



TreeAH: A method of assessing the suitability of trees for heritage status

(Version 06-270511)



TreeAZ
www.TreeAZ.com



TreeAZ

www.TreeAZ.com

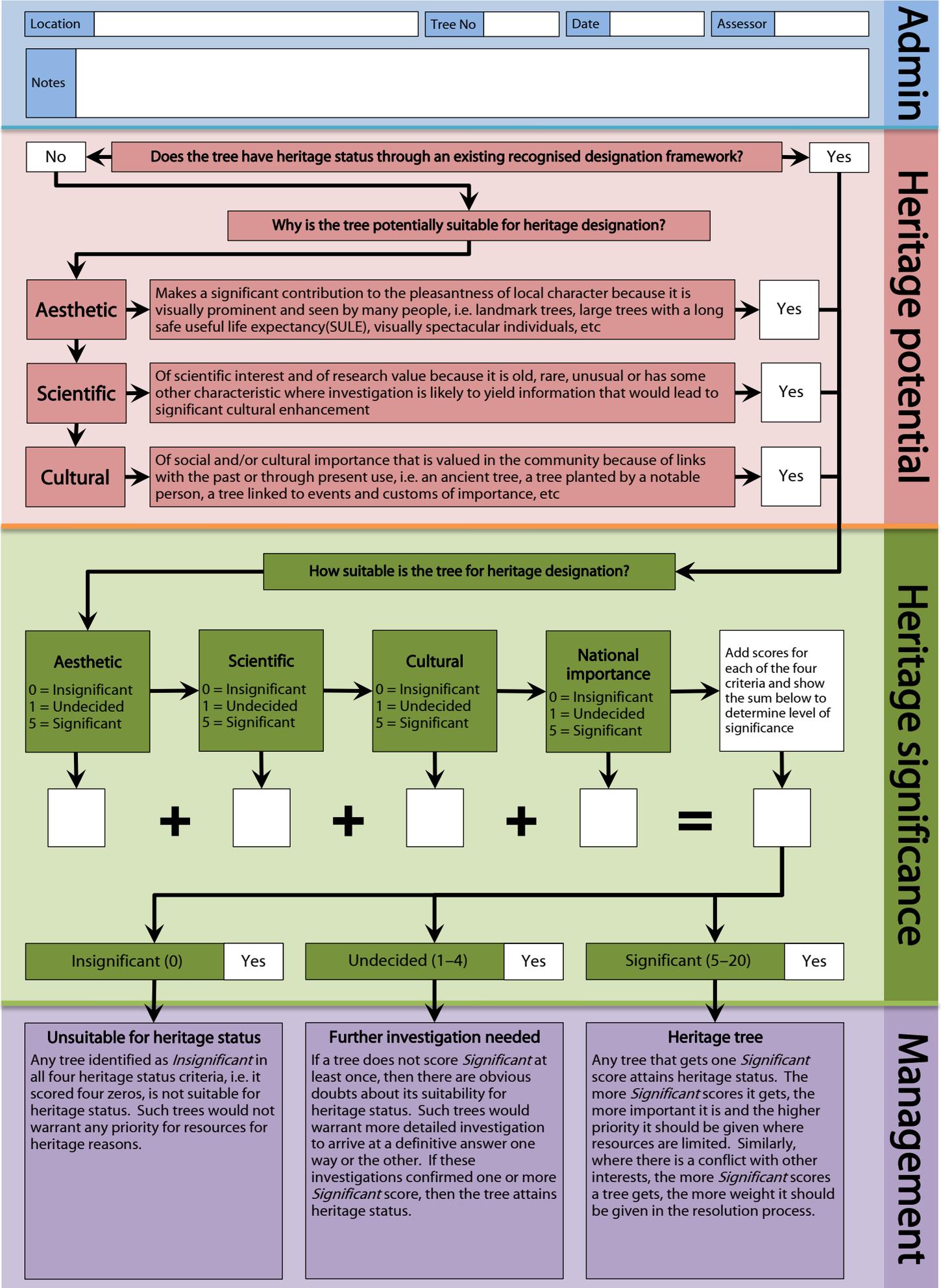
Preface

TreeAH is part of the TreeAZ suite of tree assessment methodologies. It is an internationally applicable method for assessing if a tree has heritage merit when planning land-use changes that could adversely affect its health and survival. This download is published as a working draft incorporating the most recent developments in the evolution of the method. TreeAH is presently a work-in-progress method and further updated versions will be published as they are developed and field-tested. It is not subject to copyright and can be copied freely for use, with or without modification, but its source should be acknowledged.

It has been produced by Barrell Tree Consultancy (BTC) (www.barrelltreecare.co.uk) and is distributed through their tree assessment website (www.TreeAZ.com). The BTC business is based in the UK, although it does have a background of training and development in other countries. BTC has no direct income through the publication of its tree assessment methods and finances their development through its UK business. The objective of these endeavors is to enhance the international dissemination of best practice guidance through the BTC websites.



