



Tips for Tree Wardens

For our contact details and further information about tree wardens in West Sussex, visit our website: www.westsussex.gov.uk/treewardens.

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Tree wardens are a valued group of enthusiastic volunteers who do much to promote the importance of trees in and around West Sussex.

Whether you have been a tree warden for years or are just starting out, we hope these tips provide you with information and inspiration to continue to care for the trees in your local area and give you the tools you need to be an effective tree warden.

Getting Started

So, you've decided to become a new tree warden. You've been appointed by your parish council or equivalent organisation, you have the handbook and are now ready for action.

So, what do you do now? Where do you start?

The most important piece of advice we can give you is, "Don't be overwhelmed!" We send lots of information to our new tree wardens and we are aware it can seem a lot to take in – so take your time.

This section helps to guide you through the first few steps and highlight some areas that you need to be aware of. Remember, we are here to help you, so if you'd like to talk over any ideas or issues, please contact us.

A word on insurance.... West Sussex Tree Wardens are insured with Zurich through The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) scheme for conservation groups. The public liability limit is £10 million. This does not include working with power tools or machinery. As the parish council's appointed tree warden, you may well be covered by their insurance so do check this.

As part of the [TCV Community Network](#) you are also entitled to discounts on purchases from the Tools, Trees and Wildflower catalogues. Many of their training courses are discounted too.

Do's and Don'ts

It is important to become familiar with the do's and don'ts, or Code of Conduct, of a tree warden. Please remember, this is not intended to be unnecessarily restrictive but is there to protect you in our increasingly litigious society. It can also be useful when extracting yourself from difficult situations!

Know your worth and your limitations:

- Tree wardens are valued volunteers but have no special powers or authority; they are not experts and are not expected to be. You may not know the answers to all the questions but should be able to find someone who does. You can still be a focus for actions in your locality as well as initiating your own projects.
- Keep in touch with the organisation that appointed you.

- Landowners' permission must be sought before going onto their land, whether it's to conduct a hedge survey, check on a TPO or to remove stakes and ties.
- Do not get involved in disputes or antagonise situations. Remember, these are your neighbours, you live in this area. Be aware that although you may not always win the argument, a suitable compromise may be reached.
- Do not underestimate the importance of improving awareness and understanding of the value of trees in your local area.
- Age or physical ability is not necessarily a limiting factor. If you are unable to undertake the physical demanding tasks, such as tree planting, you can still organise projects, gather tree information or give talks.
- If a tree appears dangerous, damaged or threatened in any way, tree wardens can act as an early warning system by alerting the tree officers at the district and borough councils as soon as possible.
- Be willing to co-operate and involve others – tree wardens can work with others on tree projects, you do not have to work on your own.
- Tree wardens should not give technical advice, make decisions or offer opinions on matters relating to tree health, and particularly tree safety. This is the job of the professionally qualified tree officer, who has the legal right to deal with such matters. You could be legally liable for the consequences of any such advice given.

Know Your Patch

One of the most useful things you, as a new tree warden, can do is to get to know your patch. Only by knowing your area well, the people who live there and what already exists, will you be able to understand what is needed. You will know not only the trees and green space in the local area but also the people and groups you may be working with, or who may be useful contacts in your work. This may then give you ideas for what to do next, perhaps even the beginnings of a plan!

While walking or cycling around your patch there are various issues to look out for:

- threatened trees;
- proposed development;
- Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs);
- parks and green spaces;
- possible planting areas; and
- newly planted trees requiring maintenance.

You can also start looking into:

- land ownership and recent or proposed planting schemes;
- historic background and historic maps;

- the parish council or the [Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre](#) may be able to tell you of any ecological surveys done in the area – tree, hedge or historic (or you may wish to conduct your own);
- recent or planned planting;
- designations in your area – such as Common Land, Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI), Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI), Notable Road Verge (NRV) or Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM); and
- Conservation Area boundaries.

You can get yourself known through:

- parish council meetings;
- parish newsletters – tree-related articles, introduce yourself, updates on projects;
- parish notice board;
- having a display at local fêtes or events; and
- introducing yourself to any similar or like-minded local groups in your area.

Working With Your Parish Council

The relationship between a tree warden and their parish council (or equivalent organisation) is very important; it could be one of the most useful ones you have. Not only could the parish council provide support to you in your role, but your influence could well be beneficial to the treescape in your local area.

