Trees and Planning – tools for planners and design teams

Chair: **Claire Stafford**, Planning Practice Adviser, Royal Town Planning Institute

From Managing Trees to Leading an Urban Forest – The evolution of Cambridge's Urban Forest Strategy 2026-2036
Matthew Magrath, Urban Forestry Manager, Cambridge City Council

Tools for Planners: 3-30-300 Principle in Practice
John Rose, Urban Forest Consultant, Treeconomics

Tree Value Visions Tool: A New Free-to-Use Tool for Councils and Communities
Alison Dyke, Research Fellow, Stockholm Environment Institute, University of York

Urban Tree Canopy Cover User Guide: Progress Report
Nicola Brown, Senior Officer, Green Infrastructure, Natural England

Assessment of Green Infrastructure Equity (AGIE Methodology): Plymouth Case Study
Martha Crockatt, Researcher (Ecosystems & Biodiversity Programme), Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford

Knowledge Partners: AA, ICF, IHE, LI, UDG

Please note:

- **Third party transcribing:** please note that this is not permitted and some people had to leave the meeting as they were not allowed to be at events where this takes place.

- **Sound:** while everyone presenting tries to ensure that their IT is operating well, it is not always possible to guarantee this and is beyond anyone's control. It can help if people keep their cameras off during presentations and only turn them on when they want to ask a question.

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS AND SPECIFIC REFERENCES

Matthew Magrath took us through the very comprehensive Cambridge Urban Forest Strategy. There have been some very positive outcomes such as cross-departmental collaboration.

Questions raised included:
How much of your efforts focused on what already existed in the ground and providing an environment that could grow those existing trees well into maturity as an approach that actually GROWS canopy.

What dataset are you using for Canopy Cover? - National Tree Map?

Have the different departments embraced this cross departmental working for the urban forest?

- From Matthew: Every department was consulted and we received general support, were there are opportunities, such as the recent development of our social value policies we prioritise engagement. Outside of opportunities we make progress when we have capacity. Continuity is important to overcome capacity issues

Did you incentivise front garden de-paving / tree planting?

- From Matthew: We incentive garden planting by providing free trees, the shadeways scheme is developing and we are currently looking at ensure work by different teams and organisations in this area are coordinated to reduce duplication - this takes time.

With the trees outside your control have you gone round putting TPOs on those that contribute to the urban forest?

Have you developed educational resources that would facilitate best practices for private gardens?

Is there a specific policy in the Local Plan that supports and promotes this objective?

Did you reach out to the Community Forest programme, for example at Marston Vale Bedfordshire?
https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/forest-marston-vale-design-guidance-spd

If a mature, privately owned tree that conflicts with development suddenly dies, what powers do you have to investigate the cause of tree death? When do you and when do you not deploy these?

How are you preparing for future climate change with species choice advice and potential succession (Cambridge will be one of the most hostile climates in the country with respect to moisture and temperature).

- From Matthew: We encourage diversity of species to be planted; however, I am not a fan of lists as I think they can reduce diversity rather than increase it - our approach it one of planning and serendipity - I have seen plenty of tree considered inappropriate for Cambridge flourish and vice versa

John Rose outlined how the 3-30-300 Principle can be used in practice with particular reference to Hartlepool and demonstrating the various ways in which 3-30-300 can be achieved on the ground.
https://nbsi.eu/330300-principle/

Questions raised included:

Given that the 3-30-300 guideline is not based on any published science and it also puts the focus on planting more trees without addressing the challenges our existing trees face, why not support a focus on resolving the current abiotic challenges to growing our existing trees well into maturity using science-based practices?

- Why not do both?

Are there many councils in the UK using the 3-30-300 rule?

- Some are using it without acknowledging it

Hartlepool is an interesting case study - has the council been sympathetic in terms of funding trees?

The 3-30-300 provides good base line evidence but how does creation of new resources and their management in forward planning i.e. guidance on how to proceed once engagement achieved

Fascinating work. Is any of this map-based data based on this project available online?

- From John: 3-30-300 Hartlepool Web Map https://felt.com/map/Hartlepool-3-30-300-TGr1gUbrTGKgRHKp9A1J6PD?loc=54.6729,-1.1975,11.68z

- Cecil K will be visiting Hartlepool in a few weeks

Treeconomics' recent webinar was great:
3-30-300 - Three numbers. One Town. Plenty to learn.
https://treeconomics.co.uk/resources/recordings/

Given that the Tree Equity Score is based on LSOAs/SOAs/data zones depending on nation rather than the building-based method you outlined, how effective will it be to guide strategies?

Is there a quick summary of how Trees fit into the new NPPF (or "Yes" Book) with reduction in SPD, Neighbourhood Plans. delegated approvals etc?

