



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

(Version 07-260811)



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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.



This ancient olive in Walajeh, Palestine, scores a maximum on the TreeAH heritage scale!

TreeAH (Version 07-260811) Introduction to the method

- The TreeAZ suite of tree assessment methods:** TreeAH is one of a 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.
- Purpose and application of TreeAH:** TreeAH is a method for assessing if a tree has heritage merit when planning land-use changes that could adversely affect its health and survival. It sets out an overarching assessment framework that can be used to:
 - **Quickly and easily establish if a tree has sufficient heritage potential to warrant more detailed assessment.** This is useful where there are many trees to assess and obviously unsuitable candidates can be quickly discounted without carrying out a more time-consuming detailed assessment.
 - **Establish where a tree sits within the spectrum of heritage importance.** This is useful when deciding on the allocation of resources in a competitive management environment, i.e. where should limited money be spent first.
- TreeAH is a subjective method:** Most of the decisions to decide if trees are suitable for heritage status will be based on the opinions of the assessors, i.e. their subjective assessment, and there is often a range of opinions between assessors. Although this may make the assessment process seem less precise, it is still possible to come to a valid and reliable answer as long as the stages are clearly mapped out and the reasons for each decision are recorded. TreeAH provides a framework for that process, making sure that all the relevant matters are considered to arrive at a final conclusion. The detail of the smaller decisions along that path are for the assessors to make and justify, with space on the forms for notes where they can explain their reasoning. TreeAH does not seek to provide the detailed answers to any of the questions, but merely to set out the framework for individuals to make their own decisions. It is not a detailed recipe, it is a framework for interpretation, providing the security that all relevant matters have been considered in a systematic and balanced way.
- The concept of 'special':** TreeAH is designed to separate out trees with 'special' characteristics from the ordinary, average, everyday trees that are common throughout our communities. Of course, it is possible to say that all trees are special because of the benefits they offer, which may be a valid point, but such a stance defeats the object of trying to select out the best to create a hierarchy of importance. Many communities do not have the luxury of protecting all trees and so to reliably identify those that are special or outstanding for any reason is particularly useful. A good example of a common benefit offered by trees is the influence on their surrounding micro-climate; they provide shade and can significantly affect local temperatures. However, most trees do this and so it is not a benefit that is so special it deserves extra weight when comparing individuals. 'Special' implies a tree is unusual, different, distinct or exceptional, and it is this every-day meaning that TreeAH embraces to separate the best from the rest.
- The meaning of 'heritage':** 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. These valued characteristics can originate from past associations and/or present circumstances, and do not necessarily have to be old. TreeAH identifies three broad groups of characteristics associated with heritage value; visual, scientific and cultural.
- International referencing:** TreeAH has evolved taking account of a range of published references describing how the identification and protection of special trees has been approached by enthusiasts and professionals around the world. 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.
- Compatibility with other assessment methods:** TreeAH has been designed to complement, not replace, existing assessment methods, and can be used in conjunction with them. It is pitched as an overall assessment framework to be used as a quick and easy starting point in deciding if heritage designation is appropriate. It allows unsuitable trees to be identified right at the start and avoids expending valuable resources on assessing them in detail. If a tree is identified as suitable, then the tree valuation method of choice can be applied as required. TreeAH avoids the need to do a detailed assessment on every tree identified for review.
- Overview of the assessment form and explanatory notes:** The TreeAH assessment form is designed to be a quick, but systematic checklist, with the minimum of complication on the form. It fits on two sides of A4; the first page is a summary sheet, with the second page providing a more detailed record of the reasoning behind the *Heritage significance* assessment. When fully completed, the form provides a record of what the assessor considered and indicates where further investigation may be necessary. The accompanying notes are intended to be an on-site *aide memoire* to assist the assessor in working through the assessment process in an organised way.
- Who can use TreeAH:** 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 through using the *Heritage potential* part of the form. This is useful because it allows anyone, irrespective of their level of tree expertise, to make the initial assessment as a preliminary step towards deciding whether it is worth moving on to the more complex issues of *Heritage significance* and *Management*. However, the detailed assessment required in the *Heritage significance* and *Management* sections must be carried out by specialists, or verified by specialists if a lay-person has carried out the preliminary assessment.
- Draft status:** Version 07-260811 is a working draft for comment, with plans to prepare more detailed updates based on feedback from the current consultation exercise.

