



ENGLISH HERITAGE

# Landscape Advice Note: Commemorative Trees



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It is common in public parks and other open spaces to find commemorative (or memorial) trees – trees planted by famous people to commemorate a visit or special occasion or to the memory of a person or people who particularly liked the park or open space in which the tree is planted. This Landscape Advice Note provides an overview of how to formulate a policy for commemorative trees in historic gardens and landscapes.

## INTRODUCTION

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Those responsible for managing sites open to the public often receive requests for the planting of commemorative trees. It is important that individual sites have a detailed policy to ensure any requests for commemorative trees are dealt with fairly and uniformly over the long term.

## FORMULATING A POLICY

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Any policy should be clear even if this is simply that commemorative trees are not accepted. The policy should be included as part of the management plan for the site as this should enable everyone who needs to be involved to comment on and agree the way forward (Box 1).

When considering allowing the planting of commemorative trees it is important to remember that trees differ from other memorials in several important respects;

- Trees are living organisms which can fail to thrive and can die – sometimes immediately after planting or sometimes several years later. Donors can become very upset if their tree dies.
- Even if trees establish and grow well for a number of years trees can still die or be seriously damaged by a number of agencies such as high winds, lightening, fungal or other infections and vandalism. Unlike benches they cannot be repaired.
- If trees do survive they become long lived and often very large which makes them a long term maintenance consideration.
- Tree planting pits and root growth can have archaeological implications. Scheduled monument

consent will be required for tree planting on scheduled sites.

- Once established trees grow significantly each year so the choice of site and species is particularly important, especially when near buildings.

## ASPECTS TO BE CONSIDERED

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If it is decided that commemorative trees would be appropriate the following points should be considered when formulating a policy:

- Total number

Decide if there are locations or areas where trees are appropriate and how many are needed - 1, 10, 100 or more. If this is carefully considered at the start and set out in the policy it gives the perfect cut off when there are enough.

- Location

There needs to be specific areas set by sites where trees are considered appropriate. Trees are a long term additions to the landscape so it is unlikely that ad hoc planting at the behest of donors would be acceptable. This is particularly important in designed landscapes where the spaces and views between various points are a crucial part of the design. Deciding at an early stage where trees may be planted will enable staff to clearly state the policy to potential donors.

- Species of trees

Different species of tree vary enormously in their ultimate size, longevity, visual appearance and impact on the landscape. A small ornamental flowering cherry would be out of place in a landscaped park, whereas a wide spreading Horse Chestnut would be unacceptable within a parterre. As much consideration needs to be given to the type of tree acceptable within an area as to the actual areas where trees may be planted. It is important that all involved with the presentation, maintenance, historical and landscape setting of the site are involved with the choice of tree species.

- Commemorative plaque

The material, position and size of the plaque should be decided and applied uniformly. Regular attention needs to be given to prevent the plaque being subsumed by the growing tree. Final approval of the wording on plaques should be reserved by the site. On some sites it might not be appropriate to have plaques at all. In such cases it may be preferable to have a book which records donations and the position of the tree.

- How much to charge

Costs to consider include the cost of tree, planting, and administration costs. There should also be a policy on whether the cost will include an element of profit to benefit the site. The site should make all arrangements for the actual planting trees, preparations for any ceremonial 'planting' and finishing of the area afterwards.

- Future maintenance

Trees need regular maintenance during the first five years of their life – watering, pruning, stake and tie adjustment and eventual removal etc. The cost of this needs to be considered and should probably be included within the initial charge.

- Time limit

Trees are effectively accepted for the life of the tree, but it would be advisable to make clear at the beginning that after the tree dies or needs to be removed, the site are not bound to plant a replacement.

- Replacement

The first five years after planting are the most crucial for tree establishment and it is during this period that the tree is most likely to die. It may be advisable to accept a need to replant if a tree dies (or fails to thrive) within this period.

- Relocation

Within certain limitations trees can be relocated provided they are not too big. However, except for very small trees, this operation cannot be guaranteed to succeed and except with the smallest of trees is likely to be expensive. It should also be considered a one-off operation and unlike benches which can be temporarily relocated and then returned to their original locations, this is not a realistic option for trees.

