



According to Barrell... Tree protection must be brought up to date

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Protecting trees through tree preservation orders was historically a good idea but the modern reality is somewhat different. Similarly, conservation areas effectively protect local character, but to apply those same principles to trees is a step too far.

Legislation conceived in good faith is no longer fit for purpose because it is cumbersome and complex to administer, and it fails to focus scarce resources where they are most needed.

Tree officer time is consumed dealing with trivial requests to prune branches, most of which cannot have any significant impact on urban character, when real harm is arising through weakly administered planning control. The most pressing threat to urban trees is not average homeowners maintaining their gardens, it is developers running circles around councils trying to do too much with too little.

Although a desirable aspiration, the continued local government administration of tree pruning is becoming an unaffordable luxury. In contrast, meeting sustainability and climate change objectives through the effective protection of existing trees and the planting of new trees on development sites is an essential function that cannot be ignored.

It is obvious that shifting effort from processing tree work applications to development control would save money and better protect trees, yet this farce of wasting resources on pointless bureaucracy plays out across the country on a daily basis.

Our current statutory tree protection framework is failing to meet modern demands and the case for urgent review is mounting. If the Government is really serious about getting more for less, then a good start would be to remove the need for consent to prune and transfer any saved resources to reinforcing development controls on tree protection and planting. Streamlining UK tree protection is long overdue and there is unlikely to be a better time to do it.

