

Detailed guide: Tree felling licence: when you need to apply

Who can apply for a licence

Anyone can apply for a felling licence, but it must be issued in the name of the owner or lessee of the property. Lessees must ensure that their lease entitles them to fell trees. Where an owner or lessee uses an agent, the agent must demonstrate that they are authorised represent the applicant – use the [agent authority form](#).

In some circumstances, a licence can be issued to someone who is not the owner or lessee but who has sufficient legal interest in the land. This means that they must be able to demonstrate that they can fell the trees without the need to get permission from anyone else.

We'll accept applications from and issue licences to a business or organisation. Such applications must include details of a named individual who has authority to sign the application and is able to sign any restocking conditions. This person will be an employee of the business or organisation, or an agent with sufficient authority.

Felling trees without a licence, where one would have been required, is an offence.

Exemptions

Not every tree felling project requires a felling licence. Exemptions can be based on:

- location
- the type of tree work
- the volume and diameter of the tree
- other permissions already in place
- legal and statutory undertakings

Find out more about felling licences, exemptions and how to apply in our guide

[Tree felling – getting permission](#)

(PDF, 1.69MB, 8 pages)

You can also contact your nearest [Forestry Commission area office](#) before felling to check whether a licence is required.

Environmental map browsers

The Forestry Commission's [Land Information Search \(LIS\)](#) is a map-based tool that allows you to search for information about land designations or features that might already apply to your land or affect your woodland management and tree felling proposals. It also shows details of other approved felling licenses in your area.

Natural England's [MAGIC map browser](#) contains a greater range of environmental data and can provide further information on designations and issues that might affect your woodland or woodland management proposals.

How to apply for a tree felling licence

You need to complete this tree felling licence application form.

Send a completed application form to the nearest [Forestry Commission administration office](#).

You must send 2 signed and dated copies of a map showing the boundary of the tree felling proposals with your application.

If you're using an agent, you must also send an Agent Authority Form with your application. The agent will then be able to sign your felling licence application, restocking conditions (where they apply) or an application for a felling licence without restocking in order to change land use (deforestation). This only needs to be done once for each client represented.

If you're applying to fell trees on a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) then you should also complete a [Supplementary notice of operations within a site of special scientific interest](#). This document will provide more detail on how you propose to manage the tree felling and protect the SSI, and will allow us to issue Natural England's consent for the work at the same time as the felling licence.

How to appeal our decision

If an approved felling licence has replanting conditions applied to it and you are not happy with them, you should initially [contact your local woodland officer](#) and discuss the issue.

However, if you're still unhappy with the conditions applied to your felling licence, you can appeal to the appropriate Forestry Minister. You must do this in accordance with the details on your felling licence. If you do not follow these then your appeal will not be accepted.

The Minister will usually get the advice of a reference committee (independent of the Forestry Commission and selected to consider the case), before giving a decision on whether the conditions should remain or be amended.

You may also appeal against refusal of a felling licence to the Minister, but only if you have been refused a licence twice for the same area and work proposals. There must be at least 3 years between our first and subsequent refusal.

Management plans and felling licences

Felling licences can be issued following the review and agreement in principle of a detailed woodland management plan that meets the standards and requirements set out in the [UK Forestry Standard](#).

Restocking conditions on a licence

Restocking conditions will normally be included on felling licences where tree felling will result in creating openings within a woodland. Conditions are applied to ensure:

- restocking or regeneration of the felled area with replacement trees
- replacement trees are maintained for a period not less than 10 years

Felling licence applicants are required to provide restocking proposals as part of their application, and these will be discussed with the Forestry Commission when processing the application. The applicant will then be sent a copy of the final proposed restocking conditions. They must raise any concerns over the proposed conditions within 14 days in order to agree an alternative before the licence is issued.

The government has a general policy against felling woodland without restocking. Licences to thin woodlands are granted unconditionally, without the need to restock.

Using an approved felling licence

Once a felling licence is approved by the Forestry Commission it cannot be changed.

