoidance and mitigation measures proposed (either by the applicant or the LPA). Do you require any additional information from the applicant before you can make an informed judgement? If the final conclusion is, that despite the avoidance and mitigation measures proposed, an area of ancient woodland will still be lost or significantly deteriorated then the test set out in paragraph 118 of the National Planning Policy Framework(2012) should be considered; also from our Standing Advice section 6.1, "<i>these [mitigation and compensation measures] should be issues for consideration only after it has been judged that the wider benefits of a proposed development clearly outweigh the loss or damage of ancient woodland.</i>"</p>		