

ADVICE OF THE DIOCESAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

THE CHURCHYARD AND ITS TREES

1. INTRODUCTION

- a) This paper aims to address some of the issues relating to the management of existing trees and the planting of new trees in churchyards. Trees give churchyards a special atmosphere and often make them particularly distinctive within their setting, both from a visual and ecological viewpoint. Everyone associates churchyards with trees, particularly with native species and more particularly with yews and limes. However, some churchyards are naturally more open, with the church more visible from the distance. Here it may be preferable to retain their openness.
- b) Traditionally churchyards were maintained as meadows, the sward was either cut for hay or grazed, trees were planted or self-sown and had practical and religious significance. References to trees growing in churchyards date back to the 17th Century when trees such as ash, small-leaved lime, holly and oak were brought in as saplings from the surrounding woodlands.
- c) In the 18th and 19th Centuries new species of exotic trees were planted in churchyards as well as in the parks and gardens of the same villages. Such introductions included cedar, Wellingtonia, monkey puzzle and fastigate yew. These species can often be found in churchyards and in adjacent vicarage gardens.
- d) It should be noted that all quinquennial reports must contain an account of the churchyard and its trees.

2. EXISTING TREES

- a) In determining whether new trees should be planted, the existing tree stock in the churchyard should be considered. It may be that there are already significant mature and semi-mature trees and that new plantings will create an over population of trees in the future.
- b) Existing mature trees may need some remedial tree surgery to render them safe and prolong their life span. Before such work or the felling of trees takes place, it is important to check whether there is a Tree Preservation Order or Conservation Area Designation in place by consulting the Local Planning Authority. In addition the following points should be followed:
 - i) 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 split and hanging limbs and dead wood (more than 55 mm in diameter) may be carried out as authorised by the Archdeacon on evidence of advice from an expert;
 - ii) formative pruning during the first ten years following planting, and crown lifting for access along paths, the removal of split and hanging limbs and dead wood under 50 mm in diameter is a normal part of churchyard maintenance and does not require approval.

- iii) other works of tree surgery, for example, cable bracing, crown reduction and removal of major limbs, must be recommended in a written report by an expert as identified in the Chancellor's Guidance Notes. The report must be submitted to the Archdeacon of the Archdeaconry in question, who may authorise the work or part of it, but in any case of doubt or difficulty the Archdeacon should refer the matter to the Diocesan Advisory Committee and the Chancellor.
- c) Old and ancient trees may provide valuable habitats for the nesting, roosting and feeding of birds and bats. Some may harbour ivy and mistletoe which provide a food source and nesting site for many creatures. Hedges and overgrown corners may also provide important wildlife refuges.
- d) Trees which have reached the end of their useful life span and which do not provide a unique wildlife habitat may (subject to a Faculty being obtained) be removed to create space for new planting.
- e) Where the Parochial Church Council (PCC) is advised by an expert, as identified in the Chancellor's Guidance Notes, that a tree or trees should be felled for safety reasons, relating to either buildings or people, a copy of the written report of such expert must be supplied to the Archdeacon, who may authorise the felling if he is satisfied that the tree is dangerous. A photograph of the churchyard with the tree or trees concerned should be taken and retained, together with the expert's advice, with the parish records.
- f) If the PCC wishes to fell a tree which is diseased (but not dangerous), or for any other reason, then it must seek the advice of the Diocesan Advisory Committee and a Faculty from the Chancellor.
- g) The PCC should consult the Diocesan Advisory Committee before grubbing out of hedges. A Faculty will be necessary. In June 1997 new legislation was introduced which requires that normally the consent of the Local Planning Authority must be obtained for the removal of hedgerows. District Councils should be contacted.

3. NEW TREES

- a) In determining which types of trees should be planted it is important to consider the objective of the planting. In most cases the need to respect the existing historic character and atmosphere of the churchyard and its surround will be paramount. Other factors such as soil type and local climate are important in determining which species will thrive.
- b) It is likely to be inappropriate to introduce ornamental species in an old churchyard that is currently inhabited by native species. Where traditional native species such as lime, holly, and yew predominate but need replacing, then these species should be used for new planting. Where an avenue or line of trees needs to be strengthened, then the same species, often lime or horse chestnut, should also be used.
- c) It may be desirable to specifically plant species to encourage wildlife into the churchyard and to achieve this an emphasis on the use of native species would be appropriate. Trees such as oak, holly, yew and rowan are particularly valuable in this respect.