If you need to change your felling proposals then you will need to make a new application. If you have already felled the trees within the licence, you must complete the associated restocking conditions. These also cannot be changed.

Selling land with a felling licence

A felling licence is transferable to a new land owner as long as there is no change to the felling or restocking set out in the felling licence.

Any restocking conditions that apply to the land after a felling licence has been enacted remain in force after the land is sold. Those who sell land with a felling licence must advise the Forestry Commission and the purchaser

accordingly.

Detailed guide: Report suspected illegal tree felling

Before anyone can cut down trees, they may need to get a felling licence from the Forestry Commission. In some circumstances, exceptions or other permissions may apply. Illegal tree felling is described as 'unlicensed'.

If you suspect an illegal felling incident that you'd like to report to the Forestry Commission, you can contact your [local Area office](#).

You can choose to make your report of an alleged illegal felling anonymously if you prefer.

Before you report

Before you let us know about the tree felling, note that some tree felling does not require a felling licence from the Forestry Commission. For example:

- felling trees in gardens, churchyards or a public open space where the public have a legal right of access for recreation
- felling trees to prevent the spread of a quarantine pest or disease
- felling trees with a diameter less than the width of baked bean can (8cm) at a height of 1.3m on the main stem

Up to 5 cubic metres of timber (approximately 5 metric tonnes) may be felled per calendar quarter without a felling licence.

For more information on exemptions, see the guide on [when to apply for a tree felling licence](#).

What could happen if a tree is cut down without a licence

If no felling licence or other valid permission is in place, or if the wrong trees are cut down:

- all parties involved can be prosecuted
- the Forestry Commission can serve a Restocking Notice to re-stock the land concerned, or any other land as may be agreed, regardless of whether or not a prosecution takes place

- the owner or tenant must maintain the replacement trees to acceptable standards for up to 10 years

If someone fells trees without a licence, and they get an annual agri-environment scheme payment on their land, they might be penalised financially. Any failure to comply with the licensing controls is a breach under the Cross Compliance rules (GAEC 7a).

If anyone tries to sell illegally felled timber, they might be committing an offence under the Timber and Timber Products (Placing on the Market) Regulations 2013. A breach of these regulations means that the illegally felled timber can be seized by an authorised inspector. Anyone convicted of an offence under these regulations could get an unlimited fine and/or term of imprisonment.

If the restocking requirements of either a felling licence or a restocking notice are not complied with, the Forestry Commission may issue an Enforcement Notice requiring action be taken to meet the conditions previously set. It's an offence not to comply with an Enforcement Notice and a fine may be imposed.

[Detailed guide: Find local tree felling projects](#)

Register of Woodland Planting and Tree Felling

The Forestry Commission's Register of Woodland Planting and Tree Felling gives details of proposed tree felling projects.

Details of a tree felling application will stay on the register for 28 days. During this time, anyone may provide us with comments or additional information about the application or the impact that it may have on the area. You can also ask the Forestry Commission for more information on specific tree felling proposals.

Most tree felling applications are for work on private land and you may need permission if you wish to enter the area. The inclusion of the area on the Register of Woodland Planting and Tree Felling does not change this requirement.

How the Forestry Commission is involved

You need a felling licence from the Forestry Commission to fell growing trees if the volume of timber to be felled exceeds 5 cubic metres. Felling licences

are normally granted with the condition that the land where the tree felling takes place is replanted with trees.

There are exemptions to needing to apply for a felling licence, such as for trees in:

- domestic gardens
- churchyards
- orchards
- public open space or, for pruning or remedial tree works

The Forestry Commission also consults local authorities and other organisations with statutory powers in relation to land use before deciding whether to approve applications for tree felling.

The Forestry Commission will only grant a felling licence if the proposals for tree felling are consistent with good forestry practice as outlined in the [UK Forestry Standard](#).

Find out more about [how to apply for a tree felling licence](#).

It's an offence to fell trees without a licence or other permission, unless it's covered by an exemption. Find out how to [report suspected illegal tree felling](#).

