

Engaging with communities to support local tree planting and deliver change
Held on 18th July 2024. Questions, comments and references
Partners: AA, LI, TCPA, UDG

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Chair: Esme Jones, Engagement and Marketing Director, Trees for Cities

Public engagement to build a shared vision

Phil Bixby, My York Central

The importance of community engagement roles in Urban Forestry

Catherine Nuttgens, Consultant Urban Forester

Stonehouse Community Arboretum

John Parker, Chief Executive, Arboricultural Association

Creating our urban arboretum

Audrey Jarvis, Lewes Urban Arboretum Project

Useful arboricultural guidance for community tree projects

Keith Sacre, Urban Forestry Director, Barcham Trees

Partners: Landscape Institute, Arboricultural Association, Town and Country Planning Association, Urban Design Group

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS AND REFERENCES BY TOPIC (to be read in conjunction with the recording and the presentations)

The 'chat' was very busy, so we have tried to collate comments/questions/responses in some sort of order! Many thanks to our speakers for providing responses too.

Comment on so called experts

It is interesting that you say that the so called 'group of experts' approach didn't work. Too often it seems that the 'wrong' get into positions of influence???

- Response from Phil:
The problem with groups of experts is they set up the boundaries of debate with the language they use.

Funding and financial support for community engagement

Question: Is there financial support for delivery on the ground?

- Response from Phil:
We're currently working entirely voluntarily but are very aware that very soon we'll need serious financial input and support (Hello Homes England!)

Question: How do you navigate short timescales between funding acquisition and date required to have trees planted, and need for genuine community engagement in planning that planting?

- Responses from Phil:
 - Hard - if possible, get involved earlier - hence thinking about ways of engaging positively with the strategic planning process, rather than reacting to its failures.
 - Nothing too cunning I'm afraid - I'm very much at the point of trying to get the council to re-think the Local Plan process to get a rolling conversation going (that doesn't involve questionnaires or "submit free text comments which we will ignore"...
- Big energy/utility companies should be part funding tree officer roles in the LA...
- Do you have ideas of ways of doing so that aren't prohibitively expensive before funding is acquired? Or can be meaningful but done rapidly once funding is received
- Birmingham TreePeople (Charity) were able to employ a community engagement office and communications officer thanks to some funding, they're building on that now and now have just been awarded lottery funding so we can have an Operations Manager, a Comms and an Engagement Person for the next 3 years! exciting times ahead. Next, we need a Tree Planting Manager!

It's only possible because of the very hard work of the trustees which includes a person who is fab at writing funding bids and is comfortable offering to line manage people - they've been building up to this for some years.

Community forests approach:

The community forests do try to work with communities when tree planting is scheduled for urban/peri-urban sites. Interestingly nowadays there do seem to more CAVE folk around than there used to be - Citizens Against Virtually Everything.

Need common ground for dialogue:

What is critically important in all these initiatives is to find common ground as a basis for dialogue. Invariably we don't all agree on everything but having common ground gives a shared perspective on certain things. Makes moving forward much easier.

- Response from Phil: I agree - and the common ground needs to be dynamic - based on the inevitability of change and working towards the best possible change

Question: Was Demos's combined choice used as part of this programme? What was your experience of using that tool?

- Response from Phil: Ha h aha ha - yes! We worked a bit with Demos and this very much sparked a lot of work on our part (developing the community plan). But I'd say the online voting was less successful as it required people to put forward complex, sophisticated proposals (for people to vote for) and this was unreasonable expectation. But it was an interesting partnership.

Low traffic neighbourhood:

Question: Low traffic neighbourhoods have had a negative image but liveable streets a positive one when they are the same thing, how did you frame the conversations to get positive outcomes?

- Response from Phil: As per my comment on narrative - explore the experience and articulate it so you get away from the labels and work with what people actually want to do and feel.
- Islington are calling them Liveable Neighbourhoods now - not sure it escapes the negative connotations of LTN for the objectors though
- I believe this was the approach used in Birmingham too, Liveable Neighbourhoods rather than LTN
- How do we encourage people to not need their cars...having fun and games in Oxford on that front...despite the obvious benefits...
 - Car clubs are wonderful things for vastly reducing impact of cars...
- Better public transport and streets that are pleasant to walk along (including more trees, of course).

Past community engagement tools:

Really interesting - back in the 1980s/1990s Birmingham for People was a campaign group that put together an alternative vision for the Bull Ring shopping centre. We used *Planning for Real* in community consultations. <https://www.planningforreal.org.uk/>
Our women's group was very active too
<https://www.peoplesplans.org/putting-women-in-the-centre-womens-community-planning-in-birmingham/>

- Response from Phil: I'm old enough to have one of Tony Gibson's cardboard boxes of PFR resources! Your project sounds good - I'd say what we're doing now is similar but maybe broader - thinking around economy and other issues - and relying on other ways to "hold" the narrative other than 3D maps.

