

## Written evidence submitted by Trees for Cities (TPW0062)

**The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is seeking written submissions, by Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> December, addressing any of the following questions:**

Trees for Cities (TfC) is an independent national charity that engages local people to plant and protect urban trees. We are a delivery-focused charity with 27 years' experience of working in partnership with landowners (local authorities, housing providers, schools) to plant and establish trees in towns and cities across the UK. Since 1993 we have planted over 1 million urban trees in 40 towns and cities, through which we have an established national network of partners.

Trees for Cities' response focuses primarily on the Urban Forest. Other definitions may vary, but the definition of Urban Forest used for this response is:

*The urban forest comprises all the trees in the urban realm – in public and private spaces, along linear routes and waterways and in amenity areas. It contributes to green infrastructure and the wider urban ecosystem.<sup>1</sup>*

### **1. Are the UK Government's targets for increasing forestry coverage, and tree planting, for England and the UK sufficiently ambitious and realistic?**

**EFRA should be more ambitious with their forestry coverage targets. By using recommendations from a range of expert sources they can be realistic and achievable.**

**We ask EFRA:**

- **to be more ambitious in their target setting, using current recommendations to support their policies**
- **to support metrics specifically for urban forest scenarios to ensure the national targets reflect the special characteristics of towns and cities, linking canopy cover to a more complex range of criteria relating to climate change response and involving multiple physical environmental indicators**
- **to support local authorities in adopting and meeting ambitious targets through Local Tree Strategies.**

The current European average tree and forest cover, both urban and rural, is 38%<sup>2</sup>. This compares with the target in the draft England Tree Strategy to increase tree canopy cover from 13% to 17-19% by 2030.

With our focus on Urban Forests, Doick et al (2016)<sup>3</sup> recommend that towns and cities with a current average tree canopy cover of 20% should be set to a 5% increase as the minimum standard over a 10-20 year span to ensure the benefits of trees are fully utilised. Forest Research<sup>4</sup> has called for all local authorities to commit to a minimum 30% tree canopy cover target for new development land.

A recent study<sup>5</sup> suggests that planting 20% more trees in megacities would double the benefits provided by urban forests, such as pollution reduction, carbon sequestration and energy use reduction; they call on authorities to change their perception of the natural resources available in cities "the less cities rely

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308749636\\_Introducing\\_England%27s\\_Urban\\_Forests](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308749636_Introducing_England%27s_Urban_Forests)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics/forestry-statistics-2018/international-forestry/forest-cover-international-comparisons/>

<sup>3</sup> Doick, Kieron & Davies, Helen & Moss, Joe & Coventry, Rob & Handley, Phillip & Vaz Monteiro, Madalena & Rogers, Kenton & Simpkin, Phil. (2017). The Canopy Cover of England's Towns and Cities: baselining and setting targets to improve human health and well-being.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322337570\\_The\\_Canopy\\_Cover\\_of\\_England%27s\\_Towns\\_and\\_Cities\\_baselining\\_and\\_setting\\_targets\\_to\\_improve\\_human\\_health\\_and\\_well-being](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322337570_The_Canopy_Cover_of_England%27s_Towns_and_Cities_baselining_and_setting_targets_to_improve_human_health_and_well-being)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/research/understanding-role-urban-tree-management-ecosystem-services/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://ideas.repec.org/a/eee/ecomod/v360y2017icp328-335.html>

on nature outside the metropolitan area and the more they focus lands on conserving nature within the cities, the healthier and more sustainable those cities will be”.

In addition to setting higher tree cover targets, we concur with recommendations in TDAG’s response to the England Tree Strategy consultation in June 2020, to use the following additional and relevant urban metrics <sup>6</sup>:

- Number of trees per head of population/household/square mile, square kilometre / number and size of trees in the population.
- Age and size diversity.
- Species mix and species diversity.
- Annual loss and attrition rate associated with routine urban forest management.

## **2. Are the right structures in place to ensure that the UK wide target for increasing forestry coverage is delivered?**

**Structures already exist in urban locations to deliver against a UK wide urban forest strategy. However from an operational stance, accountability and consistent resourcing are needed to incrementally support research and development, quality control, up scaling of production to meet supply and demand, training, planting and maintenance programmes.**

## **3. How effective is the co-ordination between the four nations on forestry issues, including biosecurity, plant health and other cross-border issues?**

N?R

## **4. Why were previous ambitions for increasing tree planting in England not met and what lessons should be learned?**

**Previous ambitions fell short because targets, timeframes and funding were unrealistic for national tree planting ambitions to be successfully met. The emerging strategy, should have sensible targets, a time frame that relates to the growth and establishment of trees, and adequate funding attached that is not only for supply and plant but for planning, management and maintenance.**

