

Making a difference



Over 240 attendees took part in the autumn 2014 Arboricultural Association Roadshow exploring BS 8545 *Trees: from nursery to independence in the landscape – Recommendations*, published in February 2014 and the Trees and Design Action Group's recently released *Trees in Hard Landscapes: a Guide for Delivery*. The talks, exchanges of ideas and general discussion stimulated a thirst for action and, for many of those involved, a contagious sense of confidence that we, that is every individual, can make a difference. Proceed with care, this article might now also involve you in the epidemic...

By Anne Jaluzot, Jeremy Barrell, Martin Gammie and Keith Sacre



Something new?

This autumn, the Arboricultural Association (AA) partnered with the cross-disciplinary Trees and Design Action Group (TDAG) to organise a series of seminars on the latest British Standard *BS 8545:2014 Trees: from nursery to independence in the landscape*, and TDAG's latest publication: *Trees in Hard Landscapes: a Guide for Delivery*. These one-day events took place in Exeter, York, Preston and Leicester in November 2014. What's news-worthy about this?

Firstly in addition to tree specialists, the audience for the 2014 AA Roadshow featured a good number of planners, designers (landscape architects) and some civil works contractors. Secondly the programme was also somewhat unusual: although undoubtedly derived from tree-related publications, the focus was largely beyond the tree. As Martin Gammie, one of the facilitators for the events, explained: "*as arboriculturists, we sometimes spend too much time looking at the trees when a lot more can be achieved if we know when and how to look beyond*". Discussions amongst delegates provided a powerful demonstration of this seemingly obvious, but not so easy to put into practice, idea – one that fundamentally boils down to achieving a step-change in the way we work, to embrace a much more collaborative model. Planners and highways engineers stood out in discussions and debates as two key parties who

required much more attention. Delegates further identified a set of 10 simple actions using the new BS 8545 and the latest TDAG publication for each and everyoneevery one of us to make a positive difference to the ways trees can be used to create better places.

It all starts with planning

Whether in Exeter, York, Preston or Leicester, forward planning and development control were the focus of a lot of the discussions. As of 31 October 2014, close to one in four local planning authorities¹ were still in the process of updating and finalising the key policies in their Local Plan. In summing-up discussion at the end of each Roadshow event Jeremy Barrell, who chaired the team facilitating the seminars, inevitably found himself encouraging attendees to *“find the planner in [their] forward planning team to make sure that these documents are specifically referenced in strategic as well as area-based policies.”*

In addition to strategic policy, examples provided from the audience highlighted the importance of pre-application documents such as development site briefs, design and access statements and development Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). The wording of planning conditions also became a recurring discussion topic. Jeremy Barrell often pointed out to delegates that specifically referring to consultants’ arboricultural reports within the planning condition was one of the best ways to ensure that the enforcement process would have strong “legs” to stand on.

Delegates built upon this by highlighting that the enforcement process could be made easier to manage if responsibility for monitoring was placed on applicants, providing that adequate regular reporting mechanisms to the local planning authority were secured. Some attendees also reported partnering with local community groups to help provide “a third eye and boots on the ground” to monitor the implementation of tree protection and planting measures for major development sites.

Conversations often started with an emphasis on and, indeed, bemoaning the reactive position tree officers often feel themselves pushed into – particularly at a time when local government is so pressed for efficiency savings and staff are increasingly over-committed. Participants seemed to drift naturally towards the conclusion that, however overwhelming the situation might be, waiting to be consulted by planning colleagues was unlikely to lead to meaningful improvements. *“If they don’t speak to you, you go and speak to them”* became a key take-away action from all the seminars.