- d) If the traditional planting extended beyond the churchyard boundary in the form of a hedgerow or line of trees, this should perhaps be maintained in order to perpetuate both the visual effect and the benefits to wildlife using the planting as a corridor into the churchyard. Such corridors may reflect the original field boundaries surrounding the churchyard.
- e) Where evergreen exotic trees create a unique atmosphere within the churchyard, then consideration may need to be given to the planting of similar species in order to perpetuate this. Evergreen species and conifers may be important for giving winter shelter and providing a winter refuge for birds. Holm oak is evergreen and is often found in churchyards in coastal areas.
- f) There are many species of tree, for example, birch, ornamental cherry, maple, acacia, plan and fruit that are not commonly associated with churchyards. Their introduction should be considered with care. Such trees may provide added interest in the form of flower, berries and foliage at certain times of the year and may have a place, particularly in more modern or urban churchyards.
- g) The planting of trees in churchyards has to be authorised by a Faculty.

4. **FORM AND MANAGEMENT**

The form and eventual size of the tree should be considered in relation to retaining or framing important views of the church. Trees around the church can also affect the light inside the building. Some tree species, for example beech, yew, and horse chestnut, will cast a denser shade and may, for this reason, be less desirable than those which cause dappled shade, for example oak, field maple, pine and birch.

The long-term management of the tree may also be a determinant. Some trees lend themselves well to coppicing, pollarding and pruning, for example lime, oak, yew and sweet chestnut. Such trees can be planted and managed to achieve a particular size and form. Unless pollarded at a young age, beech is a tree that is best left to attain its mature spread, which, in open situations, can be extremely broad.

5. **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

Before planting trees in new locations in the churchyard it is advisable to ascertain whether any archaeological sites or unmarked burials may be affected. In locating new trees consideration should also be given to the possible long-term effect of tree roots on structures such as tombs, memorials, walls and railings. These effects will be determined by the tree and soil type and should be balanced against the benefits that trees have in enhancing our environment.

Many churchyards may contain rare or unusual species of flora and may be designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest or County Wildlife Sites. The planting of trees, which may directly or indirectly affect important flora, should be avoided.

6. **TECHNIQUES**

When planning the techniques of new planting the following factors should be considered:

- a) Removing old tree stumps can be costly but may prevent the risk of decay fungi affecting young or mature trees.

- b) Using small whips or feathered trees will involve minimal digging and ground disturbance.
- c) larger trees may look more impressive when planted but they will be more costly and require more ground preparation.
- d) Correct planting, protection, nurturing and management of trees is essential to ensure their long-term survival.
- e) The planting of new trees should be kept away from the church building – at least 15.3 metres (50 ft) if forest trees are being planted.

7. **CONCLUSION**

Churchyards are normally enhanced by the presence of trees, which, by their nature, require management and eventual replacement. In planning for the latter it is important that the historic character of the churchyard is respected as that other practical aspects which have been referred to are taken into account.

8. Sources of Advice on Trees are set out below.

OTHER SOURCES OF ADVICE

The District or Borough Council's Arboricultural Officer

These people are usually extremely helpful and should be approached whenever the situation needs professional input.

The Arboricultural Association

Ampfield House, Romsey, Hampshire, SO51 9PA (Tel: 01794 368717)

Publishes a free directory of consultants and contractors as well as useful leaflets.

The Forestry Commission

Alice Holt Lodge, Wrecclesham, Farnham, GU10 4LH (Tel: 01420 22255, Ext. 2305)

Tree Helpline: 01420 22022 (Arboricultural Advisory and Information Service)

Many useful publications and advice.

The Tree Council

51 Catherine Place, London SW1E 5DY (Tel: 0171 828 9928)

Promotes trees, good free magazine "Tree News"