



## **Landscaping on new development sites**

### **Introduction**

Since time began people have improved the appearance of their homes by cultivating and planting the area around them.

Unfortunately, in the past there was a tendency to clear development sites of existing vegetation before building started. However many developers now realise that most people do like trees and shrubs around their homes and attempt to meet the wishes of future occupants. The District Council is also aware of the need to protect and improve the environment and most planning permissions for development carry conditions requiring the submission, approval and implementation of a landscaping scheme.

Many large development companies employ their own landscape specialists or seek the advice of landscape consultants. This leaflet is aimed at giving a few practical hints on landscaping conditions attached to planning permissions.

All too often landscaping has been no more than an afterthought, a “dressing up” of a previously planned layout, so that many developments have not realised their full potential. Developers are, therefore, urged to submit a landscaping scheme at the same time as other details of the proposed development. The reasons for this are:

- A planting scheme is best designed at the same time as the layout of buildings, roads and underground services to avoid conflict between elements of the overall scheme.
- Most people nowadays move into new houses before the development is completed and certainly before any landscaping is carried out. It is important, therefore, that prospective purchasers of new dwellings are made aware of any planting which is to take place within their gardens.

### **Existing landscape features**

When designing the layout of a new development, consideration should be given to the existing vegetation on the site. Care should be taken to retain as much as possible and the layout should be around the existing trees and hedgerows.

Particular attention should be paid to existing ponds, streams and copses where there is an excellent opportunity to enhance and develop them as ecological features within the development. Care should be taken to ensure that adequate safety measures are incorporated where water is a design feature.

Existing vegetation in the vicinity of new buildings creates a maturity of landscape that would otherwise be expensive to achieve and take decades to attain. In order to ascertain the extent of landscaping requirements it will often be helpful to discuss the proposed form of

development with the Local Planning Authority (before formally submitting a detailed planning application after the principle of the development has been established by an outline permission). This may well save time at a later stage. A tree and site survey of existing details is essential for all parties at any pre-planning discussions.

Where there are existing trees on the site the following points must be considered:

- Are any of the trees the subject of a Preservation Order, within a Conservation Area or protected by planning condition?
- The layout must take into account the height rootspread of future growth of trees and the necessary steps taken to avoid potential root damage to buildings, roads and underground services. Where a large tree needs to be felled the possible subsequent ground “heave” should be considered. Soil shrinkage (or heave) is more likely on clay soils and it may be advisable to increase foundation depths in such cases. If there is a possibility of root invasion the construction of an underground barrier between buildings and trees could be considered. Advice on these matters can be obtained from the Local Authority Building Control Officers and further information is available in Building Research Establishment Digests 240, 241, 242, 251 and 298.
- All trees to be kept must be adequately protected by strong fencing, which should be maintained throughout the length of the construction period. This fencing should be positioned at least around the canopy spread of the trees - and further, if possible. Within the fencing, no materials should be stored, no fire lit and no soil compacted. Care should also be taken to safeguard trees which overhang the site from the outside.
- Where it is unavoidable to site underground services beneath the canopy of trees, it is essential that trenches are dug by hand so that no roots are unnecessarily cut.
- The ground level near the existing trees should not be changed as this inevitably affects their health and stability.
- Trees should be clearly marked so that site operatives are in no doubt as to which ones are to be kept and protected.
- The British Standard “Guide for trees in relation to construction” (BS 5837 : 1991) sets out the following table for minimum distances for protective fencing around trees:

It should be emphasised that this table relates to distances from the centre of the tree to the protective fencing. Other considerations, particularly the need to provide adequate space around the tree including allowances for shading problems, light restriction and future growth and also working space, will usually indicate that structures should be further away. It is also quite clear from planning appeal decisions that the Inspectorate regards this standard as an important consideration. The Council will, therefore, expect developers to follow it. It must be stressed, however, that individual cases would still need careful consideration to ensure that all necessary factors are addressed.

### **Location of scrubs and trees**

The NHBC sets out guidelines which determine the foundation design of new buildings in relation to existing and proposed vegetation. For more information on this, please contact the Building Control Section.

The eventual use of an area should determine the design of the landscaping to avoid future conflict. For instance, a kickabout area should have little or no planting while a community

space for toddlers to play would require more attention to detailed design in respect of play equipment, hard areas and seating. The design of mass and of space should also be related to use. For example, where pedestrian traffic is not desirable, mass planting should be greater, making the area darker, thereby discouraging people from walking through it.

Trees and shrubs always look their best if they are planted in groups rather than as single specimens dotted throughout the development. As well as having more of a visual impact, group planting also has a better chance of survival because the plants protect each other. For added protection it is often advisable to erect fencing around newly planted areas until they have become established

Mulching will also aid moisture retention and prevent weed invasion, thereby reducing the amount of aftercare required. In addition, planting density should be designed to achieve ground cover within a three to five year period. Planting should also represent different canopy levels to produce interest and stable plant groupings.

Consideration should also be given to the use of ground moulding (where space permits), but care should be taken to ensure that the finished contours look natural and allow for easy maintenance. Groups of trees and shrubs on the roadside verges are not usually favoured by the County Council which is responsible for upkeep. One way of overcoming this is to include such planting within enlarged enclosure of dwellings and within public amenity areas and play areas. Where amenity areas are to be adopted or maintained by the District or Parish Council any landscaping scheme should first be approved by the appropriate authority at an early stage.

### **Choice of planting material**

When choosing species of trees and shrubs for new planting, it is essential that careful consideration be given to the soil and climatic conditions of the site. Landscaping schemes have failed because the wrong type of plants were selected for the locality. Whilst some plants will thrive in one locality and soil type, they will fail in others. It is always a good idea to study the area and note what species of plants are flourishing in the vicinity. These have proved themselves and the inclusion of similar ones in a scheme gives the development a more natural appearance (see Planning Information Leaflet TL2). Advice can also be obtained from local nurseries. Extreme care should be taken to avoid species which are poisonous to children and animals. In addition, trees which may attract extra attention, such as those bearing edible fruit or conkers, should be positioned where this attention is least likely to cause a nuisance to nearby residents. Once the basic scheme has been designed, advice on the suitability of the plant species and their positions, in relation to buildings and services, can be obtained from the Local Planning Authority. Conifer hedges would not be acceptable as part of a landscaping scheme because of the problems they cause to neighbours. They could become the subject of formal complaints (under Part 8 of the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003).

In any planting scheme, no matter how carefully carried out, there will inevitably be some plants which die as a result of being moved. This is why it is a good idea to plant a few more trees and shrubs than you really need. It is also essential that a maintenance clause is written into the landscaping contract so that any plants that die are replaced for up to a period of at least two years.