

Appendix B – Tree Planting Best Practice Guidance

Community Tree Planting Grant Fund

Braintree District Council

Introduction

Planting trees is one of the most effective ways to improve biodiversity, increase climate resilience, enhance public spaces and contribute to healthier communities. However, successful tree planting requires careful planning, species selection and long-term maintenance.

This guidance has been developed using best practice recommendations from the Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, UK Forestry Standard and The Tree Council and should be followed by all grant recipients.

1. Right Tree, Right Place

The most important principle of successful tree planting is choosing the right tree for the right location.

Before planting, consider:

- Soil type
- Drainage conditions
- Exposure to wind
- Existing habitats
- Future climate conditions
- Public access and visibility
- Underground and overhead services
- Future tree size and canopy spread
- Maintenance requirements

Poor species selection is one of the main reasons for tree failure. Trees should be selected according to site conditions and the outcomes the project aims to achieve.

2. Species Selection

Applicants are encouraged to prioritise species that:

- Support local wildlife
- Are resilient to climate change
- Suit local site conditions
- Increase species diversity
- Contribute to canopy cover and shading

The following guides for species selection are recommended:

- [TDAG's Tree Species Selection for Green Infrastructure](#)

- [Reference Essex Tree Palette](#)

Native and locally appropriate species should be used wherever they are suitable for the site and the intended purpose of the planting. Native broadleaf trees can provide significant biodiversity benefits by supporting insects, birds and other wildlife through food, shelter and habitat value. Where possible, trees should be UK-grown and locally sourced from suppliers in Essex or nearby, as local provenance is generally better adapted to local soils and climate conditions and can help reduce biosecurity risks.

Non-native species may also be acceptable where they are carefully selected to suit the location and provide clear benefits, such as improved tolerance of urban conditions, drought resilience, canopy cover, visual amenity, pollinator value or long-term climate adaptation. Any use of non-native species should be proportionate, avoid invasive characteristics that could threaten existing native planting and should form part of a diverse planting mix that supports resilience and reduces reliance on a narrow range of species.

3. Biosecurity and Tree Sourcing

To reduce the risk of pests and diseases:

- Purchase trees from reputable suppliers.
- Use UK-grown stock wherever possible and prioritise local provenance.
- Inspect trees on arrival.
- Do not plant unhealthy trees.
- Clean tools between planting sites when appropriate.
- Follow Plant Healthy and Forestry Commission guidance where applicable.

Biosecurity is an increasingly important consideration in tree establishment and woodland creation.

3A. Species Diversity and Resilience

Why Species Diversity Matters

A diverse range of tree species creates more resilient landscapes and reduces the risk of widespread losses from pests, diseases and climate change impacts. Diverse planting schemes also provide a wider range of habitats, food sources and ecological benefits for wildlife. The Woodland Trust and Forestry Commission encourage planting a varied mix of suitable species rather than relying heavily on a single species.

Benefits of Species Diversity

- Improves resilience to pests and diseases.
- Supports a wider range of wildlife species.
- Enhances year-round habitat value.
- Increases climate adaptation potential.
- Reduces the risk of large-scale tree loss.
- Creates visual interest and seasonal variation.

Recommended Approach

For medium to larger schemes applicants should aim to:

- ✓ Include a mix of species.
- ✓ Avoid over-reliance on a single species.
- ✓ Select species suited to local soil and site conditions.
- ✓ Include species of varying mature sizes.
- ✓ Balance biodiversity benefits with site constraints.

Suggested Species Mix

Where appropriate:

Category	Suggested Proportion
Large canopy trees	30–40%
Medium-sized trees	30–40%
Smaller trees	10–20%
Fruit trees	5–15%
Climate-resilient species	Variable

A mixed planting approach is typically more resilient and provides greater long-term ecosystem benefits than single-species planting.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tree-planting-and-woodland-creation-resources>

4. When to Plant

The ideal planting season is:

November to March

This is when most trees are dormant, reducing stress and improving establishment success.

Avoid planting when:

- The ground is frozen.
- The soil is waterlogged.
- There are prolonged drought conditions.
- Heavy snowfall is forecast.

The Woodland Trust and Forestry Commission both recommend winter planting during the dormant season for highest survival rates.

5. Site Preparation

Good site preparation significantly improves survival rates.

Before planting:

Check for Constraints

- Utilities
- Drainage infrastructure
- Rights of way
- Visibility splays
- Existing habitats

Control Competing Vegetation

Remove or manage:

- Dense grass
- Brambles
- Invasive species
- Dominant weeds

Competing vegetation can significantly reduce tree growth by competing for water and nutrients.

