Trees in Towns II:
a call to action

A personal view by
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Plants to the Rescue
SCI's Horticulture Group
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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. It has a vital role to play in creating healthy and sustainable cities

- However, listening to CABE and some other major players you might be forgiven for thinking that green infrastructure was largely about green roofs and walls!

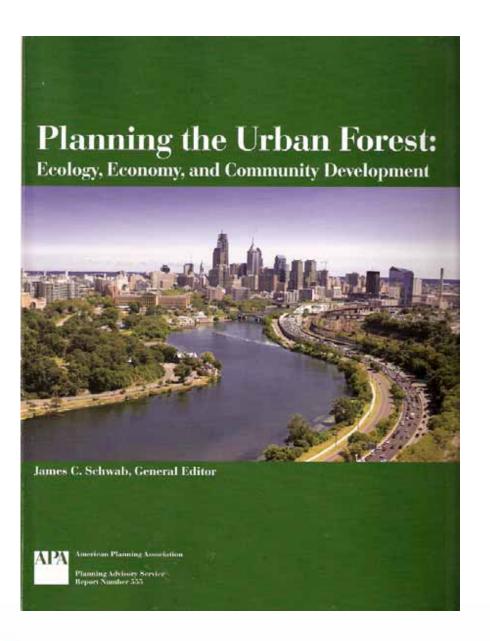- What is the most important single element of green infrastructure?

Green Infrastructure

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

- The techniques and equipment required to plant and maintain trees are special – that's why we need to employ tree specialists called arboriculturists to do this work

- Not so long ago, everybody was talking about urban forestry. When you realise that urban forestry wasn't just about the trees, you will recognise that green infrastructure is about much the same thing.

- Canopy cover is the crucial factor in achieving healthy and sustainable cities and climate adaptation – and that's the urban forest. But the government cut the funding for NUFU, saying it was no longer necessary because the concept of urban forestry was now widely recognised.

Planning the Urban Forest:
Ecology, Economy, and Community Development

James C. Schwab, General Editor

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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 are not getting anything like the attention they need. Standards of tree maintenance and management are often very poor and in many cases even the basics are not being addressed

- If we are really serious about promoting green infrastructure to create healthy and sustainable cities we had better start focusing on our urban trees before it's too late

- *Trees in Towns II* offers a wonderful opportunity to do that, with its recommendations and 10 targets – but is it getting the recognition and support it deserves?

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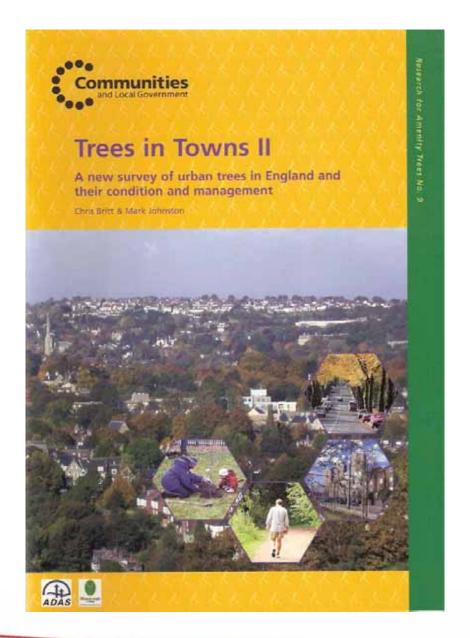Providing opportunities for all

Trees in Towns II

A new survey of urban trees in England and their condition and management

Published in February 2008

Undertaken for the Department for Communities and Local Government by Myerscough College and ADAS Consulting

Communities
and Local Government

Trees in Towns II

A new survey of urban trees in England and
their condition and management

Chris Britt & Mark Johnston

ADAS

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Elements of the research

Strand 1

- A sampling survey to identify the distribution, species composition, size, condition, etc. of the trees

Strand 2

- Main survey of all English local authorities (LAs) to identify policies and practice in urban tree management.
- Tree Officer Recruitment Survey; Partnership Working Survey
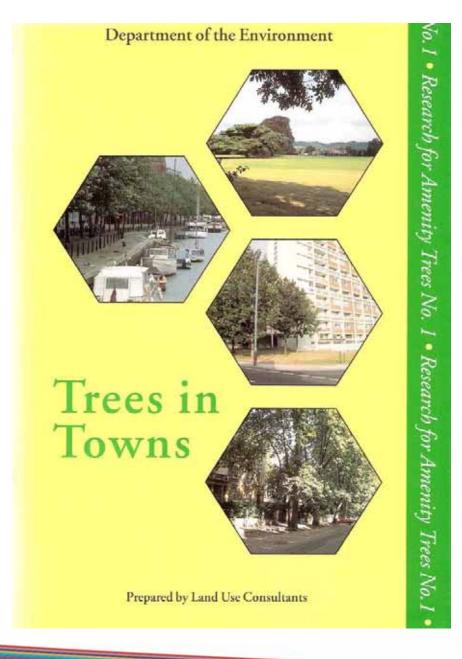
Case Studies

