

Notes from Tree Safety Meeting – 7th July 2008
Forestry Commission, 340 Bristol Business Park, Bristol

Attendees:

Sir Harry Studholme (FC Commissioner) (Chair)	Simon Richmond (Arboricultural Association)
Nick Eden (Arboricultural Association)	Mike Seville (CLA)
Caroline Harrison (ConFor)	Jane Karthaus (ConFor)
Neville Fay (TEP)	Simon Wallis (Forestry Commission England)
John Lockhart (Lockhart Garratt/RICS)	Emily Ramsay (Forestry Commission GB)
Rachael Edwards (Forestry Commission England) (minutes)	Andy Tipping (LTOA/London Borough of Barnet)
Rebecca Haskell (Woodland Trust)	Shireen Chambers (ICF)
Mick Boddy (BSI)	Mike Hodson (BSI)

Apologies were received from Brian Mahony (Forestry Commission England), Prof. David Ball (DARM, Middlesex University)

Review of Actions/ Comments from last meeting

No comments or amendments.

All actions completed and discharged.

Review of the conference

The conference has succeeded in raising awareness of issues associated with tree management for public safety across the industry. It was a highly successful event and achieved the primary objective of raising awareness of the NTSG and the impact of understanding among the hierarchy of organisations. It highlighted the breadth of the issue and how many people it touches. Delegates experienced in dealing with tree safety issues may also have gained a greater awareness of how difficult it is to unravel this complex subject.

Early on in the day there were some comments made that nothing new was being discussed, it wasn't entirely clear to everyone at outset that this wasn't just information but was part of a process. This message was reinforced and became clearer towards the end of the day.

This was a successful event in bringing people to the same level of knowledge and understanding and in highlighting the work of the NTSG. However, the NTSG do not think that, at this stage, another conference would achieve anything further.

The electronic Q&As were judged to be a valuable part of the conference. Some comments suggested the questions were leading/patronising, however it was very hard to pitch them at right level for everyone in the audience.

The data collected through the use of these devices has been collated and has been circulated amongst NTSG members. There were two requests for the information after the conference.

The data was really for the purposes of the day only, becoming redundant afterwards. However, there is the potential that if the results are not published it could be misconstrued as NTSG being a closed body of organisations.

As well as fulfilling the specific requests received, the data presents an opportunity for people who were not at the conference to gauge the feeling of the room. Due to the nature of the data it should not be used for detailed statistical analysis and any conclusions drawn should not be based solely upon this data.

The results could also be used as a vehicle to promote next stages of process. The publications of professional organisations could be approached to highlight activity.

ACTION: NF/HS to produce a covering note to include caveat for the reliability of the data and arrange publication on TEP website.

Follow up letter

The proposed letter to be sent to delegates of the conference was discussed and a number of changes agreed.

ACTION: HS/RE to change letter to include points above and circulate to the group

It was agreed that distribution of letter would be by electronic mail. The letter would include a banner containing the logos of the organisations involved in the NTSG rather than on one organisations headed paper.

BSI draft standard (BS8516)

The BS8516 was discussed. The meeting concluded that:

1. Development of a standard at this point is inappropriate.
2. The possibility of a BS at a future date not ruled out but may have a different scope.
3. Offer representative of BSI to join NSTG
4. Ongoing work to be fed back into the BSI process at a later date.

ACTION: Organisations to respond individually to the draft. NTSG will also provide a written response to the BSI.

DARM – Risk work

Proposal now received. Contract will be drawn up in next couple of weeks for work to commence.

Legal Framework

Richard Stead is thought to be the best person to take this forward. Following conference, approach him to produce a synopsis of what he said in his speech. Should budgets allow, and Richard Stead agrees to the approach, it may be beneficial to pass this before a QC.

The legal framework should also consider Scottish law. It was suggested that RS could use Forestry Commission lawyers in Scotland for their views if required.

ACTION: HS/NF to discuss with RS to take forward.

Guidance

Need to develop set of principles, the NTSG's initial aim.

With regard to a time scale, there is no immediate pressure from BSI publishing standard. Need framework for what we want to produce, including risk work and legal framework, risk and benefit of tree removal and broad guidance for the management of trees for public safety.

Need to note down areas for discussion, rather than finer points at the moment. Can bring to next meeting. Need to understand boundaries before start this.

ACTION: SR and NE to draft 'areas for discussion' document for discussion at next meeting

There is the possibility of approx £6,000 funding from English Heritage via Ancient Tree Forum. This could be used for drafting guidance.

Also monies from RICS and CLA has been proposed, which could assist this process.

Communications with the Press

A discussion was had about the how the NTSG should deal with media enquiries. If approached by the press, give own organisations position, mention NTSG but that you cannot speak on behalf of that group. This will prevent conflicting messages being sent out and confusion about the remit.

It was agreed that HS, as chair, should act as voice of the group. Where comment is being required/requested from the NTSG refer to reporter HS.

Insurance

It would be useful to engage David Hewitt at Lycetts for attendance at one meeting and correspondence as required thereafter.

ACTION: AT to try to get info from Zurich Municipal about cost of tree damage to insurers.

Composition of NTSG

The NTSG needs to develop Terms of Reference to cover:

1. What the objective is – to try to tidy up policy and guidance in the management of trees for public safety.
2. How often meet.
3. How it is composed and who is on it

A 2-tier process was suggested, with a wider grouping, which officially is the NTSG, but with a smaller group to focus on specific issues and keep the process on track.

ACTION: Write ToR for discussion at next meeting.

Possibility of using voting to determine status i.e. in focus or wider group.

Date of next meetings - 9th October 2008 and 14th January 2009