

# TREE WARDENS

In South Somerset 80% of Parish and Town Councils have appointed Tree Wardens. Although this is very good, there are plain gaps, particularly in towns. For this reason, and also because we are asked from time to time what a Tree Warden does, the Tree Warden Steering Group decided there was a need to provide a concise summary of The Tree Warden Role, particularly for Councils to consider, which is to follow below.

Regards  
Barry Knox  
**SSDC Tree Warden Coordinator**



## **Tree Wardens and Parish/Town Councils in South Somerset**

The South Somerset Tree Warden Steering Group felt parishes, towns and wards might welcome some basic information about what Tree Wardens were for and how to work with them. This note is the result.

It's a good idea to have a Tree Warden; s/he provides the Council with an access point and can help with the clerk's workload. It allows the Council to delegate responsibility to someone who is hopefully interested and active and who can act as a source for ideas. A Tree Warden can work through papers others may not be interested in and act as an informed link and focus for the councillors, parishioners and SSDC Tree Officer.

## **Your Tree Warden and the Council**

The Council may well wish to suggest things for Tree Wardens to get involved in, but should be open to their ideas too. Tree Wardens are volunteers and it is important that they enjoy their role and can see the benefits themselves. It is much easier if the

parish or town knows who the Tree Warden is and that s/he is there to consult on all tree matters.

Don't expect too much of your Tree Warden too soon – once appointed s/he will need time to settle into their role and also absorb a lot of information. Often their best start is to survey the local area – get to know it and the landowners and map all the relevant features on a plan. Certain things may become evident – dead or dying trees that might become hazardous; stakes and ties on recently planted trees that need attention; potential sites for new trees etc.

The Warden and Council working together should be able to decide what the priorities are in a particular area, and then draw up a simple plan to tackle them step by step.

Your Warden will ideally submit regular reports of their Tree Wardening activities. This will give the opportunity for assessing progress, checking that the overall aims are being met and that everyone is happy.

Councils should be able to put their Tree Wardens in touch with other local groups that they may be able to work with, for example, a parish action group; guides, scouts or a local conservation group.

Your relationship is a partnership: Tree Wardens have to be accountable to the Parish Council and in return for that need your support and guidance.

Support does not necessarily mean hard cash but you might be able to offer some of the following:

- A meeting room
- Maps of the parish
- Photocopying facilities
- Access to planning applications
- A list of tree preservation orders in the parish
- Travel expenses to attend training events
- Funding for tree planting projects
- A spot in the parish newsletter (for promotion, requests for help, seasonal highlights etc)
- Purchasing tree identification guides
- Helping to understand Parish Council procedures and protocol
- Encouragement and building confidence!

**A few examples of potential Tree Warden activities:**

Looking at issues brought to the Parish Council and reporting back.

Spotting problems: e.g. strimming damage; stakes and ties need to be removed.

Identify where new hedgerow trees could be planted or allowed to develop.

Tree preservation order maps that need updating.

Take the opportunity of a local event to organise a commemorative tree planting.

Helping a brownie pack with their tree badge.

Planning local seasonal walks to help everyone appreciate trees more and why they are important.

Reporting trees that need to be weeded at the base.

Checking trees on sites planned for development.

Looking for areas where new trees can be planted and maintained in the long term.

Attending specialist meetings; finding out about grants and maintaining a stock of forms.

### **An ideal Tree Warden.**



A number of characteristics make for a suitable Tree Warden. They have more to do with attitude than knowledge which can be improved through training.

A Tree-warden should be responsible and willing to co-operate. Wardens have no special powers, and they should not trespass or get sucked into tree disputes. They should not interfere with the work of their District Tree Officers (who provide advice and training) but try and work with them.

Tree Wardens will probably not be experts, and are not expected to be, but they can be a focus for action and assist the Tree Officers as well as initiate their own projects.

Wardens need to be neutral. They need to see matters in a balanced way, so if a tree does have to come down, e.g. for safety reasons, they won't over-react or let their emotions rule their reasoning.

Wardens must genuinely care for their environment and the context of trees within it.

Wardens need to have enough time to give to their duties. There is no minimum amount set, but wardens will probably be living in the area. Many wardens who work find time in the evenings and weekends, or combine some duties with their normal routine, e.g. tree surveying while walking the dog.

Wardens should be willing to learn. Those who “know it all” or who are narrow-minded will be difficult to work with.

Ideally, wardens should have some knowledge of trees, for example they should be able to recognise our main native trees and where they grow. However, this knowledge can be learnt.

People who could commercially gain from being a Tree Warden, e.g. working tree surgeons, might not be ideal candidates since they could seem to unfairly exploit their position but circumstances will vary.

Age or disability is not necessarily a limiting factor. Although some may not be able to undertake physically demanding tasks, e.g. tree planting, they can act as the Parish contact point, gather information or give talks.

If Parish Councils prefer they can appoint people on a trial basis e.g. for an initial six months before they confirm the appointment. If demand is high, several wardens can be appointed (either to cover different geographical areas or to undertake different aspects of the scheme). Assistant wardens can also be appointed.



The above, which mainly comes from another District's publication, is included because it contains lots of good points, but as you've read it through you will probably have realised there are no ideal candidates in your parish/town. So like everyone else you'll have to make do with a human instead. The final appointment will naturally depend on the parish/town, the Councillors and the individual. However it might not be a good idea to have a Tree Warden who can only give a very limited amount of time or commitment to the role.

### **Local tree champions**

As local tree champions Tree Wardens are the eyes and ears of their neighbourhoods and the main contact for parishioners: community involvement is a central aim of the scheme. Local people will often see what needs to be done before

council officials or landowners – Tree Wardens can be the focal point for such information and will usually know who to contact. If they don't, they will know someone who does!

They can be the link on tree matters between the community and the Parish/Town Council and can also be the catalyst for getting tree projects started and supported.

There is no set formula for selecting or appointing a Tree Warden. The only stipulation in the SSDC scheme is that he or she must be appointed by the Council – this is due to communication, accountability and liability issues. You may appoint more than one Tree Warden.

It is important for the SSDC to maintain an up-to-date database of contact details. Please tell us if your Tree Warden or parish/town clerk contact details change. If you wish to appoint a new Tree Warden please inform the Tree Officer [details below] who will send out a pack and ensure s/he receives any updates.

There is of course a wealth of other detailed information available from numerous sources, including the Tree Council [[www.treecouncil.org.uk/tree-wardens](http://www.treecouncil.org.uk/tree-wardens)], however your natural first call will be the South Somerset District Council Tree Officer. [contact through the SSDC website or 01935 462462]

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