

Tree Wardens Code of Practice

Tree Wardens can play a valuable part in looking after trees and woodlands in their local area, benefiting both the environment and their local community. However, as volunteers they are not given any special powers and there are a few potential pitfalls that all wardens should be aware of. This sheet provides a reminder of wardens' limitations, to help them to concentrate on what they can do best.

General

1. Wardens should be aware of the boundaries of their own knowledge and should always work within these limits. Volunteering as a tree warden cannot make anyone an instant expert, rather they should be seen as local contacts who have access to basic information and who know who to contact for more technical detail. If in doubt, the Tree Warden should contact Harrogate Borough Council's Arboricultural Manager or Nidderdale AONB for advice.
2. The training provided to Tree Wardens is intended to give background information on a range of tree and woodland matters. It does not qualify wardens to give technical advice, however they can help local people by passing on copies of information received at training courses and referring them to specialists where appropriate.
3. Tree Wardens should take care not to give the impression that they are a local authority officer or professional, e.g. wardens should not introduce themselves as "from the Council".
4. Tree Wardens should maintain regular contact with their parish council. This will enable the council to be kept up to date with any findings or proposals and also to provide help to the warden as appropriate.

Rights of landowners

5. Tree wardens do not have any special powers to enter other people's land without their agreement. If a warden wishes to access private land, e.g. to carry out a survey, s/he must gain permission from the landowner in advance. Even in cases where it is possible to see trees from public rights of way, it may be advisable to discuss your intention beforehand - many people fear the worst when they see someone with a clipboard, and explaining the reason for your interest may gain extra information or support.
6. Similarly, tree wardens must not carry out any practical works in woodlands or on individual trees without the owners' permission.

Disputes

7. Disputes may occasionally arise in connection with Tree Preservation Orders, tree health and planning matters. Tree Wardens should keep in close contact with both Harrogate Borough Council's Arboricultural Manager and their parish council in these matters. The warden's role is not to resolve disputes, but rather to remain objective and as diplomatic as possible.

Dangerous trees

If a tree appears to be dangerous, damaged or threatened in any way, Tree Wardens can act as an "early warning system" by alerting Harrogate Borough Council's Arboricultural Manager as soon as possible.

Legal liability

8. Whilst Tree Wardens can give general advice on tree matters, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are NOT qualified to pass judgement on the following matters:
 - Tree Health
 - Tree Felling
 - Tree Pruning
 - Planning Matters

9. No tree warden should give advice on these matters as s/he could be held legally liable for the consequences of action taken on it. In all such cases, the tree warden should refer the matter to Harrogate Borough Council's Arboricultural Manager.
10. Tree Wardens who wish to organise practical projects will be given support by Nidderdale AONB. Wardens should take care to check for any health & safety or insurance considerations before starting work