



Barrell on... Follow London lead on tree strategy

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Follow lead on London tree strategy

"Tree, urban and rural, are the same resources in the context of green infrastructure"

Beneath the superficial green spin, this Government still struggles to grasp the fact that trees are a national asset, requiring a national framework for sustainable management. The forest sell-off fiasco and the bungling Independent Panel on Forestry that somehow missed the 89 million non-woodland trees in its remit raise serious concerns about whether the future of our national tree resource is in safe hands.

The case for the importance of urban trees is more than won, with the recent i-Tree Eco pilot project in Torbay as the latest in a string of reports confirming that our urban tree stocks are a significant environmental asset. In the face of climate change, the Government's challenge is to ensure that the UK's first National Adaptation Programme properly incorporates urban trees.

The keyword here is "national" because we are all in this together and a continued obsession with a localism agenda outside of a nationwide framework will not deliver a sustainable solution.

At the local level, London is pioneering the way with its draft supplementary planning guidance Green Infrastructure & Open Environments — Preparing Borough Tree & Woodland Strategies. Most importantly, this sets out a broader vision for individual trees and woodlands as integral parts of green infrastructure, and the expectation that all the London boroughs contribute to the greater good. There are some powerful parallels here between what London is doing locally and what the UK needs to be doing nationally.

First, whether trees are rural or urban, they are the same resource and an effective national strategy must deal with them all in the context of green infrastructure, not artificially separate them under headings of forestry and urban. Second, climate change adaptation is a national issue and a local approach simply cannot deliver a coordinated response. Finally, in addition to telling people what to do, a workable strategy must show people how to do it.

There is no need to reinvent the wheel. London is setting the pace and it is now for the Government to find the wisdom and vision to roll it out nationally.