If commemorative trees are to be permitted on a site care should be taken to identify locations which are acceptable historically and archaeologically and are unlikely to be changed in the future.

To cover unforeseen eventualities any policy needs to have a clause which reserves the right to remove or relocate trees for operational reasons (see Box 2 for an example document for potential donors).



IMAGE 01

It is rarely a good idea to allow memorial plaques to be fixed directly to trees. Without regular maintenance and adjustment these can cause problems to the tree and also become damaged themselves. © Alan Cathersides

## POLICY DOCUMENT

1. All enquiries for commemorative trees will be added to the Commemorative Tree File (include File Number xxx).
2. Allocation of tree locations will be on a strictly 'first come first served' basis.
3. Commemorative trees will only be planted in positions specified in the Management Plan. A choice of position may be offered but the applicant donor may not specify locations other than those offered by the site. All existing and potential tree locations on the site have been mapped and are shown on Drawing xxx in File xxx.
4. The right to remove or relocate commemorative trees for operational reasons is reserved. Reasonable effort should be made to inform the donor along with an explanation of the reason for such action.
5. Commemorative trees will be of the following species at the location indicated (list of location/s and species as approved in the Management Plan).
6. Commemorative inscriptions, specified by the donor and approved by the site can be inscribed on a plastic/brass/other plaque in letters xx mm high, on a maximum of xx lines. The maximum number of characters for inscriptions is xxx. Plaques will be located in front of the tree/tied to branches (or no plaques etc. - as agreed in Management Plan).
7. The minimum donation that is required to plant a commemorative tree is £xx plus £xx per letter for inscribed plaques. The donation covers the purchase of the tree, plaque and planting and maintenance charges for a five year period. The site will make all arrangements for the actual planting trees, preparations for any ceremonial planting and the finishing of the area afterwards.
8. Payment in full must be made before an order can be placed. Notification of a space to donors and collection of payment should be co-ordinated by xxx.
9. No payments should be made until the site has notified the donor that a space is available and the donor is satisfied with its location, and the species allowed.
10. Trees which die or fail to thrive within the first five years will be replaced by the site. Established trees which die, or are seriously damaged or blown down after this period will be replaced at the discretion of the site.

### FRONT COVER

Cedar tree in front of Osborne House. During Prince Albert's time at Osborne important birthdays or anniversaries would be commemorated by planting a tree in the park. © English Heritage Photo Library

### BOX I

An example of how a policy document might be laid out. It contains a number of details which are useful to record internally for the benefit of staff.

## INFORMATION FOR POTENTIAL DONORS

1. All enquiries for commemorative trees will be added to the Commemorative Tree waiting list. All applications will be considered in strict order based on the date of the application.
2. Commemorative trees will only be planted in positions specified by the site. A choice of position may be available but the applicant donor may not specify other locations.
3. The site reserves the right to remove or relocate commemorative trees for operational reasons. Reasonable efforts will be made to inform donors if this is necessary along with the reasons for such action.
4. Commemorative trees will only be species approved by the site.
5. Commemorative inscriptions, specified by the donor and approved by the site can be inscribed on a plastic/brass/other plaque in letters x mm high, on a maximum of x lines. The maximum number of characters for inscriptions is xxx. Plaques will be located in front of the tree/tied to branches (or no plaques etc. as agreed in management plan).
6. The minimum donation that is required to place a commemorative tree at is £xx plus £xx per letter for inscribed plaques. The donation covers the purchase of the tree, plaque, planting and maintenance charges for a five year period. The site will make all arrangements for the tree planting, preparations for any ceremonial planting and the finishing of the area afterwards. Donors will not be permitted to dig holes and plant trees themselves.
7. Payment in full must be made before an order can be placed.
8. Trees which die or fail to thrive within the first five years will be replaced by the site. Established trees which die, or are seriously damaged or blown down after this period will be replaced at the discretion of the site.

### BOX 2

An example of the policy document at Box 1 converted into an information document for potential donors. This excludes the internal information which would not be of interest to potential donors.

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