



Forestry and Arboriculture – allegiance or alliance?

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As the ICF moves towards a more embracing approach to arboriculture, we are pleased to welcome the first article from our arboricultural colleagues. Jeremy Barrell is an enthusiastic advocate of greater integration of the two disciplines and sets out his views on the mutual benefits of a closer alliance.



Forest or woodland? The words we use have a significant impact on public perceptions of what we do

Forestry and arboricultural perspectives

As an outsider looking in, my impression is that forestry is in turmoil, with traditional priorities being turned on their heads and everybody a little unsure as to what their role is or where it is all going. It was so simple when it was just about trees, but now people are creeping into the equation! In modern forestry, timber production isn't the priority it used to be, with the research emphasis drifting towards the psychology of visitor management and how the place looks. Uncomfortable times indeed for the traditionalists and old boys whose present status was forged on the ways of the past.

I am not such an outsider in the ICF, but my perception of it is much the same. This is a struggling organisation, not big enough to deliver effective member services and losing its way in the modern professional arena. For the doubters, stagnation is there for all to see; dwindling numbers, dissatisfaction from the membership and an inadequately slow response to the evolving demands of professional practice. A tough analysis

to swallow for those who have dictated its path, but I am not one of them so I have no performance to defend. It seems that forestry is in trouble and the ICF is part of the problem.

So that's what I don't know much about, although they are valid and real perceptions. As an insider looking out, here is what I do know about – arboriculture. The arboricultural industry – the people that do all the physical work like pruning and planting and tending – is in great shape. Huge public contracts, driven by ever-increasing public expectations for the quality of their living environment, have fuelled extensive research and development on the practices and equipment needed to meet those demands. In contrast, the arboricultural profession – the managers that advise, administer and oversee the industrial process - is not in good shape. It is fragmented and uncoordinated; it has no vision, no leadership and no plan. The recipes that served the industry so well have failed to provide an effective framework for professional practice. Arboriculturists have no collective voice and no professional home.



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Although my analysis is purposely pessimistic, an obvious conclusion for even the most optimistic observer is that past forestry and arboricultural ways are not meeting modern day demands, with future prospects even gloomier! So is it that bad or is there a way back from the precipice? Well, I think it probably is quite bad but not hopeless, so there is no need to jump quite yet! I believe there are alternative strategies to the past failures that might brighten up future prospects. An alliance between arboriculture and forestry is not a particularly new idea; more, there is a convergence of circumstances that are now making it much more attractive to both sides. Of course, it will require sacrifices, adjustments and compromises, but the benefits and advantages are likely to be considerable for all involved.



Both forestry and arboriculture have to deal with similar issues caused by public access close to trees

Mutual benefits

For arboriculturists, the ICF is attractive because it has a well-established professional practice framework with a significant body of members, practising at the highest professional level. Arboriculturists have no parent organisation through which to coordinate and express their concerns on professional issues. The new BS 5837 revision is an excellent illustration of this weakness. Probably the most important tree management document in the last 10 years and there was not one collective representation on behalf of the profession. Consequently, arboriculture has been force-fed a sub-standard document with no option but to accept. Furthermore, there is no professional code of ethics for arboriculturists; they have to borrow from other professions when a dispute arises! Perhaps most significantly, arboriculturists have no realistic hope of professional recognition without

aligning to a Chartered Institute and the ICF is the obvious choice. The ICF already has these capabilities; they just need to become more accessible for arboriculturists.

As for the ICF, well it is certainly in a rut and needs some new blood to invigorate the stagnation. Arboriculture has that resource; there are many fantastically talented and enthusiastic people out there desperately seeking a means of expressing their abilities. Trees are the passion for both camps and it is inevitable that closer contact will result in cross-fertilisation of ideas, a concept at the heart of dynamic development. Of course, there are not thousands of potential members queuing up, but there are probably hundreds over a few years, which will be a fertile boost to the obvious decline in vitality. More members, more enthusiasm, more new ideas and more money may not be the complete answer, but they would be a leap in the right direction!

If an alliance is going to be so mutually beneficial, then the obvious question is why hasn't it already occurred? Although there is no simple answer, the web of professional practice surrounding forestry and arboriculture is changing very quickly, with opportunities emerging that did not previously exist. Three of the most significant are:-

- **Increasing reservoir of professionals:** 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 has created a new and increasing reservoir of professional people looking for a professional home.
- **Attitude of the ICF towards arboriculture:** Traditionally, forestry and arboriculture have not been strongly aligned, probably because there is an obvious urban/rural divide creating a somewhat false separation. Although the ICF had the remit to include arboriculture, historically, it ignored that opportunity, paying nothing more than lip service to its responsibility with no serious effort to embrace its urban cousin. However, over the last few years, there has been a dramatic shift in attitude towards attracting arboriculturists and



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properly incorporating them into the Institute's affairs. Significant changes to the examination system have resulted in an increasing flow of arboriculturists into the ICF, which is sustaining a much-improved atmosphere between the two camps.

