

A review of TreeGeneration: the urban forestry project for north-east Wales

There is a growing awareness in Britain that trees and woodlands in urban and peri-urban areas can make a positive contribution to the social and environmental justice agenda. Urban woodlands and green spaces can provide a range of benefits such as improved health and well-being, increased recreational opportunity and environmental improvements. Public space, including streets, parks, shopping precincts and markets, can also play a vital role in the social life of communities. In the UK there is currently a policy push towards the 'greening' of public spaces in an attempt to reconnect the population with nature whilst simultaneously striving to meet economic and environmental goals.



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Background

Welsh Assembly policy is committed to urban regeneration incorporating the principles of sustainable development, and to improving the quality of life and the quality of the environment for urban communities. TreeGeneration was established with a core aim to *promote and support a substantial increase in the planting of new trees and woodlands in an urban environment* in the counties of Wrexham and Flintshire in north-east Wales. A partnership was established between Forestry Commission Wales, Countryside Council for Wales, Wrexham County Borough Council and Flintshire County Council to deliver TreeGeneration. The project provided grant aid of up to 75% for 20 planting schemes between 2004 and 2008, and provided specialist advice and facilitation to a further six schemes.

Objectives

The research aimed to:

- assess the fit of TreeGeneration with the wider strategic aims of Forestry Commission Wales (FCW) and the relevance of the project to Assembly policy
- examine the delivery and partnership processes, outputs and outcomes, with a review of internal structures, processes and funding mechanisms
- provide a summary of the available literature regarding the benefits of urban greening, allowing the TreeGeneration project to be understood in the wider context of community regeneration and development

Methods

The methods used for this research were varied and included:

- desk and literature searches to provide a context for TreeGeneration in the Welsh urban greening agenda and to assess the potential contribution of TreeGeneration to the Welsh Assembly Government policy agenda
- semi-structured interviews and discussions over a four-month period with FCW officers, partner organisations and grant recipients
- a review of TreeGeneration documentation, processes and mechanisms to provide an overview of projects, aims, objectives and outcomes

Findings

One of the key successes of the TreeGeneration model was that partnerships were formed between organisations directly, enhancing integrated working, creating networks and increasing understanding. Evidence collated for this review shows that these partnerships were valued but short lived. This can be ascribed to the time constraints of the TreeGeneration officer and to

the organisational structures of other delivery partners such as the British Trust of Conservation Volunteers and Groundwork Flintshire.

Particular resistance to the project was experienced from the business community, citing a fear that tree cover would exacerbate existing crime and anti-social behaviour issues. Overcoming such attitudes often takes a shift in the political agenda and operational framework of delivery organisations. It points to a significant need for increased information and advice on the benefits of trees and woodlands in the urban environment.

The flexibility and breadth of TreeGeneration was cited as both a strength and a weakness. It allowed for engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders, but also resulted in a

lack of focus and direction with an unrealistic expectation of delivery upon the single project officer.

The diverse range of support, both monetary and other, offered to applicants was felt to be appropriate and valuable. Importantly, it was felt that this level of support is not available elsewhere and that a single point of contact for expertise on urban greening matters, whether silvicultural or other, is extremely important.

The development of indicators and a monitoring plan would have allowed for the collation of a strong evidence base in order to allow a full evaluation of the benefits of TreeGeneration to the residents of Flintshire and Wrexham.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the results of the research.

- The types of support offered by TreeGeneration were valued and unavailable elsewhere. There is an evident need for both monetary and advisory support to be available to a wide range of organisations, individuals and groups. It is recommended that FCW consider the opportunities presented by this need and develop an advisory service for the public and private sectors that would complement future grant support programmes.
- Partnership approaches to delivery have proved successful for TreeGeneration. It is recommended that this approach is strengthened by FCW.
- Further, it is suggested that the partnership approaches used by TreeGeneration are broadened to allow for increased opportunities for communities to participate in local governance issues.
- TreeGeneration was limited to two counties in north-east Wales. It is apparent that this type of support would be valued across Wales. It is recommended that consideration be given to a pan-Wales programme, with focus placed on highly deprived urban and rural areas.
- The lack of a project plan, baseline data, indicators and monitoring programme has made it problematic to assess the true impact of the project. It is recommended that all future projects have these in place prior to commencement.

Partners

Roz Owen, Forest Research.

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Reports and publications

Roz Owen, (2008). *TreeGeneration: the urban forestry project for North East Wales, a review*. Forest Research. www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-756BQC