

Written evidence submitted by Kate Southworth (TPW0046)

WITNESS STATEMENT/ on Urban tree planting.

I am a Parish Councillor in Chalfont St Peter, Bucks. I have been working on urban street tree projects within the Parish Council in this area for at least 8 years.

This statement is my own, taken from my own experiences in tree planting and is not a statement of any views or policies of the Parish Council.

I have studied at some length the many benefits of trees to residents as well as the planet, and have written a tree policy plus research details for my Parish.

SUMMARY IN BRIEF.

Urban trees should be far more of a priority, this is where 84% of the population live. There are huge health and well being factors from trees in this environment, along with flooding control.

Street trees and green areas should become a top policy directive for all possible existing roads/verges.

Builders should without exception design with street trees, verges, hedging and green corridors.

Construction, new build or extended build, increases hard cover of land. This increases flooding risks, air pollution from more population, and reduces green cover. As mitigation, builders should pay a Green Deposit held before planning permissions are granted and refundable if they have complied.

Bureaucracy and inertia make tree planting a major struggle at Parish/Town local authority level.....simplify and place power to plant with local areas.

TPOs are badly needed to protect mature trees, which are 70 times more useful to clean the air and absorb run off.

Whips are of no use in an urban setting.

Grant applications are complex and local authorities need to access money for trees in some far simpler ways. N.B. many conducting this work locally are volunteers with busy lives.

The attitudes to trees should experience a culture shift....adverts? Articles?

1. Trees in urban areas should be made more of priority.

Increasing build, high levels of tree felling and hard cover of land, is increasing the number of urban flooding incidents, which have devastating results for homes, families and businesses.

Increasing traffic is leading to more polluted air with all that means for health of all, from developing babies in the womb, to the elderly. Pollution increases the rates of heart, lung and neurological damage. It also increases the risk of cancer.

We need more trees in urban areas. That is where most people spend their lives.

2. Cumbersome bureaucratic processes hinder (make seriously unnecessarily difficult), urban tree planting.

Make the process simple for parishes, or local town councils. Allow these bodies to plant on any green land even if owned by the county as long as sight lines and underground service checks are carried out carefully. Clearly informing County but NOT having to wait for months to proceed. Lack of response within a week to be taken as agreement.

3. Give grants to local parishes/town councils, for full standard trees. Whips are useless as street trees...run over by parking cars or vans, walked over, pulled up and sold by others! The only trees that work in this area are high standards with two or more beefy stakes. Larger trees need more watering care, but a Tree Guardian scheme, in which volunteers do this, can work really well, if the benefits are explained.
4. The planting of new trees is made a pointless exercise if the mature trees are cut down at the current tragically high rate by residents and councils.. mature trees are **70 times more** effective in clearing pollution from the air, far more effective in mitigating flooding from run off, sequestering carbon, or cooling the air. They must be protected or this project is pointless.
5. The replacement of felled trees if essential is poorly, (or not at all) monitored, and the requisite number and size of replacements is not followed in most cases. Country wide this must be vast in its effect.
6. TPOs are rarely granted. The rhetoric is always ,we do not issue TPOs until a tree is under threat..by the time an emergency TPO has been obtained, the tree has gone. It takes about two hours to fell a mature tree..usually done deliberately at a weekend, and once gone its too late.

No meaningful sanctions on Tree companies or residents. Tree surgeons should be more closely monitored, carry and display permission letters at time of work, and any agreement to felling should be displayed as with planning on the site for the requisite time. Local parish /town councils should be informed well in advance of any permission granted for felling, and indeed consulted.

The reasons to create a TPO should be far wider, including the health benefits of maintaining urban trees.

The use of TPOs should be a primary weapon to protect mature trees, in both private or local authority land. There is absolutely no meaningful commitment to protection of these vital work horses in the interest of residents health and well being.

7. Building contractors treat trees with little care. They are an inconvenience. Firm legal action should be followed, at present it is risible how builders are free to behave as they wish, dispensing with trees and hedges with no real consequences.

8. Utilities companies dig up verges, pile up spoil and machinery such that the ground is compacted around street trees and roots killed. There is no understanding of the BS 5837Trees in relation to construction.

The truth is, they mostly do not care, because they do not really understand the import of a mere tree; only serious teeth in a legal sense, or damage to professional reputation will in any way bring these contractors on side.

9. All new build should as a starting point, HAVE to put in verges and street trees, plus watering systems for three summers, (60% reduction in internal air pollution in homes fronted by street trees).

The shade cools summer heat and protects from the sun. The transpired water vapour makes air healthier, indeed one mature tree is equivalent to 10 room sized air conditioners, which in the hotter summers we are experiencing can be life saving.

The creation of green corridors across developments, with bushes and trees, to increase biodiversity and wildlife should be made mandatory...persuasion or good practice guides do **not** work...only financial loss, or in some cases financial gains for those who set a high standards in this field.

Contracts should only be awarded to those who have shown good practice, and made this happen.

This should be tied in with the insistence at governmental level on the creation of swales(run off absorbancy areas alongside car parks, areas of hard land or roads, with trees and planting),to help with flooding control. These are used world wide to great effect.

In new build the natural greed for profit can only be controlled by strict governmental laws, with CONSEQUENCES at a level that is meaningful!

10. New build in any setting, including extensions etc. as well as major building sites, will add to hard land cover. Builders should all pay a Green Deposit, paid out before any planning is granted. This sum of money to be held by the planning authority to pay for the planting of trees (number related to size of build) to mitigate for the increase in hard land from the build, also as cover against damage to local green areas, and to trees in the proximity of building work. At the end of the build, if all green verges are reinstated, trees checked and planted as required this deposit, or part of , may be returned, otherwise it is used to replace or mitigate for damaged green resources.

11. Planning laws must be shaken up to make trees and hedgerows carefully protected.

Final Comments

Whilst clearly there is a totally justified drive to plant massive numbers of trees outside built up areas, urban tree planting should become a far higher priority,

walking hand in hand with other planting.

It is in urban areas that **84%** of our population live, work and raise their families.

It is the responsibility of government and local governmental bodies i.e. Parish and Town councils, to facilitate the planting of trees to improve peoples health and well being, along with safeguarding biodiversity, and taking meaningful steps to deal with Climate Change.

Legislation must be tougher to reflect the emergency of Climate change and air pollution.

Increasing build over large areas makes the need to promote and protect trees even more critical.

Trees need to be seen as a community asset, essential in being able to improve health for all, and not to be dispensed with at the will of anyone individual.

The right to clean water, food supply and clean air is a basic human right, which other members of any community should not jeopardize by any act of commission or omission.

At the World Environment Day June 2019, the Secretary General of the U.N. stated that we had no time to lose in acting to protect our environment, in his words, “this is the battle of our lives.”

Local authorities, and government, have a huge responsibility, and must act with credible and extremely strong actions to protect mature trees and ensure very substantial planting of new trees both in rural settings, and urban where they are sound guardians of our communities well being. We owe it to our residents.

The future will judge us all, and rightly so, we must stop tinkering at the edges of this problem and take decisive action NOW. Tomorrow will be too late.

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