TreeAH: a method of assessing the suitability of trees for heritage status (Version 06-270511)



TreeAH: a method of assessing the suitability of trees for heritage status (Version 06-270511)

Background to the method

1. **The TreeAZ suite of tree assessment methodologies:** TreeAH is one of family of tree assessment methods that include TreeAZ (for trees in a development planning context), TreeAP (for tree preservation) and TreeAS (for street trees). Further information on all these and extensive background information on tree assessment can be found at www.TreeAZ.com.
2. **Purpose and limitations of TreeAH:** TreeAH is a method for assessing how suitable trees are for special management consideration because of their 'heritage' merit. It does not attempt to identify a precise and objective/measurable threshold that an ordinary tree has to pass to attain heritage status because this is a subjective judgment with no precise or definitive boundary. TreeAH does provide a means of judging where an individual tree fits into the spectrum of heritage status to help decide on the allocation of resources in a competitive management environment, i.e. where should limited money be spent first. The numerical scoring is provided as a broad guide to flexible interpretation; the score is not absolute and it should not be used in isolation from subjective judgments.
3. **The meaning of 'heritage tree':** In the context of TreeAH, a 'heritage tree' is broadly interpreted as possessing characteristics that are presently of value and likely to be valued by future generations, making it worthy of special effort to conserve. Other international terms meaning the same thing include 'Scheduled trees' and 'Protected trees'. These valued characteristics can originate from past associations and/or present circumstances. TreeAH identifies three broad categories of heritage value; aesthetic, scientific and cultural, which can be important on a local, regional and/or national level.
4. **Draft status:** This is a draft version of TreeAH for comment, with plans to prepare updates based on feedback from the current consultation exercise. These notes are a preliminary *aide memoire* in advance of more detailed explanations that will accompany future versions.
5. **International referencing:** TreeAH has evolved taking account of a range of published national references describing how the identification and protection of special trees has been approached by different countries. In that context, TreeAH is positioned as an internationally applicable framework for managing heritage trees, which is suitable for modification and fine-tuning on a local level.
6. **Compatibility with TPO and other legislation:** TreeAH is designed to neatly bolt on to existing tree protection legislation, specifically tree preservation order legislation (TPO) in the UK. The legislation focuses on visual amenity, but acknowledges that other factors can also render a tree suitable for TPO protection. TreeAH identifies and assess those other factors.
7. **Detailed guidance on the use of TreeAH:** The TreeAH assessment form is designed to be a quick, but systematic checklist, with the minimum of complication on the form. These accompanying notes are intentionally brief to provide preliminary guidance for those who want to try out the method. A full photographic guide on the use of the method will be published in time as the definitive detailed reference on TreeAH assessment.

Using and understanding the assessment form

8. **Overview of the assessment form:** A new form should be used for each assessed tree. The form is divided into four sections of different colours that should be completed strictly in order from the top first to the bottom last. Each dark coloured box provides a brief explanation of what issue is being assessed. Arrows from these issue boxes lead to a white box that represents a decision or choice that can be highlighted as a formal record of the decision-making process.
9. **Assessor experience:** The assessment process has been designed so that assessors without any tree management expertise can quickly establish whether a tree has any potential for heritage designation. This is useful because it allows anyone to make the initial assessment as a preliminary step towards deciding whether it is worth moving on to the more complex issues of appropriate tree management. In contrast, detailed tree management can only be reliably specified by a tree expert and a specialist must be involved in fine-tuning the overall assessment and its translation into management action.
10. **Filling in the assessment form:** The *Admin* section at the top of the form provides space to identify the tree being assessed, and to record other relevant details. From that point onwards, the assessor should follow the arrows and mark or record the choices made. If a tree succeeds in passing the *Heritage potential* section, then its significance needs to be assessed for each of the four scoring aspects in the *Heritage significance* section and written in the appropriate white boxes beneath. The options are *Significant*, where there is no doubt it is significant, *Undecided* where there is some doubt and *Insignificant* where there is no doubt it is insignificant. The scores for each of the tests for significance need to be added up to form a total in the far right-hand side total box. This total score will then dictate if the tree is *Insignificant*, *Undecided* or *Significant* and the appropriate box should be marked as confirmation.
11. **Significance scoring:** The scoring system uses numbers because it is intuitively obvious that the lower the number, the lower the significance, and the higher the number, the greater the significance. However, due to the nature of the characteristics being assessed, i.e. cumulative low scores do not progressively contribute to making a tree significant, the score options do not increase in regular increments. There are four tests/criteria in the *Heritage suitability* section that have to be scored 0, 1 or 5. This scoring structure is designed to minimise the opportunity for biasing the figures by making the requirements for each score difficult to dispute. 0 and 5 represent each extreme, which should always be obvious, and 1 is where a choice does not obviously fit into either extreme. Each criterion can score 0, 1 or 5, with a possible total score range of 0–20, which represents the significance spectrum. TreeAH divides this range into three simplistic significance categories, i.e. *Insignificant* (0), *Undecided* (1–4) and *Significant* (5–20). This scoring system means that low scores of 0 or 1 on all four criteria cannot add up to reach the necessary total of 5, which is the threshold for a tree being significant. Similarly, one significant score of 5 is enough to cross that threshold and more high scores increase the relative significance of the tree.

