

West Suffolk Council trees frequently asked questions

West Suffolk Council receives many enquiries regarding trees on its land. Below are some frequently asked questions which you may find helpful before contacting us? Click on a link for more information and to find out how to report a tree related issue.

- [I believe roots from a council tree are causing damage to my property.](#)
- [The roots from a tree are lifting a pavement or road surface.](#)
- [A council owned tree is causing direct damage to my property, such as lifting roof tiles or pushing against a wall.](#)
- [A sticky substance is falling from a tree onto my car and property.](#)
- [A tree outside my property sheds its leaves, seeds and fruit.](#)
- [A tree outside my house seems to be very large or sways in the wind and I am worried about its safety.](#)
- [Birds in the trees outside my property are causing a mess with their droppings.](#)
- [I believe a council owned tree is blocking my TV or satellite reception.](#)
- [I am an owner-occupier and have a tree in my garden that needs pruning; can you do this for me?](#)
- [My neighbour has a conifer hedge that is blocking out all my light and dropping brown needles everywhere, what can I do?](#)
- [My neighbour's tree is overhanging my garden. Can I cut it back?](#)
- [Branches from a council owned tree are overhanging my garden.](#)
- [There is a tree blocking light to my property, blocking light to my solar panels or blocking my view.](#)
- [There is a council owned tree blocking the view of a road junction, road sign or streetlight.](#)
- [There is a tree or bush overhanging from a private property and causing an obstruction to people walking past on the footpath or travelling along a road.](#)
- [I believe a council owned tree may make it easier for someone to break into my house.](#)
- [Will you replace a fallen or diseased tree?](#)
- [Can the council give me advice about my privately owned tree?](#)
- [Does the council have a list of approved tree surgeons?](#)

- [Can I pay for work to a council owned tree if the council will not do the work I want done?](#)

I believe roots from a council tree are causing damage to my property. Can you remove the tree?

Potential damage from tree roots can be complicated. We would need to investigate this further, but please read the below policies before reporting as there are a number of root related issues we cannot resolve through tree work.

Scenario	What you can do
Is the tree on West Suffolk Council land?	Report it to us
Is the tree privately owned?	This is a private matter between you and the tree owner. Unfortunately the council cannot help in this instance.

Subsidence

Subsidence is a complex interaction between the soil, building, climate and vegetation that occurs on highly shrinkable clay soils when the soil supporting all or part of a building dries out and consequently shrinks. If a resident wishes to make a claim in relation to subsidence, the resident will need to submit evidence in line with our policy requirements. Further information can be sent on request.

Direct root damage

Direct root damage results from the pressure that tree roots and trunks can exert. Lightly loaded structures, such as garden walls, driveways and patios, may be affected but damage to heavily loaded structures, such as houses, is rare. Cases of direct root damage will be investigated and considered on an individual basis, with a balance struck between the nuisance experienced and the tree's benefits to the wider community.

Removal of a tree would not necessarily be an acceptable solution, alternative options such as root pruning and/or the installation of a root barrier maybe more suitable.

Surface roots

Surface roots in gardens and areas of grass are a natural occurrence near trees. Neither pruning nor removal of the tree will have any effect on the presence of the roots i.e. in a lawn.

Unless the roots are causing some form of mechanical damage (pushing against a structure, for example) pruning or removal would not be recommended. In fact, pruning or removal may possibly have a detrimental effect on surrounding structures.

Drains and Roots

Whilst tree roots do not actively seek out water contained in underground pipes or drains, if they are growing in close proximity they can gain access to weakened or cracked pipes exploiting them and eventually blocking them if there is enough water, nutrients and oxygen.

It should be noted that tree roots can rarely directly break drains by lifting or girdling them as drains usually fail by other means, such as failed drain collars, old drain piping and differential settlement or movement of soil along the drain length.

The removal of one tree will not prevent other vegetation from exploiting the same opportunity. The presence of roots close to, around, or alongside drains will not be taken as proof that root invasion is or will occur.

The council presumption is that the appropriate way to deal with tree root blockage of drains is to ensure that the drains are watertight and in good condition. Accordingly, the council will not normally take action in response to complaints that council managed trees are blocking drains without clear evidence.