However, building a good relationship with your parish council will not happen overnight, especially as they may not have had a tree warden before so may not realise all you can offer.

The following tips are from some of our longer term tree wardens – they will give you guidance on how to build a beneficial relationship with your parish council.

- Be aware that building up a good relationship with your parish may take time, but it is worth the effort.
- Make friends with the parish clerk – a key person in the communication structure between the council and the wardens. Establish simple and sound communication with a clear understanding of the relationship between the tree warden, parish council and district council.
- If there are relevant committees such as the environment committee or the planning committee, introduce yourself to the chairman, make yourself known and stress how you can help, making their job easier.
- Make sure they know that tree wardens are the first port of call for anything remotely connected with trees in the parish.
- Be informed about how parish council meetings work – protocol, meeting cycles, items on the agenda, and so on.
- Attend the parish council (or relevant sub-committee) meetings when you can, especially after a significant number of changes to the councillors, to ensure they know who you are and you know who they are.

- If you attend the meetings be prepared – pick out something specific to report on or mention, a query or a point for discussion, such as progress on a community project or survey or an item raised in Broadleaf.
- If unable to attend the meeting in person, give the clerk a written report beforehand.
- Remember, you are working with people as much as with trees, and try to share knowledge and ideas as much as possible.
- Offer your services as a tree warden to attend local council or community partnership events to be on hand to answer tree queries. Attend fêtes, fairs, etc, raising your profile.
- Don't tell them how to do their job – no one likes this. Make sure they realise you are advising, the decision rests with the council as they have overall accountability. Be generous, share the glory for your idea – or even make the parish council think it was theirs!
- Try and make reasonable compromises, rather than risk a big confrontation which would be harmful to the overall aim and need to work together.
- Know your patch. Ensure that you know where all the trees with Tree Preservation Orders are and where the Conservation Area boundaries are. Get to know local landowners with large numbers of trees. Keep an eye out for trees under threat. This enables you to know what's happening in your local area and constantly update the parish council on these.
- You could also consider becoming a parish councillor. This will get you in the thick of things and the committees that have dealings with trees. Building a strong and useful rapport with the parish council will stand you in good stead in the long term.

Useful Information

There is a wealth of information out there; here are some links to just a few which may help you in your role as a tree warden.

General

- [The Conservation Volunteers](#) – is a charity with many years' experience of working in practical conservation, running practical conservation courses and providing some excellent practical handbooks.
- [Hedgelinek](#) – is the place to look for information on the UK's native hedges, hedgerow conservation and hedge management.
- [Natural England](#) – aims to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity that it brings. The natural environment, conservation, landscape and climate change is just a small selection of the areas they cover. Their website also provides a selection of links to a wealth of online information about UK wildlife.
- [Nature Detectives](#) – is a wonderful website with loads of ideas and resources you can use when working to raise children's awareness and understanding of the environment around them.

- [Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre](#) – collects, manages and disseminates wildlife data, providing an information service for the whole of Sussex.
- [Sussex Wildlife Trust](#) – is an important information centre on habitats, wildlife and conservation issues.
- [West Sussex Landscape Character](#) – to find out more about the landscape character around you and to access the land management guidance sheets.

Tree Health

It is useful to be aware of any new diseases and pests affecting trees. If you wish to increase your knowledge in this area, various reports are available on the latest research.

The most up-to-date information can be found from:

- Forest Research – [tree pest and disease alerts and advisory notes](#).
- Forestry Commission – [Plant Health Service](#).
- Tree Advice Trust – which looks at further issues and conditions that can cause damage to trees

Tree Law

The law relating to trees, woodlands and hedgerows is extensive, sometimes complex and subject to change. In the words of Charles Mynors, author of 'The Law of Trees, Forests and Hedgerows' they are "subject to a unique legal framework – a wholly uncoordinated mixture of private and public law; of common law and statute".

However don't be deterred, this is what makes it so fascinating! These laws can have a bearing on the type of advice you may give to someone in your community. The laws you are most likely to come across in your role as a tree warden are either those relating to Tree Preservation Orders, or trees in a Conservation Area.

Plenty of information is provided in your Tree Warden Pack but you can also find further details from:

- GOV.UK – on [tree preservation orders and trees in conservation areas](#) and [high hedges](#).
- Forestry Commission – on [woodland regulations](#), including felling licences and habitat regulations.
- [Natural England](#) – for legislation affecting wildlife management and licensing in England.

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