Highway engineers: more friend than foe

The often antagonistic nature of relationships with highways colleagues was another major topic at the Roadshow debates. Whereas on planning issues discussions quickly generated ideas on strategies to navigate through the difficulties being raised, a dark sense of helplessness or anger would emerge and tend to overwhelm when highway engineers came into the picture. This was particularly acute for delegates working in two-tier local authority settings. Many explained that the highway authority they work with refuses to adopt new highways if tree are included. One delegate reported being recently asked to remove healthy and not particularly old or high-maintenance highway trees just on the basis of overall cost reduction measures. Highway engineers, delegates highlighted, often perceive trees as a liability that should be avoided...possibly at all costs. Some participants suggested that clear policies and political commitments could help change this perception and its impacts. But the fundamental belief of polarised interests between highways and arboriculture was, by and large, consensual. Challenges on this came from the facilitation team. *“How often do we, green*

¹ Source: Planning Inspectorate national database of Local Plan progress
<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/planning/planningsystem/localplans> referenced on 25/11/2014

*infrastructure or tree specialists, articulate the benefits of trees in respect to traffic calming, traffic management or sustainable transport strategy implementation?” asked Anne Jaluzot. She repeatedly pointed out that “out of the 32 schemes featured as case studies in Trees in Hard Landscapes: a Guide for Delivery, 75% were primarily or part-funded through transport and highways-related sources”. In these examples, the contributions trees make to support not just “quality of place” but also the movement functions of highways were a key driver for design choices. The landscape architect and/or arboricultural specialists involved in these examples had the appetite and ability to engage on positioning of trees and species choice to help achieve, amongst other benefits, reduced vehicular speeds, to facilitate junction recognition and way-finding, to achieve both soft and effective road users separation where needed, to enhance pedestrian crossing or cycling facilities and to improve bus routes and public transport users satisfaction. Anne invited delegates to make more use of the evidence and examples on trees and local transport issues to ensure this no longer remains a blind spot in the arguments that are typically used to outline tree benefits and shape the advice provided on tree layout and tree planting specification. The good news is for all of this, *Trees in Hard Landscapes: a Guide for Delivery* provides plenty of ammunition!*



The autumn 2014 AA Roadshow brought planners, landscape architects and tree specialists around the table – as pictured here in Leicester

Standards of practice: informed, context-sensitive and principle driven

Standards of practice provided another stimulating focal point for discussions. Poor understanding of nursery production systems, limited horticultural knowledge for plant selection and over-engineering of or ill-informed tree planting details were identified as primary causes of the industry’s poor track record in reducing the failure rates of newly planted trees, particularly in hard landscape settings. To the surprise of some neither the latest TDAG publication or the new British Standard 8545 recommend a definitive set of specifications. Instead, the emphasis is on providing a decision-making framework with solid references facilitating context-sensitive and informed decisions. Keith Sacre, who was the fourth member of the Roadshow facilitation team, explained this with a powerful list of questions based on the understanding that *“there is no such thing as a perfect ‘tree pit’ because no two sites have identical circumstances and requirements. Beyond obvious micro-climate, soils and available space issues, what are the accessibility needs around the tree? What are the load-bearing requirements and the access to utilities requirements? What’s the water table level? What is the local supply of materials like – this might make using certain planting specs more sensible*

than others? What constraints are there on the delivery approach – this also might affect the choice of planting specs? The variables are so many that the best thing we can provide you with are the key questions to ask and an overview of the options so that you can carve your own path and write specifications that will meet the particular needs of the particular site and project you are working on.”

Leadership and change: 10 ideas to make a difference

The need for leadership, particularly at a political level, was identified as one of the “fundamentals” required to achieve better success when integrating trees into the built environment. Different channels to engage with politicians were discussed. This included the role of professional bodies such as the Arboricultural Association, the Institute of Chartered Foresters or the Landscape Institute in engaging with relevant MPs, the opportunities for individuals to engage with Parish Councils and community organisations, the use of tools helping to articulate the value of trees in a local context, such as i-Tree Eco².

