

JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

GUIDANCE TO SUPPORT THE SELECTION OF SITES AS SSSIs FOR VETERAN TREES

1. Additional guidance on Veteran Tree SSSI selection

- 1.1 Where information is available on key species groups associated with wood-pasture and veteran trees (particularly lichens and saproxylic invertebrates) the guidance set out in the *Guidelines for the Selection of Biological SSSIs* (NCC, 1989) will continue to have effect. However, sites may also be proposed on the basis of the significance of their veteran tree populations and associated vegetation, independently, or in addition to, known species interest in accordance with the following guidance.
- 1.2 In an Area of Search, the assessment of veteran tree sites should be undertaken in accordance with the protocol set out in Table 1. The use of this protocol is described, with examples, in English Nature Research Report 628.
- 1.3 The threshold values given in Table 1 are those that are likely to be appropriate for much of England. However, they may need adjustment in the light of further application of the procedures, particularly in Scotland.
- 1.4 The protocol enables sites to be compared and roughly graded in terms of their value for veteran trees and likely associated interests, although it does not set the threshold for A/SSSI status. Existing sites in a particular Area of Search with veteran tree interest, even if this has not previously been recognised, need to be taken into account.
- 1.5 The following test should be applied to determine whether sites identified as scoring highly using the assessment protocol should be notified. Namely, does a possible new site:
 - i. significantly increase the range or number of veteran trees protected;
 - ii. represent a significantly different aspect of the veteran tree resource; or is it
 - iii. significantly higher in value than the main sites currently selected?

Table 1: Veteran tree site assessment protocol

Field Measure	Possible thresholds		
	High value	Medium value	Low value
Primary assessment criteria			
Number of veteran trees	>100	10-100	<10
Number of ancient trees	>15	<15	0
Number of trees >1.5m dbh	>15	5-15	<5
Secondary assessment criteria			
Extent of site	>50ha	11-50ha	10ha or less
Tree cohort continuity (assessed by tree size)	At least 1 cohort per 100 yrs similar spp and distribution to veterans	Future generations present but gaps in cohorts/new generations do not reflect spp/ distribution of veterans	Large gaps in cohorts/veteran trees only
Visible deadwood (standing and fallen & incl. rot holes, hollow trunks etc)	Abundant	Present but evidence of removal	Little present
Ground vegetation	Unimproved grassland/semi-natural woodland	Semi-improved or significantly disturbed	Arable, improved or suppressed (bare)
Veteran trees near-by (sites and trees in the landscape)	Adjacent	Within 1km	>1km away
Diversity within veteran tree population (species, form, age, situation)	Diversity in at least three characteristics (species, age, form and situation)	Diversity in two characteristics or significant diversity in 1 characteristic	Little diversity
Associated species interest (e.g. lichens, saproxylic invertebrates)	Known to be high	Some interest known	
Documented habitat continuity - historical continuity	Documentary evidence of habitat continuity (several centuries)		
Potential	Interest likely to increase in short- to medium-term	Interest likely to increase moderately in short- to medium-term	Interest likely to decline in short- to medium-term
Other field measures that may assist in describing the value of the site			
Density of veteran trees (over site)			
Species composition of veterans			
Scrub (incl. bramble and hawthorn)			
Site management/threats			
Water-bodies/wetland habitat			
Shape			
Surrounding landuse			
Local pollution load			

Note: Ancient or veteran

The term 'veteran' tree encompasses a wide range of trees which display attributes associated with late maturity such as large trunk girth and truck hollowing. The term 'ancient' refers specifically to the age class of a tree, describing the stage of development in the ageing process beyond full maturity. Whilst all veteran trees are potentially of cultural and ecological value, ancient individuals are a key indication that there is likely to have been a continuity of veteran tree/deadwood habitat and management at a site. It has been possible to

devise a standard field definition of a 'veteran' tree, but recognising ancient trees is a more subjective judgement, which can depend on the experience of surveyor. Hence abundance of ancient trees has been considered as a separate criterion. The criteria used to indicate possible 'ancientness' are:

- i. diameter at breast height, though this only applies to certain species (e.g. oak);
- ii. significant trunk hollowing;
- iii. significant crown die back (as a result of natural retrenchment through ageing), often accompanied by reiterative epicormic growth though this will not apply to working pollards;
- iv. historical records of individual trees or sites though these will not be consistently available.