How to comment on proposed projects

If you'd like to see an application to decide whether to comment on it, you can call in to your local Forestry Commission office and ask to see the application form and the accompanying map.

These are working documents, which may have been annotated, and may be subject to further change before approval. The name and address of the applicant will not be shown. If you submit comments about an application, we'll consider them as part of our application review process, and may also discuss them with the applicant.

Find your [Forestry Commission local area office and administrative hub contact details including, address, telephone number and email address](#).

What we do with your comments

If we receive comments or other information about the application, we may discuss these with the applicant and we may ask them to change the tree felling proposals to take these comments into account. In most cases where this happens, reasonable changes can be made and a satisfactory solution reached. Conversely, we may decide that in the light of the information we have received, the application should be refused.

Once we've made our decision, we publish details of the final approved felling licence on the Register of Woodland Planting and Tree Felling.

Tree Preservation Orders

Local planning authorities (LPAs) deal with planning matters relating to trees and hedges, and with [Tree Preservation Orders \(TPOs\)](#).

However, if protected trees are to be felled and would normally require a felling licence, then the land owner must apply to the Forestry Commission for a felling licence. The Forestry Commission will consult with the LPA to reach an agreement on what work is appropriate and if any replanting is required.

Landowners or managers must inform the Forestry Commission if a TPO exists on tree felling proposals when making an application for a felling licence.

[Detailed guide: Sites of special scientific interest on or near woodland](#)

Sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) are protected by law to conserve their wildlife or geology. The Forestry Commission or [Natural England](#) can help identify woodland you own or occupy as an SSSI – this is called being designated.

Find out [what you can do on or near an SSSI](#) and when you need consent for an activity. The Forestry Commission in consultation with Natural England can help you manage your woodland.

You don't need formal consent for work next to an SSSI but Natural England may choose to advise on precautions you may need to consider so that your work doesn't harm the SSSI.

How the Forestry Commission can help

The Forestry Commission will obtain consent from Natural England on your behalf when we process your application for grant aid or a felling licence. This means that when we send the grant agreement or felling licence to you we'll also send Natural England's consent, which may list additional conditions. Prior to carrying out any work on an SSSI it remains your responsibility to check that you have the relevant consents from Natural England.

Find out about applying for a felling licence

Find out more about applying for grants and funding in the overview guidance

on creating woodland.

What you need to do

Complete a supplementary notice of operations for work on an SSSI and send this with your grant or licence application. If you don't send this form to us, you'll have to get consent from Natural England independently.

Download the SSSI supplementary notice of operations to complete and return with your application to the Forestry Commission.

In this form you'll answer a series of questions related to woodland management operations and what the impacts will be in order to carry out tree felling on a SSSI.

You must give full and clear details about the specific nature of the proposed operations, how you propose to carry out and manage them and where and when within the SSSI they would take place. This information allows Natural England to check that you won't harm the SSSI's special wildlife so they can decide whether to give consent.

To process your application as quickly as possible, we may contact you to arrange a joint site visit with a Natural England advisor.

Contact the Forestry Commission

You can [contact the Forestry Commission](#). The Forestry Commission area offices assist with:

- grants
- licences
- advice for woodland owners and managers
- pests and diseases

Detailed guide: Manage and protect woodland wildlife

You must comply with regulations protecting wildlife species and habitats when you're managing woodland and planning forestry operations. These include the European protected species (EPS) listed in the [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017](#) and the [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#).

It's an offence to:

- deliberately capture, injure, kill or cause significant disturbance to a protected species
- deliberately destroy the eggs of a protected species
- damage or destroy protected species' breeding sites or resting places (such as a bat roost in a tree or a dormouse nest on the woodland floor)

You must carry out planned operations carefully, making the necessary checks, and you may need a wildlife licence in certain circumstances. If you follow good practice you should be able to carry out most activities without the need for a licence – but to do so you may just have to modify or reschedule some of your management proposals or practices.