- 12 Case Studies on 'good and innovative practice' in various aspects of urban tree management

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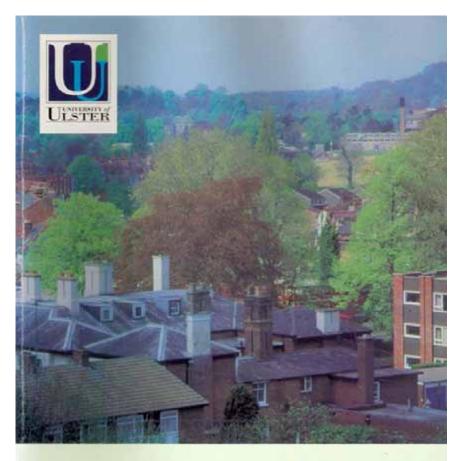Providing opportunities for all

Strand 2 Results

- Response rate to main LA survey: 66% of 389 LAs
- Response rate to Partnership Working survey: 88% (from 20% sample of LAs responding)

- Many of the results were correlated with the population size and 'urban weighting' of the LAs

- Comparison with previous surveys to establish trends:

1992 – Trees in Towns (DoE, 1993)
1997 – University of Ulster (Johnston and Rushton, 1999)

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A Survey of
Urban Forestry in Britain

Mark Johnston and Brian S. Rushton

Strand 2 Questionnaire

A. Resources and Budgets

B. Surveys, Strategies and *Planned management*

C. *Systematic Management*

D. TPOs, Conservation Areas and Development

E. *Integrated Management* and Social Aspects

F. Urban Tree Programme SWOT Analysis

G. Tree Officer Information

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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 strategy?

- Only 28% of LAs had produced a specific tree strategy. However, questions were raised about the content and detail of many of these.

- 75% of LA tree budgets didn't reflected a planned level of service – just formulated on previous year's funding

- 55% of LAs had obtained no external funding for their tree programme over the past five years. But of the 45% that did, the average over this period was £72,610

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Systematic Management

- A very wide variation in levels of systematic management, both between and within LAs

- Encouraging signs: a small majority of LAs now have computerised tree management systems; utilisation of timber and brash was often very good.

- But some aspects were often very poor, e.g. inspections, post-planting maintenance, and other general routine tree maintenance

- The difficult dilemma for tree officers: divert limited resource to surveys and inspections but get less actual work done. The only solution is to develop a costed and comprehensive tree strategy

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Integrated Management

- While urban forest management is essentially a local authority function, partnership working with a wide range of organisations and groups is essential

- There are many benefits of community involvement and partnership working for the community and the LA. But this needs an initial investment of time and money

- Community involvement also needs some formal organisational structure to support and sustain it. Only 33% of LAs had a Tree Warden Scheme in their district. Only 18% had a district-wide Tree Forum or Committee

- Need for more integrated management within the LA

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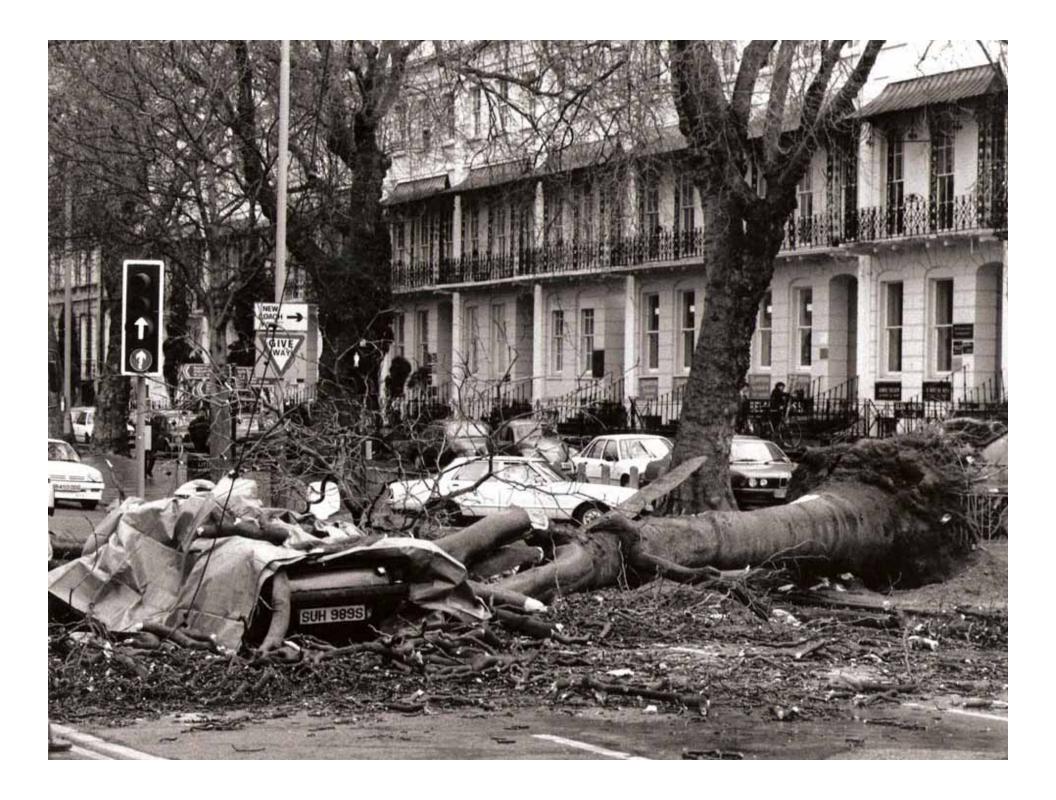College
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Planning and privately owned trees

