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TREE CONSULTANCY

Barrell on ... a better standard for tree survival

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## Barrell on ... a better standard for tree survival



The Government's promise of a national tree planting campaign ([www.programmeforgovernmentl.hmg.gov.uk](http://www.programmeforgovernmentl.hmg.gov.uk)) is a sound-bite of superficial nonsense. We have been planting trees for decades and yet all the indications are that the UK has a severely depleted urban canopy cover and a nationally compromised capacity to cope with climate change. What is the point of planting more trees if they do not make it to maturity? Tree survival is the issue, not tree planting.

As new trees shrivel and die in our streets, suppliers and managers bombard us with the same old excuses - it's the tree, it's the soil, it's de-icing salt, it's poor maintenance. If it is so tough in towns, why do we see so many mature trees flourishing? The irrefutable evidence that trees can thrive is all around us. This is not a tree failure, it is a nursery production failure.

Tree production is an international business strongly influenced by the need to maximise returns at the nursery gate. Growing the biggest tree in the shortest time, using the smallest amount of space, dominates conventional nursery practice. This drives species selection towards the fastest growers, not the best survivors. On the streets, the community manager wants a tree that will cope with the hostile conditions, establish with minimal maintenance and live a long time. Although the new tree initially appears to fit the bill, it struggles to grow, it takes years to die and the delay is too long to seek redress.

This fundamental incompatibility between what nurseries are growing and what is needed should be the focus of Government attention, not a headline-grabbing tree planting campaign. Against this unsatisfactory background, we should welcome the announcement of a new British Standard - *BS 8545 Code of Practice for Trees: From Nursery to Independence in the landscape* - offers a rare opportunity to break the suppliers' grip on this market and allow managers to buy trees that are fit for purpose, not fit for profit.

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