Importantly too, other kinds of leadership opportunities were discussed: those that each of us can seize to bring about small incremental changes that can slowly but surely nudge situations and yield noticeable cumulative outcomes. Here is a précis of the main ideas that delegates suggested – we find they are worth using:

- (1) **Spreading the word:** *“I’m going to start mentioning the new BS 8545 and Trees in Hard Landscapes to my colleagues and clients – bringing it up during coffee conversations, during meetings, in power-point presentations...spreading the word around, and trying to follow-up by email with sending the link (particularly for the TDAG guides which are free to download!)”*; It’s also good to know that, to make this easier, all key diagrams from the TDAG guide are can be downloaded freely from the TDAG website (www.tdag.org.uk/trees-in-hard-landscapes), and all drawings from the BS will soon also be freely available on the Barcham website (www.barchampro.co.uk)
- (2) **Cross-referencing in reports and plans/drawings:** *“I will now reference the BS and Trees in Hard Landscapes in all my reports to back up the advice provided, so that it becomes much harder to dismiss!”*; *“We’ll also put it on plans and drawing: on a construction site, that’s often the only thing people look at – references to the new BS, when relevant, need to be explicit on this”*
- (3) **Using the checklists:** *“I don’t always have the right questions to ask – particularly when I interact with other professions – the checklists give me a good point of reference to work more easily with project managers, designers, etc.”* Both the BS 8545 and the TDAG guide offer practical checklists on what needs to be done a various project stages.
- (4) **Using the case studies:** *“Many don’t like the idea of being a pioneer, so it’s really good to have examples of what can be done, or what has already been done...”*; *“For me, as a landscape architect, I can now pull relevant case studies and include them in Design and Access statements – it’s really convenient”* – *Trees in Hard Landscapes: a Guide for Delivery* features 32 case studies, and its earlier companion document *Trees in the Townscape: a Guide for Decision Makers* (also available on the TDAG website as a free download) include another set of 30 examples... There’s plenty to choose from.
- (5) **Producing case studies:** *“The model of using case studies to change hearts and minds is really useful – I think I need to create some small case studies in my own local area, and monitor outcomes”*. TDAG is aiming to put its existing library of case

² See: <http://www.itreetools.org/>

studies online sometimes in 2015. The goal is to keep adding more examples: all are welcome to send their suggestions.

- (6) **Use training & CPDs for cross-disciplinary proactive engagement:** *“Given what we’ve heard today, I am now going to go back to my professional organisation to ask that we proactively approach other professional bodies to organise accredited courses. We are all members of professional organisations here, aren’t we? If we all do this, then they will listen.”* The Arboricultural Association definitely noted this, because they were there, but the message can easily be applied to other professional and trade bodies
- (7) **Enhancing communication on the positives:** *“On our website, we detail all the procedures on how to deal with the issues trees can cause, but we don’t communicate much on the positives – I think we need to change this, and reframe the argument: we can promote trees on a cost efficiency basis, and provide links for people on existing cost-benefits models, and published publications like the TDAG documents and the BS.”*
- (8) **Engaging with universities and colleges:** *“Alongside my day job, I am involved in education with young professionals – I want to bring the new BS & Trees in Hard Landscapes into the college where I teach and make sure we build-upon it in what we teach”; “Maybe this is also something the AA and the ICF can also help with: making sure these documents or key ideas drawn from these two documents are built into the curriculum, not just of arboriculturists or foresters, but also of other professions, like landscape architects and engineers...”* Engaging with other disciplines, particularly at the stage where young professionals are being trained was considered critical to future collaborative working in the ‘field’.
- (9) **Bringing greater level of detail early on in the planning process:** *“These two documents give me something very tangible to refer to in planning conditions, pre-applications documents as well as during the pre-app meetings: I can say ‘we expect you to demonstrate adherence to the principles that are presented in here, and particularly this, this and that clause in the BS”*
- (10) **Get involved with TDAG:** *“I want to get involved in providing feedback in a few years and help enhance the documents when the time for a refresher comes.”*

Can you join in with the above or is there more you think you can do? If so, we would love to hear about it: feel free to contact TDAG (www.tdag.org.uk/contact-us).