



A vision for Arboriculture  
*Article in essentialARB Issue 15*

BTC/19/2005





## A vision for Arboriculture

The Arboricultural Profession is fragmented with no vision, no leadership and no plan. The recipes of the past have served the industry well but have completely failed to provide an effective framework for professional practice. Jeremy Barrell believes the time has come for a change in emphasis and that individual arboriculturists, not organisations, hold the key to the rapid evolution of the Profession.

It was hugely disappointing to witness the nonexistent coordination of the response from the Arboricultural Profession to one of the most important arboricultural events in the last 10 years. The review of BS 5837 was arboriculture's opportunity to prove it had emerged from being a very successful industry to the status of a profession. Of course, as we all saw, there was no overall response on behalf of arboriculture; some commendable submissions by individuals and interest groups but not a whisper with a collective voice! So as individuals struggle to be heard, the evolution of arboriculture is being dictated by a volunteer committee of landscape architects, engineers and surveyors, with a sprinkling of arboriculturists. Even the most informed bystander could be forgiven for thinking, 'profession; what profession?'

For all of us concerned about our professional status, these are indeed anxious times and events over the next few years will have a profound impact on the way we are able to perform in our interaction with other professions. Arboriculture as a profession is not in good shape, that is certain. It is fragmented and uncoordinated; it has no vision, no leadership and no plan. Indeed, on past performance, there is a compelling case that it is destined to languish at the amateur end of the spectrum for some time. So is there really no hope or is there a way to drag ourselves out of this unorganised mess?

I am optimistic that it can be done but a significant change in focus is needed if there is to be a realistic hope of an effective profession in the near future. Historically, the emphasis has been on organisations, and individuals worked within their frameworks for the greater

good. Whilst this has proved effective from a commercial perspective, it has utterly failed on a professional level. There has been a complete failure to understand the professional arena and no corporate strategy on how to compete in it. Our traditional trade based organisations have had their chance and failed. In the absence of any sort of credible plan, I believe it is time for individuals to provide the lead and set the agenda for the evolution of the Arboricultural Profession.

Arboriculture, and the web of professional practice surrounding it, is changing very quickly, providing emerging opportunities that did not previously exist. I believe two of the most significant are:

- **Demand for professional services:** The demand for UK arboricultural consultancy has burgeoned over the last five years. Sophisticated consultancies based on providing subsidence, hazard and planning advice have prospered. These rapidly expanding sectors mean salaries of £40–50k are now achievable, which matches the expectations in other allied professions. For the first time, a career structure is emerging with realistic potential for progression up through the ranks of industry into the top echelons of the profession. This is essential to attract and retain the high calibre of people necessary for the healthy development of the profession.
- **ICF and arboriculture:** Traditionally, there has always been a rift between forestry and arboriculture, although the reasons are somewhat vague. The Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) has



## A vision for Arboriculture

the key to UK professional recognition, the Royal Charter, and arboriculture is defined within it. Despite this, the ICF has historically ignored arboriculture, paying nothing more than lip-service to its responsibility and made no serious effort to cater for our needs. However, over the last few years, there has been a dramatic shift in attitude towards attracting arboriculturists and properly incorporating them into the Institute's affairs. At last, there is a lead-body other than a trade organisation dealing with arboricultural matters in a professional way and offering the status that counts in the professional arena.

Two rather disparate developments that together have the potential to change the face of arboriculture forever. A rapidly expanding pool of potential professional membership and an existing favourably disposed Chartered body is a fantastic opportunity for the exponential evolution of the Arboricultural Profession, and yet progress is all but stalled. Not surprisingly, the existing arboricultural trade organisations are not going to advertise the benefits because of the threat it poses to their membership bases. On the other side, ICF are so distracted in their own proposals for merger with RICS that they have failed to develop this potential.

For arboriculturists, there are plenty of options but no professional body to guide us at the moment. In the absence of a framework for

action, it is very much down to individuals to work towards a future where eventually their collective presence will result in a coordinated direction. I believe that the ICF (RICS) is the vehicle to achieve this end; Chartered status is the key to professional recognition, the ICF are empowered to deliver this, they are now taking arboriculture seriously and an increasing number of arboriculturists are joining. The greater our membership, the greater our potential to improve professional practice and enhance the status of Arboriculture irrespective of whether it is with ICF or RICS. Obvious benefits from membership of a Chartered institution include:

- Chartered status on a par with those in other professions
- A career structure with multiple pathways from the bottom to the top
- Organised CPD monitoring and provision
- A mechanism for coordinating responses to important documents
- Compilation and publishing of detailed best practice guidance
- Provision and administration of a Code of Ethics with effective complaints handling
- Professional publications

That is the vision for Arboriculture. The challenge now is for individual arboriculturists to make it happen in the absence of an organised lead.