

Trees in Churchyards

The Chancellor wishes parishes to follow the guidance given below.

1 *Introduction*

- 1.1 Trees have long been associated with churches and their surroundings, and frequently it is the treescape (along with a tower or a spire) which defines the general view of the churchyard. It is therefore of vital importance that trees are properly managed.
- 1.2 It is the **Parochial Church Council** which has the final responsibility of caring for trees in the churchyard, whether the churchyard is open or closed for burials. This responsibility covers all aspects of tree work, including planting, routine maintenance, lopping, topping, and felling. This guidance applies both to trees and to substantial shrubs and hedges, but not to small self-sown tree seedlings.
- 1.3 Some modern uses of churchyards can inadvertently cause damage to established trees; for example, a parking area close to trees can damage roots close to the surface of the ground, as can spillage from a fuel heating tank. Conversely, ill-advised tree planting can give rise to damage from roots spreading to a wall of the church, a tombstone, or a churchyard path.
- 1.4 The Parochial Church Council needs therefore to seek and follow expert advice in these matters.

2 *Expert advice*

- 2.1 Many local authorities employ an **arboricultural officer**, who should be able to give advice with regard to the safety of a tree in a churchyard, and what (if any) maintenance or remedial work is necessary.
- 2.2 An **arboricultural consultant** is a person with special experience in the management and assessment of trees, able to give advice on what work should be undertaken. A report from such a consultant would be evidence that the Parochial

Church Council has acted in a prudent manner, as is expected generally by the law and by insurance companies. A Consultant will, however, charge for this advisory work.

- 2.3 An **arboricultural contractor** (better known as a Tree Surgeon) will undertake the necessary work. The contractor may have the necessary experience to give adequate recommendations in more straightforward cases. If major work is needed, it is very desirable to employ a reputable contractor to undertake the task rather than rely on volunteers, however willing. Remember too that such voluntary work is not normally covered by church insurance policies. Make sure, therefore, that your contractor is adequately insured, including third party injury, loss and damage.
- 2.4 A Directory of Arboricultural Consultants and Contractors is maintained by the Arboricultural Association (Ampfield house, Ampfield, Romsey SO51 9AP). Listing within the Directory is an assurance that the consultant or contractor has satisfied such standards as technical knowledge and provision of insurance cover.

3 *Inspection of trees*

- 3.1 The need for a full and regular inspection of trees increases with their age. Such inspection should be carried out by one of the experts mentioned in paragraph 2, and the inspecting person should be asked to categorise the urgency of any work recommended in a report, so that such work can be undertaken in order of priority as and when funds permit.
- 3.2 Trees should be inspected at least every five years. Those that are subjects of a Tree Preservation Order **must** in fact be so inspected (paragraph 3 of the Care of Churches and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991). If this inspection is undertaken by the architect on his quinquennial inspection, any concern which the architect expresses with regard to the safety of a tree should be referred to one of the experts mentioned in paragraph 2.

- 3.3 Any specification of work, other than emergency work (which may be authorised by the Archdeacon), is to be sent to the Diocesan Advisory Committee for their advice before the work is undertaken.

4 *Planting of trees*

- 4.1 Before undertaking any planting, it will be helpful to prepare a churchyard plan on which may be plotted the church, churchyard building and monuments, the position of each existing tree, the diameter of its trunk and the span of its branches. The growth and mature spread of any proposed tree should then be considered; it would be highly undesirable to have to remove or drastically prune a mature tree in years to come, because not enough forethought had been given to an appropriate site for its planting. Some trees grow to large maturity comparatively quickly; but even a slower-growing species such as a yew will eventually grow to a very large size indeed. Remember too that some species, such as poplar, may well take a large amount of water from the soil, causing shrinkage - disastrous close to the church building. Further, leaves from mature trees planted too close to the church building can block gutters, gullies and downpipes, leading to expensive repairs.
- 4.2 It is therefore important to consult one of the experts mentioned in paragraph 2 as to the suitability of any proposed species for the churchyard, and as to an appropriate location.
- 4.3 There is much to be said for planting native British trees, which over the centuries have regenerated naturally in and around our churchyards. It is also worth noting that wildlife generally prefers deciduous trees to coniferous ones. Take care to follow the advice of the tree nurseryman with regards to the season and manner of planting.
- 4.4 The planting of any tree is subject to the jurisdiction of the Chancellor, and should therefore be the subject of an application for advice to the Diocesan Advisory Committee. Following that, smaller trees may be authorised by the Archdeacon (as may Millennium Yews) in writing but without a Faculty, while other potentially large trees will be the subject of a Faculty.

5 *Lopping and topping of trees*

- 5.1 All trees are capable of shedding dead wood, and can consequently be hazardous to persons using the churchyard. Standard remedial work, such as the removal of dead, split or hanging limbs, may be carried out as advised by an

arboricultural contractor without further reference, unless the tree is subject to a Tree Preservation Order, or is in a Conservation area - concerning which see section 7.

- 5.2 More major tree surgery, including cable bracing, crown reduction or the removal of major limbs, must be referred to the Archdeacon for his consent in writing. The Archdeacon may at his discretion refer the matter to the Diocesan Advisory Committee.

6 *Felling of trees*

- 6.1 Where the Parochial Church Council is advised by an expert (paragraph 2 above) that a tree or trees should be felled for safety reasons or because of disease, a copy of the written report of the expert must be supplied to the Archdeacon, who may in writing authorise the felling. A photograph of the churchyard with the tree or trees concerned should be taken and retained by the PCC, together with the expert's advice, with the parish records.
- 6.2 If the Parochial Church Council wishes to fell a tree which is sound but occupying a space in the churchyard required for some other use, then the PCC must seek the advice of the Diocesan Advisory Committee, and a Faculty from the Chancellor.
- 6.3 When a tree is felled, the stump should generally be removed; occasionally such are retained to encourage wild life.

7 *Tree Preservation orders*

- 7.1 Where a tree is subject to a Tree Preservation Order, or is in a Conservation Area, the consent of the local planning authority must be obtained before any lopping, topping, or felling takes place. This does not apply if the tree is dying, dead, or dangerous.
- 7.2 The local planning authority consent is in addition to the consent of the Chancellor (or Archdeacon, as the case may be) referred to above.

8 *Sale of timber*

- 8.1 Where a tree in a churchyard is lopped, topped or felled, the Parochial Church Council may sell the timber or dispose of it in some other way. The PCC should apply the proceeds to the maintenance of the church or churchyard.