Urban trees and the challenge for local authorities
balancing risk and initiative

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with Alexander van der Jagt
on behalf of Forestry Commission Scotland
Local government in Scotland

According to the National Inventory of Woods and Trees:

- 6% of all forest in England is LA owned
- 0.9% of all forest in Scotland is LA owned
- But great variations – and most urban have higher proportions:
  - Lothian 4.2
  - Fife 4.1
  - Central 3.8
  - Strathclyde 1.6

- And possibly more:
  - Scottish Borders: 0% ???
Our study: information sources

• Qualitative interviews with 9 LAs - varying size and age of tree stock
• Documentation such as tree strategies and management plans
• Questionnaire distributed to all 32 LAs requesting information on:
  – tree/woodland (policy) documents
  – tree/woodland resources
  – tree/woodland data
  – community involvement

• Results provide information about (urban) tree management practice in 26 out of 32 Scottish LAs (81%)
Ownership

• Lack of data on ownership in most LAs
• Glasgow: 64% of all urban trees in LA-ownership
• Other landowners:
  – Private individuals
  – Forest Enterprise Scotland
  – Environmental NGOs (e.g., Scottish Wildlife Trust)
  – Road and rail infrastructure service providers
Drivers for tree management

• Statutory requirements
  Most prescriptive:
  – a Duty of Care under the Occupiers Liability (Scotland) Act 1960;
  – a duty to make Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) on high amenity trees under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997.

• Strategies and plans
  Social, economic and environmental benefits of trees can be highlighted in:
  – Local Development Plan
  – Open Space Strategy
  – Tree and woodland strategy

• External support
  – Grant schemes
  – Partnership working
Barriers to tree management

• Lack of resources

• Low level of interest at senior management level

• Fear of legal liability

  So you're actually safer not surveying than you are if you have. So what you should do is actually go out with a contractor, survey one tree, right do the work, right let’s move to the next one. That’s the safer way of doing it because if you end up with all this information and you don’t do anything with it, you’re goosed.
Documents

- LAs are encouraged to prepare a forestry and woodland strategy (FWS) as a supplementary document to their Local Development Plan.

- The FWS:
  - outlines a vision and objectives for all LA-owned woodland
  - is a local interpretation of national policy

- Less than half of all LAs had implemented a FWS

- Just over half of all LAs had implemented one or more woodland management plans
Data, surveys and inspections

• Tree and woodland surveys within the last five years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Public open space</th>
<th>Street trees</th>
<th>Woodland</th>
<th>TPOs</th>
<th>Education premises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full survey</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial survey</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample survey</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total surveyed</strong></td>
<td><strong>17 (85%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>16 (80%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>15 (75%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>9 (47%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>9 (50%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not surveyed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• A similar picture emerged for tree inspections

  No, we don't record individual trees unless there is a record of a request for service. So you’re a customer, you come to me, a tree down the road is about to fall down, basically we put down the details of that tree or if it’s not going to come down, why it’s not going to come down.
Reactive vs. proactive

- Tree management is mostly reactive, as opposed to proactive
Organisation

• Staff managing trees tend to operate from either one of two main departments:
  – Environmental Services
  – Development and Planning

• Other departments (e.g., Housing, Education) often own land as well. And Environmental Services tends to be split between operational and strategic sections

• Communication is therefore key to ensure consistent and high quality tree management
  – For example, one LA abolished division between strategic and operational work, and introduced Neighbourhood Environment Teams responsible for management of all public trees, regardless of ownership.
Resources

• LA expenditure on tree management per head of population:
  o Scotland: £1.18 (2014)
  o England: £1.80 (2014 based on 2004 figures)

• Much variation between local authorities:
  o < 50p ....... > £2.50

• Total budget
  o On average slight decrease over last five years
  o 60% reported a stable budget
  o Problem seen as low budget rather than cuts

• Knowledge: Arboriculture and/or forestry qualifications
  25% of respondents no qualification at level 3 or higher
  Knowledge exchange and CPD through professional networks – valued but not always supported
Community engagement

• Why involving communities in tree and woodland management?
  – They bring in funds that the LA cannot apply to
  – Their actions tend to improve accessibility, amenity value and woodland biodiversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of community involvement</th>
<th>No. of LAs</th>
<th>% of LAs responding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informing (e.g., talks)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care and maintenance</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared decision-making</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-led decision-making</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Issues

1. Heritage trees:
   • protection may be inadequate;
   • TPOs are based on amenity (not heritage) value and only when under threat
   • tree officers can only advise
2. Tree health: low priority, reactive management
3. Trees on private land:
   • None of the LAs had data on individual private trees other than those protected by TPOs
   • Only one included private woodlands in management plans
   • Contrast with holistic views of ‘the urban forest’
4. Climate change:
   • Much thought
   • Proactive management needed
Example: Glasgow

Glasgow City Council and CSGN recently commissioned a pilot tree survey in four areas of the city.

Previously estimated number of street trees = 6000

Extrapolation implies more realistic number = 71 000

Better idea of woodland coverage than of street tree numbers.

Of 1600 ha, only managing 400 ha of woodland.
Governance

• Statutory requirements take priority
• Risk is the main reason for tree data collection
• Risk management competes with community engagement
• Need mandate from national government to give work impetus
• But motivated visionary individuals are key
Land

Data challenges:
- NIWT: 0.9% woodland is LA owned
- The City Woodland Initiative: 64% of woodland in Glasgow is LA owned

Stakeholder challenges

- *We’re not used to working with them (the LA) but without them any scheme in the urban environment will fail*

- *I probably wouldn’t have spent any time on the woodland because to be honest it wasn’t a woodland I knew we had until they (the community group) talked to us about it!*
Delivery mechanisms

• Transfer tenure
  – To the Forestry Commission (FES)
  – To community groups

• Grants
  – WIAT and others – Challenge Funds to improve woodland access and quality
  – Mostly taken up by the LAs not community groups
  – Lead to increased *use* not empowerment

• Friends groups
  – Often linked to funding
  – Sustainability?

• Tree Warden schemes
Conclusions:

- Trees tend to be perceived as a liability, not as an asset, resulting in reactive tree management.
- Data on trees is limited, incomplete and difficult to access.
- Budgets, already inadequate, are dwindling further.
- Staff are not always supported with appropriate qualifications and a strong internal organisation.
- Nevertheless there are some very positive experiences and examples:
  - improving data
  - involving communities in urban trees and woodland management
  - enhancing socio-economic valuations of trees and woodlands
From liability to asset:

- Know the resource
- Computerised databases
- Organisation
- Increasing financial support (non trivial)
- Legislative support
- Highlighting socioeconomic value of trees (for health and well-being), to help access funds
- Increase community engagement: volunteering in woodland management activities; citizen science (tree health); leasing as ‘good landlords’
- Sharing experiences
Thank you to …

- Alexander van der Jagt who did most of the work!
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