

Introduction

The Charter for Trees, Woods and People (the Tree Charter) was launched in 2017. Developed from stories collected from over 60,000 members of the public, **the Tree Charter** was shaped by hundreds of groups rooted in neighbourhoods and communities across the UK, and has been steered forward over three years by 70 different organisations with a wide range of specialisms in conservation, forestry, wellbeing, social justice and public engagement.

The Tree Charter has laid down the basis for action to increase people's capacity as a resource – for people to speak up for, take care of and input into policy relating to the future of trees and woods. The charter sets out the role trees and woods play in people's lives, the rights we all have to the benefits trees and woodland provide, and our responsibilities towards maintaining and supporting them. Each of its 10 principles seeks to articulate the relationship between people and trees in the UK in the 21st Century and have been supported by more than 130,000 people to date.

The Tree Charter UK Board comprises of organisations which have come together to continue to advance the charter's vision for a future where people and trees are stronger together. This means changing the way people think about trees, what we do to defend, preserve and care for them and how we all choose to value and include them in our lives from now on.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to proposals that could contribute to increased protection and enhancement of the natural environment, and help deliver the government's ambitious 25 Year Environment Plan. Trees in urban landscapes are of immense value. With 83% of the UK population living in urban areas, they are the main green spaces that many people interact with on a day to day basis. The ecosystem services they provide offer major, long-term benefits to both people and places, including homes and food for wildlife, cooling and shading in built-up areas, noise abatement, air quality improvement and helping flood water retention. Trees in residential areas and along pavements and roadsides don't just make an area more attractive with colours and wildlife; they've been proven to raise house prices too¹.

Summary

With the suggested updates and additions, the government's plans could help embed at least 7 of the Tree Charter's ten principles² into national policy, into best practice management guidance and into the fabric of society:

1. Sustain landscapes rich in wildlife
2. Make trees accessible to all
3. Celebrate the power of trees to inspire
4. Protect irreplaceable trees and woods
5. Plan greener local landscapes
6. Recover health, hope and wellbeing with the help of trees
7. Combat the threats to our habitats

There is a real need to improve England's urban forest through increased planting, public engagement and better protection for existing trees and woods. We welcome the government's intentions to address public awareness and concern over urban tree management while promoting transparency, good practice, meaningful data, and community empowerment, and accompanying stakeholder engagement. We do however **wish to highlight specific concerns** about the scope of the proposals - what they will mean in practice for professionals delivering urban tree management and, critically, how the objectives can actually be met without accompanying innovation or guidance or indeed without adequate resourcing.

¹ Large street trees were the single most important indicator of attractiveness in a community (Coder, 1996). In house price studies these were shown to rise between 5-18%. CABE Space, 2005 and Wachter and Gillen, 2006

² <https://treecharter.uk/>

It is not clear in these proposals exactly how duties put forward will be levied and how the new powers will be enforced. Many local authorities and the Forestry Commission continue to deliver good practice in urban areas in the face of significant budgetary pressures and constraints. Without appropriate resources we believe the proposals – in their current form - will prove overly burdensome and would likely have a **negative impact** on the future of sustainable urban forestry. We urge the government to take this chance to **develop and enhance** the proposals, to provide a **system that works** for both local authorities, government agencies, and the communities they serve.

The Tree Charter vision

We all need to do more to foster a love of trees and woods across society. The best way to ensure a positive future for trees and woods is to ensure that people across the UK will stand up for them. Enabling and encouraging everyone in society to access and enjoy trees should be recognised as a strategic action to ensure that the next generation will care for and protect trees.

Top-line position on specific consultation questions

- Q5. We **support** giving the public power to influence street tree management decisions by introducing a duty on local authorities to consult residents - but only if government provides adequate resources for local authorities to deliver this effectively and to analyse and act on the results.
- Q6 & 7. We **do not agree** with the proposed scope of the duty to consult - 100m² has been identified by government as a typo/error (10m by 10m square) but even a radius of 100m may be insufficient in certain circumstances. The scope is too narrow and doesn't adequately reflect the significance that some trees have beyond dwellings in the immediate vicinity. We **do not agree** with the proposal of closed consultation with a 'trigger' point (although there appears to be little difference between a closed and a full consultation in the proposal) – the level of consultation should be related to the significance of the tree in the public's eye, and any 'trigger' be based on interaction from consultation responders as well as residents.
- Q9. We **agree** it is appropriate that trees of special historic or cultural significance are subject to a more rigorous consultation process.
- Q12. We **do not** believe that the duty to consult will have negative impacts on development.
- Q13. We think consultations should be done on an individual basis **AND** also for groups of trees, depending on context.
- Q14. We **support** placing a duty on local authorities to report on tree felling and planting activity – but only if the government provides resources to facilitate this reporting, and commits to collecting and using this data for monitoring and to inform where resources and support are subsequently targeted.
- Q18. We **agree** that tree and woodland strategies help local authorities and the public to manage their trees and woodlands.
- Q19. We **do not agree** that best practice guidance would be sufficient for local authorities and the public. Support and advice from government is also necessary.
- Q21. There needs to be a realistic number of Forestry Commission enforcement officers to identify illegal felling and **ensure it can deliver** on the ambition of protection.

