



By email: [REDACTED]

Network Rail
Freedom of Information
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5th June 2018

Dear [REDACTED]

Information request
Reference number: FOI2018/00546

Thank you for your email of 7 May 2018, in which you requested the following information:

'I wish to submit the following request under the Freedom of Information Act:

- 1. How many trees along the network does Network Rail intend to fell under the current felling scheme?*
- 2. What species of tree have been identified for felling?*
- 3. What measures are being taken to protect birds due to it being the breeding season?*
- 4. How does the scheme comply with the Wildlife & Countryside Act?*
- 5. What measures are being taken to prevent harm and disturbance to other wildlife?*
- 6. What conservation organisations and statutory bodies have been consulted regarding the felling scheme?*
- 7. What nature conservation mitigation measures are being put in place?*
- 8. What assessment of the detrimental impact on wildlife of this felling scheme has been made and, if done, when will the results be made available to the public?'*

I have processed your request under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) as the information requested is environmental according to the definition in regulation 2(c) of the EIRs. Section 39 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000

(FOIA) exempts environmental information from the FOIA, but requires us to consider it under the EIR).

At Network Rail, we take very seriously our responsibility to keep the railway and the natural environment around it safe.

In recent media reports, there has been a lot of inaccurate coverage of how Network Rail manages trees and other vegetation that grows alongside the railway. To be clear, we do not have a national tree felling programme and we certainly do not have any plans to cut down all of the trees on our estate.

We believe we can enhance biodiversity whilst still running the railway safely. But it's much more complex than has recently been portrayed. By proactively managing vegetation we think we can find a win-win solution – protecting the environment and meeting our need, reinforced by the regulator, to remove trees and vegetation as necessary to maintain a safe and reliable railway. I have attached a copy of a briefing note which may be helpful.

Further information about our approach and policies is available on our website at these links, including copies of documents:

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/managing-railways-habitats/>

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/feeds/working-with-nature-by-the-railway/>

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/communities/environment/sharing-railway-wildlife/trees-and-the-railway/>

I can confirm that we hold some of the information you requested. In response to your questions:

1. How many trees along the network does Network Rail intend to fell under the current felling scheme?

Network Rail, in a similar way to other large landowners managing trees, does not manage trees on an individual basis but by area. As explained above, there is no current felling scheme and there are no plans to have one.

The railway network is divided into eight routes ¹. Any management works are planned by the routes and considered in relation to whether trees pose a risk to the operation of the railway.

¹ <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/running-the-railway/our-routes/>

2. What species of tree have been identified for felling?

When deciding which trees to fell we do not make our decision on the basis of species but rather on the basis that the trees in any given area pose an operational or safety risk to the railway. We do carry out risk assessments to identify species likely to cause a risk to the network in the autumn; high risk sites because of leaf fall during autumn will typically have a higher proportion of Sycamore, Poplar, Lime, Ash, Horse Chestnut and Sweet Chestnut trees.

3. What measures are being taken to protect birds due to it being the breeding season?

Where possible, we protect and maintain the local environment the railway runs through and we do not normally carry out lineside vegetation management work during nesting season (March – August). However, there are exceptions where in safety critical instances we must prune or remove trees during nesting season to maintain the safe operation of the railway. When we have to do this, we carry out thorough ecological surveys and inspections before starting any work.

4 How does the scheme comply with the Wildlife & Countryside Act?

As explained above, there is no national tree felling programme. We take our environmental obligations extremely seriously and we manage our lineside to provide healthy biodiversity, advised by experts in the field and we fully comply with the Act.

5. What measures are being taken to prevent harm and disturbance to other wildlife?

Network Rail takes steps (in a similar way to the approach outlined in 3.) to identify the possible presence of other protected species on its infrastructure and has access to independent ecologists to undertake specific surveys, should they be necessary.

6. What conservation organisations and statutory bodies have been consulted regarding the felling scheme?

As explained above, there is no national tree felling programme and therefore we do not hold this information.

7. What nature conservation mitigation measures are being put in place?

Where there is enough room and it is safe to do so, after pruning or removing trees, we leave smaller branches as habitat for wildlife, such as hedgehogs and amphibians. Depending on species and availability of space we may allow tree stumps to regrow, or treat them with herbicide to stop unwanted regrowth, thereby enabling more diverse ground flora to grow.

8. What assessment of the detrimental impact on wildlife of this felling scheme has been made and, if done, when will the results be made available to the public?’

As explained above, there is no national tree felling programme and therefore we do not hold this information.

If you have any enquiries about this response, please contact me in the first instance at FOI@networkrail.co.uk or on 01908 782405. Details of your appeal rights are below.

Please remember to quote the reference number at the top of this letter in all future communications.

Yours sincerely

Danielle Stratton
Information Officer

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Appeal Rights

If you are unhappy with the way your request has been handled and wish to make a complaint or request a review of our decision, please write to the FOI Compliance and Appeals Manager at Network Rail, Freedom of Information, The Quadrant, Elder Gate, Milton Keynes, MK9 1EN, or by email at foi@networkrail.co.uk. Your request must be submitted within 40 working days of receipt of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire SK9 5AF