

## West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 (adopted June 2025)

### Policy DM15

#### Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows

Development which conserves and enhances trees, woodland and hedgerows will be supported.

Development proposals should be accompanied by an appropriate Arboricultural Survey, Arboricultural Impact Assessment and/or an Arboricultural Method Statement. Proposals will be expected to clearly demonstrate that wherever possible existing trees, woodland and hedgerows have been incorporated into the design and layout of a scheme from the outset. Where this cannot be achieved the onus is on the applicant to justify the loss of trees and/or other features as part of the proposals.

Development affecting trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) must be justified and the impact of the proposal will be assessed on the amenity of the area. Where these and other protected trees are subject to felling, a replacement of an appropriate number, species and size in an appropriate location will be required.

Ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees and ancient hedgerows are irreplaceable habitats. Development resulting in their loss or deterioration will be considered in accordance with policy SP11. The scale and quality of the compensation measures required will be commensurate to the loss or deterioration of the irreplaceable habitat.

Development proposals which could potentially result in the loss of ancient wood pasture; or trees, woodlands and hedgerows located within historic parks and gardens will be considered in accordance with policy DM12, for those within Registered Parks and Gardens, or policy DM11 for those forming part of non-designated heritage assets.

Where loss or damage of non-protected trees, woodland or hedgerows is unavoidable, appropriate replacement or compensation planting including appropriate measures to secure their long term maintenance will be required.

Development proposals will provide appropriate protection for retained trees, woodland and hedgerows in advance of any work on site to prevent damage to root systems and to take account of future sustainable growth.

Where appropriate, suitable opportunities should be identified and incorporated for the restoration and planting of new trees, woodland and hedgerows. New planting should:

- a. Be suitable for the site conditions;
- b. Use appropriate tree pit sizes and soil volumes;
- c. Use native species wherever appropriate;
- d. Be informed by and contribute to local character; and
- e. Enhance or create new habitat linkages.

To ensure the sustainable growth of restored or newly planted trees, development will be required to include appropriate measures to secure their long term maintenance.

### Supporting Text

**10.128** The purpose of this policy is to ensure the management, including conservation and enhancement, of existing trees, woodland and hedgerows, and to ensure that opportunities for restoration and new planting are realised where appropriate. Development proposals will be considered in accordance with the latest guidance in British Standard BS5837 'Trees in relation to demolition, design and development'.

**10.129** This policy does not prevent the appropriate management of trees, woodlands and hedgerow or removal of trees and hedges that are not in character with their locality particularly if they are a non-native species of flora. For new planting the use of UK and Ireland sourced and grown tree stock is encouraged.

**10.130** West Berkshire's trees, woodland and hedgerows are valued visual and ecological assets in our towns, villages and countryside, adding local character and distinctiveness to the landscape, streets, parks, gardens, public rights of way and other open spaces. They have an inherent biodiversity value and can help integrate new development into the landscape, its character, and environment. They are important components of the historic environment as

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planted or managed flora, and often historically important as indications of past land use and ownerships. They assist in mitigating for the effects of climate change, increase the tree canopy cover in the District and make both public and private areas within a development more attractive, enjoyable and healthy places to be.

**10.131** The protection of existing trees, woodland and hedgerows and the addition of new planting contributes greatly to conserving and enhancing the local character of an area. Boundary treatments are particularly important and the character of an area can easily be lost if front gardens or boundary hedgerows are removed. There is evidence in both rural and urban areas of the District of long established boundary hedgerows being ripped out and replaced by close boarded fencing or walls. A proportion of these result in retrospective applications to retain fences or walls in excess of 1 metre next to highways. Where planning applications are required to propose new boundary treatments or retrospective applications are required to regularise works already undertaken and it is clear that an established hedgerow will or has been removed, the Council will require sufficient space to be left to allow for the retention of an existing hedge or planting of a new one to replace the one that has been removed.