- Positive in the new NPPF: N3 c) Development proposals should c. Make provision for the long-term maintenance of both existing and newly-planted trees which form part of the development
- I did this summary from an amateur point of view: https://www.treesinchi.org/tree-policy#NPPF
- The NPPF now refers to "Green Infrastructure Managers

Cecil will be visiting Hartlepool in a few weeks

Alison Dyke outlined the work on the Tree Value Visions tool with an update on seeing how it might work in two additional cities.
https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=15149

How variable were outcomes following workshops, and have you got enough contextual data to understand what was behind the types of outcomes desired?

- From Alison: The demographics of the city population and the discussion during the workshop provides a lot of context, hence the usefulness of recordings and notes from the workshops

Were all the tree stories positive?

- From Alison: The stories weren't all positive, and negative impacts were included in the vision.

I'm finding this presentation almost impossible to relate to - trees are not people. What does it actually mean ?

- From Alison: This is interesting as it is probably where the LIFE framework differs most from most commonly used frameworks for relationships with nature. The living as frame was included to encompass biocultural relationships with nature that are not based on western thought. However, these types of relationships were immediately obvious in our participants stories, viewing trees as family members for instance. Our participants also found it easy to get hold of this concept and to use it in their analysis of stories.

Nicola Brown provided a progress report on the Urban Tree Canopy Cover User Guide.
This is very welcome and raised a number of questions about tree canopy cover.

Does NE have any plans to develop wildfire risk management in peri-urban green infrastructure?

- From Sue James: I know that Wildlife and Countryside Link is doing a short research project – not sure if NE is linked to this. Philip Box is leading the work.

How do we increase canopy cover when the housing targets require increase housing density and remove land available for tree planting?

Maybe I didn't hear correctly but I think the first speaker said a 1.5% increase was a realistic target. How achievable are the figures of 5 to 15% in the NE documents (sorry I missed some of this as the sound wasn't great)

Are there any plans to provide a robust national dataset for measuring canopy cover change over time ?

You mentioned the 5- year canopy cover re-assessment. Does the guide cover a standard for methodologies to measure this?

How are those responsible for increasing / maintaining canopy cover dealing with the impacts of climate change - new / more tree diseases, droughts, etc. Does this mean we have to plan for higher % failure of planting?

- The matter of species selection for climate change is dramatically complicated by the rapid increase in diseases induced by it - such as the recent explosion of Sooty Bark Disease, and especially in the south, on a tree formerly thought pretty much bomb proof. Trying to foresee such potentially huge consequences when looking at possible future trees species makes nursery strategy even more precarious than it already is. Even Planes now suffering the rapid colonisation by the Lace Bug, which like OPM has human consequences
- On our new woodland plantings 30% failure was common this year.

Interesting questions re tree and woodland canopy targets the original evidence report is here (2022):

https://consult.defra.gov.uk/natural-environment-policy/consultation-on-environmental-targets/supporting_documents/Woodland%20cover%20targets%20%20Detailed%20evidence%20report.pdf

Just to note that TDAG has produced two First Steps Guides on Canopy Cover:
Frist Steps in Urban Tree Canopy Cover: A Strategic Approach for Urban Forest Planning
and
First Steps in Canopy Cover Assessments: For All Working in the Built Environment at a Development Site Level.
https://www.tdag.org.uk/first-steps-in-urban-tree-canopy-cover.html

Nicola – we look forward to the final guide!

Martha Crockett outlined the Plymouth case study for the Assessment of Green Infrastructure Equity (AGIE) Methodology.

You can see the full Output-Report here: https://naturerecovery.ox.ac.uk/outputs/green-infrastructure-equity/

Again, this talk raised several questions:

Where did you get temperature [differential] dataset from for the AGIE work in Plymouth? thanks

- From Martha: The temperature data are from Landsat 8 Collection 2 Level 2 Surface Temperature scenes from the summers of 2020-2023. Full details of how the metric was calculated are in the Detailed Methods at the bottom of the page here: https://uk.treeequityscore.org/
- We have an agreement in Leeds that all new trees planted in the City Centre will have a minimum of 25m3 of rootable space.

Check the new Strategic Plans of all the 15 Community Forests. There are excellent targets for increasing canopy covers.

Various issues raised in the chat not necessarily directly related to overall discussion!

Is there any way that the BS for trees from nursery to independence in the landscape can be made publicly accessible? Many new development residents would like to hold their housing providers to account.

- TDAG has some guidance which is useful for residents and communities on how to plant trees, which shows how success can be achieved and
  Homes England will shortly publish a Tree Planting Standard along with two videos on how to plant trees and how to carry out their long-term aftercare . These will be helpful for development residents to better understand what their housing providers can and should do.

Defra's announcement of an expanded (£53M over 2 or 3 years) Trees Outside Woodland Fund for Local Authorities to apply for is excellent news?! This is when having your evidence to hand as mentioned earlier will really pay off as application deadline will no doubt be tight to get it going in 2027-28.

- Should there be conditions like climate resilient species and also does it include the real needs and costs of tree establishment?