**We ask EFRA:**

- **to embed flexibility and adaptability in the strategy and allow experienced organisations to take the lead in developing and delivering local programmes**
- **to ensure the new strategy and funding programmes are sufficiently flexible to be interpreted by local agencies who can provide opportunities for collective learning from emerging good practice and deliver iterative improvements over time**
- **to relate the emerging strategic ambitions to a variety of local scenarios including the urban forest so that we can quantify what success looks like**
- **to ensure sufficient time and resources are available to monitor and adjust programme deliverables in order to manage expectations and risks in the years after planting.**

Delivery programmes that emerge from the new England Tree Strategy should come with realistic time frames for lead-in, delivery, planning, community engagement, site preparation and implementation of effective management and maintenance plans. This will lead to more sustainable outcomes, and is particularly important in an urban context, where there are multiple layers of negotiation required on contested and populated open spaces.

Centralised funding has often emerged with top down, overly prescriptive restrictions that focus too strongly on rural forestry. This can hinder established urban practitioners and operatives from using tried and tested delivery processes. For example, specifications required by central government based on a quantitative approach to spacing of tree planting does not pay regard to qualitative impact on smaller urban community spaces that have multiple interested parties to respond to.

---

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.tdag.org.uk/uploads/4/2/8/0/4280686/ets\\_consultation\\_tdag\\_submitted\\_response.pdf](http://www.tdag.org.uk/uploads/4/2/8/0/4280686/ets_consultation_tdag_submitted_response.pdf)

This prescriptive approach can frustrate the development and success of a programme that requires organisations along the entire chain to re set their internal mechanisms to meet supply needs and provide unfamiliar or un necessary ancillary materials such as plastic tree guards, where more sustainable alternatives could be used. Responding to prescriptive, formulaic programmes, can be at huge risk to smaller organisations, should the government change or drop a programme after a relatively short period of time.

Trees For Cities' planting season has shrunk to just 4 months between November and February. With warmer winters and drier, hotter springs and summers, the anticipated risk to losses of newly planted stock has increased. In simple terms getting the newly planted urban forest to survive is becoming increasingly difficult and requires consideration in a similar manner to DEFRA's Tree Health Resilience Strategy which focussed only on pests and diseases<sup>7</sup>. Establishment of forest stock particularly in its early seasons requires consideration to concentrated levels of climate stress in urban situations, severe losses of stock over Spring 2020 and anticipated future programmes. We need to quantify what is an acceptable level of loss is due to uncertain weather patterns, to provide sufficient time and resources to monitor and adjust urban forest programme deliverables and to manage expectations and risks in the years after planting.

This will require local risk assessments, addressing resources to restock, if appropriate, adjustments to expectations to allow for natural failure caused by drought and other weather damage, and adjustment to future management plans to allow for natural regeneration in place of replacement tree planting. Making space for natural regeneration alongside new planting will create genetic and species diversity in urban sites and provide a setting for strongest stock survival<sup>8</sup>.

## **5. In relation to increasing forestry coverage in England, what should the Government be trying to achieve? For example, how should the policy objectives be prioritised?**

With our overall priority on Urban Forest Tfc' response is focussed three on interconnected priority criteria that we can deliver against, working with local authorities and community partnerships:

- improving human wellbeing and health
- biodiversity and nature recovery and
- Communities.

### **a. Human well-being and health**

**We ask for emerging national strategy and policies to have a greater focus on towns and cities and to recognise the unique benefits that the urban forest brings to human well-being and health. With 83% of the UK population living in cities, the direct impact of the Urban Forest on the human population cannot be ignored in delivering a national tree strategy.**

Urban green space interventions deliver positive health, social and environmental outcomes for the population, and particularly those in lower socioeconomic status groups<sup>9</sup>. There are very few, if any, other public health interventions that can achieve all of this.

Areas with low tree canopy cover, poor access to green spaces and nature, and poor air quality<sup>10</sup> can all lead to poor quality health and wellbeing and human disconnectedness with nature<sup>11 12</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/710719/tree-health-resilience-strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/710719/tree-health-resilience-strategy.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/05/180516144706.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/urban-health/publications/2016/urban-green-spaces-and-health-a-review-of-evidence-2016>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.treesforcities.org/strategy-2019-2022>

<sup>11</sup> Urban Green Space Interventions and Health - A review of impacts and effectiveness; WHO 2017

<sup>12</sup> <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2016.1139534> Robert Fletcher (2016): Connection with nature is an oxymoron: A political ecology of "nature-deficit disorder",

Research illustrates that there is nearly always a correlation between areas that are socio-economically deprived and areas with greatest environmental deprivation. That correlation can be further focussed on trees, where all deprived UK areas demonstrate low levels of canopy cover<sup>13</sup>.