Reaching the disenfranchised:

Question: How do we reach those who are disenfranchised and don't engage with organisations for a range of reasons as they have potentially the most to be gained?

- Response from Phil: Our approach is to go where people are - whether that's a pub or a skatepark. And generally steer clear of formal "public meetings" as they put people off (and are often awful)

Responses from others:

- Neighbourhood Planning is supposed to represent local community view on Local Planning - from Localism Act 2010/11.
 - Response from Phil: My experience has been that NP is often very narrow in scope - about buildings and places rather than the lives which people want to live. So it misses out on engaging with people and groups in

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positive ways and gets bogged down in detail design or setting restrictions rather than developing positive vision.

- Fair point, and 'planning' tends to intimidate anyway
- There is a need for Landscape Led Planning - not to mention requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain and so on. Yes, vital to involve at start of projects

Influence of planning and planning reform

Question: Planning Reform Act and NPPF - conflicts...?

- Response from Phil: Not identified so far but thanks for flagging up the question - will read up!
- Sue James: we are waiting on further planning reforms at least for England.

Maintenance

Ownership and maintenance are so quickly forgotten when trees are planted

- Agreed - there is so little money available for maintenance. It is - of course! - vital to ensure new trees become established.
- Absolutely, care and maintenance are so important for establishment
- In Harringey Borough in London residents can adopt street trees to help water them in drought conditions. A great way to engage people and raise awareness of ongoing maintenance
- Birmingham TreePeople (Charity) were able to employ a community engagement office and communications officer thanks to some funding, they're building on that now and now have just been awarded lottery funding so we can have an Operations Manager, a Comms and an Engagement Person for the next 3 years! exciting times ahead. Next, we need a Tree Planting Manager!
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Honest sharing of tree knowledge:

Comment: And having people engage, design requires a basic understanding of what is a tree and how does it grow. If we share that digestible information with the communities we work with, that establishes a basis for all the strategies that enable tree long term growth.

- Honesty is the best policy to ensure that communities are fully aware of the positive and negative impact of trees within an urban environment
- Response from Phil: Yes - this picks up my point about "the Usual Suspects" - partner with knowledgeable people to share (and question) that knowledge and use it to shape vision in helpful ways. Very much so - again exploring a narrative allows all-year-round thinking

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Question: Interesting development proposals - were you open to people wanting more green/public space than the % you'd suggested? I ask because there are often boundaries to what a developer chooses to engage around.

- Response from Phil: The York Central proposal includes a park - so there's actually quite a lot of green in the scheme - but people wanted it outside their doors; less a case of % and more a case of how do we relocate cars and parking to enable that. The challenge to the developer is about movement and cars (but it's right next to the station so, hey!)

Connecting trees with people:

In writing my monograph *Connecting Trees with People: Synergistic Strategies for Growing the Urban Forest*, I found that many people want to do something tangible that can make a difference and caring for and about trees is a real tangible endeavour and its contagious.

Connecting Trees with People. Naomi Zurcher

<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-94534-3>

Need for narrative:

Narrative - not education. we often get to tempted to think that if everyone is given the same information as me, they will come to the same conclusion. But this isn't always the case. Experience can be a much stronger motive. So if you can find the narrative that belongs to those experiences you can better understand why people make the decisions, they do...

- Response from Phil: Yes indeed - it should be a mix of listening and talking and as Esme said, shaping conversations around people's priorities, not ours!

Value tree officers:

How to persuade a council that rangers and tree officers should not be outsourced to a private landscape company?!

Trees are assets:

Always a secondary point from history. Trees are assets

- Don't plant quantity, GROW quality!!!
- I seem to remember advising Sheffield that trees were assets not liabilities back when they were tendering, but sadly they were set on removal as we now all know.
 - What happened in Sheffield was crazy, they must have had one of the biggest trees and woodland teams in the country. We were not involved.
 - It was the Highways people. A while ago now.

Stonehouse Arboretum:

<https://www.trees.org.uk/News-Blog/Latest-News/Stonehouse-Community-Arboretum-Management-Plan-Launched>

Comment: Birthday party for a tree! I love that!

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Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Why does the Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain Metric seemingly give a higher value to Native tree species - even if actually less appropriate in many development locations and encourages lack of diversity?

- Because the wrong people wrote BNG
- BNG is based on a rather limited metric of native habitats, by ecologists, who generally only consider native species are acceptable.
 - Useful guidance on BNG and urban trees from the Bristol Tree Forum <https://bristoltreeforum.org/2023/04/01/biodiversity-metric-4-0-whats-it-all-about/>
- Andy Hirons is adding biodiversity to the TDAG Tree Species guidance
 - Well done Andy Hirons - looking forward to it - we tree professionals desperately need this!!
- And is the funding for the trees or the longer-term maintenance?