TreeAH (Version 07-260811) Summary assessment form

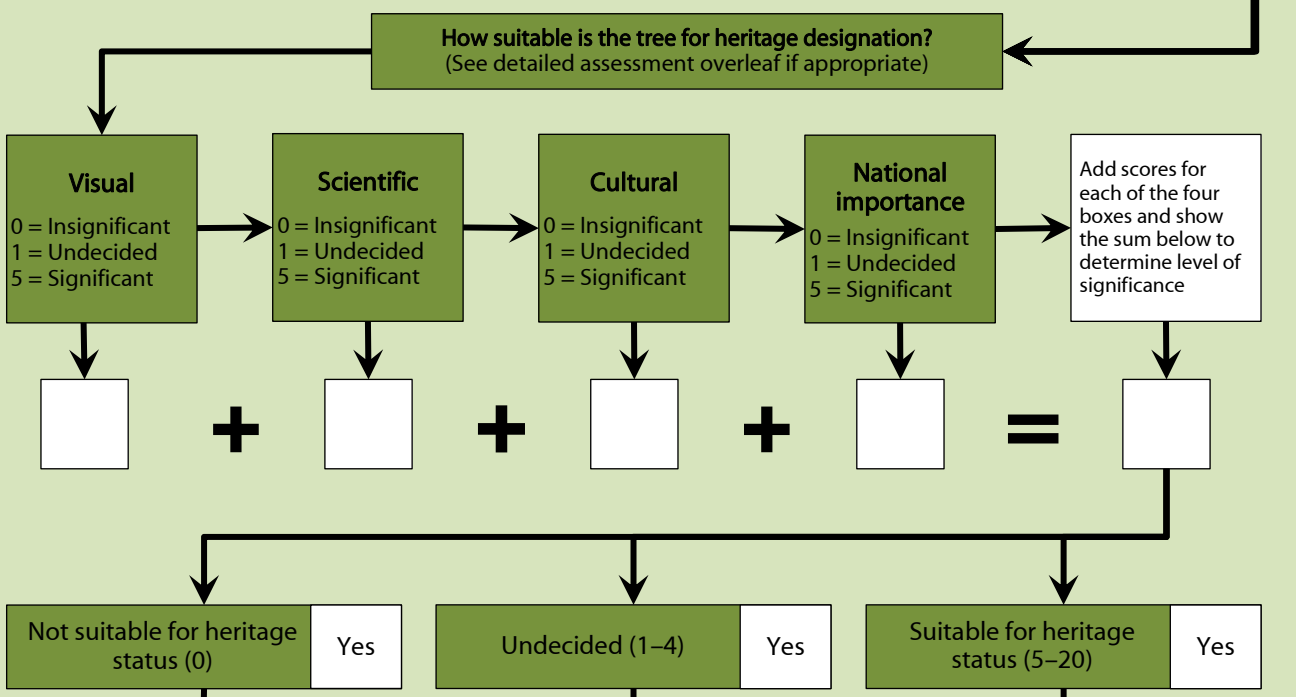
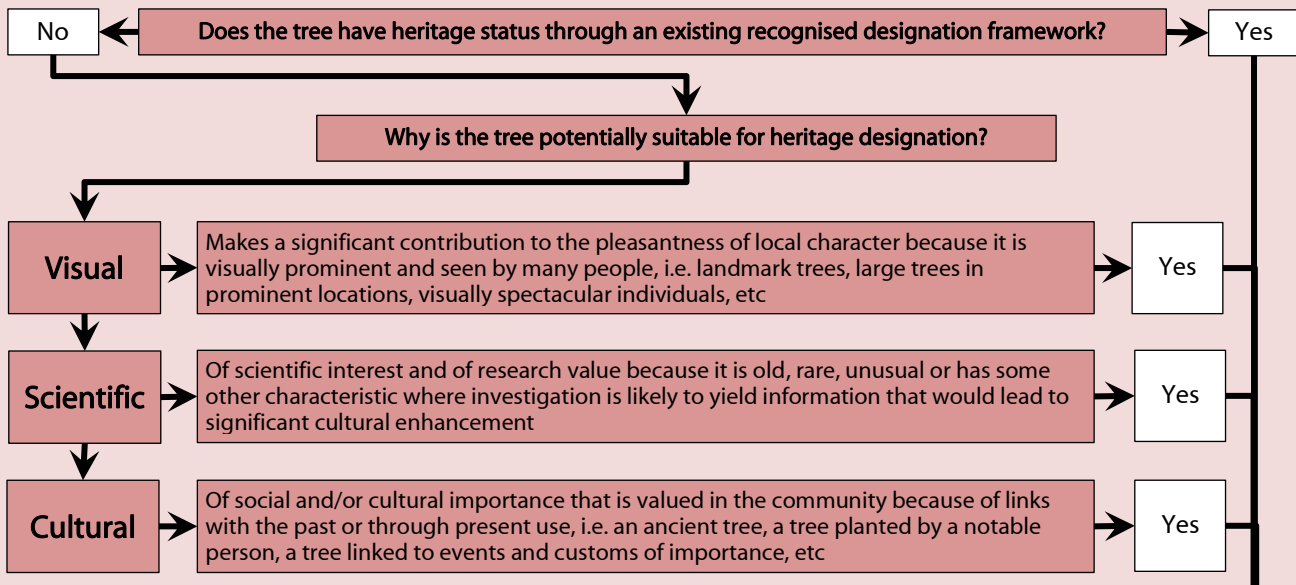
Location	<input type="text"/>	Tree No	<input type="text"/>	Date	<input type="text"/>	Assessor	<input type="text"/>
Notes	<input style="height: 40px;" type="text"/>						