- **Shifting objectives:** As the focus of modern forestry shifts from trees to the people using woodlands, the attention of foresters is turning to issues of amenity, hazard and psychology. Similarly, as arboriculture evolves, its emphasis too is shifting from the practical application to these same issues. From two very different starting points, a natural convergence of purpose is occurring, which is revealing opportunities that were never viable in the past.

Obstacles

Some of the likely obstacles that may slow down any integration proposals include:-

- **Arboriculturists already have satisfactory representation:** There are already several organisations catering for the needs of arboriculturists so why add one more? Superficially, that may seem the case, and analysis in depth reveals that there are several very effective trade organisations dealing with the commercial needs of the industry. However, it is also a fact that not one of those organisations has control of professional matters across the breadth of arboriculture. Indeed, that will never be the case whilst the ICF hold the key to top flight professional practice, the chartered status. Although trade organisations may aspire to fulfil this role, they have not been able to deliver, and never will be able to, on this show-stopping issue.
- **Edinburgh HQ:** Logistically, having the HQ in Edinburgh is probably the most significant obstacle towards rapid integration of arboriculturists. Even in the context of modern transport, to travel almost the full length of the country, twice, to attend a meeting is utterly onerous to even the most dedicated member. There is no choice; if the ICF is to reap the benefits that arboriculture has to offer, a geographical shift is required.
- **Resistance to change:** My experience is that there is always tremendous resistance to change and I doubt if this issue will be any different. My answer to the critics of integration

is you had your chance and failed to deliver a winning formula. Change is a fundamental aspect of evolution and it is going to happen. Understand it and contribute to it or go back into the jungle.

- **Arboricultural perceptions:** I regularly encounter suspicion from arboriculturists about forestry and the benefits of an alliance. Although unfounded, probably born out of rumour more than any material divide, it nevertheless exists and needs to be understood. A little more open-mindedness from both sides would go a long way towards breaking down this rather artificial barrier.

How can ICF facilitate an alliance?

My perception is that the ICF is running out of options whereas arboriculture still has other choices, the Institute of Biology and RICS being two obvious alternatives. As the ICF has most to gain from this alliance, it is likely that the majority of the determination to make it work will have to come from foresters. Here are a few ideas that might help:-

- **Be welcoming:** It sounds simple, but a friendly and accessible point of contact is an essential element of fostering improved relations. Arboriculturists are understandably anxious about venturing into unknown territory. The ICF is obviously home for foresters but, from the outside, entry can seem quite formidable. James Ogilvy made a significant step in dispelling these anxieties by speaking at the last AA Conference. More of the same will establish a familiarity, which will reassure the doubters in the short term and deliver new members soon after.
- **New debate on trees and woodlands:** At the recent southeast AGM, Derek Patch brought up the issue of public perceptions created by the words 'forestry' and 'arboriculture'. 'Forestry' conjures up images of trees being felled and timber being processed; historically correct, but it no longer effectively portrays the modern forestry role. 'Arboriculture' is equally unenlightening about what arboriculturists do. The very word has the kiss of death because it is hard to read, say and remember, as the numerous variations we see confirms (arborealists, agriculturist, arborologist, etc)! As Derek pointed out, our business is about 'trees' and 'woodlands'; these words do create a



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more accurate image of what we do so why isn't that reflected in what we call ourselves? Similarly, in a recent AA Newsletter article, John Flannigan called for a national strategy for amenity trees, possibly administered by the FC in parallel with their forestry responsibilities. None of us are moving with the times; a review of the words we use as part of wider debate on a national strategy for trees is needed and the ICF is the obvious host for those discussions. An integrated approach to a shared problem is an effective way of bringing people together.

- **Collaborative projects:** There are already enough arboriculturist members to set up a working party to identify projects that could be administered by the ICF. If the momentum that has been achieved is to be maintained, it will be important to be able to demonstrate to prospective members that progress is being made. Arboriculture is crying out for a definition of good practice standards, which is a product that none of the trade organisations are empowered to deliver. Similarly, the failure of the latest revision of BS 5837 to meet professional expectations and its future development is a major issue that must be administered by the profession. These are two obvious collaborative projects whose natural home is with the ICF and would dramatically raise its profile in the arboricultural world.

Although I have presented this as a possible course of action, the reality is that it is already happening and the main issue now is about speeding up the process. For the last few years, there has been a steady stream of arboriculturists passing the Part II test and joining the chartered ranks. I believe this is good for the ICF and it is in everyone's best interests to make sure the trend continues. It seems inevitable that the future for both forestry and arboriculture will be together, so the sooner we all start to adopt that mindset, the sooner we will see if

this alliance can deliver the benefits that seem so promising.