Attention should be focussed on priority areas with low tree canopy cover, poor access to green spaces and nature, and poor air quality<sup>14</sup>.

Whilst available space may be considerably less than in rural areas, we know through numerous studies that the positive impacts of the Urban Forest upon the human population will be considerably greater.

Recognising the multiple benefits and the cost savings a quality urban forest can bring at decision-making, funding and planning level will demonstrably create healthier, resilient and more prosperous cities.

As we navigate the uncertainties of COVID-19 an emerging realisation is how particularly important well stocked and well connected green space is for exercise and general health and wellbeing, especially when leisure choices are severely curtailed and our urban climate is changing<sup>15</sup>. There will be many lessons learnt from the COVID-19 crisis and those lessons should shape our future plans for the Urban Forest and green spaces to meet growing demands for outdoor exercise, healthy air, safer, cooler streets and green spaces, more biodiversity and more attractive places to live and work.

### **b. Biodiversity and nature recovery**

**To promote biodiversity and nature recovery we seek greater emphasis on de-fragmentation of city land through planned, connective green corridors between city spaces; we consider improving the use of existing linear infrastructure and left-over land will support a process of reconnecting the urban land mosaic with peri-urban and rural landscapes.**

The national tree strategy should promote opportunities for local strategy and policy to protect, manage, restore and improve existing green space, taking the lead from Forest Research's recommendations to use the Urban Forest to diversify tree stock and increase canopy coverage<sup>16</sup>.

Emerging strategy should consider the potential of cities and towns as a mosaic or network of fragmented green spaces that could be connected by linear infrastructure both natural and manmade<sup>17</sup>. Creating green corridors supports species dispersal and protection of habitat by creating opportunities for a connected network of habitat, including forest canopy. This is particularly pertinent for urban landscapes.

Land is precious in Britain's towns and cities but there are still opportunities to make the lowest value land work hard by bringing multiple benefits. There are pockets of leftover space, sidings, classified brownfield and contaminated land, all of which are ripe for new planting, and / or natural regeneration.

Planning for the urban forest should take use of greenbelt as an open and irreplaceable resource into consideration<sup>18</sup>. If Greenbelt were to be re-evaluated as natural capital or green infrastructure it could begin to deliver a wider range of quantifiable benefits and a useful land resource to create connective urban forests between urban and rural landscapes.

### **c. Community engagement**

---

<sup>13</sup> England's Urban Forests: Using tree canopy cover data to secure the benefits of the urban forest, Urban Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committee Network

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.treesforcities.org/strategy-2019-2022>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2020/sep/29/joggers-and-drinkers-what-a-day-in-the-life-of-a-leeds-park-tells-us-about-modern-britain>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/urban-regeneration-and-greenspace-partnership/greenspace-in-practice/practical-considerations-and-challenges-to-greenspace/habitat-fragmentation-practical-considerations/> Monteiro, Phillip Handley, Kieron J Doick, An insight to the current state and sustainability of urban forests across Great Britain based on i-Tree Eco surveys, *Forestry: An International Journal of Forest Research*, Volume 93, Issue 1, January 2020

<sup>17</sup> Richard J J Foreman, *Land Mosaics: The ecology of landscape and regions*, Cambridge University press, 1995

<sup>18</sup> <https://landscapepstorage01.blob.core.windows.net/www-landscapeinstitute-org/2018/04/li-green-belt-briefing-apr-2018.pdf>

**We seek an England Tree Strategy that is responsive to the communities it serves and we call on EFRA to support and resource compulsory adoption of local tree strategies to ensure community engagement lies at its centre by following a right tree right place approach in reaching cohesive national canopy cover targets.**

**We seek**

- **a unified and flexible standard for urban local tree strategies to ensure accountability and inclusion of bottom-up involvement in setting and meeting local targets.**

With an emerging national strategy setting the lead, it makes best sense for strong local tree strategies to follow suit, if there is a clear duty on local authorities to provide them.

Whilst we welcome the Government's recent introduction of a *Duty to Consult* with communities on felling of street trees, we are disappointed that compulsory urban tree strategies will not be introduced as a result of that consultation. That is despite almost 90% of those who responded to their survey being in favour<sup>19</sup>. We ask EFRA to widen the duty to consult beyond what has been introduced which applies only to the single action of felling, and only to a single class of urban trees, along streets.

#### **6) Are the right policies and funding in place to appropriately protect and manage existing woodlands in England?**

N/R

**How will prospective changes to policy and legislation effect this?**

N/R

*December 2020*

---

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/tree-and-woodlands-introducing-measures-for-felling-street-trees/outcome/summary-of-responses-and-government-response>