Detailed response

The 'duty to consult' locals about removing trees

The Tree Charter emphasises that people should have a right to influence decisions affecting the trees in their lives. Through **the principle of 'plan greener local landscapes'** the charter advocates that significant decisions around planting, management and removal of trees should be informed by genuine consultation with those who are likely to be impacted. In **the principle 'making trees accessible to all'** the charter describes how in woods people can work together, sharing experiences and learning from each other and their natural surroundings. Establishing a duty to consult would help to embed these principles into policy and practice - however we cannot emphasise enough that undertaking consultation is not an end in itself. The Government risks undermining the objective without ensuring adequate planning and resourcing: there must be adequate resources for local authorities if they are to deliver effective, full consultation and in turn act upon the results.

The Tree Charter vision

Sustain strong local networks of tree expertise

A durable culture of expertise in tree management and protection can connect and empower local communities and local authorities in maintaining a healthy tree population. Local volunteers, dedicated local authority staff and specialist tree and landscape consultants should work together to ensure informed decisions are made about their trees and woods.

Respect the connection between people and trees

In many cases the people who benefit most from trees and woods are not those responsible for their management. People should have a right to influence decisions affecting the trees in their lives. Significant decisions around planting, management and removal of trees should be informed by genuine consultation with those who are likely to be impacted.

Promote diversity and inclusivity in forestry and arboriculture

There are varied and rewarding opportunities for people of all backgrounds working with trees and timber, but these career paths are less well known and understood than others. Training opportunities and qualifications in tree and woodland management should be widely promoted as equal opportunities for all, and made accessible to everyone in society.

The 'duty to report' on tree planting and tree felling

The Tree Charter emphasises that we can only protect and maintain what we know is there and what has been lost. Through **the principles of 'protect irreplaceable trees and woods'** and **'celebrate the power of trees to inspire'** the charter advocates recording the significance of trees and woodland and mapping our tree and woodland heritage, as well as the decisions that are made about their future. The **principle of 'combat threats'** highlights the importance of knowledge – our greatest tool.

Establishing a duty to report on planting and felling would help to embed this principle into policy and practice - we support the idea of standardised reporting; the planting and felling of all publicly owned or managed trees should be reported in a uniform way regardless of location. However it is important that the framework and resources for delivery are provided. Government agencies should also have a reporting duty, as local authority-owned trees are only a small proportion of trees in the urban landscape.

Effective reporting requires a central government database with open access and mapping to enable monitoring, and a standardised government model for reporting and presenting data compatible with existing asset management software to facilitate data transfer (with provision for those authorities currently without asset management software).

The Tree Charter vision

Identify and map important trees and woods

We can only protect and maintain what we know is there. Important trees, woods, hedges and landscapes with trees should be recorded on a national public database that is maintained and updated to allow proper monitoring and protection.

Recognise trees as living heritage

The cultural, historical and emotional significance of specific trees, woods and parklands to people, locally and nationally, should be recorded and made available to all through a national database. Evidence of the cultural value of trees and woods should inform decisions around local planning and good management.

Consider our future tree heritage

The trees and woods around us are clues to the historical and cultural context that led to them being planted, protected, managed or ignored. Decisions about tree planting and management today should be based on an understanding of the area's past, and with a mind to the future. Decisions should be recorded for posterity in local records to give cultural context to the landscape for future generations.

Invest in research to find solutions to tree diseases

Knowledge is our greatest tool in protecting the woods and trees of the future. Support should be provided for research into causes and treatments of tree disease, development of more productive and resilient tree species, and the sharing of knowledge and data between professionals and through volunteer networks.

Tree and woodland strategies

The Tree Charter emphasises that a strategic approach that offers clear objectives can achieve the best results for trees and woods. Through ***the principles of 'plan greener local landscapes'*** and ***'sustain landscapes rich in wildlife'***, the charter advocates tree and woodland strategies being adopted by all councils, integrated with strategies around the environment and health and wellbeing and highlighting the wider ecological network. The ***principle of 'recover health, hope and wellbeing with the help of trees'*** makes it clear that healthcare and tree care go hand in hand.

