

BIG TREES VITAL FOR UK'S URBAN FUTURE

Trees and Design Action Group launches consultation



*New guidelines to increase the profile of large-growing trees have been produced to maximise opportunities to plant large species trees on new developments and promote the valuation of existing big trees. **Barbara Hall** explains:*

More big trees are vital in new developments in the UK's towns and cities. That's the call from a unique alliance that includes developers, planners, architects, landscape architects, urban designers, tree experts and representatives of the utilities and insurance industries who are urging the inclusion of large-growing species in the earliest stages of project planning.

Urban trees are under threat as never before. The report by the London Assembly Environment Committee "Chainsaw Massacre" (2007) highlighted the loss of street trees in London, indicating that overall more large species trees are cut down than are replaced. Trees in Towns II, the report on urban trees and

tree management commissioned by Communities and Local Government, echoes these findings for trees across England. This report encompassed the entire urban realm from streets and estates through to parks and private gardens. In particular the report highlighted the threat to trees from built development in all its forms. Particularly vulnerable to this trend are the larger structural trees, such as the London plane, which contribute to London's international reputation as a green, tree-filled capital. What is happening in London is mirrored in many other urban centres throughout the United Kingdom.

At the start of The Tree Council's National Tree Week, the Trees

and Design Action Group (TDAG) launched consultation a set of important guidelines on how to achieve an increased profile for large-growing trees in the face of perceived problems, especially from insurers, and the reported "chainsaw massacre", which is particularly affecting large species trees.

The group's third sector Green Paper, No Trees, No Future – Trees in the Urban Realm, was launched at a House of Commons reception, hosted by Tree Council Vice President Brian Donohoe MP, when Baroness Andrews, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at Communities and Local Government, officially launched National Tree Week.

The paper includes two guidance documents produced by the TDAG, the first called Guidelines on Large Species Trees in New Development – including maximising opportunities to plant large species landscape trees in new development and overcoming issues such as perceived threats to foundations. The other is Guidelines for Assessing the Value of Urban Trees – so that builders and planners can measure the financial value of trees in developments, including their value to the community.

The guidelines aim to promote greater recognition of the social, environmental and economic value of trees and encourage the integration of large species trees in new building schemes through early-stage collaboration between planners, developers, engineers, tree specialists and other professionals. To



Photograph ~Joe D Miles

highlight the launch of the guidelines, Rupert Bear helped children to plant a new field maple (*Acer campestre*) at the Places for Children Nursery on Places for People's Meadows Estate, Hounslow, West London. When fully grown, the tree's shade and microclimate will be an asset to future generations, especially in the face of climate change.

The tree was the symbolic first tree to be planted for the 2008 National Tree Week (26 November to 7 December). The species was specially selected for the site – in line with the policy "right place, right tree" – and chosen to reinforce the message of the Trees and Design Action Group's consultation document. The field maple was donated to the group by Barcham Trees, with Willerby Landscapes doing the heavy part of the planting for Rupert Bear and the children. Places for People, Barcham Trees, Willerby Landscapes and The Tree Council are among the many organisations that are members of the group.

"We want the built environment to accommodate new large species trees in new developments," said Jim Smith, London Tree and Woodland Framework Manager for the Forestry Commission, another member of the TDAG, and co-author of the guidelines. "This currently isn't happening – and it really is a missed opportunity.

"Many perceived problems can be overcome if only architects and designers take account of good practice – and talk to tree professionals at the very beginning of a project. Built environment professionals should obtain sound arboricultural advice at conception and design stage – at the outset. This is very important if money is not going to be wasted by planting the wrong tree at the wrong time and in the wrong place. Instead of thinking of trees as a cost, they should be looking at their practical and community benefits, which include cooling in times of high temperatures and reducing wind speed. Our guidelines on assessing the value of urban trees should help with this.



Photograph ~Mark Sammons

If we don't integrate large species in new developments now, there will be nothing replacing the trees that currently exist when they are lost from our towns and cities within the next 50 years. The only real opportunity to get new large landscape trees is on new development sites, where foundations can be put in to allow for this.

In London, for example, large-growing trees are not being replaced in Edwardian and Victorian developments because the buildings have shallow foundations on highly plastic clay soils. This will be an increasing problem with climate change.

Although there is considerable technical information available about trees, much of this does not reach developers, planners, designers and other decision makers. The Trees and Design Action Group guidelines aim to address this.

The Trees and Design Action Group is uniquely placed in bringing together bodies which have not normally collaborated closely in the past – such as insurers, designers, tree officers and utilities."

The Trees and Design Action Group is seeking feedback from planners, architects, landscape designers and other concerned professionals on these guidelines by 30 April 2009. The complete document can be found at www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-7KDEHU.



Case Study 1, photograph - Graham Paul Smith



Case Study 2, photograph - Michael Murray, Capita Lovejoy

TDAG Good Practice Guide Case Study No.1

Accordia in Cambridge is a Stirling Prize winning scheme which was commended for its innovative approach to incorporating trees into the development. This exceptional residential scheme close to the centre of Cambridge has been fitted densely into a site which formerly housed government offices and prefabricated WWII buildings.

The development is set in a strong and protected green structure of magnificent mature trees, and its legible road layout displays an openness unusual in modern housing. Over 700 mature trees have been supplemented with additional planting, and the scheme provides three times the open and wooded green spaces compared with developments locally, with the added amenity of a number of play-spaces. Some shared communal areas are exceptional, particularly one shared garden with imported pleached pear trees.

TDAG Good Practice Guide Case Study No.2

Valuing green infrastructure with a commercial angle that demonstrates the financial benefit of development designed to integrate green infrastructure. Arlington business parks include 25-30% of on plot landscape within the business parks which demonstrated a dramatic increase in rental income due to the improved working environment.

Arlington Securities has built its £800 million business park portfolio around the concept of locating business premises in high quality green space. It consistently devotes 30% of its sites to unoccupied, communal parkland, designing to formulas and rules that convey a brand identity through landscape.

The design of each "product" is determined in advance. For each new development, Arlington prepares a masterplan which lays down building plots, densities, landscape, car parks and infrastructure zones. The entire development is planned before any buildings have been started or any tenants have been signed up. The communal landscaping for the entire development is completed before the first tenant moves in.

High quality green space is vital to every Arlington masterplan. Central to Arlington's planning at any new sites is the condition that 25% of the plot area of all buildings must be devoted to green space (with typically 25% being taken up by the building footprint and 50% by car parking and circulation). The soft landscape component represents between 0.8% and 2% of the total build cost on a plot.