



According to Barrell... Urban trees let down by policy failures

According to Barrell ...

Urban trees let down by policy failures

From biosecurity to planning guidance to climate change resilience, Government policy on urban trees is in disarray.

There is no credible plan to protect London's plane trees from the lethal threat of plane wilt now in northern France, there is not even a mention of urban trees in the National Planning Policy Framework and there is no recent survey of the baseline data needed to plan our defence against climate change.

Remarkably, despite the widely acknowledged importance of urban trees to human health and well-being, there is no Government department with overall responsibility for national policy.

Government turmoil and confusion is evidenced by the recent archiving of the Natural England Green Infrastructure Guidance, a demotion that means it is no longer a material consideration in determining planning applications. As a tree consultant, I witness valuable tree loss on a daily basis through poorly administered councils floundering in the absence of effective national guidance on green infrastructure management.

Urban trees are in trouble and urban residents will suffer as a result. So the announcement of a House of Lords select committee on the built environment, with a remit to scrutinise placemaking and built environment policy, is welcome news. This is a direct result of the Farrell Review, which highlighted the sense of place created by landscaping as a central strand of sustainable city development.

In 2008, we gained a snapshot of the state of the nation's trees through the Department for Communities & Local Government Trees in Towns II survey, but its findings have gone largely unheeded. The need for and the wisdom of a new review is beyond doubt, so Trees in Towns III is an obvious priority for the next Government. More importantly, that research must be used to initiate real progress, not languish in the archives.

