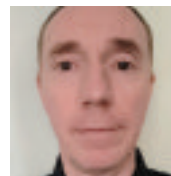




The 'Value of Trees' project - priceless protection

Andy Jackson, project manager from the Environment and Transport Department at Leicestershire County Council and a member of the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT), talks more about the ADEPT 'Value of Trees' project



The importance of trees has been widely publicised over the past few years. Last year, the Government launched the England Trees Action Plan, which sets out the long-term vision for trees, woodlands and forests in England, including increased tree planting and woodland creation.

However, ash dieback – a widespread, lethal disease that threatens native ash trees – is causing widespread decline of trees across the country.

ADEPT wanted to understand the consequences of ash dieback and how this will impact local authorities. In January last year, it launched a new project called 'Value of Trees' to measure the impact of ash dieback and develop an action plan.

It is estimated that over 90% of ash trees may be lost due to ash dieback. There is no cure and very few trees are resistant to the disease. This means that existing tree stock is at threat, in woodlands, in parks and along highways.

Leicestershire CC, together with consultants Treeconomics, is taking the lead on the Value of Trees project, which will produce guidance regarding species choice and tree planting techniques in both rural and urban areas.

As a council, we have a direct responsibility to ensure that our trees do not pose a danger to the public or property and are managed appropriately. We also have a duty of care under the Highways Act 1980 to ensure the safe use of the highway and to assess risk to public health and safety.

Like many other local authorities, we have had to begin removing and reducing the size of dead ash trees where possible, leaving deadwood in the landscape to provide rich

feeding and nesting habitats, and replanting other species in their place.

As a country, we need a more sustainable, co-ordinated approach to planting trees. Our trees are facing unprecedented environmental challenges and any new tree planting and species selection should be mindful of the need for resilience to changing environmental factors.

Working with partners, this project will produce specific guidance. This includes a tree valuation matrix, which will calculate the value of different species according to a number of factors including ecosystem services, biodiversity, replacement cost and amenity value. This will involve assessing ecosystem services that various species provide – such as reduced flooding and air pollution – while also considering other factors including the lifetime cost of a tree from buying it through to long-term maintenance.

The project will also produce a highway tree design guide, which will provide detailed advice on planting matrices, stocking density, stock selection and post-planting care, in both urban and rural locations. Finally, we will be developing a tree lifecycle costing document.

The intention is that we will be able to plan for the Leicestershire landscape of the future by using these documents to guide species choice and planting designs, to help tackle climate change, build greater resilience and develop nature recovery.

This project will create a consistent set of guidance documents that will allow trees to survive and thrive in a host of different environments. 'Right tree, right place' is our mantra – it is vital that this remains at the core of the project, so we can make informed choices about what we plant, not just for now, but to benefit future generations as well.

We hope the project will deliver many other benefits too. We want to develop a considered strategy for delivering ecosystem services and create a consistent, evidence-based approach.

There are some challenges. Planting of trees in public space can be contentious, with varying views on the best way forward across different stakeholders. It is a complex process, but our hope is that this will bring the different groups together. Developing the matrix is also very time consuming, as there are so many factors to consider.

The first phase of the project will be complete by April 2022. Although the project is developed for Leicestershire in the first instance, we are ensuring it is adaptable so that it can be applied more widely by other local authorities across the country. Our next steps will be to plan a pilot project and focus on how we can roll out the documentation more widely.

Calculating the value of trees is an important piece of work. To date, the value of trees has been an abstract, often subjective view but by creating a uniform, consistent approach we hope this project will help to influence national policy. ➔



- The project is funded by the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund: www.reesjeffreys.co.uk
- More information about ADEPT can be found online at: www.adeptnet.org.uk
- Information on how ADEPT is working on climate change can be found online at: <https://www.adeptnet.org.uk/projects/climate-change-hub>