Penalties

You can get an unlimited fine and up to 6 months in prison if you don't have a wildlife management licence when carrying out an activity that have an impact on protected species.

Who to contact

Although Natural England are the statutory body for wildlife licensing, the [Forestry Commission local area teams](#) offer support to woodland managers and owners who may need to [apply for a wildlife licence from the Natural England licensing unit](#). The Forestry Commission will carry out an initial assessment to help with processing of wildlife licence applications and give applicants a single point of contact. Natural England will make the final decision on wildlife licences and will issue them through the Forestry Commission.

Read more about
[how to comply with habitats regulations](#)
 (PDF, 1.18MB, 19 pages)

– including decision-making and woodland planning processes that help to effectively manage protected species in woodlands.

Protected species checklists

Use this
[European protected species and woodland operations checklist](#)
 (PDF, 135KB, 1 page)

when you begin to plan what work you want to do and how it might affect protected species. The completed checklist will help provide some evidence that you have considered protected wildlife if your operations are later challenged, but you must also research what species records are available, survey your woodland for evidence of species presence and manage your woodland according.

Operational site assessments

You can also complete an operational site assessment (OSA), using the

[site feature checklist](#)

(PDF, 23.5KB, 1 page)

This is a simple checklist to use when planning forest operations – eg harvesting or civil engineering work. Use the OSA to consider any aspect of the work that could cause a problem, including to:

- wildlife on or close to the site
- people directly involved in the operation
- third parties such as members of the public, neighbours etc
- the landowner who is legally responsible for operations that occur on the site

Read Forestry Commission

[guidance on OSA and protected species](#)

(PDF, 64.2KB, 2 pages)

You can download species-specific advice from the Forestry Commission on how to check your woodland for protected species and how you should operate in their presence:

- [all 17 species of bats](#)
(PDF, 311KB, 12 pages)
- [dormouse](#)
(PDF, 79.5KB, 9 pages)
- [great crested newt](#)
(PDF, 171KB, 10 pages)
- [otter](#)
(PDF, 89.7KB, 10 pages)
- [sand lizard and smooth snake](#)
(PDF, 80.3KB, 9 pages)

Read the

[Forestry Commission field guide on European protected species](#)

(PDF, 5.64MB, 96 pages)

Badgers

It's an offence to kill, injure or take badgers. It's also an offence to interfere with their setts. If you're in doubt over whether you might damage or disturb badgers or if damage or disturbance would be unavoidable, you should [apply for a wildlife licence](#)

Red squirrels

Red squirrels and their drays are protected by law. Find out more about the [legal protection of the red squirrel](#).

Plants

You should also consider plants in your woodland that might be protected by law. See the list of [plants protected by law and how they are protected](#).

Note: woodland managers should follow the good practice found in the [UK Forestry Standard](#).

Biodiversity

Find out more about [managing your woodland to benefit species and habitats biodiversity](#).

Apply for a wildlife licence

Find out when you need [to apply, the type of licence you need and how to complete the application](#). This guide provides a full list of licensing information for:

- badgers
- bats
- bumblebees – non-native species
- deer
- dormice
- freshwater fish
- great crested newts
- invertebrates
- mink, coypu, muskrat and grey squirrel
- natterjack toads
- otters
- plants
- reptiles
- water voles
- white-clawed crayfish
- wild birds

Wild plant licences

Find out how to apply for a [licence to cover activities affecting wild plants](#)

Tree felling

You should be able to undertake felling operations without a wildlife licence even in the presence of EPS, providing you follow the associated good practice rules and make proportionate decisions on how to deliver your work proposals

You may need a wildlife licence if felling operations could adversely affect any protected species on your site, for example, when you need to fell trees that host protected species because of a tree pest or disease. Find out more about tree-felling and applying for felling licences.

Contact the Forestry Commission

You can email england-protectedspecies@forestry.gsi.gov.uk or get in touch with a woodland officer in your local area office for advice on protected species and support to apply for licences.

Find your [Forestry Commission's Area Office and Administrative Hub contact details including, address, telephone number and email address.](#)