An Introduction to the South Somerset District Council Tree Warden Scheme

The Tree Warden Scheme is a nationwide initiative of the Tree Council and National Grid. There are over 100 local schemes, including the one in South Somerset run by the District Council’s Conservation Unit. The following guidance on the South Somerset scheme is intended for new and potential Tree Wardens. Further information is given in a 'Tree Warden Action Pack', which is sent to all new Tree Wardens.

Who are Tree Wardens and what do they do?

They are volunteers from all walks of life with an interest in trees and a desire to help care for the local tree stock, for the enjoyment and benefit of present and future generations. They are appointed/approved by their Parish or Town Council.
Their general role is to gather information about local trees, to be a point of contact for locals with tree problems or queries and to encourage practical projects associated with trees and woods. The role is what individuals make it and depends upon personal interests, skills and preferences.

The role is certainly not as a ‘tree policeman’ as no special powers are given. However, keeping an eye on our vulnerable trees, woodlands and hedges is an important aspect, especially protected trees, those adjacent to development sites or the survival of newly planted trees.

Local surveys

It is a good idea for Tree Wardens to become familiar with their local area and its woodlands and prominent trees. One way to do this is to plot them on a large-scale map. It is also useful to know of any Conservation Areas and Tree Preservation Orders in the parish. This information is available either from the parish clerk, or the District Council, (see pages 8 and 9 for contact details) who can also supply maps.

In addition to general surveys, there are more specialised surveys that Tree Wardens can get involved with, such as:

- Countryside Services Group, County Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY
  Website: www.somerset.gov.uk/somerset/ete/

- Somerset Wildlife Trust 01823 652400
  Tonedale Mill, Tonedale, Wellington, Somerset TA21 0AW.
  e-mail: enquiries@somersetwildlife.org
  website: www.somersetwildlife.org

- The Tree Council 020 74079992
  (general information, community and schools grants)
  71 Newcomen St., London SE1 1YT
  email: info@treecouncil.org.uk
  website: www.treecouncil.org.uk

- The Woodland Trust 01476 581111
  (membership organisation, own woodland sites, produce publications and advice, promote ancient trees)
  Autumn Park, Grantham, Lincs NG31 6LL
  website: www.woodland-trust.org.uk

- Ancient Tree Forum
  c/o Woodland Trust
  website: www.ancient-tree-forum.org.uk
**Veteran Trees**

These are trees that are very old and hence will often have hollow trunks or cavities and some dead and decaying wood on them. A lot of wildlife including some rare invertebrates can be associated with such trees. Unfortunately, however, many species are declining or threatened due to the gradual loss of these veteran or ancient trees.

The Veteran Trees initiative aims to raise awareness of the importance of these trees amongst the public, landowners and managers. Another aim is to produce an inventory of ancient trees. In Somerset the Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC) is compiling this. Help is needed with surveying, a task which, can be undertaken locally by Tree Wardens. This involves collecting data on location, ownership, species, size, and other features. Further information is available from SERC (address on page 10) or from the Tree Warden Coordinators.

**Practical projects**

One of the roles of a Tree Warden is to encourage practical projects such as tree planting. It could be a small scheme involving just a few trees on public land, or on private land with permission, or it could be something more ambitious! Examples of activities include the following:
Tree Council events: Esso National Tree Week/Walk in the Woods/Seed Gathering Sunday

National Tree Week, organised by the Tree Council and sponsored by Esso, takes place every year in late November/early December, and is designed to encourage people to think about, plant, and care for trees. There is generally a different theme each year but the emphasis is always on involving people in ‘tree activities’ of one kind or another. SSDC generally tries to arrange some tree planting or related events during the week. Some Tree Wardens arrange their own local events.

The first Sunday in October is now designated as ‘Seed Gathering Sunday’, as the best time of year to gather a variety of tree seeds to sow and grow on for planting out in following years. Support is available for events on this theme. May is a good time of year for “Walks in the Woods”, currently sponsored by Center Parcs.

