



According to Barrell... Trees are let down by UK planning system



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The UK planning system does not work very well for trees. On the one hand, tree officers are often the first to go because of council cuts, forcing planners to become tree experts overnight, among their many other responsibilities.

On the other, opportunistic developers are destroying trees faster than they are replaced, favouring profits today in exchange for creating tomorrow's concrete slums. This broken approach is depriving communities of the trees that make places better.

As the Farrell Review of architecture and the built environment ([www.farrellreview.co.uk](http://www.farrellreview.co.uk)) highlights, proactive planning in areas such as Brent, Croydon, Birmingham and Manchester is delivering better places to live through strong leadership and retaining a core of skilled people.

But equally, within that same planning framework, these successes are far outnumbered by failures, reducing the quality of the urban realm. There is strong evidence that the planning system can work well, so perhaps it is the mindset of the people within it that makes the difference.

The traditional "them and us" mentality, which dominates modern planning, is a real barrier to efficiency and sustainability. It frequently delivers substandard outcomes and squanders scarce resources on unnecessary discussions and negotiations.

It is inevitable that councils will have to lose posts, including tree officers and planners, so how can service levels be maintained? One radical solution may be to view the planning process as a team event, where all parties work towards the same goal - a better quality of built environment.

The private sector has the capacity and expertise to plug the redundancy gaps, but that will only happen if councils instigate and embrace a more futuristic mindset. If austerity is the new reality, something has to change to deliver more for less, and it is councils that must drive this evolution.

