Homes England

The Housing and Regeneration Agency

A Standard for planting trees in the living landscape

Getting it right for trees Part 1

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Consider who – what roles – are influencing and impacting planting trees for healthy establishment.

Are there some weak links?

What is it about current practice that isn't working?

- The client(s)
- Quantity Surveyor
- Design team & landscape consultants
- Main contractor
- Landscape sub-contractor & team
- Landscape CoW – if they exist – or who is doing any proper monitoring?
- Management & maintenance teams

80 newly planted trees counted – but only 18 alive.
62 dead or dying

Knowing what to avoid

Do they know about trees?

- Poor specification & drawn details – the contract documents.
- Too many large specimens
- Poor tree handling and planting
- Planting in the wrong season (warning! standard JCLI)
- Soil compaction - site operations
- Underfunded and unresponsive aftercare

Knowing what to achieve

Is there a vision beyond being decorative?

- Think tree health
  - **Where on the site will trees live their happy long lives? What types for where? Damp lovers? Drought tolerants?**
  - **Masterplan for tree groups. Avenues can be mixed species.**
- Think people - cooling, air cleansing etc.
  - **Wherever there are social spaces, some trees will be essential.**
  - **Proximity to housing/work places**
  - **Walking & cycling routes**
  - **Must have a quantum of *large* tree species.**
- Think programme
  - **Trees delivered early – natural infrastructure**

Essential knowledge – Soil

Who is caring abut soil?

- Soil
  - Soil resource survey (greenfield sites)
  - Huge biodiversity (potential)
  - Ecosystem services (potential)
- Planting pits
  - Soil profile (topsoil 300-400mm max)
  - Rootable depth 1m min.
- Surrounding soil
  - Compacted?
  - Drainage?

12 multi stem birch dead. 1 alive
Podium planting – rootable depth?

Essential knowledge – site operations

. . . and is there any monitoring?

- Handling trees on site
  - Minimising time from delivery to planting
  - Keeping roots moist
  - Protecting trees from injury during moving
- Planting trees
  - Correct depth: roots - root flare - trunk
  - 1m circumference size for bark mulch
  - Essential branch pruning (crossing, broken)
  - Vertical placing
  - Tread
  - Watering

Essential knowledge – tree species selection

- Recent research
  - Sourcing genetic material of 6 species at Kew Gardens for 2090 (Kevin W E Martin , Henrik Sjoman ‘Evaluating urban tree population fitness for a changing climate: using climatic moisture index’)
- Ecosystem services and tree stress
  - Shading, regulation of water (flooding reduction), noise & wind buffer, places for recreation
  - Cooling, air cleansing, carbon sequestration – *dependant on* healthy trees’ evapotranspiration i.e. not drought stressed
- Natives and non-natives and nature recovery
  - Biodiversity potential matters more than whether native or non-native
  - Tree sizes at maturity
  - Seasonal spread

Celtis australis planted too deep, undergoing a slow death on the left; Celtis australis flourishing on the right. Photo Tony Kirkham

Essential knowledge – programme tolerances

- Planting season
  - ‘Before Christmas’ or Nov to early Feb.
  - Ditto replacements
- Responsive maintenance
  - Recommended watering from 50 - 70 litres per tree p.w. May-August, first three years.
  - Watering needs assessment. Different watering demands across site? Soils, exposure, tree species/ sizes?
- Costs
  - Water access on site? Below ground water tanks?

Concluding . . .

- Tree planting ***is*** done well on some sites – but very often isn't.
- What can help improve this?
  - Knowledge and skills
  - Joined-up working
- Professional bodies being active
  - Landscape Institute
  - JCLI contract - produced by the LI
  - Institute of CoWs?
- Monitoring as standard not exceptional

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Thank you