Trees in Towns II

government recognition of urban forest needs

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Trees in Towns II
A new survey of urban trees in England and their condition and management
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A Survey of Urban Forestry in Britain

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Green Infrastructure

• In recent years, there has been much talk about ‘green infrastructure’, especially from government departments and agencies and the planning and landscape profession.

• The concept originated in the United States in the mid-1990s and it highlights the importance of the natural environment in decisions about land use planning.

• However, listening to CABE you might be forgiven for thinking this was largely about green roofs and walls!

• What is the most important single element of green infrastructure?
Green Infrastructure

- Urban trees are special – they provide a unique range of environmental, economic and social benefits.

- The skills and equipment required to plant, maintain and manage urban trees are special – that’s why local authorities employ specialists called arboriculturists to do this work.

- All those working in the urban environment and green infrastructure need to recognise the invaluable contribution that arboriculturists can make to their work. As urban tree specialists they are uniquely qualified and experienced.

- However, the value of this expertise does not seem to be recognised by CABE.
Improving quality of life through design

CABE is the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. We marked our tenth anniversary in September 2009.

Read our publications for design advice and our case studies to see what can be done.

Grey to Green
East London Green Grid, London
Urban Forestry

• From the late 1980s, many professionals involved in planning and managing the urban environment were talking about ‘urban forestry’. It was the latest ‘buzzword’ in efforts to green our towns and cities.

• Those professionals who always realised that urban forestry wasn’t just about the trees have quickly recognised that green infrastructure is about much the same thing.

• While the emphasis of urban forestry is firmly on the trees, the focus of green infrastructure often seems vaguer and the trees are frequently not actually mentioned.

• However, in terms of sustainable cities and urban climate adaptation, what is the most important single element of green infrastructure?

• It’s the tree canopy cover - and that’s the urban forest.
Urban Forestry

• For many years, successive governments were quite supportive of urban forestry and promoted a number of major initiatives, including the establishment of the National Urban Forestry Unit

• For ten years, NUFU disseminated advice about urban tree management and promoted the need for a city’s tree cover to be planned and managed in a holistic way

• But then a few years ago the government cut the funding for NUFU, saying it was no longer necessary because the concept of urban forestry was now widely recognised

• Since then, all we seem to hear from government is about green infrastructure with little mention of the trees

• However, the concepts of urban forestry and green infrastructure are entirely compatible and complementary
Green Infrastructure

• From *Planning the Urban Forest*: “The first step in reincorporating green infrastructure into a community’s planning framework is to measure urban forest canopy and set canopy goals.”

• But data from *Trees in Towns II* shows that the urban forest canopy is often very space and the trees themselves are not getting anything like the attention they need.

• Arboriculturists need to seize this opportunity to promote the crucial importance of trees in green infrastructure – and their own vital role as urban tree specialists.

• It’s good to see that a number of organisations and individuals involved in British arboriculture are now doing precisely that. But much more needs to be done.
TTII Strand 2: Some General Conclusions:

- **Planned Management:** Many LAs lack some basic information about the nature and extent of the trees and woodlands in their district. How can this lead to a meaningful tree strategy?

- **Systematic Management:** A very wide variation in levels of systematic management, both between and within LAs. Some encouraging signs but some aspects very poor, e.g. inspections, post-planting maintenance, and other routine tree maintenance.

- **Integrated Management:** While urban forest management is essentially a local authority function, this should include partnership working with a wide range of organisations. There is also a need for more integrated management within many LAs.
Planning and privately owned trees

• There appeared to be a lack of consistency in the LAs’ approach to much of this work

• There was also concerns about insufficient monitoring and enforcement of some of the relevant legislation

• This aspect of LA work should feature prominently in the tree strategy

• Only 27% of LAs had produced any Supplementary Planning Guidance (or SPD) relating to trees and development

• Information, guidance and documentation could be more readily available, especially through e-government. Some LAs tree programmes had really embraced e-government but many had not
Urban trees – asset or liability?

• There was concern that the public are increasingly viewing urban trees as a liability rather than an asset

• There is much evidence from *Trees in Towns II* to support this, particularly the tree officers’ SWOT analysis

• The ‘claims culture’ and an increasingly litigious society

• The best way of addressing these concerns must be to operate an efficient and effective tree programme – and this can only be done with sufficient funding

• At the same time, tree officers need to vigorously promote the environmental, economic and social benefits of trees – so the public are aware of their tremendous value
The trend towards ‘lollipop landscapes’

• Evidence from *Trees in Towns II* and other sources indicates a trend towards the removal of large-growing trees and their replacement with small-growing ornamental types. Significantly fewer large-growing trees are planted.

• This trend has prompted fears it will lead to a proliferation of ‘lollipop landscapes’.

• It is the larger forest-type trees that have significantly greater benefits, and this trend could have a particularly damaging impact on the climate-proofing of our cities.

• The Trees and Design Action Group (TDAG) has taken up this challenge and is demanding we make far more space for large trees in our urban landscapes and we continue planting these trees.
NO TREES, NO FUTURE
Trees in the urban realm

Trees and Design Action Group
November 2008
Raising standards

• Alan Barber in *Horticulture Week* in July 2009: “*Trees in Towns II* is a wake-up call to a nation whose urban tree structure is inadequate.”

