



## WHY ITS IMPORTANT

Trees are an important feature of the environment. They complement and contrast with the built environment through their shape, form, texture and colour. They also provide habitats for plant and animal life, give shelter and shade in the summer, screen neighbouring properties, reduce noise and dirt from roads, filter dust and lead particles from the air, take up 'greenhouse gases' and convert them to wood, reduce carbon dioxide and produce oxygen.

And of course, they're beautiful too.

As an owner or manager of a tree, you are responsible for its well-being and safety. You also need to take all practicable precautions to avoid the tree causing damage to third parties. This may sound a daunting task, but there are a range of specialist tree care companies to provide advice and practical help to manage your trees. They can also assist with problems of tree shading and / or overgrowth over buildings.

This guidance note aims to give an insight in to how to select the right firm for the job. The wrong firm could leave your trees seriously harmed, disfigured, destroyed or left in a dangerous condition by inappropriate work – **and** you could be left with damaged property and unwanted timber and masses of prunings. At all costs, avoid door-knockers and leaflets offering bargains for performing tree work or alarming views on your trees' safety. They often have no business address, only a mobile phone. Professional arboricultural contractors are usually too busy to spend time knocking on doors or leafleting.

## PROTECTED TREES

A good tree or arboricultural contractor will ensure that they, and you as their employer, carry out tree work within the law, and carry out all necessary searches and gain consents for the work from the Council. Such legislation, in general, makes it an offence to cut down, top, lop, uproot, wilfully damage or wilfully destroy a protected tree without the Council's permission. You or your contractor can find out if a tree is protected, by telephoning the Development Enquiry Centre, or by e-mailing us, or submitting an inquiry form via our website's links, see below.

## WHAT IS ARBORICULTURE?

Arboriculture can be defined as the cultivation, care and preservation of individual trees, tree groups and woodland, for their visual amenity; (*as opposed to timber production*). It is often coupled with recreation and wildlife considerations.

## WHAT IS AN ARBORICULTURAL CONTRACTOR OR CONSULTANT?

An arboricultural *contractor* is a specialist in the carrying out of tree works and will usually provide a range of other services, such as planting. They are sometimes referred to as arborists or tree surgeons. An arboricultural *consultant* is an independent specialist in the assessment of tree condition and management.

## WHAT DOES AN ARBORICULTURAL *CONTRACTOR* DO?

An arboricultural *contractor* will carry out basic tree surveys and inspections and provide the following main services:

**Acting as your agent**, - in checking if your trees are protected and getting consent for the work, if they are.

**Pruning** – A contractor will usually be able to determine what type of pruning is necessary to maintain or improve the health, safety and appearance of your trees. They will usually also have the skills, experience and equipment required to carry out the works that are required.

**Removal** – A contractor will usually have the skills, experience and equipment needed to safely remove trees. They will also be able to help decide when a tree needs to be removed, including removal of the stump by grinding it out.

Additionally, they should be able to carry out:

- Planting and recommending suitable trees for a specific location.
- Cabling or bracing to provide support for weakly attached branches.
- Aeration and fertilisation for improved root growth.
- Installation of lightning protection systems.
- Spraying to control insect and disease problems (very rarely necessary or appropriate).
- The supply of woodchip for mulching (usually needs composting first), firewood kindling and logs.

## WHAT DOES AN ARBORICULTURAL *CONSULTANT* DO?

An Arboricultural *Consultant* should provide impartial advice on the condition of trees, and prepare a specification for any remedial work and they can also arrange / supervise work. Normally qualified to a higher level than contractors, they will also advise on tree and building issues, development and subsidence and represent you in appeals. See our separate guidance note on this.

## SOME KEY QUESTIONS

Below are some questions to ask a tree contractor, *before* employing them.

1. **What's in the quote?** Make sure you get one or more *written* quotes and that this includes a description of: *how* the work will be done; when started *and completed*; *how difficult and confined work* will be handled (without damage to property and garden features); *what* will be removed from site and what left behind; and in *what condition* your property will be left.
2. **Qualifications and experience.** There are many qualifications relating to the Arboricultural industry and when employing a contractor you may wish to satisfy yourself that they are competent to carry out the works required. The main qualifications to look for when choosing a contractor to carry out tree work are certificates of competence in the use of chainsaws and related arboricultural activities such as tree climbing, pruning or dismantling. The most widely recognised body that provides such certificates is the National Proficiency Tests Council (NPTC).

Other qualifications that you may come across are educational qualifications:

- City and Guilds (Arb) – City and Guilds arboricultural qualification
- NC (Arb) – National Certificate in Arboriculture
- ND (Arb) – National Diploma in Arboriculture
- RFS Tech Cert – Royal Forestry Society technicians certificate
- AA Tech Cert – Arboricultural Association technicians certificate

When employing a contractor you may wish to ask to see copies of any relevant training and competence certificates, and ask the firm if they work in accordance with the relevant Health and Safety standards and what these are. Also, check that they work to the quality standards set out in the British Standard for Tree Work (B.S.3998.) If the contractor isn't able to talk knowledgeably about these, avoid using them.

3. **Membership of a professional organisation**, such as the ISA (International Society of Arboriculture), the AA (Arboricultural Association) or the NAA (National Arborists Association) or International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist Status or Arboricultural Association Approved Contractor Status. Such membership doesn't guarantee quality of work, but it does show a willingness on the firms behalf to keep up to date with the latest information and techniques. Where such membership is professed, you may wish to phone the relevant society to check if the firm are current members, to avoid bogus claims.
4. **Insurance.** Accidents happen..... when employing an Arboricultural contractor check they are adequately insured, they should have both public and employers' liability insurance; most firms will have this to at least £1,000,000. You should ask to see their current insurance certificates.
5. **References.** Personal recommendations from a friend can be valuable. If you can't get this, ask the contractor to provide references of where they have undertaken similar work and contact the owners to see if they were content with the quality of work.
6. **Local Authority approval.** Where a contractor states he is "Local Authority approved", ask what this means. Few local authorities can "approve" contractors, because of liability and competition legislation. To avoid bogus claims, call the relevant Authority to check their claim.

## Useful Web Links

Arboricultural Information Exchange [www.aie.org.uk](http://www.aie.org.uk)

Arboricultural Association [www.trees.org.uk](http://www.trees.org.uk)

International Society of Arboriculture (UK and Ireland) [www.isa-uki.org](http://www.isa-uki.org)

The woodland Trust [www.woodland-trust.org.uk/index.htm](http://www.woodland-trust.org.uk/index.htm)