The roots from a tree are lifting a pavement or road surface. Will the council remove the tree?

If surface roots are causing damage to adopted pavements, this should be reported to the Highway Authority (Suffolk County Council), who will take appropriate action and assess the level of problem.

If it is a West Suffolk Council owned tree causing the problem, we will work with the Highways Authority to resolve the problem, which will usually be in the form of an engineering solution rather than removing the tree.

Scenario	What you can do
Is the tree on West Suffolk Council land?	Report it to Suffolk County Council
Is the tree privately owned?	Report it to Suffolk County Council

A council owned tree is causing direct damage to my property, such as lifting roof tiles or pushing against a wall. Will the council remove the tree?

Where a council owned tree is causing damage to private property, the council will take action to resolve the problem.

Scenario	What you can do
Is the tree on West Suffolk Council land?	Report it to us

This type of damage will usually be in the form of direct physical contact between any part of a council owned tree and any part of a structure. Such an example would be a branch in contact with a roofline which could dislodge tiles, gutters, fascias and so on.

In such cases the council will look towards established arboricultural techniques such as pruning and crown lifting to alleviate the nuisance and there will be a presumption against felling of the tree.

A sticky substance is falling from a tree onto my car and property. Can you remove the tree?

The council is unable to undertake any measures, including pruning or felling, to alleviate nuisance from honeydew. Please read below for more information on honeydew and its causes.

Honeydew is a sugary liquid which is the natural secretion of excess sugar by aphids and other sap-sucking insects. Some trees, such as certain lime and maple species are associated with larger amounts of honeydew compared with others types of trees.

Whilst the residue can cause problems, it does not, despite popular perception, damage car paintwork and it is easily removed by washing. It is not readily controlled by pruning of trees. Honeydew is a natural occurrence and is not considered to be a legal nuisance.

A tree outside my property sheds its leaves and fruit. Can you prune it to prevent this?

The council will not carry out tree work or remove trees to control the fall of leaves, seeds and fruit. Please read below for more information on this issue.

Scenario	What you can do
Are leaves, seeds or fruit causing a problem to private property?	The law has determined that it is reasonable to expect a householder to clear leaves if they live in an area where there are trees.
Are leaves, seeds or fruit causing a problem to pavements and roads?	Report it to Waste Management

The dropping of leaves, flowers, seeds and fruits is a natural function of a tree's biology, and are not considered to be a legal nuisance and cannot be controlled without damage to the tree's health and appearance.

Activities such as clearing up fallen leaves and seeds, such as from gutters and pathways, are part of normal household maintenance. The law has determined that it is reasonable to expect a householder to clear leaves if they live in an area where there are trees.

Our street cleaning section regularly sweeps and cleans the streets to prevent falling leaves and fruit from causing too much of a problem. If you want to know when your street is due for cleaning, contact our street cleaning section.

A tree outside my house seems to be very large or sways in the wind and I am worried about its safety. How often do you inspect trees?

To manage the risks from council owned trees, and in line with national guidance, the council inspects the trees on its land in a cyclical programme, which means each tree is inspected once every four years to make sure they are safe.

Scenario	What you can do
----------	-----------------

Is the tree on West Suffolk Council land?

Please read the information below. However, if you are still concerned about the safety of a council owned tree, [report it to us](#)

Is the tree privately owned?

You will need to raise your concerns with the tree owner.

For some members of the public, a tree's natural ability to grow to great height and size is a cause of concern from a perception that a tree is dangerous merely due to its size.

A large or tall tree does not mean it is dangerous or any more likely to fail than a smaller individual. The relative risk posed by a given tree must be measured solely on its unique condition, health, location and other local factors which may be an influence. We take these factors into account when inspecting our trees every four years to make sure they are safe.

Birds in the trees outside my property are causing a mess with their droppings. Can you prune or remove the tree?

Roosting birds are a natural occurrence as is their production of droppings, and is not considered a legal nuisance. Generally, felling a tree will not alleviate the problem as birds will relocate to another tree in the locality. Similarly pruning will not resolve the problem as birds will relocate to other branches. Pruning or felling of trees will not be considered as a way of resolving such matters.

I believe a council owned tree is blocking my TV or satellite reception. Will the council prune or fell the tree?

