

TREES AND DESIGN ACTION GROUP (TDAG)

TREES IN THE URBAN REALM

Executive Summary

The Threat to Urban Trees

- Urban trees are under threat as never before. The report by the London Assembly Environment Committee "*Chainsaw Massacre*" (2007)¹ highlighted the loss of street trees in London indicating that overall more large species trees are cut down than are replaced. *Trees in Towns II*, the report on urban trees and tree management commissioned by Communities and Local Government, echoes these findings for trees across England. This report encompassed the entire urban realm from streets and estates through to parks and private gardens. In particular the report highlighted the threat to trees from built development in all its forms.
- Particularly vulnerable to this trend are the larger structural trees, such as the London Plane, which contribute to London's international reputation as a green, tree-filled capital. What is happening in London is mirrored in many other urban centres throughout the United Kingdom².

The Benefits of Urban Trees

- Trees are one of the urban realm's greatest allies and have been shown to improve health and well-being for people and the environment. They mitigate temperature extremes³, reduce pollution^{5,6} and increase real estate values^{7,8,9}.
- In terms of climate change, trees have been identified as being a key element of any urban climate change adaptation strategy^{10,11,12}. Trees are uniquely placed to be widely integrated into the urban fabric, providing a shading and cooling mechanism. Without this cooling mechanism, cities of the future, and London in particular, are likely to be very inhospitable places.
- There is however a huge practicality gap between the aspirations detailed in climate adaptation strategies for more and larger trees to mitigate temperature extremes and the practical considerations required to achieve the presence of enough large species trees in the urban landscape to do the job required. This gap is in addition to the incremental erosion of the existing large tree populations highlighted in the reports detailed above.

In addition,

- 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 unless practical steps are taken by a range of professional bodies working in partnership.

WHY THE TREES AND DESIGN ACTION GROUP?

- The Trees and Design Action Group (TDAG) is a unique multi-disciplinary group of individual professionals and organisations from both the private and public sectors. They have come together under The London Tree and Woodland Framework to collaborate in achieving an increased awareness of the absolute need to bridge this practicality gap and to create the pre-conditions necessary for trees to be considered as an integral part of development at the earliest conceptual and design stages of any scheme.
- The Trees and Design Action Group are convinced that this gap can be bridged without major investment in new research using current technical knowledge.
- What is required is a new culture of collaborative working that places trees and their requirements at the forefront of the decision making process. Overcoming the perceived barriers to adequate consideration of existing trees and proposed tree planting in development is a key objective.
- TDAG has started this process by publishing a set of web based guidelines available to built environment and landscape professionals so that they may better integrate trees and their requirements into their thinking. These guidelines provide solutions to overcoming many of these barriers and illustrate practical successes through the use of UK based case studies. Many of the solutions are innovative, most are common sense, all are essential to achieving large species trees in our towns and cities.

The Challenge for decision makers in the built environment

- 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 we have a poor track record in this regard and we need to do better.
- The time has come for primary decision makers to make the right choices at the right time to ensure that the design and construction of our cities creates the right places for the right trees. TDAG has a key role to play in providing practical guidance and information, as well as ensuring that we do not miss the opportunity to create liveable cities of the future.
- The TDAG's remit covers all trees (both existing and proposed) in the urban environment. Following the publication of its first two guidance notes on development and tree valuation it will also be publishing a further series of guidance notes to cover aspects within the group's "Ten Point Action Plan" (see appendix in main document).

References

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10. **Greater London Authority** ,The London Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, 2008
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