Admin

Heritage potential
(Can be done by enthusiasts)

Heritage significance
(Must be done or verified by specialists)

Management
(Must be done by specialists)



Unsuitable for heritage status
Any tree identified as *Insignificant* in all four of the decision-making boxes, i.e. it scored four zeros, is not suitable for heritage status. Such trees would not warrant any priority for resources for heritage reasons.

Further investigation needed
If a tree does not score *Significant* at least once, then there are obvious doubts about its suitability for heritage status. Such trees would warrant more detailed investigation to arrive at a definitive answer one way or the other. If these investigations confirmed one or more *Significant* score, then the tree's heritage status is confirmed.

Heritage tree
Any tree that gets one *Significant* score attains heritage status. The more *Significant* scores it gets, the more important it is and the higher priority it should be given where resources are limited. Similarly, where there is a conflict with other interests, the more *Significant* scores a tree gets, the more weight it should be given in the resolution process.

TreeAH (Version 07-260811) Heritage Significance assessment form
(Must be filled in or verified by an experienced heritage assessor)

Is the tree worthy of heritage designation for visual reasons? No Yes

Size	Big Small	Mark on this vertical scale where you assess this tree best fits the range described by the words	<u>Explanatory notes</u>
Viewers	Many None	Mark on this vertical scale where you assess this tree best fits the range described by the words	<u>Explanatory notes</u>
Landmark	Prominent Hidden	Mark on this vertical scale where you assess this tree best fits the range described by the words	<u>Explanatory notes</u>
Other trees	None Many	Mark on this vertical scale where you assess this tree best fits the range described by the words	<u>Explanatory notes</u>
Inappropriate	Suits setting Inappropriate	Mark on this vertical scale where you assess this tree best fits the range described by the words	<u>Explanatory notes</u>
Unpleasant	Looks OK Unpleasant	Mark on this vertical scale where you assess this tree best fits the range described by the words	<u>Explanatory notes</u>
<p align="center">Decision statement</p> <p>In the context of my experience in undertaking heritage assessments, I have carefully considered all the above issues that could influence visual importance and conclude that this tree <input type="checkbox"/> is / <input type="checkbox"/> is not worthy of heritage status for <u>visual</u> reasons.</p>			<u>Explanatory notes</u>

Is the tree worthy of heritage designation for scientific reasons? No Yes

Exceptionally old	Yes	<u>Explanatory notes</u>
Rare or unique	Yes	
Endangered species	Yes	
Provides threatened or rare habitat	Yes	
Other research interest or scientific value	Yes	
<p align="center">Decision statement</p> <p>In the context of my experience in undertaking heritage assessments, I have carefully considered all the above issues that could influence scientific importance and conclude that this tree <input type="checkbox"/> is / <input type="checkbox"/> is not worthy of heritage status for <u>scientific</u> reasons.</p>		