- This year's won't fund larger nursery trees needed in many urban locations :-(
    - Why not plant smaller trees? They are known to establish quicker and better, require less water, staking, protection and are much cheaper if replacement is necessary. And attract less vandalism. I've never understood why standards are preferred to whips unless some kind of visual impact is paramount, which is a designer's criterion not an arboriculturist...
    - Received wisdom is they need to be a heavy-duty standard on highways to resist e.g. being driven over, and higher vandalism of smaller trees in parks (plus if whips, being mown).
    - As I understand it tree size relates to several elements in location...size of highways, likelihood of vandalism etc? The proverbial no size fits all?
    - From Sue James: We are about to publish a TDAG case study focusing on tree size at time of planting.

- How can trees be prioritised over utilities in a public highway context?
    - Trees are part of our critical infrastructure so we need an integrated infrastructure approach, just as we need to have SuDS for integrated water management?
    - But our highway authorities don't seem to have the tools to keep space from statutory utilities for future trees ...
    - But they are not necessarily in conflict... perhaps utilities have too much influence on decision making?
    - it's their statutory powers which seem to be the foundation of the problem.
    - Please see the recent Forest Commission Street Tree guidance on the TDAG website... it outlines all the statutory powers...but there is nothing in law about distance of trees and utility installations: https://www.tdag.org.uk/uploads/4/2/8/0/4280686/street_trees_guidance_forest_commission_august_2026.pdf and a new TDAG guidance: https://www.tdag.org.uk/trees-as-infrastructure.html
    - From Alison: This is something I've come across in working with local authorities and the level to which trees are seen as having priority over services often seems to be an artefact of historical priorities, such as the decision to route broadband cables under verges and footways in York that now restricts new and replacement tree planting.
        - Ditto here in Chichester. Highways Authority didn't have the power to insist on where in the public highway the cables could be run.

There was a 'chat' discussion about trees as critical infrastructure:

Please note that "infrastructure" is defined as a human construct while trees, soil and the non-human associates they host and support are naturally occurring organisms that are not created by humans. Calling these organisms "infrastructure" has facilitated their treatment as jewellery

or street furniture. These non-human organisms are integral components of the urban forest ecosystem.
If we want all this ecosystem services. we need to recognize the rights of these non-human organisms and what we MUST do to sustain and support their well-being as living organisms - NOT INFRASTRUCTURE!!!

- We have argued this many times...what you have said is understood, the key is to use the language that gets other disciplines to recognise the equal importance of trees.
- We work in a multi-disciplinary word and we, arborists need to work in this environment and this means learning other languages. If we are to get our points across and get support of other disciplines we need to adapt to their languages. If that means referring to trees as 'infrastructure' to get support, we need to go with it!
- "Infra" is a Latin preposition meaning "below" or "underneath". In English, it is used as a prefix in various contexts to indicate something being beneath, below, under or within. I am happy that trees, soils, nature underpin human life on earth and therefore to recognise them as essential infrastructure

There then developed a lively discussion about nature rights and the rights of trees.

Trees don't have rights - this is nonsense.

- Trees have all the rights that we give them!!
- This discussion is ridiculous - you cannot compare rights for people (women) with 'rights' for a tree.
    - Women didn't use to have rights either! (Incidentally Lewes Town Council Adopts Groundbreaking Rights of Trees Charter | Lewes Town Council
        - Lewes is a Parish Council with no powers to give rights to anything.
    - Funnily enough, for a long time it was thought ridiculous for women to have rights. It actually isn't that much of a stretch to extend a right to life to non-human life. Given the natural lifespan of tree is much longer than ours, I'm open to a discussion of the ethics.
        - I repeat - conflating rights of trees with rights for women is absolute nonsense. It is likely to set the case or trees and woodlands back rather than advance it.
        - It would be useful to explain why it would set the case for trees back...bring your thoughts to the seminar

    - There is quite a campaign out there about nature rights and tree rights!
    - Interestingly Right of Nature is achieving a high profile in Europe - Rights of Nature and it's an equal to Human Rights.
    - From Alison: I'm working on the cultural case for rights of nature at the moment, primarily focused on rivers, but there are broad parallels
- There's also a UK Rights of Nature Bill at committee stage in the House of Lords at the moment
    - I shall enquire of my niece, who is the Clerk [manager] of the HoL Tables committee [management of motions and amendments]
    - Yes...of course it is a private members bill, but the issue is raised...see also, https://www.sussex.ac.uk/broadcast/read/70280 Tree Rights Charter Toolkit
    - Yes, it is a good indication of the strength of the movement for rights of nature and takes a particularly robust approach compared to most existing legislation.

- TDAG is planning a seminar on this topic - it clearly needs debating and hopefully Natalie Bennett and Joanna Smallwood-Miller will be able to take part.

Hey everyone! Thanks so much to all of the speakers for the interesting talks! I just wanted to add that I work for Treeapp and we work with councils and other landowners to fund tree planting projects across the UK, helping bring more trees and hedgerows to the places that need them most. If your council or organisation has a site that could benefit from tree planting but needs funding to make it happen, please feel free to get in touch - jemma.mariner@thetreeapp.org