

News release

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Torbay's trees: results of 10-year comparative study released

A new report, comparing Torbay's tree canopy cover with a previous survey from ten years ago, has been published.

In 2010, Torbay Council carried out an analysis of its tree population, using specialist tree valuation software, i-Tree. The study was able to apply monetary values to the ecosystem services the trees provided, for example, how much carbon the trees were storing, and the area's percentage canopy cover. Over a decade later, Torbay decided to re-run the study, to see how its urban forest had changed over 10 years. The full report from this 2nd study has just been released; the results were unexpected.

The number of trees in Torbay has reduced quite significantly; 692,000 trees were recorded in 2010, but only 458,800 in 2021. There has also been a reduction in tree density per hectare from 109 trees to 71 trees. There are undeniably fewer trees there, compared with 10 years ago. However, what was surprising, was that despite the reduction in tree numbers, canopy cover has actually increased significantly; from 11.8% in 2010, to 18.2% in 2021. This means that even though the number of trees has decreased, tree canopy cover has gone up by 6.4% and the amount of carbon stored has similarly risen.

The loss of trees can be partly explained by natural thinning of trees in woodland areas, and also to the removal of trees on development sites. But the increase in canopy cover, on the other hand, is principally due to the existing trees in Torbay being well maintained and receiving good care, which has allowed them to flourish and spread their canopies.

Kenton Rogers of Treeconomics, explained, 'This indicates that although the population of trees has thinned out, overall canopy cover has increased as the urban forest matures. This highlights the importance of maintaining existing trees. This is crucial to improving canopy cover and the ongoing management of established trees has allowed them to continue to live and thrive in Torbay'.

Leader of Torbay Council, Steve Darling, commented: "We welcome the new i-Tree survey findings and I would like to thank Treeconomics, SWISCo and of course some of our local tree warden volunteers who helped carry out the updated survey. The report recognises that it is really important to look after our existing, established trees and this is something we will be working on with SWISCo, our contractors Hi-Line, and our tree warden volunteers. In addition, as part of our commitment to tackling climate change, we are planting more new trees and this will help absorb and store carbon emissions, as well as improving local air quality and reducing flood risk."

In summary, even though there are fewer trees in Torbay now, those that remain have been able to increase the area's canopy cover significantly, helping the area to work towards its goal of 20%. It is doubtful whether this 6.4% increase would have been possible, had the council relied entirely on new tree planting. Tree planting is essential in any urban area, but a better approach to achieving an increase in canopy cover is one where resources and investment are made not only in tree planting but also in better management of trees already present.

The full report can be viewed at: <https://www.treeeconomics.co.uk/resources/reports/>

Notes for editor: The 2022 Torbay project was carried out by a partnership between Treeconomics, Torbay Council owned company SWISCo, tree specialists RSK Hi-Line, Forest Research and Wild Planet Trust. Fieldwork was completed by teams of volunteer tree wardens from across the region, and Hi-Line representatives. The resulting data was analysed using 'i-Tree', a software suite developed by the US Forest Service and used around the world, to assess the structural value and environmental benefits of urban trees.

Treeconomics is a social enterprise which works internationally with community groups, research organisations, public bodies, municipalities and private business, to complete projects which highlight the value of trees.

IMAGES ATTACHED: Torbay treescape (1), volunteer training (2)

Contact

Nadine Moreby

Marketing Co-ordinator, Treeconomics

07710 803339

nadine@treeconomics.co.uk