Is the tree worthy of heritage designation for cultural reasons? No Yes

Linked to a historic event or location	Yes	<u>Explanatory notes</u>
Linked to a historic person	Yes	
Part of an established or emerging custom	Yes	
Long-established community feature	Yes	
Other cultural value	Yes	
<p align="center">Decision statement</p> <p>In the context of my experience in undertaking heritage assessments, I have carefully considered all the above issues that could influence cultural importance and conclude that this tree <input type="checkbox"/> is / <input type="checkbox"/> is not worthy of heritage status for <u>cultural</u> reasons.</p>		

Is the tree of national importance? No Yes

<u>Explanatory notes</u>	
<p align="center">Decision statement</p> <p>In the context of my experience in undertaking heritage assessments, I have carefully considered the issue national importance and conclude that this tree <input type="checkbox"/> is / <input type="checkbox"/> is not of national importance.</p>	

Introduction to the assessment form

1. **Overview of the form:** The full form fits on to two sides of A4. A new form should be used for each assessed tree. The first page is the summary and should be completed for each tree. The second page is optional, for use if the assessor decides that more detail would be helpful to clarify the decision-making process. This second page must be completed by a person with training and experience in assessing heritage trees.
2. **The field assessment summary page:** This is divided into four sections of different colours that should be completed strictly in order from the top first to the bottom last. Each shaded box provides a brief explanation of what heritage characteristic is being assessed. Arrows from each heritage characteristic box lead to a white box that represents a decision or choice that can be marked with a pen as a formal record of the decision-making process.
3. **Filling in the summary page:** 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 with a pen the choices made. If a tree succeeds in passing the *Heritage potential* section, then its significance can be assessed in more detail for each of the three scoring heritage characteristics and the optional *National importance* criterion in the *Heritage significance* section; the scores are 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 it is clearly not significant. Each significance score is added and the total written in the far right-hand side total box. This total score will then dictate if the tree is *Unsuitable*, *Undecided* or *Suitable*, and the appropriate summary box at the bottom of this section should be marked with a pen as confirmation.
4. **Scoring each heritage characteristic and the optional *National importance* criterion:** 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, the score options do not increase in regular increments due to the nature of the characteristics being assessed, i.e. cumulating low scores cannot be add up to eventually reach a threshold where a tree becomes significant. There are three heritage characteristics in the *Heritage suitability* section that have to be scored 0, 1 or 5, along with the optional *National importance* criterion that is scored in the same way. 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 fit into either extreme. Each heritage characteristic and the optional *National importance* criterion can score 0, 1 or 5, with a possible total score range of 0–20, which represents the *Heritage significance* spectrum. TreeAH divides this range into three simplistic *Heritage significance* categories, i.e. *Unsuitable* (0), *Undecided* (1–4) and *Suitable* (5–20). This scoring system means that low scores of 0 or 1 in all the options cannot add up to reach the necessary total of 5, which is the threshold for a tree being suitable for heritage status. Similarly, one significant score of 5 is enough to cross that threshold and further high scores increase the relative strength of the heritage status of the tree.

Heritage potential

(A preliminary assessment that requires no specialist training or expertise)

5. **Overview:** The *Heritage potential* part of the form is intended to be a very quick and simple preliminary assessment that can be carried out by anyone with an interest in trees, irrespective of their level of expertise. If a tree has no obvious visual, scientific or cultural merits, then there is no need to go any further; such trees have no heritage potential. There is no precise threshold where a tree suddenly moves from being ordinary to having some special heritage merit worth protecting. What makes a tree special is a subjective judgment, and there may be differing opinions about what qualifies a tree for the elevated heritage 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. Trees under threat often generate intense emotional reactions and it is to be expected in such circumstances that there will be individuals who have strongly polarised views. This first stage of the TreeAH assessment allows the expression of strong views. However, the validity of the personal views of the assessor (who need not be a specialist at this preliminary stage) will be tested in the *Heritage significance* section, which applies a more detailed analysis and must be carried out by a specialist with experience of heritage assessment.
6. **Visual:** The way a tree looks in terms of do people like it and does it make a significantly contribution to the visual character of an area is an important heritage characteristic because it is immediately obvious the tree is special. 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. If the tree is obviously special and stands out in its surroundings, then it may be suitable for heritage status.
7. **Scientific:** Ordinary, everyday trees with no unusual characteristics would not normally qualify for heritage status under this heading. Very old, rare, unique or unusual individuals where scientific investigation is likely to lead to some beneficial cultural enhancement are more likely to qualify.
8. **Cultural:** This is a broad characteristic that encompasses trees with historical, social, cultural and/or spiritual associations, and obviously extends to trees embedded in traditional folklore. These subjective judgments are often difficult to precisely define in an objective way. In principle, any tree that has links or associations with what people used to do or are doing now is likely to have some level of cultural merit. Whether this is enough to qualify it for heritage status is a matter for more detailed assessment in the following *Heritage significance* section.

