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Barrell on ... being shown up by the US

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## Barrell on ... being shown up by the US



It was with some unease that the assembled wisdom of UK arboriculture faced a lesson on using urban trees in climate adaptation from the Americans at the recent Arboricultural Association conference in Exeter.

Matthew Wells, director of tree preservation in New York City, explained how his team had secured funding of \$220m (about £134m) to plant and maintain one million trees as part of its climate change and sustainability strategy. Furthermore, New York's canopy cover is 24 per cent with 5.2 million trees; it is 74 per cent stocked and ranked fifth in the US league of greenest cities.

Having such statistics is essential to plan for climate adaptation, so how do we fare in the UK? The Forestry Commission (FC) has been charged with overseeing climate mitigation and adaptation, through the Government's flagship policy, of England's trees, woods and forests. The FC is doing a great job in combating the effects of greenhouse gasses by planting more woodlands and funding research into how we can do better.

Indeed, it has just started a five-year survey of woodlands for the National Forest Inventory, justified because "accurate, up-to-date information" is essential to manage this "major national resource".

Although our urban tree resource is similar in scale to the forest estate, the FC is showing no such leadership or commitment to documenting and exploring its adaptation potential. The bulk of the research effort is devoted to rural mitigation. London is typical for the UK; it has no idea what its canopy cover was, what it is now or what it needs to be to meet the climate change adaptation responsibilities set out in the Climate Change Act 2008.

Against this background, MP Huw Irranca-Davies' recent statement that "there will be a revival of trees in our streets" seems like a forgotten promise. As the Americans are demonstrating, the UK climate adaptation effort is inadequate - and that will not be good for our cities when the heat finally comes.

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