

Initiatives in London

An example for the rest of the country

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Summary

Trees in London have never before been faced with such serious threats to their existence as they are now. These threats come in various forms but the main ones that have the most far reaching implications are:

Development (in all its forms)
Subsidence and infrastructure damage
Climate Change

These threats reinforce each other in their impacts on trees and how trees are perceived, planned for and dealt with in the built environment. Climate change is the most potent of all these threats as it will have the greatest influence on all the other factors either in combination or individually.

However, while climate change is the single biggest threat to the presence of trees in urban areas in London (due to the prevalence of clay sub-soil), paradoxically it is also one of the most challenging opportunities for trees since the great storm of 1987. Using trees in urban spaces as one of the very few natural three dimensional landscape elements that can ameliorate the urban heat island effect, promises to be one of the great successes of London's future. Success, however, is not assured and the relationship of trees to urban infrastructure and vice versa and how they will obtain enough water to provide transpirational cooling must be considered and planned for if they are to contribute effectively to climate adaptation.

The challenge is to bring all the relevant professionals, both within the natural environmental disciplines and those with responsibilities for the built environment, together to deliver the benefits that we know trees can bring to cities. In the UK generally we have a poor track record in this regard and we need to do better. The initiatives currently being delivered in London offer examples in how all the professionals involved can better understand their roles and work in partnership with each other to achieve a place for the urban tree in our cities by focusing on the needs of the tree at the earliest stages of design and development, thereby providing for these needs throughout the tree's full cycle of life.

Meeting the Challenge

In March 2005 The Mayor of London launched The London Tree and Woodland Framework (LTWF), a joint partnership document for London's trees and woodlands produced under the leadership of the Forestry Commission. The LTWF is also the Forestry Commission's Regional Forestry Framework for London, it is a living document that responds to and addresses current and emerging issues.

Since its publication it has been the strategic overarching document for directing and influencing the issues that affect London's trees and woodlands. Some of the initiatives it has worked with partners on and has been instrumental in moving forward are:

- **The Right Trees for a Changing Climate.**

Development and publication of an online tree database providing information to professionals and the public on the types of tree suitable for planting in London in relation to climate change resilience and adaptation (www.right-trees.org.uk).

- **The Trees and Design Action Group.**

The Trees and Design Action Group is a multi-disciplinary group of individual professionals and organisations from both the private and public sectors who have come together under The London Tree and Woodland Framework to collaborate in achieving an increased awareness of the role of trees in the built environment. The group is currently producing guidance on tree valuation and trees in development.

- **CIRIA Project: A guide for long lived large trees in the built environment.**

A CIRIA project to produce technical guidance for the construction and built environment sectors on how to achieve the presence of large long lived species trees in the built environment. This project is part of CIRIA's Building Greener Initiative.

- **The London Tree Officer's Association Risk Limitation Strategy for Tree Root Claims.**

Guidance for local authorities on developing a risk limitation strategy that prevents unnecessary tree removal while at the same time limiting local authority liability and costs in respect of tree root claims (www.ltoa.org.uk).

- **Guidance for Local Authorities in London on Producing a Comprehensive Tree Strategy.**

Guidance for local authorities on how to approach producing a comprehensive tree strategy covering the mechanism, components, actions and time scales required to produce an effective tree strategy that treats all trees within the local authority's geographical area as a single resource.

- **The Joint Mitigation Protocol.**

The Joint Mitigation Protocol is an agreed method of subsidence claims management where trees are implicated as being the cause of building movement. It seeks to establish best practice in the processing and investigation of tree root induced building damage, benchmarking time scales for responses and standards of evidence. It represents a considerable achievement, as for the first time, building insurers and their agents have agreed that remedial pruning may be considered as an option rather than always asking for tree removal. Trees that should be retained will be retained and claims will be processed quickly so residents' properties are repaired without unnecessary delay (www.ltoa.org.uk).

- **Development of Tree Pruning Criteria in Respect of Subsidence Claims**

Complementary to the JMP, the development of tree pruning criteria agreed with insurer's agents and their arboricultural consultants so that trees are pruned when implicated in subsidence claims rather than always being targeted for removal.

- **Tree Evaluation.**

Encouragement of the use of tree valuation systems, in terms of tree population management, for setting levels of investigative evidence within the Joint Mitigation Protocol and defining the total life value of trees on development. Achieved through the LTOA's preferred CAVAT system and guidance produced by The Trees and Design Action Group.

- **National Joint Utilities Group Volume 4.**

The LTWF Manager represented the Framework in the revision of NJUG's document 10 Guidelines for the Planning, Installation, Maintenance and Repair of Utility Services in Proximity to Trees, now published as NJUG Volume 4. It includes guidance on effective planning for services in respect for new developments, and how to avoid damage to trees both above and below ground (www.njug.org.uk).

- **Trees and Woodlands Partnership.**

The Trees and Woodlands Partnership is a member group of organisations that have come together to work with London 2012 to offer a vision for long term sustainable change. The Partnership believes that trees and woodlands are an important element when the design, construction and landscaping for the Games Park and its legacy are drawn up. It has produced a ten point vision that champions trees and woodlands within this design and identifies key areas for action.

- **London 2012 Biodiversity Programme.**

The London Tree and Woodland Framework Manager sits on the London 2012 Biodiversity Programme group and represents the Forestry Commission and Trees and Woodlands Partnership in putting forward the pertinent issues to London 2012.

Conclusion

The connection between people and trees goes back to prehistory. For much of human existence trees have provided shelter, tools, food and a wealth of myths, legends and experiences. These experiences and connections have arguably fostered deep emotional ties within the human psyche for the tree in all its forms.

Modern cities, however, are relatively new in human evolutionary terms. They are artificial environments created to allow large populations to live and work together in close proximity to each other. Cities are not the natural environment of trees or indeed of people. Trees are nonetheless required by society as an important feature of the urban landscape and where there are no trees the landscape is considered by many to be impoverished.

The services and infrastructure needed in cities to achieve high density living generally militates against the presence of trees. Climate change will add to these pressures and create a landscape devoid of large trees in London unless practical steps are taken to plan for their presence by the professional community working in partnership.

For the professional community to fail to work in this way and not deliver large species trees as an essential element of urban living will invite censure from the Londoners of the future. We will have failed the first test of sustainable development and provided for our own needs at the expense of future generations who will be living with the impacts of climate change, change that we had a large part in creating, without the benefit of an important tool to assist in cooling London.

The initiatives being followed in London are a start in the right direction and should if accepted and adopted mean that the large species trees we plant today will still be around to assist with climate adaptation towards the end of this century and hopefully into the next century as well.