Tree owners have no legal obligations to carry out remedial tree works to abate the problem of poor television reception. As such the council cannot take responsibility for the quality of television reception, as there is no basis in law or policy for that expectation. The council will not carry out tree work to alleviate TV or satellite reception for these reasons.

When a member of the public buys a television licence it allows them to operate any equipment to receive a transmission; it is not a guarantee or legal right to a television reception, let alone a perfect reception.

Ordinary televisions (terrestrial) operate in a way that will allow for a degree of variation in the reception and that will still allow a viewable image on the screen. If residents have problems with TV signals, advice can be obtained from a number of sources including the Independent Television Commission or specialist TV aerial installation companies. In most cases a suitable engineering solution can be found, such as high gain aerials, longer masts or repositioning/redirecting of aerials.

Satellite-television requires the dish to have a clear line of sight at the broadcasted signal. As such trees, highway signs and buildings can all block a signal. However, as with terrestrial signals, engineering solutions are available such as repositioning the dish or positioning a dish on a mast. When a commercial satellite dish installation company installs a dish, they should do so in a location that can receive a signal, which includes anticipating tree growth over time.

I am an owner-occupier and have a tree in my garden that needs pruning; can you do this for me?

No, we don't carry out tree pruning to privately owned trees at the tax payers' expense. If you need to carry out work to your own trees, you will need to find an appropriate contractor.

Please note that West Suffolk Council's in house arboricultural team are now available for private contract work which you may wish to consider when looking for an arboricultural contractor. You can enquire about this service with our [in house team](#).

Before you do any work on your tree, check with our [Planning Service](#) that it is not protected by a tree preservation order or within a conservation area.

My neighbour has a conifer hedge that is blocking out all my light and dropping brown needles everywhere, what can I do?

Generally, this is a private matter between residents. Some further advice is listed below. However, in some circumstances the council can act as arbitrator between parties, which is a discretionary function carried out by our Legal Services.

Scenario	What you can do
Have you attempted to resolve the issue with your neighbour with no success?	Read more about High Hedges or report it to us

You do not have a 'legal right' to light that may be blocked by trees or hedges. You should contact your neighbour, tell them about your concerns and ask if they are willing to cut their hedge. Do not approach your neighbour with an unfriendly attitude. Instead, explain to them how much the trees are affecting you.

You may find that the trees are causing your neighbour concern too, but it's one of those jobs they have not got around to yet. You could offer to split the cost of having the hedge cut, although you do not have to do this as it isn't your hedge.

In the Antisocial Behaviour Act 2004, there is a section relating to high hedges causing a nuisance if they are a conifer tree and form a hedge. Although this law will give you legal backing, we as an authority would recommend that you negotiate with your neighbour if possible as it would cause bad feeling between you if you had to go to court to sort the problem out.

Under this legislation the council has discretionary powers to become involved to help mediate between the parties. An administration fee is applicable. More information on [High Hedge legislation](#) and under what circumstances the council can get involved is available on request.

My neighbour's tree is overhanging my garden. Can I cut it back?

You should first ask your neighbour if they are willing to have it pruned. If they refuse (and the tree is not protected by a [tree preservation order](#)*), you are legally entitled to cut it back to your boundary as long as you:

- cut back only the branches over your boundary line
- do not trespass on your neighbour's property
- offer the cuttings back to your neighbour
- get rid of the cuttings if your neighbour does not want them
- do not kill the tree or make it unstable
- you cannot leave the cuttings in your neighbour's garden without their permission.

*If the tree is protected by a Tree Preservation Order or within a Conservation Area, you **must** obtain permission from the Local Planning Authority to prune back the tree to your boundary. You can face very large fines if you fail to do this, even though you are not the owner of the tree.

Branches from a council owned tree are overhanging my garden. Will the council prune or remove it?

The council has no legal obligation to remove branches back to the point at which they cross property boundaries. Trees close to and growing over walls and fences will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis by the council if they are likely to cause a legal nuisance.

Scenario	What you can do
Minor encroachment of small branches from trees not near a boundary or wall?	See the section on pruning branches over a boundary
Encroachment from trees near a boundary or wall which you believe may cause damage to your property.	report it to us

Members of the public should be advised as to their Common Law rights concerning vegetation growing over their property boundary (see above), but where this may cause an unacceptable risk to tree health or form, the council will assess the tree to seek a more beneficial solution.

