



Sheds and the Law

Many woodland owners live next door to their wood, or just down the road. Most however, have to get there by car, usually with a journey taking anything from 20 minutes to two or three hours. There's usually room in the car for the family, a picnic, a couple of saws and a few chairs – all you need for a day enjoying the wood.

But on those occasions when you want to do some serious work, you will need tools. Given that most work is undertaken during the winter, when the sap is down, the trees are bare and the temperature low, a shed or tool store seems like an excellent solution to the problems of tool storage and protection from the elements.

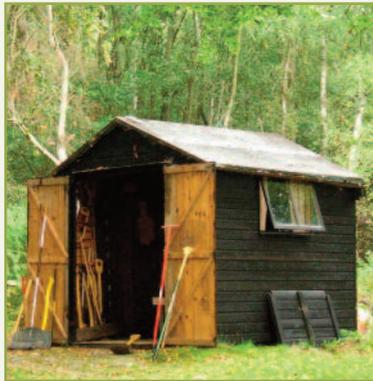
In a recent survey of small woodland owners, about half had installed some shelter or storage in their woodland.

This leaflet provides suggestions to help woodland owners navigate the planning system to persuade their local authority to grant the required permission for a woodland shed.

So what's the problem?

According to the law, all 'development' requires planning consent. There are

exceptions to this rule. You do not usually require permission to put a small shed in your garden at home as 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 thought to be 'reasonably necessary for forestry purposes'.



Permitted Development

To qualify as Permitted Development, a building that is erected cannot be used as a dwelling, cannot be within 25 metres of a classified road, and must be 'reasonably necessary' for the

purposes of forestry. Also, any building must be designed for the purpose for which it is intended, so a forestry hut that looks like a house, or even is capable of providing overnight shelter, is not allowed.

You will need to apply for this permitted development, which is not as large an issue as planning permission, nor as expensive. 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 put it up without permission, you could be required to remove it.

Forestry purposes

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

1. Conventional forestry, such as thinning, 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, ie anything which will make money by selling to the general public. This particularly applies to coppice

With even the most secure store, you should reckon to take your power tools home.

products like poles and spars, and to charcoal burning.

The local authority planning department must decide whether you are serious about maintaining your woodland in one or more of these ways, or if it is just a ploy to get the shed consent. How can you convince them of your long-term intentions?

Management plans

Get a management plan. The Forestry Commission will provide guidance. Sylva’s My Forest website provides an excellent resource with free tools to

map, document and plan a management plan for small woodlands. A 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



A basic tarpaulin makes a great temporary shelter to provide protection against the elements, if not security.



A temporary lean-to made from woodland materials and plastic sheeting.

you actually are getting on with the work in an appropriate fashion.

Communication

Planning officers may not have much experience of woodlands, so try to persuade the local officer to visit your wood. You will then be able to explain what you wish to do and he or she will have a clear idea of the site. Look around for similar structures which have received consent and use these as precedent.

Temporary solutions

How can you manage without a shed, or until you get one? Many people get by with a small secure storage box which could be hidden somewhere – even buried. 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. It is also possible to bring a mobile caravan into your woodland and use it for storage, and overnight stays, too. There is no need to apply for permission beforehand, but you

may not be allowed by the local authority to leave it there permanently, and regulations only allow owners to spend up to 28 nights in the year. If you are doing a lot of work, and need to stay for longer, you can get permission to do so as a ‘seasonal worker’.

For shelter, some people put up a three-sided log shelter, using their own timber. The roof can be simply a tarpaulin 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.



The ultimate woodland security – a camouflaged metal container. Containers need prior permission and good access for delivery.



A reasonably sturdy, permanent shed that will provide a tool store and a shelter from the rain.

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 putting in an application for permitted development, it would be helpful to discuss with the planning officer the design that is most likely to meet with approval. A structure of 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 planning authorities 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 about creating an environmentally friendly structure, which could be removed in the future if it is no longer required.

- Whatever your intention in a woodland, it is important that, before embarking on any development, you seek planning advice, liaise with the local planning authority (normally the District Council), and read up on the relevant literature yourself. This article is intended as a general guide only, and the circumstances of individual situations may mean that specific restrictions apply.

Useful contacts and further reading

Forestry Commission

www.forestry.gov.uk

Check the FC website for details of local offices.

Local district council planning office

www.gov.uk/find-your-local-council

The Land is Ours

www.tlio.org.uk

Detailed explanations of planning law relating to woodlands. The link to Chapter 7 is useful, although it is intended for those who want to build a house in the woods. They also provide free planning advice.

Sylva/My Forest

Free planning software

www.sylva.org.uk/myforest

Planning legislation for small woodlands

PDF download via Small Woods Association

www.smallwoods.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/planning.pdf

www.woodlands.co.uk

A site for woodland purchasers, packed with information about woodland ownership.

Bulworthy Project experience

<http://www.bulworthyproject.org.uk/planning>