

## Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: Reforms to National Planning Policy

The Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) is the Royal Chartered body for foresters and arboriculturists in the UK. The Institute regulates standards of entry to the profession, doing so by the provision of services and support to its members; guidance to professionals in other sectors; information to the general public; and educational advice and training to students and tree professionals seeking to develop their careers in the forestry and arboriculture industry. The Institute works to foster a greater public awareness and understanding of the tree professions in order to serve a variety of commercial, recreational, environmental and scientific interests.

### Key messages from our response

#### 1. Ensure proposals enhance the value of trees and natural features

It is important that the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill (LURB) and the overarching policy guidelines issued by government ensure that trees and other natural features are afforded an appropriate level of consideration and protection. Our members feel that the process of developing (or re-developing) a site often results in tree loss, including to provide the desirable space to logistically implement the development. Amendments to the LURB ought to not lose sight of the value that trees, and other natural features have. The direct benefits of street trees can aid mitigation against climate change, by assisting with temperature regulation, reducing ultraviolet radiation, and reducing wind speeds - leading to reduced heat loss from buildings in winter<sup>1</sup>. The benefits of trees within the urban environment should not be undervalued and we should be looking to combine benefits, such as integrating amenity planting with Sustainable Drainage Systems. Our members are seeking clarification that existing trees are being considered in the context of design, with their value assessed by a professional arboriculturist.

#### 2. Ensure proposals across government are strategically aligned

We welcome the additional emphasis on climate change and carbon sequestration, but it must be recognised that ecosystem services are achieved on a landscape scale. Existing trees should be given an appropriate weighting in the context of small-scale nature-based design interventions. It should be ensured that there is strategic read-across to other policy developments, such as Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan and Biodiversity Net Gain. For example, it recognises that soil health should be a primary consideration with all interventions, giving adequate weight and protection to high production farmland. This is particularly the case for peaty soils and other soils high in organic matter.

The role of urban trees in health and wellbeing is being increasingly recognised and rising on the agenda. There is a strong evidence base for the 3-30-300 concept<sup>2</sup>. However, planning must recognise that not all areas will provide equitable opportunity or access to trees or ecosystem service benefits –

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<sup>1</sup> [Health Benefits of Street Trees \(forestresearch.gov.uk\)](https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/health-benefits-of-street-trees/)

<sup>2</sup> [Evidence-based guidelines for greener, healthier, more resilient neighbourhoods: Introducing the 3–30–300 rule](#)

thus putting additional pressure on open space to provide canopy cover. In May 2021, the England Trees Action Plan (ETAP) was published, setting out the actions Government and its partners will take to support unprecedented levels of tree planting, creating diverse treescapes across the country which benefit the environment, people and the economy. The ETAP highlights the need to protect and improve our trees and woodlands and connect people with trees so they can enjoy the many benefits they provide.

### **3. Ensure proposals recognise the multi-functional benefits of soil**

The Institute recommends that local planning authorities have clear, adopted strategies and policies about the integration of nature recovery strategies, with strategies on local land use, potential development sites and transport infrastructure. Our members recommend LURB includes soil assessment and monitoring and provides a framework for leaving soils post development with good structure and in good health. The use of good practice guidelines such as Defra's Code of Practice for Sustainable Soils on Construction Sites should enable developers, advisers, and the public to assess soil health and opportunities for soil recovery and improvement. It is essential that all interventions consider the impacts on soil carbon and the capabilities of different soil types, including the potential to sequester carbon.

### **4. Recognise the value of collaboration and up-skilling**

To achieve government's ambitions for planning reform as well as the environmental agenda, we need the right people with the right skills within the planning system. This requires adequate resourcing, particularly for local authorities. Strategically, trees have an important role to play in a local authority's response to Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). According to The Tree Council, with nearly three quarters of local authorities declaring a Climate Emergency, prioritising nature recovery and environmental benefits has never been more prudent<sup>3</sup>. The Trees and Design Action Group (TDAG) has noted that there is not sufficient resource to develop tree and woodland strategies.<sup>4</sup> This echoes concern from the wider environmental sector that the reform is aiming to limit the barriers to development to ensure that houses are built quickly. The perception of reducing standards to meet targets is unacceptable, as this undermines the value of professionalism. The LURB approach needs to recognise and integrate the importance of the arboricultural profession, as well as interrelated professions also critical in the process, such as landscape and ecology. The Institute recognises that there is value in arboriculturists working in partnership with landscape architects to design spaces around existing trees and identify areas suitable for new planting.

## **Final Comments**

The LURB must ensure that all decisions provide a clear direction that will lead the transformation of all new development. To this end, this reform, must ensure that all policies, plans and decisions deliver on the objectives of the Climate Act and meet Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan, England Trees Action and planting targets. Crucially, this must include funds for professional management to achieve successful establishment and ongoing maintenance to ensure thriving urban forests. It needs to be ensured that any overarching policy guidelines from the LURB put trees high in the priority for

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<sup>3</sup> [Tree-Council-Trees-and-Woodland-Strategy-Toolkit-2022.pdf \(treecouncil.org.uk\)](https://www.treecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Tree-Council-Trees-and-Woodland-Strategy-Toolkit-2022.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [Trees in Hard Landscapes: A Guide for Delivery - Trees and Design Action Group \(tdag.org.uk\)](https://www.tdag.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Trees-in-Hard-Landscapes-A-Guide-for-Delivery-Trees-and-Design-Action-Group.pdf)



adapting to and mitigating against climate change, given all the recognised wider environmental and social benefits.

In forming our response, we have worked with a number of prominent organisations working across arboriculture, forestry, conservation, planning and design. There is considerable appetite for collaboration between the professional bodies in these areas, working together we can build beautiful and sustainable homes and communities that deliver for climate, nature, people and the economy.