**10.132** The retention of existing trees and hedgerows within new gardens adds a sense of establishment and maturity to any new development. New planting can also add value, with the use of dwarfing rootstocks a way of accommodating trees in smaller gardens.

**10.133** In the public realm, street trees and appropriate planting can help soften the streetscape and ensure it is not dominated by hard surfaces and parked cars. Structural landscaping is encouraged in publicly managed areas. The specification and choice of design, materials and planting should take account of the pressures placed upon the public realm through the movement of both people and vehicles.

**10.134** Individual trees, groups and lines of trees and woodlands important to the character of Conservation Areas, to their setting and to the approaches to Conservation Areas should be retained and appropriately managed.

**10.135** Protected trees includes trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order (whether that be an individual tree, a group of individual trees or a woodland) or those located within a Conservation Area. They also include those hedgerows meeting the criteria of "important hedgerow" in the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 (as amended).

**10.136** Ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees are identified as irreplaceable in the NPPF. Ancient woodland is the most extensive habitat remaining in West Berkshire. It also has a high archaeological value as a type of land use as it often contains much older features such as prehistoric field systems and barrows and also evidence of management such as sawpits and charcoal burning. Ancient semi-natural woodland currently covers 2894 hectares. There are a further 1164 hectares of plantation on ancient woodland sites which could potentially be restored. Ancient woodlands and veteran trees once lost cannot be recreated, their unique character, high archaeological value and valuable biodiversity resource will be safeguarded and not allowed to be lost or lose condition.

**10.137** Development should buffer any ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees and ancient hedgerows it affects by providing sufficient space to afford surrounding protection and allow for future growth and expansion where possible. Development near ancient woodland will be treated in accordance with the most up to date joint Natural England and Forestry Commission Standing Advice. This currently advises that development proposals should have a buffer zone of at least 15 metres from the boundary of the woodland to avoid root damage. For ancient and veteran trees the buffer zone should be at least 15 times larger than the diameter of the tree. The buffer zone should be 5 metres from the edge of the tree's canopy if that area is larger than 15 times the tree's diameter. Precise buffers would need to be determined through detailed assessment and design when proposals are submitted for development. The Council will adopt a precautionary approach as to what would be considered appropriate in order to ensure that any buffer fulfils the specific requirements of its location and the type of development proposed.

**10.138** It is important that a buffer zone consists of semi-natural habitats such as woodland and/or a mix of scrub, grassland, heathland and wetland. Development proposals, including gardens would not be appropriate. Sustainable drainage schemes would only be considered acceptable if they did not affect root protection areas and any changes to the water table did not negatively affect ancient woodland or ancient and veteran trees. The Woodland Trust<sup>(125)</sup> highlights the importance of protecting and enhancing natural habitats around ancient woodland in order to help reverse the historic fragmentation of this irreplaceable habitat and to improve ecological connectivity with the surrounding landscape.

125 The Woodland Trust Planners Manual for Ancient Woodland: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2019/06/planners-manual-for-ancient-woodland/>

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**10.139** Ancient woodland is greatly at risk from ammonia pollution and so all ammonia-emitting developments, such as intensive livestock units, which fall within 5 kilometres of an ancient woodland site will require an additional assessment to include a detailed Ancient Woodland Nitrogen Impact Assessment of the ancient woodland(s) of concern. This will need to demonstrate that there will be no deterioration as a result of the contributions from the development.

**10.140** Within the District there are historic ancient wood pastures and historic parkland, both of which are also irreplaceable habitats. These form important elements of West Berkshire's heritage and it is essential their significance is taken into account in development proposals.

**10.141** The Council needs to better understand what proportion of the District has tree canopy cover and the extent of the functions this cover provides. A canopy cover assessment will be undertaken for West Berkshire. This will provide the basis for setting targets for canopy cover within the District, supporting both this policy and policy SP10, in the consideration of future development proposals.