

Contact & Communities
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Date 13 October 2014

24 hour National Helpline:
08457 11 41 41

Ref no **SPC1/19.440/25/WK/34/35**

Dear Sir/Madam

TREE AND PLANT MANAGEMENT – St Albans

I would like to inform you that Network Rail will be removing trees and vegetation affecting railway operations near your property.

We will be removing any potentially dangerous line side trees and plants, prioritising areas that pose a significant safety or performance risk. These areas will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. However, all sites will see a clear five-metre wide corridor created on either side of the track and possibly further in areas where trains commonly accelerate and brake.

Works will be undertaken from Monday to Thursday nights only.

Start Date 17/11/14	Finish Date 28/11/14	Start Time 22:00	Finish Time 06:00
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With 20,000 miles of track and an estimated 2.5 million trees growing on the line side, managing vegetation on the railway is not just a full-time job but one of our most important safety issues. Our climate, variety of trees and train frequency mean that the railway in Great Britain faces more serious challenges than most other countries.

In 2013, vegetation management and incidents caused by vegetation cost the railway £100m. Storm, rain and wind events resulted in approximately 1,500 incidents in 2013/14 where trees caused disruption to the network

Last year, 1000 trains collided with a fallen tree or large branch – a record number – with many more instances of trees and branches blocking and closing lines causing travel chaos for millions. Such incidents can cause disruption for passengers and have the potential to severely damage a train.

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Lineside vegetation can obscure signals, get blown onto the tracks, or grow to an extent where our staff do not have a safe place to wait whilst trains pass. Vegetation management can also help prevent leaves falling on the line which hampers train acceleration and braking.

Before works start, Network Rail or its representatives will carry out an ecological survey to identify any protected species or nesting birds in the area. If any species are identified, appropriate methods of working will then be put into place. Although the works do not require the submission of a planning application, where appropriate, we will notify your local authority and any relevant statutory bodies.

To undertake these works, we will use a variety of equipment that can include chainsaws, flail machines, chipping machines or handsaws. Where suitable, logs and branches will either be left to create a safe habitat for wildlife; chipped and spread evenly; or will be completely removed from site.

Works will often be required to take place when trains are not running, but every effort is made to keep controllable noise to a minimum and our staff will be briefed on working responsibly in the local community.

At Network Rail we are very aware of the impact that removing trees and vegetation can have on local communities. We particularly know that this can come as something of a shock for people who have become accustomed to lines of trees or hedges near their homes or workplaces. But for the safety of our passengers and employees we have no option but to take action to reduce the risk posed to the safe, reliable running of the railway.

To balance the overall affect on the environment, Network Rail plans to plant many more trees than we have to remove, but away from the railway. We will supply more details on our plans via our website in the coming months.

I hope this information is helpful and we apologise for any inconvenience these essential works may cause. However, if you have any additional questions or concerns, please visit **www.networkrail.co.uk** or telephone our **24-Hour National Helpline on 08457 11 41 41**.

Yours faithfully



Denise Thompson

Community Relations Manager



Additional Information for Our Lineside Neighbours

Why are we doing this work?

We have to keep the railway and its users safe. The trees in this area are currently a safety risk to our Overhead Line Equipment (OHLE), signal sighting, level crossings and leaf fall contamination. Overhead lines can fail causing disruption on the network if overgrown vegetation interferes with them. This is a particular problem during periods of high winds or storms. Where there is high leaf fall, trains can experience braking problems.

What are we doing?

We are cutting back trees and vegetation from the running line to ensure the safe running of trains.

This work will be carried out both during dayshift and nightshift hours, depending on the location.

Before works start Network Rail or its representatives carry out site visits and inspections which determine the work to be done and whether there are likely to be protected species present. This allows us to apply the appropriate methods of working and control and, where necessary, specific surveys can be instigated. Although the works do not require the submission of a planning application, where appropriate we will notify your local authority and any relevant statutory bodies.

We have contacted representatives from the Local Authority to brief them of our intentions. We will continue to liaise with them during the work. We are also in liaison with Scottish Natural Heritage and local conservation groups.

Is this the only way of dealing with this problem?

Unfortunately it is. For safety reasons there is a requirement to retain a five metre clearance from the track.

Where are we working?

We will be carrying out tree cutting/vegetation management at various locations across Scotland.

Do we notify our neighbours?

It is our policy to give our neighbours at least 10 days advance notification of this type of work.

While we make every effort to notify every resident, we do experience difficulties at some locations. For example, some properties have secure door entries where our staff cannot gain access, in these circumstances we will put a notice on the front door or, where possible, push copies underneath it.

Do you plan to re-plant any of the slopes?

Not with trees, no. We are currently finalising our biodiversity land strategy that may well see us come back and replant with bushes and wildflowers to create an even more biodiverse environment than previously existed. But we recognise that we have an obligation to the environment with this work and so are in the final stages of arranging a re-planting scheme that will see us replanting many more trees than we have removed in the local community where we have undertaken work, but away from the railway.

Will the removal of the trees undermine the stability of the embankments?

No, we are confident that the stability of these embankments will not be undermined by the removal of these trees.

