Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Room 285
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont

From: **Dr Janice Thompson, Clerk to the Committee**

Date: **20 October 2026**

To: **Dr Michael Potter, Clerk to the Committee for Infrastructure**

Subject: **Tree Protection Bill**

Dear Michael

The AERA Committee met on 20 October 2026 and considered your memo, dated 7 October, regarding the Tree Protection Bill, which is currently at Committee Stage.

The Committee heard that the Bill seeks to strengthen primary legislation to provide greater legal protection for Northern Ireland's oldest and most significant trees and woods and bring the Tree Preservation Order (TPO) system in line with England, Scotland and Wales, close existing loopholes and ensure consistent enforcement across local authorities.

The Committee noted that the Bill:

- requires landowners, or those responsible for felling protected trees, to plant replacement trees and places duties on councils to monitor, inspect and verify that replacement trees are properly maintained; and
- proposes restrictions on development affecting ancient woodland with an exclusion zone of 15 metres where no development will be permitted (save in exceptional circumstances).

The Committee agreed to respond, suggesting that the Infrastructure Committee explore whether the proposed restrictions could have unintended consequences for agricultural diversification, farm infrastructure projects, or rural development.

Also to consider how the proposed planning protections support wider environmental and nature recovery policies led by DAERA, including Northern Ireland's first Tree

Planting Action Plan launched by the Minister in July designed to accelerate tree planting rates and address factors that have limited woodland expansion.

Regards,

Dr Janice Thompson, Committee Clerk