

Plotting and planting in urban open spaces

A reflection on experiences and approaches of different urban tree planters working within local authorities.

Responsible for creating treescapes of the future – what will they look like?

Why am I doing this presentation?

- Plotting and planting new trees in public open spaces is a huge privilege with responsibility.
- How will the planting influence the flavour, feel and look of the spaces for future generations of people and wildlife?



Plonking possible- factors at play



- WCAF – UTCF large fund available for tree planting
- High yearly planting targets from many councils
- Lack of landscape design qualifications.
- Often no landscape designer sitting within the Council for guidance.
- Large workloads means people responsible for planting may approach it as a job that needs ticking off as opposed to a task that requires quite a bit of observation, communication, thought and reflection.
- Reliance on issuing planting works to contractors through devices can lead to placement issues.

Uses of public open spaces – always contested

- Sports
- Festivals- events
- Dog walking
- Play
- Sunbathing
- Protected views
- Recreation- nature connection



Purpose of planting- why?

- Increasing Canopy cover
- Successional planting
- Formal planting
- Naturalised woodland feel- creating new spaces for walkers
- Creating and strengthening boundaries and edges
- Orchards –community food
- Place making – who for?
- Cultural significance
- Planting targets

History and existing trees considerations

- Historical context – place names may influence choices of species.
- Cultural significance of different places - building on this eg Ruskin Park- planting trees that Ruskin wrote about.
- Local knowledge of history of site – e.g. area previously a pond will influence choices of species and positioning.
- Community perception of a place



Collaboration / consultation

- Some of the best ideas come out of collaboration – whether with fellow tree officers, friends of groups or other users of the park.
- Always collaborate/ consult with Friends of groups- their level of interest and expertise with trees will vary.
- Informal conversations can be really helpful
- Amount possible depends on time officer resource available.
- When working with collaborators completely committed to the survival of the tree- worth spending more time.



Beginning of the process

- Survey the site.
- What is the age/size the existing canopy – how long is the existing canopy likely to last ?
- What narrative does the existing canopy cover tell? Along with shrub layer, meadow level.
- Rhythm that is created by existing planting – intervals between trees – how does this inform the space and planting choices
- Sight lines – trees lining paths can be a safety consideration in some urban open spaces.
- Soil type- use of a soil augur recommended to make assessment of suitability of site for different species.
- How is the space used?

Other practical considerations

- Always look up and around when plotting a tree.
- Don't plant trees too close together.
- Don't rely on the contractor to interpret your order and make common sense adjustments- that is not their job.
- How will this tree be watered? Accessible to contractor in a vehicle- or a member of friends group?
- Never make a tree a point of conflict- do not plant a tree on a desire line.

Biodiversity & Climate resilience-

- Many community members are focused on biodiversity – often tree officers on climate resilience
- For longevity in canopy diversity of species is key- who knows how the climate models of now compare with the reality.
- We are in a point of transition – aim to plant native and non- native species- uncertain times.
- Known existing biodiversity in a space- also existing species in nearby spaces- creating biodiversity connectivity/ corridors across a borough – .
Eg Elms for white Letter Hairstreak butterfly – sighted in Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens



Creativity – left brain thinking

- Necessity is the mother of invention – lead to the biomes in Mill Fields Park – Hackney-
- Using more quirky stock.
- Innovation – planning /planting for the future
- Allow time for fully observing and sensing a space.
- Not possible – totally focused on getting the tree to maturity.
- Inspiration from other planting schemes and designs.



Success in community planting

- Planting smaller trees with community groups.
- Take longer to reach maturity
- But easier and cheaper to plant
- Good way of creating woodlands
- Can plant more quirky stock- not regular standards
- Satisfying or users of the open space.
- Good for creating areas of high biodiversity value.



Final tips

1

OBSERVE THE SPACES, THE AIM IS NOT TO FILL IN ALL THE GAPS.

2

PLANT SPECIES INDIVIDUALLY OR IN GROUPS OF 3 , 5 , AND 7 'S

3

DON'T BE AFRAID TO TAKE RISKS- PLANTING NEW SPECIES OR CREATING A NEW SENSE OF PLACE.

4

ENJOY THE PROCESS AND GIVE IT THE TIME IT DESERVES.

5

ALLOW ROOM FOR CREATIVITY

People who kindly agreed to be interviewed

- Rupert Bentley-Walls – Suffolk
- LTOA Tree Planting working group
- James Allen – LB Waltham Forest
- Katerina Handicova- LB Barnet
- Marcello White- LB Islington
- Oliver Stutter –LB Southwark James Robinson-Tillet- LB Islington