

## Wider application

The increasing tendency towards risk avoidance is contributing to the loss of ancient hollow trees in the UK at an alarming rate. Whilst it may be difficult to retain over-mature forest trees in areas of dense development, ancient hollow pollards are relatively unthreatening, particularly important for wildlife and will respond very positively to appropriate management. In many places, surviving veteran trees are older than most of the surrounding buildings, and with popular support and political will they can be successfully retained, celebrated and given an extensive new lease of life. The government watchdog English Nature has an important national programme to raise awareness and improve the conservation of veteran trees and their associated wildlife.

## Further information

### National Urban Forestry Unit

This leaflet is one of a series produced by the National Urban Forestry Unit. NUFU is a charitable trust and it provides a national focus for the exchange of information and good practice in urban forestry. If you would like further information on other case studies, or if you have examples of good practice to share, please contact:

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### Ancient Tree Forum

The Ancient Tree Forum champions the cause of veteran native trees. Its members are mostly professional naturalists and sympathetic arboriculturalists, and their publications, conferences and study tours have done a great deal to increase understanding of this aspect of our natural and landscape heritage.

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### Further reading

Baines C (1992) *The Baines Report*, BBC Wildlife 10 5

Corporation of London (1991) *Pollard and Veteran tree management*. Burnham Beeches

English Nature (2000) *The Future for veteran Trees*. Peterborough

English Nature (2000) *Veteran Trees: a guide to good management*. Peterborough

English Nature (2000) *Veteran Trees: a guide to grants*

English Nature (2000) *Veteran Trees: a guide to risk and responsibility*. Peterborough

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# Urban Forestry in Practice

## Conserving veteran and ancient trees



CASE STUDY 41

# Conserving veteran and ancient trees

## Introduction

In Britain there are surprising numbers of old trees. The oldest are the ancient yews, but oaks, limes, beech, hornbeam and hawthorn are all able to survive for many hundreds of years.

A tree's key strategy for long term survival is now known to be its hollowness. As the dead wood at its core rots away, this lightens the strain on the vigorously growing outer ring of woody tissue, recycles nutrients to the tree and provides a very special habitat for a wealth of organisms of decomposition, including rare fungi and wood-boring beetles.

The majority of Europe's ancient and veteran trees are found in the UK. Many of them have been managed as *pollards*, with trunks just tall enough to put the branches out of reach of browsing cattle, and to yield a valuable harvest of branch timber century after century. With appropriate management, many of these ancient trees can be expected to live on for centuries to come, providing a strong link with the past and an invaluable asset as features of both landscape and wildlife heritage.

Wherever ancient hollow trees occur, they are in danger of being misunderstood and mis-managed, but this is particularly a problem for the few specimens that still survive in towns. They are often seen as dangerous and dying and are felled in the interest of "health and safety". In fact these trees are among the most precious fragments of our national heritage and need to be celebrated and protected

## Specific example

### Project name and location

The TETTENHALL LIME,  
Upper Green, Tettenhall,  
WOLVERHAMPTON,  
West Midlands, UK  
Grid reference SJ 886002

### Project partners

- Wolverhampton City Council
- The Ancient Tree Forum
- English Nature
- Heritage Lottery Fund

### Project objectives

- To retain an ancient hollow tree in an urban public open space
- To satisfy concerns about risk to public safety



Residents and traders, with support from the local press, persuaded the council to save the Tettenhall Lime

### Site description

The Upper Green in Tettenhall is about 1 hectare of public open space, surrounded by shops, houses and a busy main road. It is maintained as mown grass, with a collection of large trees, most of which are less than 100 years old. There is one small-leaved lime tree, known as the Tettenhall lime, which is an ancient pollard with a 4 metre high hollow trunk and a girth of 4.8 metres at chest height. It has six main forks and an abundance of vigorous branch growth. It clearly pre-dates the surrounding development.

### The campaign

In the summer of 2001 the local residents' association expressed concern that the tree posed a threat to the general public. Wolverhampton City Council responded by erecting a 2 metre high temporary barrier around the tree and commissioning a report from a professional registered tree surgeon. He described the tree as being more than 150 years old, unsightly, dangerous and with a very short life expectancy. His recommendation to the Council, endorsed by their officers, was to fell the tree and remove the stump.

Local naturalists identified the hollow tree as a summer bat roost and this caused the Council to erect notices expressing regret that, since the bats are a protected species, they would be unable to fell the tree until the winter. Erection of the barrier and notices triggered a vigorous campaign to save the tree. A petition of 186 signatures was submitted to the Council and the historic and natural heritage value of the tree was championed in the local press.

The local MP and ward councillors were recruited to the campaign, and at a full meeting of the City Council, the case was made for protecting and celebrating the tree as an important living landmark which predated the industrial history of the surrounding Black Country region.

Experts from the *Ancient Tree Forum*, English Nature and the Wildlife Trusts visited the tree. They confirmed its likely age to be more than 300 years and that its potential life expectancy, if it was regularly pollarded, would be measured in centuries rather than decades. The issue of risk was addressed by suggesting permanent protective fencing. The councillors were persuaded, in part, by considering the relatively minor risk represented by the tree when compared with the far greater risk from traffic on the nearby trunk road.

### Results

The councillors resolved to conserve the tree, with minor surgery used to reduce the weight of the two heaviest branch stumps.

A successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund provided a grant of approximately £6,000 which paid for the tree to be encircled by a 1.2m high ornamental metal fence and gate. The historic and wildlife importance of the tree is now explained on a permanent display board and the Tettenhall Lime has been entered on the national register of ancient trees.

The experience has also encouraged Wolverhampton City Council to consider more appropriate treatment of a veteran oak at Tettenhall, which the *Ancient Tree Forum* estimates to be over four hundred years old.



A modest grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund paid for elegant fencing to protect both the lime tree and local passers-by