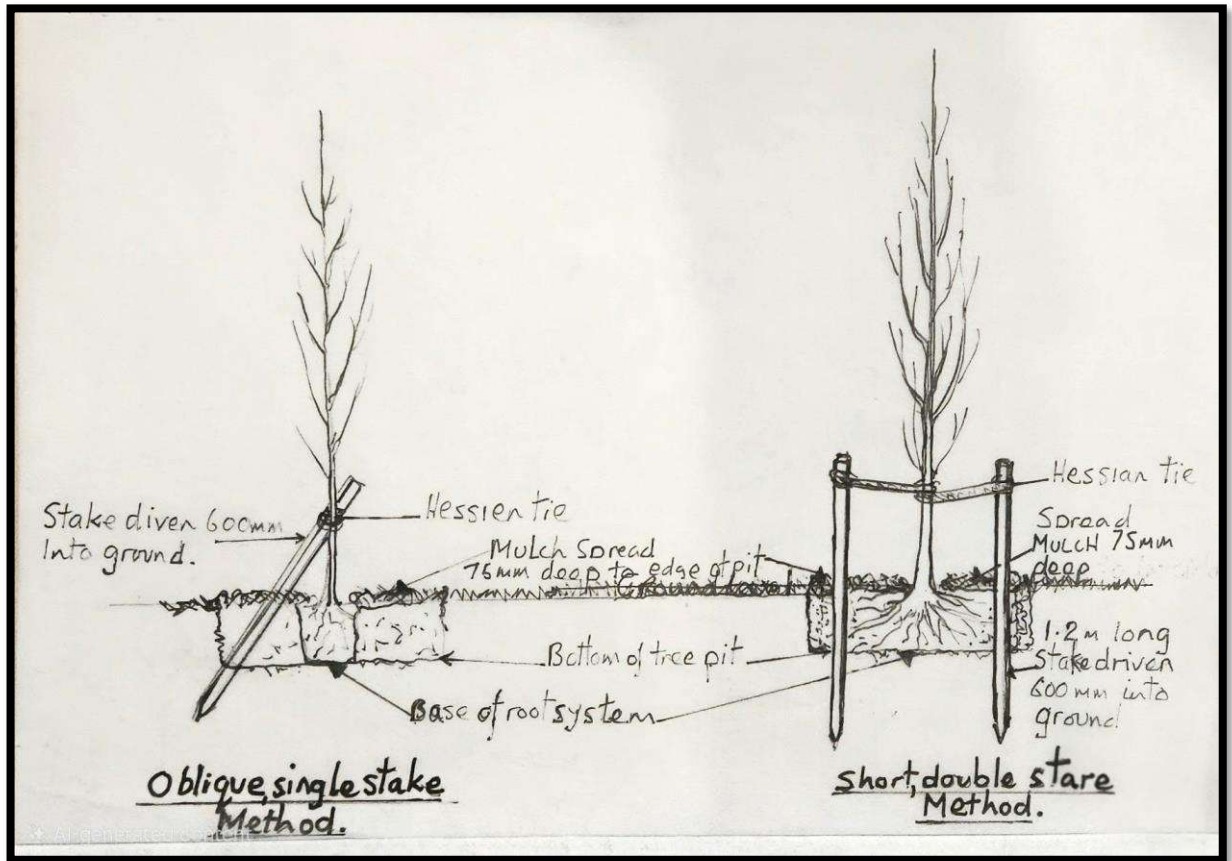
6. Planting Method

Trees should be planted carefully to avoid root damage.

General Planting Principles

1. Keep roots moist before planting.
2. Do not expose roots to sun or wind.
3. Dig a hole large enough for the root system.
4. Ensure roots are spread naturally.
5. Plant at the same depth as grown in the nursery.
6. Install watering irrigation tube and supports as necessary.
7. Firm soil around roots to remove air pockets.
8. Water thoroughly after planting.

The below image illustrates two methods of planting standard sized nursery trees widely adopted within the industry:



7. Planting Density and Spacing

As a general guide:

Planting Type	Typical Spacing
Woodland Creation	2–3 metres
Amenity Planting	5–10 metres
Community Orchard	4–6 metres
Hedgerow Planting	30–45 cm

Spacing should reflect:

- Species characteristics
- Desired canopy cover
- Management objectives
- Available space

Woodland Trust guidance recommends approximately 2 metres between woodland trees in many planting schemes.

8. Tree Protection

Young trees are highly vulnerable to:

- Deer
- Rabbits
- Vandalism
- Strimming damage
- Vehicle damage

Applicants should consider:

- Tree guards
- Stakes
- Shelters
- Fencing
- Mulching

Protection requirements should be proportionate to site-specific risks. Forestry Commission guidance identifies tree protection as a critical component of successful establishment.

9. Watering

Climate change is increasing the importance of watering and drought resilience during establishment.

Watering is often the most important maintenance activity during the establishment period. Newly planted trees have limited root systems and limited ability to retain water and they are particularly vulnerable to dry conditions, especially during spring and summer.

Recommended Approach

Year 1:

- Water regularly during dry periods, ensuring water reaches the root zone rather than only wetting the surface.
- Increase watering during warm, dry or windy weather.
- Pay particular attention during the first growing season after planting.
- Consider use of watering bags which provide a slower release of water to the rootzone preventing surface run-off or evaporation.

Years 2–3:

- Watering frequency can usually be reduced as trees begin to establish.
- Continue to water during prolonged dry weather, drought conditions or periods of high temperature.
- Monitor trees for signs of water stress and adjust watering as required.