- 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 relating to trees and development

- LAs need to be more proactive in this area

- 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 establish 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

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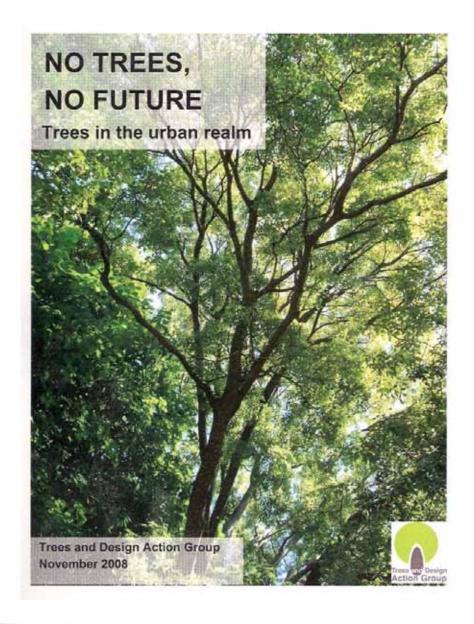
MANUAL

Trees and the wider green context

- In building support for their tree programmes, tree officers need to think beyond trees and consider the wider context of green infrastructure and the environment

- They need to exert influence on many different professionals, i.e. planners, ecologists, landscape architects, engineers

- In doing this, they must link the many benefits of trees and the tree strategy to other LA policy objectives, such as public health, urban regeneration, biodiversity and tourism

- At the same time, other professionals involved in green infrastructure need to recognise that tree officers are not just experts in practical tree maintenance – they have a role to play in wider green space policy and planning

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

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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 shocking facts 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 and 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…*

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Trees in Towns (1993)

How much have we learnt since then? Here are some quotes from the original *Trees in Towns*:

- What is needed in all towns is a long term strategy for the maintenance of the tree cover to be maintained or established in the future incorporated in a strategy with specific aims and objectives

- An almost universal failing in management was found to be the lack of attention to the removal of tree ties and tree stakes…

- Few LAs had a systematic approach to maintenance of established trees.

- Many LAs did not carry out safety inspections and planned maintenance…

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Trees in Towns (1993)

More quotes from the original *Trees in Towns*:

- (Large developments sites) should be subject to long term planning and tree management plans, underwritten by appropriate planning conditions or agreements

- It would be helpful to have a measure of performance based on the successful establishment of trees rather than the initial numbers planted

- The most numerous street trees are the smaller types such as Sorbus and Hawthorn. This points to a future in which street trees have a lower visual impact on their environment when older trees have to be replaced

- **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. That would make a huge improvement in our urban tree cover – and our green infrastructure

- Not meant to be proscriptive – individual circumstances

- **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

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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 (SPG) for trees and development

- Every consent to work on protected trees is monitored and necessary enforcement action

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LA tree management targets

- It is unreasonable to expect individual tree officers to try and achieve these 10 target 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)

And finally…

- *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

- For the first time, a government report on urban trees has been written mainly by arboriculturists. And the report and its recommendations have been endorsed by Ministers

- If we are serious about creating healthy and sustainable cities, everybody needs to get behind the report and it's recommendations, particularly the 10 targets

- If these 10 targets could be achieved it would make a huge contribution to health and vitality of our urban forests – and, most importantly, to the health and welfare of the people who live and work in our towns and cities

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Thank you for your attention