Native v. non-native trees:

John Parker - fantastic enthusiasm. Love the energy of your presentation and fully engaged me. I also learnt that we now don't mind non-native species planting, thanks

Comment:

John Parker made it clear that the 'native tree' debate had been resolved.

- If native trees are not such a focal point, should we be removing large swathes of fir trees to replace them with native trees? Surely, we are releasing carbon taking them down?
- Re native trees...they may also suffer with the changing climate and remember urban environments are arid deserts not temperate climates
- Not tree related, but as I support communities improve green spaces in urban areas, I encourage them to plant native species, as well as plants that make them feel happy, if they're new to the country, plants that make them feel at home. (of course, not if it's a known invasive)
- Actually, one has to consider what the site offers and how it can be adapted to accommodate tree growth before determining what species and what you're expectation are in terms of what the tree can deliver. The site and its potential adaptation are the starting point

Lewes Arboretum Town

Fantastic project Audrey - a real pleasure to see such collaboration across the community involving everyone including our budding young tree enthusiasts!

- Did you have help with your fantastic tree species choice? and/or did you leaf through some catalogues?

Utilities and street trees

- Don't forget to carry out a full ground investigation to ascertain if trees can be planted before engaging with the community.
- Audrey - do you carry out investigations before planting (i.e. utility checks, highway safety implication) or just go for it?
- Utilities companies have universal rights to remove any and all trees if they believe them to be a risk to their assets. They just don't want you to plant the tree and then it gets removed in 2 years by a utility company.
 - Sue James: we need to check on the rights of utilities in more detail. We plan to include this in the November seminar. I gather there are discussions about NJUG4/Streetworks - first step is to identify exactly what utilities can do and not do...albeit we have to have them onsite.
- Quite a few cities in Europe are constructing a common service trench down one side of the street and putting a linear tree pit down the other side. It's not cheap and takes time but will help to make their urban futures more viable.
 - We are trying to demonstrate this as the way forward in the technical street tree planting drawings that we are doing with Civic Engineers and others for MHCLG and, hopefully, Manual for Streets 3
 - Sue which method is being adopted for calculating soil volumes in linear pits and also potential for windthrow perhaps if linear strip is narrow...
 - Different answers for different approaches at this stage. Keith - do you want to settle soil volumes...?
 - We don't always learn from the past. When I worked in Telford all those years ago, all housing areas were serviced by a common service trench so that more trees could be planted in and around the new housing estates.
- Root deflectors are a good compromise for highways, for reducing the risk of future damage to the highway.
 - What do we think of root deflectors in the long term? I think that Trees in Hard Landscapes said to treat with caution

Guidance for successful community groups

Question: Audrey: Do you have any sort of guidance/steps for how community groups can get to the stage you are at in Lewes? It would be great to be able to work with some of our friends' groups at a more involved level, but I don't know how to determine what skills/people/engagement they might be missing to support the groups to get there

Community guidance for tree planting

Lancashire County Council have created a superb Tree planting guide that goes through roots stocks, tree sizes, everything (with diagrams and pictures) although very orchard focused. <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/952207/cheat-sheet-how-to-create-a-community-orchard.pdf>

- Great...we can put a reference in a forthcoming document that we are preparing with the National Trust as part of the Urban Forest Accelerator.

Sounds like a simple online guide could be easily produced?

- I was thinking this too - with links to other good guides, like that from Lancashire
 - Sue James: Yes, we are working on this and there should be something in a month or so
- Response from John Parker: Planting guidance featuring lots of nice posters etc. from the Arboricultural Association is free to download here:
<https://www.trees.org.uk/Help-Advice/Young-Tree-Establishment>

How much do people know about trees?

It's astonishing how little most people know about trees, even those who are enthusiastic about wanting more.

How can arboriculturists help community groups?

Should we, as arbs, be prepared to put ourselves up as willing to help? Probably signposted from the local authority. One or two for each borough? Working with the Tree Wardens? (I was looking for something to do...)

- That sounds ideal...if it is possible to give the time! The Tree Wardens seem to work very well if local groups are led by an arb, as I understand it.
 - Absolutely. We Arbs are the essential link between peoples' hopes and ideas to the tree and enabling her to grow
- A lot of good stuff going on down here with this sort of help from Forest for Cornwall. I'd be happy to help out with tree establishment projects, it beats working

Vandalism:

Following a successful planting event with the community, what is the best way to deal with vandalism of the newly planted tree within parks and open spaces. We have had some very successful planting events; however several trees have been vandalised.