Supporting local authorities to draw up Tree and woodland Strategies will help to embed these principles. We believe most authorities do an excellent job of managing trees for the benefit of their citizens and the environment. We **agree** that Tree and Woodland Strategies help local authorities and the public to manage their trees and woodlands, but we **do not agree** that best practice guidance alone would be sufficient for local authorities and the public. Some best practice guidance is already available but is only followed by those authorities who choose to adopt it.

The Government could encourage local authorities to incorporate Tree Charter principles within their strategies, as well as within a national strategy and guidance.

A template should be made available as well as central support (for example a Defra helpline), and training around bespoke local and regional strategies that consider the landscape, not just council-owned trees or council-owned land but trees in private ownership too. Strategies should also include environmental issues in the local context such as flooding, air pollution and climate change mitigation. In addition to biodiversity, other values should be assessed such as heritage, culture and landscape.

There should also be a national Tree and Woodland Strategy for England.

The Tree Charter vision

Take a strategic approach to tree management, planting and protection

Clear guiding objectives help to ensure the best results for trees and people whenever a decision is made that affects trees or woods. Every local authority should have a tree strategy developed through consultation with local residents and qualified experts. This should recognise the significant contribution of the area's existing trees, and commit to future planting.

Recognise the full value of trees and woods

Trees and woods are seen as valuable by different people for different reasons. We need a holistic planning approach that recognises environmental issues, development objectives, landscape character and the cultural, spiritual, and historical significance of individual trees and woods in management and development decisions. The full financial contribution of mature street trees should be calculated to inform local highway maintenance and planning decisions.

Create healthier environments with trees

Bringing trees closer to people where they live and work has been shown to improve their health and wellbeing by improving air quality, raising their spirits and encouraging healthy lifestyles. Local Authorities should ensure the presence of trees where people live and work as part of their health and wellbeing strategy.

Create health opportunities through cross-sector partnerships

Health benefits can be enjoyed from trees and woods that are performing other roles in the landscape. Encourage and enable embedded cross-sector working between the health sector and the forestry, conservation and green space management sectors.

Increase tree cover in new developments

Street trees and green spaces with trees enhance built environments for people and wildlife by intercepting rainfall, improving drainage, and providing shade, natural beauty and habitat. Their inclusion in new developments should be considered at the earliest stage of planning so that new planting can complement and enhance the built infrastructure.

Plan for the future when making decisions about trees and woods

The benefits of trees and woods are realised over long time periods, but are worth the investment. We need long-term planning and integrated management of trees and woods beyond short-term economic gains, with decision-makers guided and supported to achieve canopy cover targets.

Consider a Woodland Access Standard

Ensure no one is denied their right to woodland – [for example] by ensuring that no person lives more than 500m from an area of [ideally publicly accessible] woodland of 2ha or more, and no more than 4km from [ideally publicly accessible] woodland of no less than 20ha.

Provide clear good practice guidelines on planting and management

Informed decisions about species choice can ensure the best chance of newly planted trees thriving to create, replenish or buffer woodland habitats. Selection of the right tree in the right place should be supported through free-to-access, site-specific decision support tools. Knowledge networks should be created and maintained so that the skills required to manage woods well are available to all those who own or manage them.

Understand and protect the role of trees in supporting wildlife

All trees and woodland habitats play a vital role in sustaining other species, and their role in the local ecosystem should be studied and recorded locally to inform management and planning decisions and ensure the wellbeing of wildlife that depends on them. The unique characteristics of a landscape's trees and woods that enable them to support a wider ecological network should be recognised and protected through local planning and with government support for management of green spaces.

Illegal felling

We **welcome support** to help the Forestry Commission to do more in relation to tackling illegal felling. However, there needs to be **adequate provision** of resources to the Forestry Commission to enable them to enforce any new measures enacted.

In addition, the measures proposed require **further consideration and amendment**. For example, if the Forestry Commission is to deliver on these proposals there needs to be an appropriate number of enforcement officers to deliver and monitor illegal felling. The public should expect concerns reported to be investigated in a timely manner and while evidence is fresh. We also support the suggestion made by Wildlife and Countryside Link of an anonymous reporting hotline and online resource so the public can report concerns confidentially and feel protected and empowered when speaking out.

For further information please contact Kaye Brennan, Woodland Trust Tree Charter lead:



charter@woodlandtrust.org.uk - www.treecharter.uk

This response is supported by members of the UK Tree Charter Board:



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