Heritage significance

(A detailed assessment to be carried out by a specialist with experience of assessing heritage trees)

9. **Overview:** If the preliminary assessment of *Heritage potential* identifies a tree as potentially suitable for heritage status, the process moves on to the more detailed *Heritage significance* assessment, which requires a higher level of experience to carry out. The green section on the first page of the field assessment form is a summary that can be reviewed at a glance. The second page on the back of the form is an expanded version of that summary, allowing the assessor to explain the reason for each decision. A confident assessor dealing with a simple tree may decide that the decision is so obvious that only the summary on the first page is necessary and there is no need to bother with the detail on the second page. However, if the circumstances are more complex and there may be a need to explain the reasoning, then this second more detailed page may be useful in guiding the assessor through the process and assisting others to understand the assessor's decision.
10. **Scoring:** The scoring system on the first page of the form for each heritage characteristic is intended to help rank trees within an imaginary spectrum, from *Insignificant* at the lower end, to *Significant* at the upper end. Obviously, trees that score a 5 for any heritage characteristic must be suitable for heritage status. The more a tree scores in total above 5 by cumulatively adding up its scores, the more important it becomes in the allocation of scarce resources. The implication of only scoring a 1 (*Undecided*) for any of the heritage characteristic 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 result of a tree failing to score at all is that it is not suitable for heritage status and no further investigation is needed.
11. **The 'Undecided' score:** TreeAH adopts a presumption that assessors undertaking the *Heritage significance* scoring will be specialists with experience in making decisions about each heritage characteristics. As such, their role is to make judgments based on the information available and the default should be that they decide one way or the other on each heritage characteristic; that is their job. The 'Undecided' option is not intended for regular use; it is included for those rare instances where a heritage characteristic may need further specialist assessment because an assessor feels a second opinion may be appropriate.
12. **Visual:** Visual importance is a subjective assessment and it is unnecessarily complex (if not impossible) to devise an objective scoring method that will provide a reliable and definitive answer. However, there are a range of individual components of visual importance that frequently arise when assessing whether a tree is special enough to qualify for heritage status. TreeAH has identified the six most frequently cited components of visual importance referenced in methods from around the world as:
 - a. **Size:** The bigger a tree is, the more important it is likely to be. Size would normally be expressed as height, but crown spread or trunk dimensions may be appropriate in some circumstances. However, whatever feature is chosen, the tree has to be obviously big compared to the surrounding population. Trees with the potential to become big in the future would not normally qualify as special because most trees would have that potential.
 - b. **Number of viewers:** At the highest extreme, many people viewing the tree in a public place is obvious, with very few, if any, people seeing the tree if it is remote from access, defining the other extreme.
 - c. **Landmark trees:** Trees that stand out because of their location or size and can be easily seen beyond the immediate vicinity are landmarks that comfortably sit at the higher end of the scale. Trees that are screened by buildings, natural features or other trees, so that they are hidden from view beyond the immediate vicinity, obviously sit at the lower end.
 - d. **Number of other trees in vicinity:** If a tree is one of many similar trees, then it cannot be special for that reason and would be at the bottom end of the scale for this component. A tree moves up the scale progressively as the number of surrounding trees decreases, to the top end where the subject tree is an individual with no other trees nearby.
 - e. **Inappropriate for the setting:** This component is included to allow trees that are clearly incongruous or out of keeping with a setting to be identified and for that to be factored into the assessment. To be placed at the worst extreme, a tree would have to be obviously wrong for its location, with an expectation that the majority of other people viewing it would come to the same conclusion. Trees that suit the setting and are not obviously out of keeping with local character would be at the other extreme.
 - f. **Unpleasantness:** Similar to component 'e' above, this is included to allow trees that are clearly visually horrible or unpleasant, i.e. diseased or mutilated, to be identified and for that to be factored into the assessment. To be placed at the worst extreme, a tree would have to be obviously unpleasant to look at, with an expectation that the majority of other people viewing it would come to the same conclusion. Trees that look OK, with no obvious unpleasant attributes, would be at the other extreme.