Where overhanging branches are likely to cause an imminent risk of structural damage (that is within one growing season), they may be treated in the same way as branches causing actual physical damage (see previous sections).

There is a council owned tree blocking light to my property, blocking light to my solar panels or blocking my view. Can it be pruned or removed?

The council is unable to undertake any measures, including pruning or felling, to alleviate problems of light obstruction, shading or obstruction of views. If there is an issue relating to a conifer hedge, we will assess this against the High Hedges Regulations.

Scenario	What you can do
Are there two or more conifer trees in a row causing the problem?	Report it to us and we will assess the complaint in line with the High Hedge Regulations

The council often receives requests to carry out work on trees to alleviate light or shade problems from trees. However, the obstruction of light from a tree is not a legal nuisance and there is no legal right to light for a homeowner.

Similarly there is no legal right in law to a view. In addition a view obstructed by the growth of trees cannot legally be regarded as a nuisance in the legal term of the word.

There is a council owned tree blocking the view of a road junction, road sign or streetlight. Can it be pruned or removed?

In line with requirements of the Highways Act 1980, the council will ensure that street signs and street lights within the highway are clear from obstruction caused by council owned trees. It will not take action to improve the levels of illumination to private property from a street light.

The council will also ensure that its trees do not cause an obstruction to a public highway, a right of way or an access right to a property. This includes an obstruction to a highway visibility splay.

Scenario	What you can do
Is the tree on West Suffolk Council land?	report it to us
Is the tree on private property or Suffolk County Council Highways land?	Report it to Suffolk County Council

There is a tree or bush overhanging from a private property and causing an obstruction to people walking past on the footpath or travelling along a road. What can I do?

This issue would need to be reported to Suffolk County Council Highways Department who have powers to address this issue, which West Suffolk Council as non-highways authorities do not.

Scenario	What you can do
Is the tree on private property or Suffolk County Council Highways land?	Report it to Suffolk County Council

I believe a council owned tree may make it easier for someone to break into my house. Will the council remove the tree?

Tree work will only be undertaken if clear evidence exists of a problem, and that some form of tree management would provide a tangible improvement. It is imperative that any such action is carried out as part of a wider police and local authority partnership approach.

Scenario	What you can do
Is the tree on West Suffolk Council land?	report it to us

Occasionally the council receives complaints about trees due to concerns that trees provide access and/or cover for criminal acts, vandalism and harassment. This can often be the result of a misconception rather than direct evidence of a problem. In such cases, the council will direct the resident to other measures which may be more appropriate such as contacting the Safer Neighbourhood Team, and involve the Council's Community Safety co-ordinator.

Will you replace a fallen or diseased tree?

Yes, we will always do our best to replace trees, although sometimes trees cannot be planted in exactly the same spot.

Can the council give me advice about my privately owned tree?

The council is unable to offer advice to residents regarding trees in their own gardens.

The Arboricultural Association has some helpful information regarding managing trees and also maintain a list of tree surgeons and contractors www.trees.org.uk/

Does the council have a list of approved tree surgeons?

The council does not maintain a list of approved contractors or tree surgeons.

The Arboricultural Association has some helpful information regarding managing trees and also maintain a list of tree surgeons and contractors www.trees.org.uk/

Please note that West Suffolk Council's in house arboricultural team are now available for private contract work which you may wish to consider when looking for an arboricultural contractor. You can enquire about this service with our [in house team](#).

Can I pay for work to a council owned tree if the council will not do the work I want done?

Where tree work is not justifiable as the result of a request for service from a resident, some residents may wish to pay for the work themselves. This will often be in relation to minor seasonal nuisance issues.

If the council was to engage in pay for service agreements, this would create an unfair two tier system. This would fail to deliver an even handed service for residents who are unable to pay for service.

The council will not enter into any arrangements where members of the public pay for, or contribute towards the cost of tree works. We will also not allow tree surgeons engaged by members of the public, access to climb trees under our stewardship.

Except in the case of [overhanging branches](#) any unauthorised works to council owned trees carried out by any person would be treated as criminal damage.