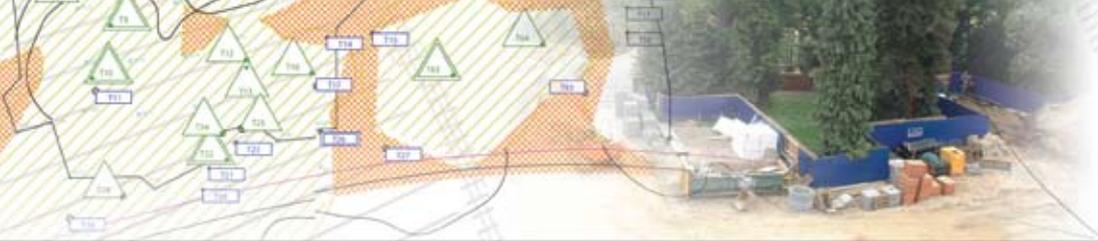




TreeAZ

Pumping Arboriculture

Article for essentialARB issue 11



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Jeremy Barrell believes things have never looked so good for Arboriculture, but why is that and what is driving this enthusiasm? More to the point, will it stay that way and will we all benefit from this buoyancy? From his consultancy perspective, he analyses how this has happened and sets out a template to maintain the momentum. Barrell Treecare's vision is the healthy development of the Arboricultural Profession through the dissemination and examination of best practice information in an impartial and widely read forum. essentialARB has agreed to be that forum and over the next few issues, will be publishing their ideas and those of anyone else who wishes to contribute to the cause.

This is a dynamic and exciting time for Arboriculture and anyone in it. Obscure as it may seem, the generator of this optimism is the Town & Country Planning Act (1990) and the fact that after many, many years, local authorities are at last beginning to get to grips with their duty as set out in it. To the majority involved in the practical tasks of managing trees, this is a distant and perhaps almost frightening document, difficult to read and understand so best tucked away and forgotten about! And is it necessary to know its detail to prune trees and plant new ones? No, not really, but it is important to know that it is the origin of vast amounts of tree work and the underlying powerhouse driving the rapid development of Arboriculture as a Profession. Of course, there are other areas of growth; the steep rise in litigation being an obvious example. But out there in front, the simple clause pumping Arboriculture forward is found in Chapter 8, Section 197 (a):

“It shall be the duty of the local planning authority – to ensure, whenever it is appropriate, that in granting planning permission for any development adequate provision is made, by the imposition of conditions, for the preservation or planting of trees.”

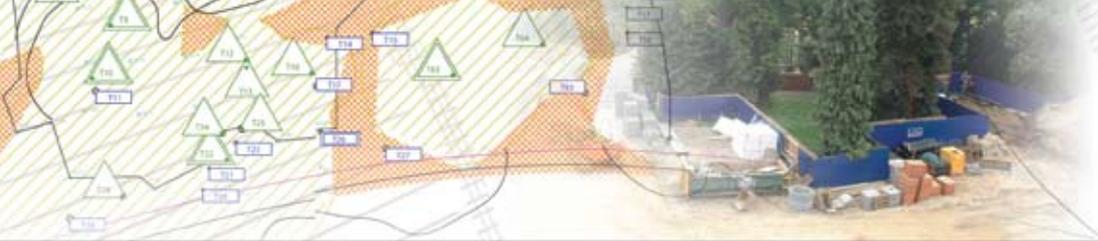
One very small sentence having a very big impact on Arboriculture; the reason why I am in a position to write this article and many of us are enjoying a fulfilling career with trees. It is starting to generate huge amounts of work at the consultancy level and that can only be great news for the Profession. Primarily, this means there is more money in the system because developers have to employ consultants to provide the information that local authorities are demanding. More employment opportunities automatically make it more interesting to a wider spectrum of people. More motivated people mean more ideas into the melting pot and a much greater potential for making progress. Money is the catalyst for this process, fuelling the search for better and more effective ways of doing tree things. Increasing opportunities at the top means that, at last, there is a complete career structure where the motivated

can progress all the way. Fantastic stuff for tree enthusiasts but why has it only just taken off?

In the past, no matter how good you were as a climber or a tree officer, only a handful ever progressed to the highest professional level because the opportunities were just not there. So what has changed? Going back to the Act, we have had that wording since 1990, with a similar emphasis before that from when it all started with the original Act just after the War in 1947. Clearly, the idea giving trees proper consideration has been around for a long time so why is it that we are only just beginning to see the delivery of what it proposed? I am sure there are a whole range of reasons but here are a few that have definitely had an impact.



