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Early 2012 was full of promise for the tree world, with the eagerly anticipated arrival of two new documents. However, the revision of BS5837 Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition & Construction and the National Tree Safety Group's (NTSG) Common Sense Risk Management of Trees, when duly published, were equally as disappointing. Both documents suffer from confusing content and weak structure, limiting their practical use for their target audiences. This is all the more surprising because each is promoted as widely consulted, with the reasonable expectation that this process delivers dependable, high-quality guidance.

After such a dull start, 2012 is again looking brighter with the imminent publication of Trees in the Townscape — A Guide for Decision-makers (www.tdag.org.uk). In stark contrast to the rather stale and flat BS and NTSG offerings, this latest initiative from the Trees & Design Action Group (TDAG) is altogether fresher and more exciting. The case for more trees is now well advanced, but how to achieve that in practice is not well documented. This new publication is a manual for action, bridging the gap between talking and doing through a series of practical examples showing what can be achieved.

It advocates 12 guiding principles for successfully integrating trees into urban communities, organised under the headings of plan, design, plant and manage. Each principle is explored by summarising the objective, discussing the benefits, listing the options for action and referencing successful case studies. This logical structure is easy to follow, allowing readers to quickly find relevant information describing what they can do to make a difference.

Although this functionality is admirable, of most interest is how this document was prepared. One lead author actively went out and interviewed the people who know best, those dealing with the issues on a daily basis, and that practical wisdom is reflected in the quality of the content. This differs from the BS and NTSG consultation model, which relies on passive feedback and limited active engagement of the knowledge-holders. The obvious calibre of this TDAG document neatly exposes how redundant that old approach now is in a modern context.

