

BOOK REVIEW

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LIVING WITH TREES

BY ROBIN WALTER

Crikey, what huge breadth Robin Walter covers in the 200+ pages of his book, the latest contribution by Common Ground to helping its readers explore the relationship between people and the natural world.

The title, *Living with Trees*, welcomes you in but neither this or the sub-title for the handbook, 'grow, protect and celebrate the trees and woods in your community' prepare you for this tour de force of history, facts, stories, case studies, ideas, analysis and introduction to many of the key policy questions for the tree agenda in 2021.

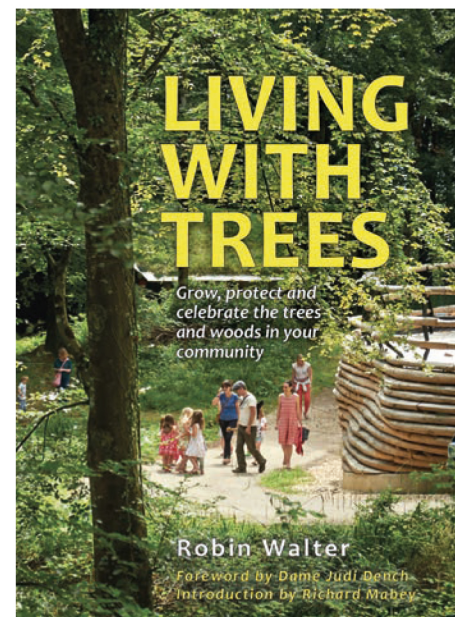
The format of the book supports this cornucopia, with a rich design approach melding very readable text, helpfully sub-titled in bite size sections, with margin facts, whole page case studies and a fine selection of images and drawings.

“ As well as being visually appealing, the book is very tactile (I guess I mean I keep on flicking through it!) and works either as an end-to-end read or as a dip-in, as almost all pages offer something as a stand-alone read. ”

Spread across five very sequentially logical chapters, starting from 'out of the wildwood' and ending with a clear vision articulated via 'into a land of trees'. Then a deep filling in chapters 2, 3 and 4 of living, playing, and working among, and with, trees.

So, there's much here for the everyperson but what about for Institute members? Well you might know or even be involved with some, or much of what Robin covers; and on first sight, Chapter 4 'Working with Trees' might be the one we reach for first, given our professional lives. But I urge you to read more widely, and I guarantee you will learn something new, or be challenged to think about bread and butter issues, in a more expansive or inclusive way. On the minutiae, as a north Londoner by birth, I'm glad I now know why the tube stop just along from me for many years is called Seven Sisters (seven elms planted around a walnut tree on common land – page 77). But I was also challenged professionally by the notion in Chapter 4, that our long accepted 'hierarchy of use' for wood, should start with the fundamental premise that the best use of a tree is to leave it growing. Perhaps the starting and end point for most citizens? And I was equally stimulated by the generous analysis of the contrasting approaches to valuing trees in Chapter 2 'Trees in our Lives', so relevant now, as many of us make the natural capital case for trees.

Robin writes skilfully about many of the key policy issues posed by these agendas and all the multiple opportunities and challenges for trees. His approach is 'big tent', presenting most of the options operating along a continuum, arguing that the best decisions are made



based on context and clarity of objectives. This inclusive approach might not suit all of us when we are grinding our policy axes, but deep down we know that bridge building to help deliver 'a lot more trees for many purposes,' is probably the best no regrets policy we can adopt. But as the final chapter points out, we always need to consider the counterfactual before we make the case for yet more (or less) human intervention in the lives of trees. As Robin points out, perhaps our ultimate challenge as tree professionals is that trees do tend to do just fine without us most of the time!

In summary, the few hours I spent reading this book count as CPD for me and I commend the same for all Institute members in 2021.