

Urban Forest Resilience Conference: “Ensuring London remains green for future generations” 4th June 2014 Kew Gardens: Conference Summary

1 Introduction

Over 100 delegates came to Kew Gardens to discuss the important issue of urban forest resilience.

Nowhere are tree populations under more pressure than in urban areas. For example, the urban forest has to cope with the urban heat island effect; challenging environments for establishment and increased entry points for pest & disease introduction... but with 80% of the population living in urban areas, the urban forest provides vital services to society, the environment and the economy.



Sir Harry Studholme, Forestry Commission Chair, giving the conference opening address

The aims of the conference were to draw together research and expertise that will help decision makers and practitioners develop a more resilient urban forest for the future. Kew Gardens offered a unique opportunity to look in more detail at one particular aspect of resilience - alternative tree species. Objectives were to:

- Review the current resilience of London / England's urban forest
- Consider the wide range of factors needed to secure a resilient urban forest
- Highlight opportunities to increase resilience
- See real example alternative species in Kew Gardens
- Discuss what else we can do to increase resilience and develop a vision of a resilient urban forest

The conference built upon some of the messages from the conference in January 2013 on "[Tackling the threat to London's trees](#)".

Conference programme – pdf copies of presentations via links below

Sir Harry Studholme, Forestry Commission Chairman, gave the opening address.

Jago Keen:	Seeking Socio-ecological resilience
Tony Kirkham:	What trees do I plant next?
Jake Tibbetts:	How resilient are London's trees now?
Joan Webber:	Pest & Disease resilience
Richard Jinks:	Right Trees for a Changing Climate
Gabriel Hemery:	Silvifuture
Keith Sacre:	BS8545 and good tree husbandry
Martin Gammie:	Trees in the Hard Landscape

In the afternoon, Tony Kirkham gave delegates a tour of Kew Gardens, to look at some of the potential alternative species that could replace existing species under threat and increase resilience.

2 Key conference messages and discussions

The conference generated wide ranging discussion during Q&A sessions and during the garden tour, including:

Strategic thinking

- The particular threats that the urban forest faces (and can help mitigate), such as urban heat island effect and increased pathways for pests and diseases through global trade and consumption.
- The need to consider and apply resilience in various ways: (i) strategically and at landscape scale as well as site based implementation (ii) economic, social and environmental resilience are all needed (iii) timescales, from immediate action to long term thinking.
- Concern about a culture that fails to fully appreciate the urban forest and what it provides everyone in their daily lives.
- What can be seen as challenges are also opportunities.

Communication and collaboration

- The need to continue raising awareness of the threats to the urban forest and need for long term resilience
- The Urban Forestry sector needs to show leadership and professionalism, but it also needs to engage and influence other sectors such as the built environment sector, planning, landscape design etc.

- The need to develop a common understanding and vision of what a resilient urban forest looks like, and giving clear, targeted messages on what can be done to deliver that vision.
- Need for collaboration – we operate in a multiple ownership, multi functional environment.
- Trees have public resonance and we need to create a communications package that resonates with everyone.

Using knowledge and tools to implement good practice

- Knowledge of the urban forest is vital in understanding its vulnerability and resilience. Urban Forest managers need to know what factors to consider when assessing current and future resilience such as species and age diversity, tree condition and soil condition. Knowing what's growing in a particular town or city is an essential foundation for understanding diversity or lack of it, and for assessing resilience to known factors like drought, diseases, etc.
- The London iTree project will provide valuable evidence, informing us about the overall resilience of London's trees and the ecosystem services that they provide (and are potentially at risk).
- Diversity is a crucial element of resilience such as species, provenance and age/size class diversity – though further thought and common understanding is needed regarding what scale diversity is applied to.



*Tony Kirkham, Head of the Arboretum and Horticultural Services, RBG Kew, showing delegates the fantastic specimen of *Aesculus indica* 'Sydney Pearce' (1935).*

- To maximise the urban forest potential, we must:
 - use professional skills, knowledge and apply good practice such as BS8545 and Trees in the Hard landscape

- use decision support tools such as Right Trees for a Changing Climate and Silvifuture

3 Post Conference feedback and evaluation

Over 90% of delegates rated the conference 'very good' or 'excellent'. Feedback from the event included the following quotes:

"A great day, well organised and thought through, with engaging speakers and debate. A fantastic venue"

"It was a very informative and thought provoking day"

"A great event with excellent speakers and a range of topics from theory/strategic to practical implementation. A fantastic venue to see alternative species and a big subject with a lot more work to do!"

"Very helpful to be appraised of current thinking on various issues"

4 Next steps and ongoing discussions

The conference highlighted how large the subject of urban forest resilience is, and the need to continue our thinking and discussions on the subject. Discussion during the day highlighted the need to communicate the issues of tree threats and resilience to a wider audience – but in order to do this, there needs to be a common understanding and consistency of messages for the urban forestry sector to convey.

With this in mind, discussion forums have been set up to enable ongoing discussion. In due course, we hope that some of those discussions will draw out issues and consensus that may be converted into guidance for the urban forestry sector and beyond. We invite anyone with a connection to urban forestry (not just conference delegates) to read and engage in the discussions.

[Institute of Chartered Foresters LinkedIn Discussion Forum: "Trees, People & the Built Environment"](#)

5 Further information

[Conference speaker & chair profiles](#)

[FC London resilience website](#)

[Kew Gardens](#)

[Delegate list](#)

Sponsors:

We are very grateful for financial support from:



and for the support and assistance from a range of other partners, including the speakers, chairs and others involved in organising the conference