The potential of an alliance between forestry and arboriculture

Figure 1 is simplistic and should only be taken as illustrative rather than accurate to the last detail. The horizontal axis represents time over the last hundred years or so. The vertical axis represents the concept of increasing development/achievement on a professional level. There is no specific unit, just a gradation from the origin upwards. It is a broad measure that could reflect any number of criteria including research, salaries, best practice, standing in relation to other professions, etc. The red line shows the best that can be achieved at a particular time and increases more steeply in more recent history to reflect rapid technological progress. Note that neither camp gets close to the objective, as there is always room for improvement.

The green line is forestry, which starts slowly but in 1919, receives a significant boost with the formation of the FC. That heralded a period of significant professional development that lasted almost to the present day. However, as I set out in this article, it has peaked in the last 10 years and seems to be in decline. Although progress was similarly slow for arboriculture, its boost did not come until the Town & Country Planning Act 1947, which proved to be the driving force for most modern arboricultural consultancy. Although still lacking a professional practice framework, arboriculture is going upwards in a big way and will continue to do so in the near future. The black dashed line is the average of forestry and arboriculture on their separate paths, where the poor performance of one drags the combined effort down. However, if integration occurs through an alliance, the combined performance is added rather than averaged. The synergy of the two creating a significantly greater potential (black dotted line) than their individual efforts.



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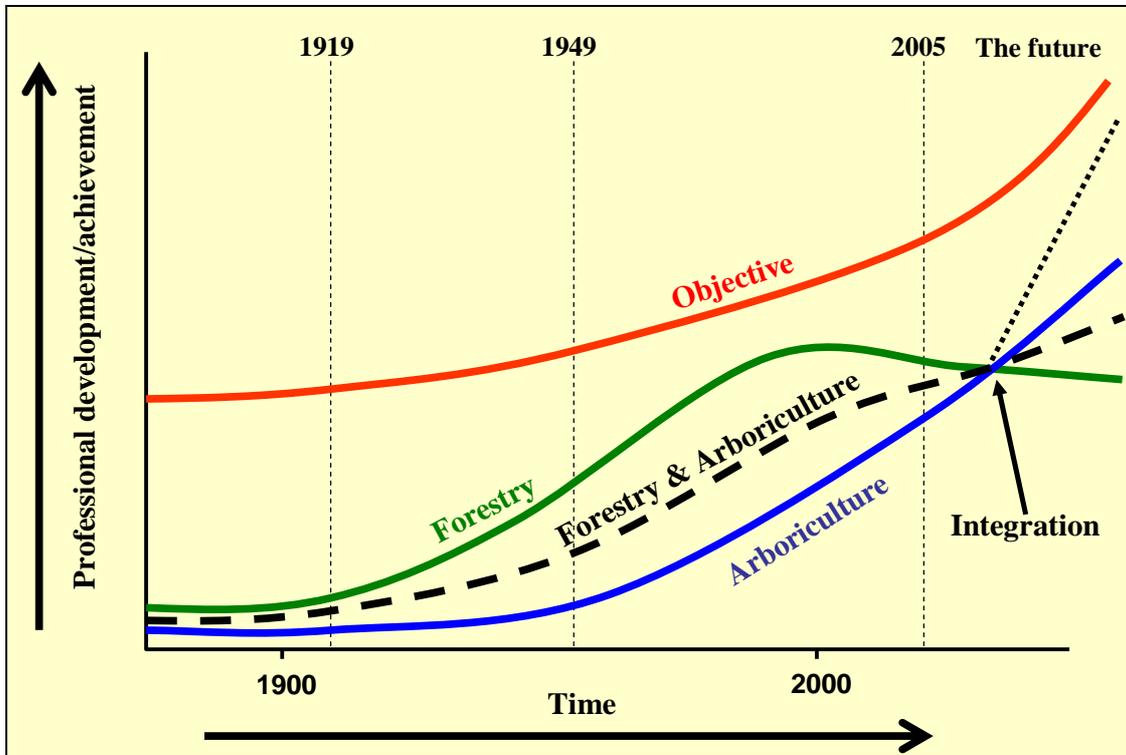


Figure 1: Overview of the professional development of forestry and arboriculture

Jeremy Barrell; a blindingly quick profile!

Jeremy Barrell has been Chartered since 1982 and a Fellow since 1997. He had over 20 years of tree contracting experience before focusing on arboricultural consultancy in 1995. His company, Barrell Tree Consultancy, is now one of the main UK Practices specialising in legal and planning tree issues, with five consultants. In 2001, he joined the ranks of Shigo, Mattheck, Biddle and Lonsdale by being honoured with the AA Award in recognition of his outstanding contribution to arboriculture. This included the conception and publication of two internationally used methods of assessing trees; SULE in 1983 and, more recently, TreeAZ in 2000. He was also responsible for the first Shigo workshop in the UK and still presents the only international report writing workshop for arboriculturists. Last year, Jeremy delivered papers at conferences in the USA and New Zealand, and is booked to present a three-week workshop series in Australia this summer. He has authored 26 technical papers and articles on tree management.