Somerset Landscape Scheme - Hedgerow Trees
This is one of several initiatives within the Somerset Landscape Scheme and aims to encourage landowners to select young trees within their hedges to allow them to grow on to become mature hedgerow trees. Help is needed to identify suitable saplings on the ground and tag them so they don’t get cut during annual hedge trimming. A small grant is payable for each tree tagged.
Useful Contacts

As Parish Tree Warden you may be the first point of contact for local people, and may receive enquiries on a wide variety of tree-related matters in your parish. You are not expected to know all the answers to these enquiries and certainly not expected to tackle problems yourself! When you receive an enquiry, you may wish to contact the relevant person or organisation on the list below, who will be happy to deal with it or assist you.

Tree problems
Some legal matters relating to trees are dealt with by the Tree Officers of the District Council, so please do not attempt to handle tree disputes yourself without first contacting the District Council. The Council does not deal with disputes between private parties.

CONSERVATION TEAM
Email: conservation@southsomerset.gov.uk
Website: www.southsomerset.gov.uk and follow links to Conservation.

Phil Poulton 01935 462670 Tree Officer
Advice on tree health and safety, TPOs, trees in conservation areas, trees on Council land

Grants

There are various sources of grant funding available for practical projects to do with landscape improvements and tree planting, and the Council will direct you to the most appropriate channels. Some community projects may be grant-aided by the Parish Council, or District Council through the Area Committees. A summary of the other principal ones is given below.

Somerset Landscape Scheme
Run by the Countryside Services Group of the County Council, this provides funding of up to £500 per project and covers a wide range of landscape and nature conservation projects including tree planting. The District Council contributes financially to this scheme and therefore doesn’t have its own grant scheme for tree planting.

English Woodland Grant Scheme
This is run by the Forestry Authority and is suitable for larger tree planting projects (greater than 0.25 ha).

The Tree Council
Has an annual grant scheme for tree planting in schools and on community sites (see page 11 for address).

Community environmental grants - as these change frequently, please ask the Conservation Team for advice.
Training and support

The District Council makes training of various kinds available to Tree Wardens. Workshops on various tree related matters are held each year for Tree Wardens. Events include the SSDC Annual Tree Warden’s Forum and walks and talks are also arranged from time to time. Tree Wardens are encouraged, but not obliged, to attend some of these.

There are also events organised by the Tree Council which are open to all Tree Wardens which, SSDC publish at various times, including the annual get-together for the South West in the autumn. We also publicise events that may be of interest, arranged by the Somerset Wildlife Trust and others.

A new scheme whereby, established Tree Wardens offer to help and support newly appointed ones is being developed.

The District Council is your local ‘resource centre’. Information and advice is available on a wide range of tree-related matters - tree care and safety, design and choice of species, natural history and ecology, ideas and resources for working with children, training, grants and so on. If you have queries, or need help with a specific matter or project, please ask and we will do our best to help.

The contacts section (pages 8-9) is a starting point for your enquiries.

Newsletters

You will receive “Tree Talk” - SSDC’s own newsletter for Tree Wardens two times a year. Contributions for this are always welcome. You will also receive a copy of Tree Guardian, a national newsletter for Tree Wardens published by the Tree Council, two or three times a year.

Relationship with Councils

As the Parish or Town Council will have appointed you it is important that you maintain strong links with them, e.g. by attending meetings occasionally and reporting annually. Any suggestions for tree planting or enhancement projects should initially be directed to the Parish Council whose support is very important. Requests for Tree Preservation Orders should also come from the Parish Council.

And finally...

How do I become a Tree Warden?

First, you should contact your Parish or Town Council to get their approval. There may already be a Tree Warden but there is no reason why there shouldn’t be two in the same town or parish. Then you or the Council Clerk should contact us with your address and telephone details.