

Understanding the 3-30-300 Rule

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In recent years a deceptively simple rule has begun to capture the imagination of urban foresters, planners and local authorities across the globe.

Known as the 3-30-300 rule, it calls for every resident to be able to see at least three mature trees from their home, for all neighbourhoods to have at least 30% tree canopy cover, and for everyone to live within 300 metres of a high-quality green space – usually interpreted as a park. The rule was proposed in 2021 by urban forestry expert Dr Cecil Konijnendijk and connects the benefits of trees with the health and wellbeing of people.

But what benefit is another rule to local authorities? How does it help?

Think of it as a set of **simple measures** – tree canopy cover, proximity to trees and access to green space – that help councils identify not only neighbourhoods but individual streets where action is most needed. This makes it easier to prioritise planting and protection work, rather than relying on ad hoc opportunities. It also supports **clear comparisons between areas**, helping officers and councillors see how different wards are performing and where progress is being made over time.

Just as importantly, the rule provides a **shared language** that can be used across teams, linking trees to wider objectives around health, climate resilience and place-making. Used this way, it becomes a practical tool for guiding decisions and making better use of limited resources.

In areas lucky enough to already tick the box on all three measures, research shows that people suffer from lower stress levels, engage in more physical activity and social engagement, experience a reduced urban heat island, and enjoy better air quality.

So how can tree teams implement the rule? There are several providers of 3-30-300 mapping in the UK, including Treeconomics and Bluesky, with others in Europe and the US. Surveys typically draw on open-source GIS data (building footprints, canopy layers and parks) and score buildings on each of the three criteria, resulting in a visual scoring map. Tree teams can then use these maps alongside datasheets which allow them to drill down into the results.

What evidence is there that 3-30-300 works?

There are scores of studies linking access to green space with human health and wellbeing. For example:

- Visual exposure to trees and greenery has been shown to reduce stress and support cognitive restoration (WHO Europe review *Urban Green Spaces and Health*, 2016).
- Access to green space (typically 300–500 m on foot) is consistently linked to higher physical activity levels, improved mental health, reduced loneliness, and lower all-cause mortality (WHO Europe review *Urban Green Spaces and Health*, 2016).
- Urban tree canopy cover can significantly reduce local air and surface temperatures during heat events, with multiple studies reporting cooling effects of several degrees Celsius in tree-rich neighbourhoods (Bowler et al., 2010; EPA; UK Climate Change Committee evidence).



A number of UK local authorities have already begun the process of measuring their neighbourhoods against 3-30-300, and there are scores of case studies from further afield. For example, researchers in Warsaw carried out a spatial analysis in order to ascertain whether the city could be called *green* according to the rule's criteria. They found that while the majority of dwellings could see three trees, full compliance with 3-30-300 was much lower (at 22% of buildings) once canopy cover and park access were considered.

In short, 3-30-300 offers a benchmark that helps tree teams spot patterns that other metrics may miss. By focusing on visibility, canopy and access together, it is possible to understand where the urban forest is working for people – and where it isn't – and to communicate that clearly to residents, planners and councillors.

www.treeconomics.co.uk/3-30-300

References

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Cecil Konijnendijk from the Nature Based Solutions Institute and Kenton Rogers from Treeconomics will be among the speakers at the Association's Green Equity Symposium in April. See pages 6–7.