



barrell
TREE CONSULTANCY

According to Barrell...Government must seize Opportunity to reverse tree loss

Horticulture Week Opinion (2 September 2016)

BTC/117/2016





According to Barrell...Government must seize Opportunity to reverse tree loss



A new Government is a new start, and with it comes new hope that past failures can be recognised to shape a future with brighter prospects. Despite the losers' lament that change is inevitably bad, the opportunities for betterment are everywhere.

There is compelling evidence that green infrastructure - and specifically trees - has a profound positive impact on the health and well-being of ordinary people. But the past 40 years have seen a relentless erosion of urban canopy cover and the green links to the countryside beyond.

Modern development and farming practices have devastated environmental resilience, with habitat fragmentation being the biggest barrier to recovery. Linking isolated pockets of residual green through leafy roadside corridors and widened field boundaries managed for nature are obvious solutions, so why delay?

Efficiency makes sense, yet we remain shackled to an archaic tree-protection system that consumes administrative resources with very little benefit. A radical overhaul based on protecting the best and exempting the rest is long overdue. i-Tree is just one of the tree-valuation tools available to focus protection, freeing up resources for managing development, where much of the tree loss is occurring.

Highways are another source of harm and roadside trees reduce that adverse impact. The current highway trend of cutting costs through tree removals at the expense of wider benefits to local communities is in need of urgent modernisation, so why wait?

The mantra of localism simply does not work for nature or climate change. The vision and leadership must come from central Government in Westminster. We need a national environmental sustainability policy covering all trees, both urban and rural.

Weak local councils that lack vision must be forced to contribute to the national effort through compulsory tree strategies, with an effective enforcement mechanism to correct the failing.

Creeping assimilation through 40 years of compliance has dulled ambition and a natural order of Britain following Europe's lead seemed inevitable. Now the reality is a new order where Britain can set the pace, leaving the rest to play catch-up. The people are ready, but the politicians must take the lead.

Jeremy Barrell is Managing Director of Barrell Tree Consultancy