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- A national greenbelt planning policy that seeks to control urban sprawl and assigns a high priority to efficiently use space within existing urban areas.
- A huge demand for new homes as a result of changing population dynamics.
- An increasing public awareness of the importance of trees and their contribution to our wellbeing.
- Increasing public pressure on local authorities to take proper account of trees when determining planning applications.
- The rapid development of tree management systems and methodologies that help local authorities take proper account of trees in the planning system

This last being the most important because all the preceding points produce the pressure to care for trees but that cannot come to bear until there are ways of delivering that care. The concept of co-ordinated arboricultural best practice relating to development didn't exist 25 years ago; it was all practical trial and error with little useful written guidance. With the appearance of BS 5837 in 1980 and its subsequent revisions, a framework gradually appeared but this did not record the detail, which is the essence of best practice.

Rather surprisingly, not even the various arboricultural bodies, which one would expect to be natural origin of best practice guidance, has made any significant progress on this issue. So the task of developing efficient systems and methods of doing things has been left to individuals. Whilst this is clearly not the most effective way of development, it has had some startling successes resulting in leaps forward in practical tree management systems. An obvious example is the introduction and formalisation of the concept of arboricultural impact appraisal reports and arboricultural method statements set out by O'Callaghan and Lawson in the early 1990s. Most, if not all, of the most effective methods of dealing with trees on development sites have evolved from these pioneering ideas.

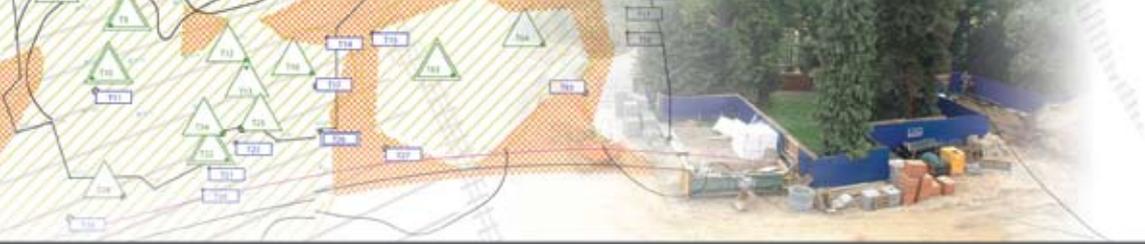
But relying on the enterprise of individuals is such a haphazard and inefficient way of developing a profession; there must be many examples of similar best practice out there in the field that will never reach a wider audience and achieve recognition because there is no co-ordinated mechanism for disseminating that information. Human nature is very much to blame for this as I have found out throughout my consultancy career. In a narrow minded way, knowledge obviously is power and that fosters a tendency to keep what you know secret lest the opposition gain an advantage. So nobody tells anyone else what they are doing and progress is dreadfully slow. I am sure I made the same trial and error mistakes that many others

had made, much of which could have been avoided with a little more openness from my peers.

Whilst there may be some merits to such a philosophy on an individual business basis, I do not believe that the old culture of conspiracy and secrecy is in the best interests of the Profession. I believe there is a new and better way that involves some risk as individuals but the benefits to the Profession, and ultimately to us as members, will far outweigh that risk. That way is to publicly set out and describe the problems that are encountered and the practical solutions being applied for all to see and evaluate. The sooner that as many people as possible are working to the best possible standard, the greater the credibility of Arboriculture and the sooner we will all benefit as arboriculturists.

In the absence of any other initiatives on best practice in consultancy, essentialARB have agreed to provide the forum and we at Barrell Treecare have agreed to set out what we are doing on a whole range of arboricultural issues. We will not be saying that what we are doing is the right way or the only way or the best option. What we will be saying is – “here is what we are doing, these are the best solutions we have been able to find and what do you think?” We hope this will stimulate others to contribute so that over time, a broad range of opinion will be represented, allowing valuable experience to be disseminated to the widest possible audience.

It is a bold move on our part because the real risk we run is that our competitors copy our ideas and steal our clients. Probably the reason why no other consultancy practice has dared to take the same step!! However, we feel the potential benefit to the Profession is huge in that, for the first time ever, there is a widely available reference and forum that all those involved in the development process can use as a resource. We are in the process of extending that concept to our website where we will be listing examples of what we think is best practice. Frustratingly, that is a huge task and it will be some time until it is completed. We expect it to be useful for developers, tree officers, planning officers and consultants wanting to know what options are available and how successfully those can be applied in practice. Over the next few issues, we will be discussing, amongst other things, site supervision, ground protection, planning loopholes, special surfacing, bridges over protective zones, protective zone distances, daylight, the use of fastigate trees and arboricultural method statements.



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In doing this, we are mindful that essentialARB is not a technical or academic journal and it services a readership with a wide range of interests. Our emphasis will be on keeping it short and snappy with a minimum of references and plenty of photos. We don't subscribe to the common perception that tree officers and consultants are on opposite sides locked in perpetual combat so we shall be doing our best to dispel that myth. We believe there is a new way where we can all work most effectively as a partnership, delivering the best deal for trees through co-operation and communication. A sort of coalition for trees where we are all on the same side!