Watering should be planned as part of the project's maintenance arrangements before planting takes place, including identifying who will water the trees, how often, and what water source will be used.

10. Mulching

Mulch helps:

- Retain moisture
- Suppress weeds
- Improve soil health
- Reduce maintenance requirements

Recommended mulch depth:

50–75 mm

Keep mulch away from direct contact with the tree stem to avoid rot and disease.

11. Inspection and Maintenance

Grant recipients should undertake regular inspections.

Recommended Inspection Schedule

Year	Frequency
Year 1	Monthly during growing season
Year 2	Quarterly
Year 3	Quarterly

Inspections should check:

- Tree survival
- Stake condition
- Guard condition

- Watering needs
 - Pest or disease signs
 - Vandalism damage
 - Any need for early formative pruning
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12. Replacement Planting

Some losses should be expected.

However, applicants should aim to maintain:

Minimum 85% Survival Rate

Where survival falls below expected levels, replacement planting should be undertaken during the next suitable planting season.

13. Community Engagement

Applicants are encouraged to maximise community benefits through:

- Volunteer planting days
- School participation
- Community orchards
- Interpretation boards
- Citizen science projects
- Local biodiversity monitoring

Projects involving local communities often deliver greater long-term stewardship and higher levels of public support.

14. Long-Term Management

Tree planting should be viewed as a long-term commitment.

Applicants should be prepared to maintain trees for a minimum of three years following planting and ideally far longer.

Management plans should cover:

- Watering
- Weed control

- Mulching
- Tree protection
- Inspection
- Replacement planting
- Future pruning where necessary

Well-maintained trees provide significantly greater environmental, climate and community benefits over their lifetime.

Further Information

Applicants may find the following resources useful:

- Woodland Trust – Tree Planting Advice [woodlandtrust.org.uk]
- Forestry Commission – Tree Planting and Woodland Creation Resources [gov.uk]
- The Tree Council Guidance Hub [treecouncil.org.uk]
- UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) Guidance [treecouncil.org.uk], [gov.uk]

Key Principle: *Plant the right tree, in the right place, for the right reason, and provide the aftercare needed to ensure it thrives.* [woodlandtrust.org.uk], [gov.uk]

Supplementary Appendix A1 - Site Preparation Checklist

Please see below a useful checklist that Applicants can complete before planting begins.

Pre-Planting Site Assessment

Permissions and Administration

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Landowner permission secured | ☐ Utilities search completed |
| ☐ Rights of way identified | ☐ Environmental designations checked |
| ☐ Planning requirements confirmed | ☐ Risk assessment completed |
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Site Conditions

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Soil type assessed | ☐ Drainage conditions assessed |
|---|---|

- ☐ Existing vegetation inspected ☐ Invasive species identified
 - ☐ Flood risk considered ☐ Exposure and wind conditions assessed
 - ☐ Existing trees and habitats mapped
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Planting Design

- ☐ Species selected using "Right Tree, Right Place" principles
 - ☐ Tree spacing planned ☐ Protection measures identified
 - ☐ Maintenance responsibilities assigned ☐ Water source identified
 - ☐ Access arrangements confirmed
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Procurement

- ☐ Trees sourced from reputable nursery
 - ☐ UK-grown stock specified where possible
 - ☐ Stakes ordered ☐ Guards ordered ☐ Mulch ordered
 - ☐ Planting tools available ☐ Volunteer or contractor arrangements confirmed
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Immediately Before Planting

- ☐ Trees inspected on delivery ☐ Roots protected from drying out
- ☐ Planting positions marked out ☐ Grass and competing vegetation controlled
- ☐ Weather conditions suitable ☐ Planting team briefed

Good site preparation is one of the strongest indicators of successful establishment and long-term survival

Supplementary Appendix B1 – Tree Watering Schedule Template

Watering Log Template

Successful establishment depends heavily on watering during the first three years after planting, particularly during dry weather and heatwaves.

Recommended Watering Frequencies

Tree Age	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Newly Planted (0–12 months)	Weekly if dry	1–2 times per week if dry	Weekly if dry	Usually not required
Year 2	Fortnightly if dry	Weekly if dry	Fortnightly if dry	Usually not required
Year 3	Monthly if dry	Fortnightly if dry	Monthly if dry	Usually not required

Note: Watering requirements will vary depending on soil type, rainfall, temperature and tree species.

Site Watering Record

Project Name: _____

Location: _____

Date	Area/Tree Number	Amount of Water Applied	Weather Conditions	Officer/Volunteer Initials

Summer Drought Response Plan

If the Met Office issues prolonged heat or drought warnings, applicants should consider:

- ☐ Increased watering frequency
- ☐ Prioritising newly planted trees
- ☐ Checking mulch depth
- ☐ Inspecting signs of stress
- ☐ Replacing failed trees during next planting season

Signs of Water Stress

- Wilting leaves
- Early leaf drop
- Brown leaf margins
- Reduced growth
- Dieback of shoots

Projects receiving grant funding should be prepared to respond to increasingly frequent summer drought conditions as part of climate-resilient tree management