



RTPI
Royal Town Planning Institute

The Right Tree in the Right Place

Why we need a “ReTreeFit” strategy and to *plan where we plant*

March 2021



“...homes with green spaces and new parks at close hand, where tree lined streets are the norm and where neighbours are not strangers”
—Prime Minister, *Planning for the Future*

“The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.”
—Chinese proverb

96% of planners say trees are important to their work
—RTPI survey, January 2021

#ReTreeFit



#PlanTheWorldWeNeed

“we are... changing the law so that all new streets that are built in this country will be tree lined”
—Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State for Housing

Why do we need to “ReTreeFit”?

The UK Government have emphasised the role of trees in new development

The RTPI welcomes the focus on ensuring trees are provided within new developments, so residents have access to the aesthetic joys and wellbeing bonus of trees. However, planning is about the entirety of the built environment, not just new development.

The majority of the population will live in homes already constructed

Just as in the debate around retrofitting home heating/insulation, the majority of people in the country will continue live in currently existing properties. Many of these houses do not currently have adequate access to trees, so it is essential that while we ensure those in new builds have access to trees we don't forget about the majority of the population.

What would ReTreeFitting look like?

ReTreeFitting will have to be place-specific as not all pre-existing roads will be able to take trees. In some cases, ReTreeFitting will require planners to examine spaces where trees were originally poorly planned and eventually removed. However, planners and tree experts will be able to identify the optimal solution for each space that will ensure residents have greenery of some form, as well as trees located within easy reach. This is why planners are so crucial to a successful ReTreeFit: *we cannot simply place trees into existing schemes without thought.*

ReTreeFitting will require resourcing from the UK government

As discussed later in more detail, many local authorities have lost their designated tree resource. Planning departments are also underfunded, so there is often not sufficient resource to deal with non-fee earning activities like tree planting. The RTPI calls on the UK Government to back our call for “ReTreeFitting” existing spaces and communities, and to provide the necessary resources.





Why are planners essential to deliver tree-lined streets?

Different types of trees need different conditions to flourish

People with expertise in trees and space planning can match-make trees to spaces, and avoid the situation seen in some poorly planned developments where trees die just months or years later.

A well-planted tree will have a long lifespan

The needs and impact of the tree as it matures therefore must be considered before planting. The right tree will avoid unwanted shading, damage to buildings and leaf litter in the wrong place, while the wrong trees planted too close to buildings will inevitably get cut down.

Trees should be integral to a development, not just “green bling”

Poorly thought through tree placement down the line in a development means trees are far more likely to die or become a nuisance to residents. For maximum success in a development scheme, trees need to be considered from the start rather than added at the end as “green bling.”

Clever planning unlocks the full wellbeing impact of trees

Urban greenspaces in Great Britain provide £16.5bn in environmental, health and amenity value per year.¹ Planners have a crucial role to play in ensuring that local communities feel the maximum positive impact of nature; in a deprived neighbourhood, good space planning of greenspace can deliver five times as much value.

Planning maximises the benefit of urban tree planting for the environment

A diverse range of trees integrated with hedges and greenspaces as part of a planned “green infrastructure” approach has the maximum positive impact for nature. Trees best support biodiversity when planned alongside other nature-supporting work.

Poorly planned tree planting can be a hazard and impact accessibility

Trees placed in the wrong locations can make pathways harder to navigate and can be a hazard for those with disabilities, in older age or with young children. Good planning can avoid trees creating accessibility issues in public space. Poorly located trees also risk damage to buildings and infrastructure, often having to be removed. In many cases this is why ReTreeFit is required, to deal with areas where inappropriately planted trees have been removed. Clearly these can't just be replaced, instead new solutions need to be found.

Tiny forests should be part of a 15 minute neighbourhood

Being around trees helps people connect to nature and teaches children about the natural world. A *15 minute neighbourhood* is one in which all essential services can be reached within a short walk, and this should include access to nature. Tiny forests are a practical urban solution that transform small, typically undevelopable sites into thriving microcosms of nature. These tennis-court sized patch of trees can grow up to five times faster than individually planted trees and attract more than 500 species of plants and animals.

¹ *Invest and Prosper: A Business Case for Investing in Planning*, October 2020.

<https://www.rtpi.org.uk/research/2020/october/invest-and-prosper/>



What do planners need in order to deliver tree-lined streets?

Planners support a nationwide push for tree planting

One RTPI member noted that places “that are most attractive and most pleasant to live in tend to have large amounts of street trees, parks and squares with trees and garden trees,” while another commented that “street trees/ trees in urban public realm areas can make a massive difference in contributing towards achieving high quality, well-designed urban area.” In some cases planners face a “constant battle” with developers to ensure trees are included within schemes, so planners welcome government support for tree planting. Our members welcome a focus on trees in new development, but equally support the ReTreeFitting of existing communities. Read the full results from our member survey [here](#).

72% of planners would like more policy guidance on trees

The UK Government’s response to the English Tree Strategy consultation is expected within the coming months, and alongside changes to the National Planning Policy Framework will support planners to deliver trees in the right places. You can read the RTPI’s full response to the England Tree Strategy consultation [here](#). 72% have asked for the RTPI to offer them more Continuing Professional Development opportunities around trees, to allow them to update their understanding of best practice.

Access to professional tree advice

Many of our members have commented on the hollowing out of expertise in tree planting within Local Authorities. Trees Officers sit within planning departments, giving expert advice to ensure trees are best integrated into development. Many members have commented that they have lost their Tree Officers in recent years, or that they lack adequate funding to utilise external resource.

Resourcing of Local Planning Authorities

Planning departments have faced increasing financial pressures. In 2017-18, Local Authorities’ spent 0.5% of net spending on planning, compared to 50 times that amount on housing benefit. Local authority spending on planning is down on 2009-10 in both absolute and relative terms, from £686m to £401m per annum. The RTPI have [set out the case](#) for an additional £500 million for planning (over four years) in their submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Contact:

Robin Hayden

Senior Public Affairs Officer

Robin.hayden@rtpi.org.uk

+44 (0)7971 375 362