• *Just a few results from Trees in Towns II:*

  • Less than 2% of LAs had undertaken any form of cost-benefit analysis of the whole or part of their urban forest
  
  • Only 19% had an accurate record of the percentage tree cover of their district. And only 8% had an accurate record of the public/private split of their district’s tree cover
  
  • Only 28% had a tree strategy - and many of these were seriously deficient or far from comprehensive
Raising standards

• 44% of LAs were undertaking less than 10% of all their treework on a systematic, regularly scheduled cycle. This means 90%+ crisis management.

• On average, 35% of LAs’ newly planted trees (excluding woodlands) received no post-planting maintenance.

• Average mortality rate for LAs’ newly-planted trees was: Highways: 23%; POS: 24%; LA Woodlands: 15%

• When housing management was transferred to RSLs, nearly 50% of LAs had made no provision for tree management in those areas

• And the above is just a selection…
Trees in Towns (1993)

• When the original Trees in Towns study was published in 1993, it was heralded as a groundbreaking report – which it certainly was. But in the light of many of the findings of Trees in Towns II we might well ask “Just how much have we learnt since then?”

• Unfortunately, the answer appears to be “Not a lot”

• At a recent seminar for greenspace professionals, Keith Sacre of Barcham Trees highlighted a number of important points from the original report that were repeated in Trees in Towns II. Even some of the wording was similar.

• The next question that now needs to be asked is: Will we be saying all this again in Trees in Towns III?
Ten targets for LA tree management

• The enormous variation in levels of performance in many aspects of tree management needs to be addressed

• 10 targets that we hope all LAs will try to achieve over the next five years. Many are already achieving some targets

• If we are serious about promoting green infrastructure and sustainable cities, let’s address the basics first by encouraging our LAs to achieve the 10 targets for tree management

• Very few professionals seem to have any problem with the 10 targets. It’s just good tree management

• **We know what to do – so why is it not being done?**
LA tree management targets 1-5

• To have at least one specialist Tree Officer, preferably qualified in arboriculture at Higher Education level

• To obtain at least £15,000 in external funding for the LA tree programme over the next five years

• To develop and implement a comprehensive tree strategy (guidance in Case Study and forthcoming LTWF guide)

• To undertake a Best Value Review of the LA tree programme, preferably covering all aspects

• To install a computerised tree management system
LA tree management targets 6-10

- To ensure at least 40% of all tree maintenance work is done on a systematic, regularly scheduled cycle

- To ensure that at least 90% of all the LA’s newly planted tree (not including woodlands) received systematic post-planting maintenance until established

- Establish a programme, within the next 5 years, to ensure every TPO is reviewed on a specified cycle

- Every LPA to have comprehensive Supplementary Planning Guidance (or SPD) for trees and development

- Every consent to work on protected trees is monitored and necessary enforcement action
Achieving the 10 targets

- It is unreasonable to expect individual tree officers to try and achieve these 10 targets entirely on their own.
- The last few sentences of *Trees in Towns II* reads:

  “In the long term, LA tree programmes have a vital role to play in promoting the government’s agenda for cleaner, greener, safer cities and the development of sustainable communities. With **sufficient support and encouragement**, the LAs and their tree officers can undoubtedly play an important role in helping to deliver that vision.”

(My emphasis)
The need for more ‘joined-up government’

- There seems to be a lack of consistency and clear direction in government policy on urban trees. The relevant bodies do not seem to be working together on this.

- Trees in Towns II is a graphic example of that.

- This groundbreaking report was commissioned and published by CLG. The document and its recommendation have been endorsed by Ministers.

- However, the response to the report from other bodies has been rather mixed.
Help from CABE for people in local authorities working to create better places.

If you think it's impossibly complicated to make your town or city low carbon, think again.

This website gives expert advice on planning, designing and managing a sustainable place. It cuts through the complexity with clear priorities for action. And it shows which places are getting it right.

Getting it right means a more resilient economy, healthier residents, a more beautiful place and a better quality of life for everyone.

Transport
Reduce car use and promote alternatives

Take action
See 15 priorities to tackle climate change, and decide what to do at particular scales such as site, neighbourhood or city-wide.

Provide leadership
Read how to make the case, mobilise funding and resources and forge partnerships to create sustainable places.

Learn from others
Find out how others have developed solutions which could help you, from the UK and around the world.

News and updates
The need for leadership on urban trees

- CLG is to be commended for delivering *Trees in Towns II*. However, there has been very little follow up since

- CLG’s view seems to be that since they published it, it’s now up to other organisations to pick it up and use it

- Understandable given CLG’s lack of resources for this?

- We urgently need some leadership at government level

- I would be happy for the Forestry Commission to give this leadership and I know there are many arboriculturists who think the same way

- An example of what the FC can do is the excellent work of its staff involved in the LTWF. FC is working in partnership with others and promoting a coordinated approach
In Conclusion

• *Trees in Towns II* is not just a government ‘tree report’ – it’s a call to action that has major implications for the future of our green infrastructure

• That means it has a vital role to play in promoting sustainable cities and urban climate adaptation

• Everyone concerned about these issues needs to take ownership of this report and promote the 10 targets

• If we are serious about these issues, we need to address the basics and get serious about our urban trees

• Unless we do, the urban forests in our towns and cities are in danger of being steadily eroded and devalued – and just at a time when we need them most
Thank you for your attention