

CHOOSING A TREEWORK CONTRACTOR

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q1. How do I know if the contractor is appropriately qualified?

A1. There is a bewildering number and range of qualifications relating to tree work.

The Health and Safety Executive requires that workers should have demonstrated competence in tasks they undertake.

The National Proficiency Test Council (NPTC) covers the technical level skills of using a chainsaw but makes a distinction between basic use on the ground and the advanced skills necessary for use in a tree. In addition, there are certificates for the use of brushwood chippers, stump grinders, mobile elevated work platforms (MEWPS) and other machines.

Mainstream education offers a range of academic qualifications from National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), through National Certificates and Diplomas to First and Masters Degrees.

The Arboricultural Association, The International Society of Arboriculture and the Royal Forestry Society each offer desirable arboricultural qualifications. However, membership alone of these organisations is **not** a measure of competence, although it does indicate a degree of commitment.

All the above qualifications are awarded to individuals and don't necessarily relate to their competence as contractors. The only system examining contracting **businesses** is the Arboricultural Association Approved Contractor scheme – this is a rigorous examination and hard won by a few.

Q2. Will liability for accidents or damage of any sort be covered by the contractor's insurance?

A2. There are three types of insurance policies which should concern you.

Public Liability Insurance covers the contractor against damage or injury caused to persons or property not in their employ or use – this means you, your family and your property; members of the public visiting or passing the work site, together with their property, including their vehicles.

Cover up to £2million is basic, while £5million is considered by many to be prudent and £10million may be advisable for carrying out extensive work on highways.

Employers Liability Insurance is a legal requirement for all those employing others. These days this is interpreted to include sub-contractors and almost anyone engaged in completing the main contractors work.

Professional Indemnity Insurance covers a person against claims that they issued bad advice when they should have known better.

Ask to see copies of **current** Certificates of Insurance you think the contractor should hold.

Q3. How do I know the contractor will do the work I ask for?

A3. If you have never used a tree work contractor before it is very difficult to know in advance how the work might turn out. The best way forward might be to act on the recommendation of someone who has been pleased with the work of a particular contractor. If possible check the work yourself to see that their ideas and your ideas correspond. If you see work in passing that you particularly like, there is no harm stopping and asking for the name of the contractor who did it.

Sometimes the specification will be controlled by permissions from Breckland Council relating to protected trees. A responsible contractor will resist pressures to do something to a protected tree for which there is no approval.

It is advisable to get a written quotation for the work you would like done. This should include clear details of exactly what is to be done to what tree and what is to be done with the arisings.

Q4. How much should it cost?

A4. With a detailed written specification a contractor should be able to give you a fixed quotation for the work. This will protect both you and the contractor and help prevent embarrassing disputes later. Fixed quotations are less open to dispute than day rates and by comparing quotes from more than one source you can assess best value before allocating the work.

Q5. Who is responsible for obtaining any necessary legal permissions?

A5. The owner of the tree and the contractor are jointly responsible in law for works to protected trees, so good communication is essential. As usual, ignorance is no excuse.

Q6. What is good tree work?

A6. If work to a tree kills it, causes irreversible decline or creates fresh hazards, it is bad tree work - beyond that, it is very much the case that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'.

Reshaping a tree as fine art is a regrettably uncommon skill, but one that is not demanded by all. The new techniques of creating simulated natural breaks or 'conservation cutting' are equally skilful but can provoke mixed reactions. Once again it is important to see some of the contractor's previous work to avoid disappointment.