



**We need a
tool store ---
and a
shelter!**

What's the problem?

Some woodland owners live next door to their wood, or just down the road. Most of us in the Small Woodlands Owners Group, however, have to get there by car, usually with a journey taking anything from twenty minutes to two or three hours. On a summer day, we can easily stow the family and the picnic into the car, with a couple of saws and a wild flower book, and when we get there we have plenty of time for a camp fire and a walk round.

But if we want to get down to some work in the woodland, we need more time between arriving and returning, and more equipment. We also need to make the journey at the right time for doing the work, which is more often than not in the winter, when the sap is down and the trees are bare, and no birds nest. It often rains in the winter, and our minds turn to shelter from the rain and the cold winds, and to having something dry to sit on, and some tools that are always to hand. These needs could all be combined if we had a shed.

Although the land belongs to you, and even if your shed will be totally concealed from public view, you may not be allowed to have one. If you

have already put it up without permission you could be required to remove it, and if you and your family have got used to having it, this will be heart-breaking.

We have put together these notes to explain what we think is at present the best way to persuade the local authority to grant the required permission, which will be permanent.

According to long-standing law, all "development" requires planning consent. There are exceptions to this rule. As you are aware, you do not usually require permission to put a small shed in your garden at home. This is "within the curtilage of a dwelling house", so it is exempt. There is a similar exemption for Forestry Land, where certain activities which would otherwise be classified as development are allowed. This is called "permitted development". Certain developments, including the erection of sheds, are allowed, but only if they are considered to be "reasonably necessary for forestry purposes".

Forestry purposes

As you are working in your own wood, and probably your friends and family are giving a hand too, quite a lot of low impact forestry work is being done there. For this you need a tool store and shelter. These can conveniently be combined in a shed large enough for both, and covered by the same exemption.

“Forestry purposes” is quite a broad description, but divides neatly into three main strands:

1. Conventional forestry, such as thinning, brashing (removing lower branches of conifers), pruning, felling and coppicing, as well as tree planting and weeding.
2. Encouraging biodiversity, by creating and maintaining glades, keeping tracks and paths open, thinning and generally letting light in. It also includes removing so-called exotic species like Western hemlock, sycamore and rhododendrons, which seed or spread freely and crowd out native species.
3. Economic forestry, by which we mean anything with which you can and do make money by selling to the general public (not just your family and friends). This particularly applies to coppice products like poles and spars, and to charcoal burning.

The Local Authority planning people have the problem of trying to decide whether you are serious about maintaining your woodland in one or more of these ways, or if it is just talk, and a ploy to get consent for a shed.

How can you convince them of your long-term intentions?

Getting started

It is best, in our view, to forget any question of permissions until you have had the woodland for a few months. That will have given you time to get to know it, to do a bit of work and discover your limitations, perhaps to get a bit of training in the use of chainsaws or whatever. You do not need anyone’s permission to do things like widening paths, cutting down the odd tree (except where there is a Tree Preservation Order), or making a small clearing to encourage butterflies. If you have any nearby resident neighbours who are at all curious, it will also give you a chance to get to know them and hopefully lay to rest any fears they have. Planning departments are very responsive to objections from resident neighbours.

After a few months, you will have a good idea of what sort of objectives you have for your woodland, and what sort of work you and your family or friends are likely to tackle. Now is a good time to call in the Forestry Commission. They are a national body, staffed by qualified forestry people, and have officers in every area whose job it is to visit owners in their woods and offer advice and support. They visit by invitation, and have few statutory powers; they cannot insist that you do anything at all, but they can prevent you, for instance, from felling all your trees at once, unless they are convinced that this is good from the forestry point of view. So their powers are limited, but their influence is great.

The Forestry Commission

Local authorities seldom employ a forestry professional, so when the officers are required to decide whether a particular shed is “necessary for forestry purposes” they often consult their colleagues in the Forestry Commission.