- I was hearing that when the community is engaged in the planting decisions, there seems to be less vandalism. Does anyone on the call have any evidence to offer on this...?
- Response from Phil: My partner Caroline organised crowdfunding of 40 trees in local open space (match-funded by council) and (touch wood) none have been harmed - now four years old. The local involvement was really emphasised through the whole process.
- If subsequent vandalism is anticipated, plant trees that are more capable than most of throwing new shoots if effectively coppiced or pollarded, or even pre-coppice them after planting so there is nothing for vandals to get hold of...
- We find that vandalism is rare on our projects. I don't know if there has been a systematic comparison of projects where there is community engagement vs not

- As part of the UTCF, objectives are to plant trees within areas of deprivation, as such these areas usually have higher levels of anti-social behaviour.
- We have vandalism issues....usually a drunken prank. Not sure anything could avoid stopping these idiots destroying new tree planting
- When vandalism occurs, before considering replanting it's useful to assess as much as possible why the vandalism occurred and therefore how likely it would be to happen again if you replanted. I.e. was it because the space is being used by the community for another use, was it random, was it because of the location of the tree close to an entrance/other activities. If it's very likely to occur again it may not be worth planting again. On sites where we might anticipate chances of vandalism being higher, we have experimented with things like getting community members to leave messages/ribbons/wishes tied to the cage of the tree - showing that someone considers the tree important as Keith says.
- We've found having labels and messages on trees helps stop vandalism
- The local Tree Wardens did consult about planting in a densely populated urban park, noted and avoided the areas used for football, social gatherings and other activities, but still had nearly half our planting of several hundred small trees in mulched beds pulled up. Which led to the coppicing idea, which actually worked, nearly all showed signs of regrowth from the stubs, right up until the mowing contractors, seeing no visible growth and evidently not having been advised of what we'd done, mowed the lot... Other trees already established around the perimeter had also been vandalised, some clearly because of obstruction of light/view. However much you might leaflet-drop, hold meetings, talk to those using the site, those who hate trees and are disposed to act against them whatever are not likely to engage, and countering these is really difficult.

Are there councils which have let community groups plant street trees?

Keith - any good examples of where councils have stood back a little to let community groups plant street trees without putting obstacles in the way that vastly reduce the opportunities to plant trees?

- @Deanne Brettle @Tonia Clark do we have examples from Birmingham?
- I think Katy our Birmingham Tree People Engagement Officer and works on the Urban Forest Accelerator team and they're reporting on their experiences of the 2023 planting in Birmingham
- We have a pretty open relationship with Lewisham in London (Street Trees for Living - <https://www.streettreesforliving.org>)

Getting it right:

Keith is making excellent points here which will ensure that tree planting provides improvements that are sustained into the future

Mulch:

Does mulch around the tree stem/above the nursery mark cause damage to the tree stem?

- Yes, the mulch should be kept 10cm or so away from the stem, don't not volcano!

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Tiny Forests:

What do the presenters think of the Tiny Forest project? Sounds to have a different approach. Tiny Forest | Super Tiny. Super Powerful. (earthwatch.org.uk)
https://earthwatch.org.uk/tiny-forest/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjw-uK0BhC0ARIsANQtgGPPRCJRRJcp7DfK67joyldInrC8Stjs-uFOqu9sJdbxTZmfy7t6HxUaAgtaEALw_wcB

- They are not the best use of limited resources and there are many much better solutions.
- <https://www.agroforestry.co.uk/> Forest gardens...
- The first Miyawaki mini-forest has been planted in a low-income community in Leeds. Agreed they're not everyone's cup of tea but it had gone well with the community, as school children helped to plant it.
- I agree tiny forest might be good for community engagement but a lot of wastage and some poor advice depending on what you read
- Tiny Forests...I understand from some tree officers that they are really concerned about anti-social behaviour...???
- Try this [heuch-and-thurman-2024-reflections-on-the-miyawaki-tree-planting-method.-arb-magazine.pdf](#) (easytreesie.com)
- Some of the mini-forests planted in The Netherlands over 5 years ago are quite amazing. The BNG is continually monitored and is contributing much to the urbs.
- Tiny forest not good silvicultural practice...
- Tiny forest prices are insane (£36,000)- But we've delivered many for £8000. We spend a lot of time deciding on different trees. I think - like all tree's - it's the right microwood in the right place
- There is one near me. It doesn't look that different to the bramble hedges in the park, which will have cost less to plant (I don't think it was even planted, I think it just happened)
- Planting whips and dense mini forests are a sign the Politicians have won the argument, not the Tree Officers.
- There is a 48-year-old Miyawaki forest at Yokohama University in Japan that looks amazing.
 - Does it look good because of its location and therefore care?

Sue James for the Trees and Design Action Group