

# Just pretty maps?

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**A new tool to understand the impact of trees is here. The Tree Equity Score UK was launched by the Woodland Trust, American Forests and the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare over a three-day roadshow in early December that bounced from Belfast to London to Sheffield.**

I was lucky enough to attend the (slightly colder than expected) first of these. Inspirational stuff from our speakers. And now it is out there, for all to use.

So, is it just a bunch of pretty maps or will it actually make a difference? I believe it is both. The Tree Equity concept – that all people should have local neighbourhood access to trees and the benefits of trees – is a simple, powerful one. Yet that thinking is hardly revolutionary within this country. Whilst making good on its grand promise is difficult and slow, few would argue against the aim. Indeed, it is embedded within the 'Priority Places' and 'Priority People' approach of the Forestry Commission's Urban Tree Challenge Fund application process.

## Anyone can play

The difference it can make is precisely because it is a bunch of pretty maps. Anyone with a smartphone can access them to explore information that relates to the places they live, work, or are working to change. No specialist tools are needed; no training required other than a willingness to spend a few minutes working out what it can do. The key word for me is 'anyone' – tree officers, councillors, residents, schoolchildren; anyone can access this information and use it for whatever purpose they choose. The dressed-up term for this is the 'democratisation of data'. For it to truly function, data must not only be available, but easy to access, interrogate and share. This tool takes big steps towards fulfilling that aim for this aspect of urban forestry.

## Data-driven decision making

Getting decisions made within any organisation today, with local authorities being no exception, requires data. Putting it together is a time-consuming exercise. A tool such as this can help to short-circuit the whole process since it can, as a minimum, inform the sort of conversation that needs to be had. Whether it is sufficient in its own right or merely the catalyst for more detailed work is something quite rightly determined against local circumstance. For many, where funds are limited, this may well prove more than adequate to support funding intervention on the ground within a given area.

## Community engagement upended?

One of the best definitions of community engagement I know is this: it is the process of involving people in the decisions which affect them. Usually the drive for this has to come from the people responsible for the decisions. They are the ones with the power, the information and the ability to choose whether to involve the local community or not. Tools such as the Tree Equity Score create the potential to upend that dynamic. Shifting access to information into the public arena massively expands the number of people able to take advantage to motivate for change within their neighbourhood, backed up by data.

Whilst this will be uncomfortable to some, shining more light on the need for trees in our cities can only be good in the long term.

## Getting started

Find it online: [uk.treeequityscore.org](http://uk.treeequityscore.org)

Scroll down to the 'View the Map' button

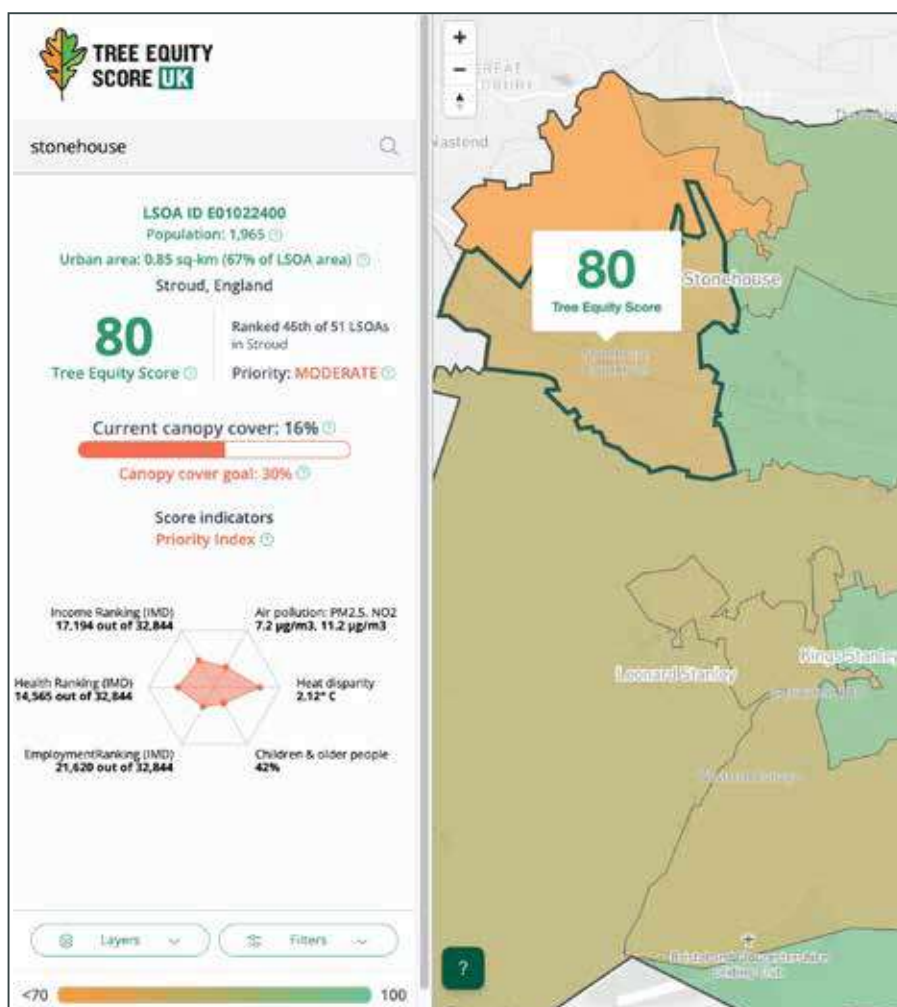
Search for somewhere you know (e.g. where you live or work)

Zoom into an individual neighbourhood [Lower super output area (LSOA)]

Click it to bring up the summary 'dynamic' report on the left

Scroll down and hit the 'Layers' or 'Filters' button

Zoom out a little and explore



[uk.treeequityscore.org](http://uk.treeequityscore.org)