Ten Point Action Plan
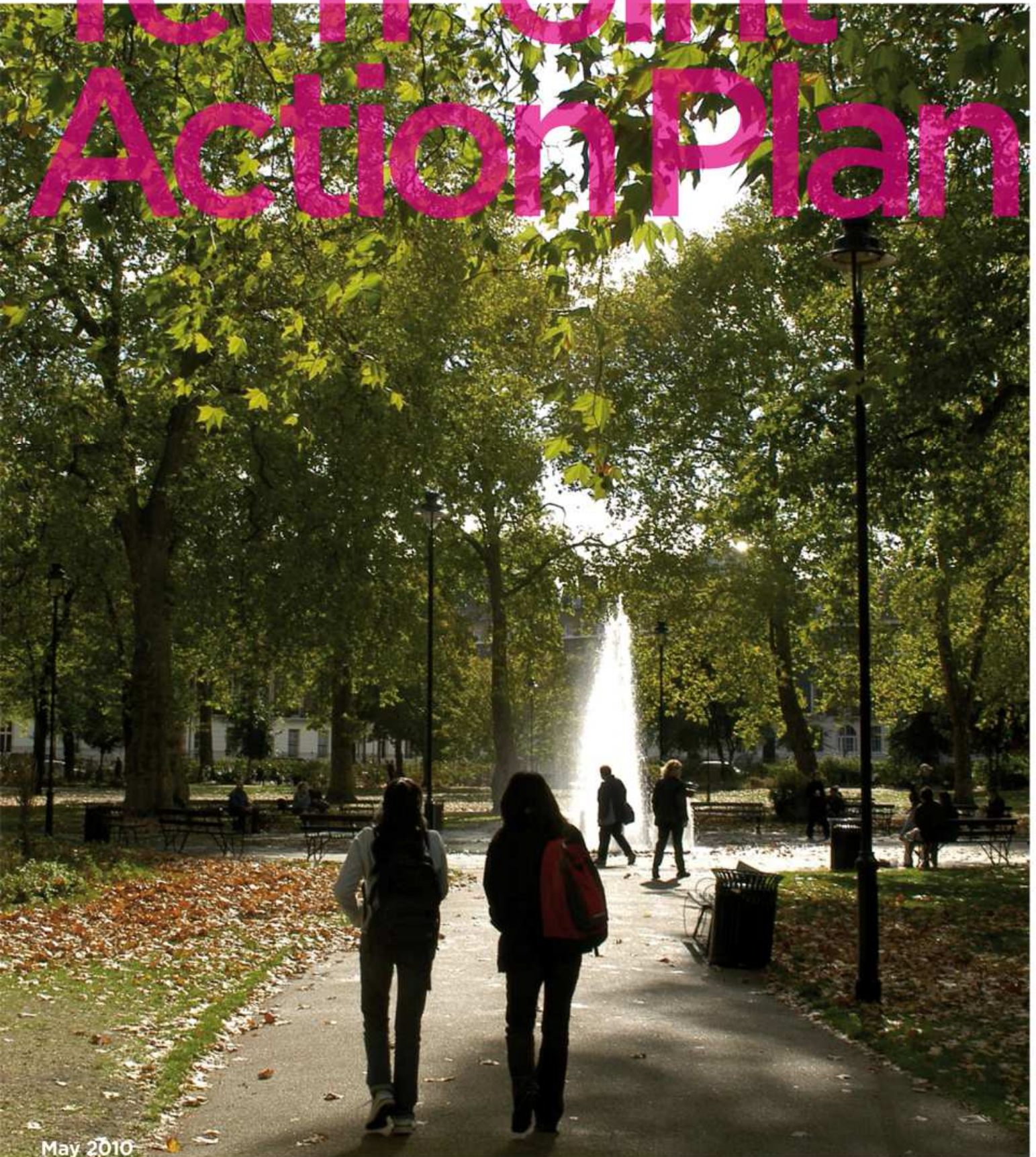
Trees & Design
Action Group

May 2010

We are committed to deliver the following 10 action points in order to protect and enhance the green legacy in our cities for ourselves and future generations

1. Promote integrated solutions to the urban realm

Trees can only be protected or planted if the right decisions are made at the right time. Joined-up thinking is needed between Government departments, regional, local and transport authorities, and a multi-disciplinary approach is required for planning, design and management. The Trees and Design Action Group's (TDAG) aim is to promote greater information exchange and consistency between all the relevant parties concerning urban trees.

2. Influence planning policies and tree strategies

It is essential that the local planning authorities, (policy, development control, enforcement and building control) have in place best practice policy and procedures to ensure that trees of high landscape value are protected and retained and that new landscape plantings are implemented and establish to provide tomorrows landscape. TDAG will work with government and all interested parties to ensure that every local authority in England have access to best practice in these important areas of the planning system. Urban trees are part of the overall urban forest and are the largest elements in green infrastructure. The two are closely linked, but it is important to emphasise issues relating to trees specifically and so TDAG will also highlight the importance of local tree strategies being supported by Regional Policy and LDFs core strategies. Guidance on urban trees should be firmly underpinned by legislation and managed through statutory requirements and enforcement.

3. Strengthen evidence based understanding and research

Understanding is needed with evidence-based research to put the "blame culture" approach into perspective, e.g. subsidence claims. TDAG will help collate and explain existing research rather than commissioning new research. TDAG will also seek to identify where the gaps are in current research and feedback findings to the research bodies.

4. Provide education and public awareness

TDAG will work to help alter negative perceptions of trees. TDAG will continue to highlight the benefits of urban trees and how they greatly outweigh some negative connotations (e.g. fruit fall, leaf drip). TDAG will also help raise awareness of how trees physically affect the built environment (subsidence, pavement upheaval etc) and how these problems can often be avoided.

5. Value, Funding and Revenue
The quality of our urban trees can affect the overall perception and competitive advantage of the urban environment. Trees can provide measurable economic, environmental, social and health benefits (reduced asthma rates and uplifted property values for example). Trees also have an asset value in their own right and a common system should be established for valuing urban trees. TDAG promotes a cost-benefit analysis approach when valuing urban trees, such as the recent results from New York City where it was found that investing $1 per annum in trees could return $5 in quantifiable benefits.

6. Publish streetscape guidance
A dense urban environment (both over and underground) means particular challenges need to be overcome to ensure trees are properly planted and maintained. TDAG will publish guidance on trees in the streetscape to help practitioners overcome some of these challenges

7. Produce and promote guidance for trees in developments
Development cycles are very short, (as little as 30 years for some buildings), and developers should be encouraged to include large trees in new developments wherever possible. TDAG will publish practical guidance on how to incorporate large trees into new developments

8. Develop landscape character assessments
Increased land values and densities means that trees and open space/urban greening can be neglected by urban planners. Aspirations for green space (and tree) quantity is expressed in various reports, such as those relating to climate change, well-being etc. TDAG will help collate existing guidance and best practice to help practitioners identify optimal grey/green ratios in the built environment

9. Identify and promote best practice for tree management and maintenance
Tree management and after care is essential to ensure the long term well being of urban trees. TDAG will provide guidance to practitioners on how to approach long term urban tree management.

10. Support trees in townscape
Trees can often provide continuity and maintain area identity even if buildings change. TDAG will publish guidance on trees and townscapes as part of its guidance on street trees and trees in the private realm which influence the streetscape. The guide will include reference to historic townscapes as well as contemporary planting to allow integration with the planning process at the regional and local policy level