

TREES and DESIGN ACTION GROUP (TDAG)

Representation to the Independent Panel on Forestry.

Our urban forests, the trees and woodlands in and around our towns and cities, have a vital role to play in promoting healthy and sustainable communities. They provide numerous environmental, economic and social benefits that contribute enormously to the quality of life of everyone who lives and works in the urban environment. Because of this and the fact that some 80% of the UK population now live in urban areas, it is vital that the urban forest is specifically included in the scope of the Independent Panel on Forestry. Many aspects of the Panel's brief have considerable relevance to urban trees and woodlands, such as how to increase tree and woodland cover; options for enhancing public benefits from all woodlands and forests; public access for recreation and leisure; biodiversity; climate change and mitigation; economic development; value for money and cost effectiveness and engagement and participation of civil society.

The Panel will be well aware of the extent of research demonstrating the many environmental, social and economic benefits of our urban forests. It will also be aware of the increasing importance of these benefits as concerns grow about the quality of the environment in our towns and cities, particularly in view of the looming challenges of climate change. We would also stress the importance of working with these benefits in a changing world and the value, including monetary value, which can be achieved by integrating these benefits in decision making across all three sectors. There are new technologies such as i-tree which was developed by the USDA Forest Service which enables a valuation of the urban forest as well as quantifying its more significant benefits. This system has already been trialled in Torbay and further trials are underway in various parts of the UK. It would be very helpful if the Panel could support a national approach to urban forest valuation.

The Government sponsored *Trees in Town II* report published in 2008 provided a comprehensive study of the role and management of our urban forests in England. It assessed the extent to which local authorities (LAs) and other relevant agencies were undertaking a planned, systematic and integrated approach to the management of urban trees and woodlands. While some LAs had highly effective and efficient tree programmes, the overall picture was disappointing with many LAs unable to achieve even basic standards of maintenance and management. In response to this, the report recommended 10 targets for performance that it hoped all LAs would try to achieve within the next five years. It is hoped that the Panel will recommend the government initiates a *Trees in Towns III* study in

due course that will specifically assess the extent to which those 10 targets have been achieved nationally.

The recent Urban Tree Research Conference, held in Birmingham in April 2011 not only put a national and international spotlight on the value of urban forests, it was also a marvellous example of cooperation among the relevant organisations. Hosted by the Institute of Chartered Foresters the conference involved a partnership of most of the relevant professional bodies and organisations, including the Forestry Commission and Natural England. The event highlighted the importance of integrating and coordinating the work of natural and built environment professionals to promote effective decision making and actions regarding our urban forests. Future actions should include the production of a nationally recognised strategic plan for our urban forests within which more local decisions can be made so that all our urban trees and woodlands can be protected and enhanced to deliver the benefits which are an essential element in our ongoing environmental, social and economic well-being. We hope the Panel will also recommend a more integrated approach to policy regarding urban trees at the level of central government. At the moment, a number of different departments and agencies have some remit for urban trees and woodlands, but this needs to be coordinated and led by single government department or agency.

Trees and Design Action Group is an ongoing initiative that is actively promoting this integrated approach to the planning and management of our urban forests. It is a unique multi-disciplinary not-for-profit, non-political organisation with members from all aspects of the built and natural environment sharing a common vision to protect and promote urban trees. TDAG would like to reinforce its earlier offer to provide either a presentation or an expert panel to answer questions on the increasingly complex issues relating to the urban forest in the context of both the trees and their role within the urban realm, including all aspects of their role in the townscape.