



London Tree Officer Association Position Statement – Increasing Tree Planting in Response to Climate Change.

Thanks to increasing recognition of the need for action on climate and the roles that trees can play locally in adaption and globally in mitigation to this, a number of planting initiatives have recently appeared, supported by a wide range of organisations. Whilst the LTOA is in support of increasing the number of trees there is concern that some of these proposals are focussed on a rapid increase without considering the intricate steps that are required to ensure that trees establish and thrive.

The LTOA represents those who carry out the strategic and day to day management of trees in streets, parks, woodlands and other urban locations and are responsible for the protection of trees within private property and development sites; all of these components make up the single largest element of London's Urban Forest. Tree Officers are responsible for expanding this urban forest through integrating and establishing new trees into the landscape, irrespective of land ownership.

In response for calls to action through mass tree planting the LTOA is prompted to call attention to the barriers to rapid increases in tree numbers. There are **key considerations** to any plan to plant an extra half million, million or five million trees in London and it is important that this is made clear to avoid good intentions resulting in failure:

- Inappropriate time pressure can result in poor and hurried execution of projects, supply problems, legacy issues and compromised futures for trees.
- We must plant the right tree in the right place; inappropriate planting can result in trees being retained at a disproportionate and unsustainable cost. Site evaluation and design is essential in ensuring that we maximise the benefits that trees provide.
- If high public enthusiasm is generated to initiate planting, this support must be sustained throughout design implementation and future care, without this investment schemes may not succeed and risk enthusiasm turning to resentment of a failed project.
- Part and parcel of climate change is that future conditions may not suit the species and provenances we use. It should not be assumed that there will be adequate nursery supply.
- Woodland creation opportunities in London are severely limited. While the use of small mass-planting stock such as whips is initially cheap and early maintenance costs low, where to plant these trees becomes of paramount importance.
- Parks and open spaces provides refuge for the human population of London and is vital for other aspects of ecological diversity, events, sports, and fair weather leisure. Extensive planting is usually only possible if these competitive issues are effectively considered and overcome.

- Whilst Local Authorities may be the controller of the largest single element of land use in the city, these organisations are only responsible for approximately one third of London's space. Whilst Local Government will be a leading contributor to increasing canopy cover through tree planting private landowners must be called upon to do the same.
- Private land is seldom available for planting at significant scale for woodland. However, there is vast potential on private land for a programme driven by education, for citizen engagement in fighting the effects of climate change.
- We must beware of the difficulties raised by the simultaneous desire to develop land and accommodate an increasing human population while also greening the city. Green roofs and green walls are always welcome but they should never be seen as justification for developing the above and below ground space that is required for trees and the retention of significant permeable-surface green infrastructure. Likewise, off-site compensatory planting should not be seen as the default justification for the loss of either existing trees or to overcome design challenges that are needed to provide the above ground space and below ground substrate needed to support large canopy trees within development sites.
- Challenges to plant high numbers of trees over short periods of time can be counterproductive, especially if announced giving minimal lead in time to an impending planting season. Such initiatives can result in Local Authorities being flooded with offers to plant trees with little time to prepare, the results are either offers being refused or rushed attempts being made to accommodate the trees increasing the risk of failed projects.
- Revenue investment in tree planting is essential, and it is important that this investment is established in the understanding that planting and establishing trees is not a cheap or low cost exercise. It should also be recognised that proper investment can result in a much healthier urban forest that potentially returns hundreds of thousands of pounds in ecosystem services. Ultimately, without appropriate revenue funding London will not have the necessary number of Tree Officers and without this crucial resource we are less likely to achieve best management of the existing urban forest and aspirations to plant more trees and increase canopy cover will be wasteful and more difficult to achieve.

The LTOA supports enthusiasm for big action, however we also support understanding that tree planting is not a cheap, quick and easy solution to climate change. With proper investment and planning, supported by Tree Officers we can plant and establish more trees and we can play a key role in preparing London for a changing climate.

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