If you wish, your Forestry Commission officer will help you to draw up a Management Plan for your woodland, fitting in broadly with what you feel is right for you. This plan is a formal document. It may involve you felling a number of trees, in which case you will also need a “Felling licence” from them. It may involve other work which will cost money, and in many cases the Forestry Commission can give grant aid towards the cost.

Coming back to the consent you need for your shed, the Forestry Commission Management Plan is a valuable tool in convincing Local Authority officers of your energy and your serious intentions. Although you may not wish to seek grant aid, the Plan in itself is the best evidence of your intentions, together with proof that you actually are getting on with the work in an appropriate fashion.

Alternative solutions

You may be advised by friends to just put up your shed in an inconspicuous place and hope for the best. After four years, it has a right to remain. In the past, when neighbours were less vigilant, this has been practicable, It is true that if you have good evidence that it has been there for more than four years, you can if necessary apply for and obtain a certificate of lawful use/existing development to formalise the situation. If you have

not notified them, and your shed is spotted after it is erected, you must apply for retrospective planning permission. This costs a lot more than applying for the exemption would have done. It also gives you less flexibility. If, for instance, you have gone to the trouble of installing and adapting a steel container it is annoying to be told that the proposed storage unit is not allowed because it is “of inappropriate materials”.

What can you do in the event of your application being refused? It is possible to go to appeal, and people have succeeded in this way. In the meantime you could speak again to your Forestry Commission officer and seek their guidance, look round for similar structures which have received consent, and collect more evidence of the work you have done in your wood and the way in which a shed could have facilitated that. What you cannot do at this stage is alter the application itself. If it is again refused, you can go back to the drawing board, and make a different application. Persistence is often the deciding factor in planning cases.

How can you manage without a shed, or until you get one? Many people get by with a small secure storage box. It may cost upwards of £200, and should be secreted; some even bury it. This will take care of all your hand tools, but with even the most secure store, you should reckon to take your power tools home. For shelter, some people put up a three-sided log shelter, using their own timber. The roof can be simply a tarpaulin (please use a camouflaged one!!!) or planks and roofing felt. There is no guarantee that the

planners will not object to this too but it is slightly less likely. You may prefer to take a caravan into the wood with you. If you have somewhere else to store it most of the time and only have it in the wood for a few weeks while you are working in it, there should be no problem. If in doubt, tell the planners what you are doing beforehand. If it is there permanently, the planners will soon object, and if you have fixed its position, you may have difficulty in getting it out. If you choose to use a caravan instead of a shed, it will pay you to look into the regulations, and how your own Local Authority interprets them.

Some thoughts about sheds

The size and design of a shed will depend at least partly on the particular requirements of the Local Authority. Before seeking prior approval for the siting and design of the shed, it would be helpful to discuss with the planning officer the design that is most likely to meet with approval. Our experience is that from 15 to 20 square metres gives adequate space for shelter as well as storage, and is still, in comparison to the trees around it, a very small structure. An argument in support of a good size is that it reduces the temptation to leave outside it all the junky looking kit that could be stored within. While you are dealing with the planners you should go for what you really need.

Environmentally friendly foundations, such as bricks or oak or chestnut logs lying on the surface of the ground, are a good idea. A dark colour, and an inconspicuous position, should take away any

threat to the landscape. Windows make the shed easier to use and look more attractive. They can be protected to an extent from intruders by bolted shutters. Using the timber from your own wood seems ideal, but may not seem relevant to the planners. Stress that this is all creating an environmentally friendly structure, which could be removed in the future if it is no longer required.

We would be very grateful to hear of your own experience with planners in this respect, and to be able to let others have the benefit of your experience.

SWOG

Small Woodland Owners Group

*Is sponsored by **Woodlands.co.uk** and serves all owners of small woodlands who want to take part. SWOG would like to help owners to have the knowledge, training, equipment, access and shelter and storage that they need.*



The regulations can be found in Part 7 of the permitted development rights for forestry

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1995/uksi_19950418_en_4.htm

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April 2010