All the above components can affect visual importance and the better a tree scores for each, the more likely it will be suitable for heritage designation. However, by far the most important consideration is a tree scoring at the lowest extreme of any component because that is likely to dominate (trump) high scores in any other component. If a tree falls into the lowest extreme for any component, i.e. it is very small, no people can see it, it is hidden from view, there are many other trees, it is inappropriate for the location or it is unpleasant to look at, then no matter how many other high scores it gets, it is unlikely to be suitable for heritage designation for visual reasons. In simple terms, a lowest score in any component would normally rule a tree out of being suitable for heritage status. Because it is not

realistically feasible to assign precise scores to each component, the form provides a scale between both extremes and the assessor estimates where the tree sits on that scale by a pen mark (a horizontally drawn line or arrow is best, but it must be bold and visible). Clearly marking where the tree sits on the scale for each of these six components creates a visual dashboard that can be reviewed at a glance to assist the subjective decision-making process. Having all the scores available in one view is very helpful; assessors can be confident they have considered all the components, being able to easily compare and review them because they are close together. This dashboard-type display is a simple but intuitive framework for the assessor to visually review and weigh-up all the components in the decision-making process.

13. **Scientific:** Trees that will contribute to public benefit for scientific reasons are important from a heritage perspective. The bulk of the tree population that are normal, with no special or outstanding characteristics, would not be expected to qualify as scientifically important. However, exceptionally old, rare, unique or endangered species of obvious interest and value, that make a significant contribution to scientific knowledge/cultural enhancement, are more likely to be suitable for heritage designation under this heading.
14. **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. Obvious examples are trees that were present when a historic event occurred or trees that are linked to a historic person. However, it is also commonly held that trees which have been present within a community for longer than living memory have great psychological importance because they provide a living link with ancestors who are no longer physically present. It is unlikely that trees in gardens and streets that are part of the fabric of the community, but not specifically connected to traditions or customs, would be suitable for heritage designation. However, trees that make a significant contribution to cultural enhancement because they are directly linked to existing or emerging traditions or customs, or have been present for longer than living memory, would be strong candidates.
15. **National importance:** TreeAH adopts a default position that the *National importance* criterion is useful and would normally be used. However, it is an optional scoring mechanism and the method does not rely on it being included, i.e. assessors can leave it out if they feel uncomfortable with it. Its value is in providing the opportunity for adding another layer of detail to assist with decision-making; if there are a number of trees competing for limited resources, then it can be very helpful to have an extra criterion for ranking importance. The *National importance* scoring option is simply a means of allocating a higher level of importance to trees that have an impact beyond their immediate location. For example, 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, would not score. However, a confirmed heritage tree that has a national status and is widely known about would be an obvious candidate. For clarification, this scoring criterion can only be used if the tree is confirmed as a heritage tree for visual, scientific or cultural reasons, i.e. it cannot be used as a sole reason for heritage designation.
16. **Decision statement:** For each heritage characteristic and the optional *National importance* criterion, there is a decision statement for the assessor to make a choice and confirm the decision. This is necessary because there is no realistic way of designing a scoring method that gives a definitive answer. The final decision will always be down to individual assessors using their experience to form balanced judgments based on what they have seen. The role of an assessor is to make such judgments and this statement makes that point clear, with the detailed comments on the form providing the reasoning behind the decision. That decision is then confirmed in the 'No' or 'Yes' boxes at the top of each heading and then transferred over to the summary on the front page.

Management

(Must be advised by a specialist with experience in tree management)

17. **Special note on safety:** Heritage assessment in principle has very little to do with safety; a tree can be falling to bits or dead or an immediate hazard, but that condition does not automatically remove heritage characteristics that are associated with its presence, associations and location. Safety is a management issue that is best considered once the heritage assessment has been done. Heritage status will inform the management process; the more important a tree is, the more resources it is worth expending to conserve that status, which would obviously include measures to reduce any risks to acceptable levels.
18. **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.
19. **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.