Heritage potential

12. **Overview:** A tree can have heritage potential for any one or more of the three categories, aesthetic, scientific and cultural. There is no obvious or precise threshold where a tree suddenly moves from being ordinary to having some special heritage merit worth protecting. What makes a tree special is often a subjective judgment, and there may be differing opinions about what qualifies a tree for an elevated status. For this reason, TreeAH purposely sets out to identify heritage potential, i.e. is there a reasonable chance the tree will qualify for heritage status, as the first part of the process. It is to be expected that

TreeAH: a method of assessing the suitability of trees for heritage status (Version 06-270511)

there will be individuals who feel very strongly one way or the other, and this first stage of the TreeAH assessment allows this expression of strong views. However, the validity of these subjective positions will be tested in the *Heritage significance* section, which applies a more objective (although not absolute) analysis.

13. **Aesthetic:** The way a tree looks in terms of do people like it and does it make a significantly contribution to the visual character of a community is an important characteristic. Although it is a subjective judgment, it is strongly related to size and the number of people that enjoy the visual benefit. At the top end of the spectrum will be big trees in prominent positions seen by many people, with small trees seen by few people at the other end.
14. **Scientific:** Ordinary, everyday trees with no unusual characteristics would not normally qualify as a heritage tree under this heading. Very old, rare or unusual individuals where scientific investigation is likely to lead to some beneficial cultural enhancement are more likely to qualify.
15. **Cultural:** This is a broad criterion that encompasses trees with historical, social, cultural and/or spiritual associations. These are often subjective judgments that can be difficult to precisely define. In principle, any tree that has links or associations with what people used to do or are doing now is likely to have cultural merits.

Heritage suitability

16. **Overview:** This scoring system is intended to help rank trees within an imaginary spectrum, from *Insignificant* at the lower end, to *Significant* at the upper end. The scores must be interpreted flexibly in this context and are not intended to be an absolute measure of significance. Obviously, trees that score a 5 in any of the criteria must be suitable for heritage status. The more they score beyond that, the more important they become in the allocation of scarce resources. The implication of failing to score a 5 in any of the criteria is that a tree could still be suitable for heritage status, but it would warrant a more detailed analysis before a final decision was made. The implication of the tree failing to score at all is that it is not suitable for heritage status and no further investigation is needed.
17. **Aesthetic:** More specifically, the bigger and more prominent a tree is and the more people that view it, the more important it is. This aesthetic assessment should focus on the more objective measures of how big the tree is and how many people can see it, rather than the more subjective characteristics of how pretty it is or the detail of its shape. Examples; 0 = small tree surrounded by many others so it is not prominent, even if it is viewed by many people; 5 = big, prominent trees with lots of viewers; and 1 = any tree that does not obviously fit into either extreme.
18. **Scientific:** Trees that will contribute to cultural enhancement for scientific reasons are important from a heritage perspective. Examples; 0 = the bulk of the tree population that are normal and have no special or outstanding characteristics; 5 = trees of obvious interest and value, and make a significant contribution to scientific knowledge/cultural enhancement; and 1 = any tree that does not obviously fit into either extreme.
19. **Cultural:** The integration of trees into traditions and customs, both well-established and emerging, can significantly enrich people's lives and greatly enhance the cultural experience of individuals and communities. Examples; 0 = trees in gardens and streets that are part of the fabric of the community, but not specifically connected to traditions or customs; 5 = trees that are directly linked to existing or emerging traditions or customs, and make a significant contribution to cultural enhancement; and 1 = any tree that does not obviously fit into either extreme.
20. **National importance:** This is simply a means of allocating a higher level of importance to trees that have an impact beyond their immediate location. Examples: 0 = a confirmed heritage tree that is important to the local community, i.e. planted by a local dignitary, but it is not widely known about on a regional or national level; 5 = a confirmed heritage tree that has a national status and is widely known about; and 1 = any confirmed heritage tree that does not obviously fit into either extreme. Note that aesthetic significance is unlikely to have an impact beyond the local level and would not normally qualify for consideration in this *National importance* criterion.

Management

21. **Limited resources:** Designating and maintaining heritage tree status is likely to consume the resources of time and money. TreeAH is a systematic method for establishing if a tree is worthy of heritage status and, where manpower and/or funds are limited, the scoring system allows a prioritisation for deciding how those resources are allocated, i.e. the higher the score, the higher the priority.
22. **Resolving conflicts:** Where the designation and retention of a heritage tree causes a conflict with another matter of acknowledged importance (perhaps a historical structure that a tree is damaging), TreeAH Provides a means of resolution in a balanced way. Where such problems arise, the experts in each field have to evaluate and compare the importance of each element of the conflict. Ultimately, a decision has to be made about which of the conflicting interests is more important, and knowing where a tree sits in the spectrum of heritage significance is an essential aspect of making a balanced judgment.