

# Installing services in root protection areas

SGN



This document is only a summary of its subject matter. You should not rely on this general guidance in isolation, and you should always seek detailed advice from an appropriate expert in relation to specific circumstances before any action is taken or refrained from. You may download and republish (in its full format) and print copies of the guidance – but you must not adapt any guidance.

# Summary guidance for site operatives

## Installing services in root protection areas

### Administration

- Unauthorised damage to protected trees is a criminal offence and could lead to enforcement action.
- Work under the normal site risk assessment procedures and comply with the wider site safety rules.
- Brief operatives entering root protection areas (RPAs) by the supervising arboriculturist before work starts.

### Other relevant SGNs

- Monitor works in RPAs by the supervising arboriculturist (See *SGN 1 Monitoring tree protection*).
- Design access to avoid soil compaction (See *SGN 3 Ground protection*).
- Minimise excavation into original undisturbed soil (See *SGN 7 Excavation in root protection areas*).

### Important reminders

- Trenchless installation will be preferred. The fall-back approaches of hand-dug broken trench and then hand-dug continuous trench, will be acceptable if agreed by the supervising arboriculturist.
- For trenchless installation, the starting and finishing pits will be outside RPAs.

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# Explanatory notes and examples

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## Purpose

SGN 11 describes the practical requirements for installing new services within RPAs, based on the recommendations in *BS 5837 (7)* and the guidance in *NJUG (4.1)*.



## General principles and clarifications

Excavation to upgrade existing services or install new services in RPAs may damage retained trees. Where possible, all services will be outside RPAs and installation in RPAs will only be chosen as a last resort. If installation within RPAs is being considered, as advised in 4.1.3 of the NJUG guidance, the decision will be made in consultation with the supervising arboriculturist before any work is carried out. If service installation is agreed within RPAs, the NJUG protocol as set out in 4.1.3 of its guidance will be used to decide the most appropriate method.

In summary, this sets out that “Acceptable techniques in order of preference are; a) trenchless, ... b) Broken trench – hand-dug ... c) Continuous trench – hand-dug”. If trenchless methods are to be used, the starting and finishing pits dug at each end of the service run will be outside RPAs. Where a hand-digging option is agreed, any roots discovered during the excavations will be dealt with as described in *SGN 7 Excavation in root protection areas*. Backfilled material around excavated services will not be heavily compacted, observing the specific advice provided in 4.1.5 of the NJUG guidance.

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# Explanatory notes and examples

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### SGN 11-01

Conventional installation of services digging a trench with a machine is not permitted in RPAs.



### SGN 11-02

Trenching with machines to install services close to trees can make them unsafe and cause their premature death.



### SGN 11-03

Thrust boring is the preferred option for installing service routes through the RPAs of retained trees.

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# Explanatory notes and examples

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### SGN 11-04

The start and finish pits for thrust boring are substantial and must be outside of RPAs.



### SGN 11-05

Alternatives to thrust boring are to hand-dig broken or continuous trenches, so that roots can be retained (with the service ducting threaded beneath). Note the ground protection boards with soil piled on top on the left.



### SGN 11-06

Ducting services that have to be threaded through existing roots is good practice because it reduces the need to excavate in the future. Note the hessian protection over roots while they are temporarily exposed to prevent sunscorch and drying.

Due to copyright restrictions, the relevant British Standard clauses are summarised, not quoted, as follows:

**1. BS 5837 (2012) Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – Recommendations:** Clause 7 (Demolition and construction in proximity to existing trees) recommends:

- 7.1.3 The installation of underground utility apparatus using trenchless technology will be acceptable where entry and retrieval pits can be formed outside the RPA. Even if the utility installation does not require planning permission, the work should still be undertaken in accordance with the guidance in NJUG Volume 4, issue 2.
- 7.7.1 Care should be taken when routeing underground apparatus because the mechanical trenching can sever roots and change the local soil hydrology, both of which can adversely affect tree health. Wherever possible, underground services should be routed outside RPAs. If services are installed within RPAs, it is preferable to use common ducts, with inspection chambers sited outside the RPA.
- 7.7.2 Underground services within the RPAs should be shown on a plan prepared in conjunction with the project arboriculturist. Trenchless insertion methods should be the preferred option, with entry and retrieval pits outside RPAs, but if roots can be retained and protected, excavation using hand-held tools might be acceptable for shallow service runs.

**2. National Joint Utilities Group (“NJUG”) Guidelines for the Planning, Installation and Maintenance of Utility Apparatus in Proximity to Trees – Issue 2: Section 4.1 (How to avoid damage to trees – Below ground) advises:**

“4.1.3 Realignment: Whenever possible apparatus should always be diverted or re-aligned outside the Prohibited or Precautionary Zones. Under no circumstances can machinery be used to excavate open trenches within the Prohibited Zone. Where works are required for the laying or maintenance of any apparatus within the Prohibited

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or Precautionary Zones there are various techniques available to minimise damage. Acceptable techniques in order of preference are; a) Trenchless: Wherever possible trenchless techniques should be used. The launch and reception pits should be located outside the Prohibited or Precautionary Zones. In order to avoid damage to roots by percussive boring techniques it is recommended that the depth of run should be below 600mm. Techniques involving external lubrication of the equipment with materials other than water (e.g. oil, bentonite, etc.) must not be used when working within the Prohibited Zone. Lubricating materials other than water may be used within the Precautionary Zone following consultation and by agreement.

b) Broken Trench – Hand-dug: This technique combines hand-dug trench sections with trenchless techniques if excavation is unavoidable. Excavation should be limited to where there is clear access around and below the roots. The trench is excavated by hand with precautions taken as for continuous trenching as in (c) below. Open sections of the trench should only be long enough to allow access for linking to the next section. The length of sections will be determined by local conditions, especially soil texture and cohesiveness, as well as the practical needs for access. In all cases the open sections should be kept as short as possible and outside of the Prohibited Zone. c) Continuous Trench – Hand-dug: The use of this method must be considered only as a last resort if works are to be undertaken by agreement within the Prohibited Zone. The objective being to retain as many undamaged roots as possible.”