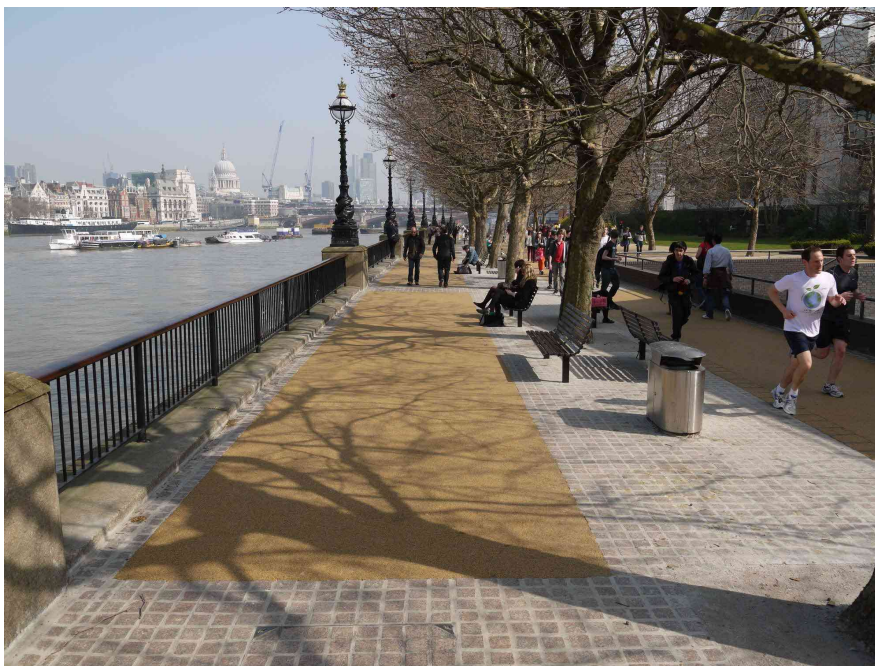# Community Trees Handbook

Case Study : London

A city wide tree campaign is promoting a 're-leaf' initiative and pioneering new ways of involving people in monitoring tree health through web-based tools, and the visionary Bankside Urban Forest seeks to reconnect an inner city business district with the natural world.

Trees For Cities

The plane trees of London have an international reputation and help give the city its distinctive character. A twenty five year old campaign, originally called 'Trees for London', has become a powerful force for improving the green spaces of the city and engaging local communities in their care. From edible playgrounds, to providing horticultural training for the long-term unemployed, Trees for Cities, as it is now known, has helped put trees centre-stage in plans to improve the quality of the urban environment.   For the last two elections, it produced a Manifesto for the Mayor of London to persuade candidates to adopt a 'ten point vision for trees in the capital'. At the heart of the vision was a call for 'active public involvement in a new tree culture for London.'

The campaign has had a galvanising effect. For two successive terms, the Mayor has committed to planting 10,000 trees as part of a 're-leaf' programme. Trees for Cities and the Greater London Authority has worked with boroughs and businesses across the city to plant trees, improve existing parks and create new 'pocket' parks.   Linked to this programme, the Dorchester Hotel has planted 80 trees to mark its 80th anniversary, and a 'tree trail' has been created for Victoria Park in east London. The approach is guided by research on the implications of climate change for trees in urban areas. It is also seeking to involve local communities with a 'love your trees' hotline to help with the care of newly planted street trees. A new web-based 'i-tree' initiative is intended to enable people to get involved in tree surveys, strengthening the connection between local communities and their local trees. The ultimate vision is for there to be one tree for every Londoner – which would mean a doubling from the current estimated tree population of the city of around six million.

To draw attention to the wealth of the city's trees, the campaign joined with Time Out to launch of 'Great Trees of London' initiative.   The public were asked to nominate publicly accessible trees for recognition and suggestions were assessed against a number of

criteria including physical character, location – was it a landmark tree? - and historical significance. The results were recorded in a handsome book published by Time Out in 2010 which recorded 60 trees of special note. The intention now is to carry out a 'future great trees of London' survey to recognise the benefits of recent work.

Websites:

www.treesforcities.org

www.london.gov.uk/priorities/environment/greening-london/releaf-london

www.treehugger.com/lawn-garden/visiting-the-great-trees-of-london-one-by-one.html

Bankside Urban Forest

One inspirational new initiative has grown up in the – until recently - relatively poorly leafed area of Bankside, on the opposite side of the Thames from St Pauls. Recognised as a 'Business Improvement District' in 2005, the area has undergone a major transformation ever since, linked with the opening of the Tate Modern five years before. The vision of an urban forest is playing a vital role in this process.

The Bankside Urban Forest initiative, developed by architects Witherford, Watson and Mann,was launched in 2007. It is a naturalistic vision to improve the network of streets and open spaces in the area, describing the large east-west streets as 'forest rides', open areas as 'clearings', and smaller roads and paths as 'streams', to create a new sense of place with trees at the heart. The notion of a forest is used to suggest a place of diversity and possibility with opportunities for social and cultural exchange. Innovative, temporary activities such as the Union Street Urban Orchard which occupied a small derelict site for a few months in 2010, have helped to give life to the vision. Fruit trees from the urban orchard were subsequently planted on local public housing estates and have contributed to local food growing initiatives developed by the local Bankside Open Spaces Trust.

To support the vision, a baseline audit recorded existing trees and green spaces in the area and identified areas in lacking in 'green infrastructure'. In such a heavily built up area it has been difficult to find locations suitable for tree planting. Experimental pits have been dug and reveal few streets that are not affected by underground services or reinforced concrete. Green walls and roofs, along with new art commissions - including one which uses wooden cobbles from the Coed Cymru 'endgrain' project - are contributing to the forest vision which has begun to inspire neighbouring districts. A community in nearby Elephant and Castle is borrowing the forest vision idea to identify and protect existing trees in their area which are at risk from the major redevelopment currently taking place there.

Websites:

www.betterbankside.co.uk/bankside-urban-forest

www.wwmarchitects.co.uk/Downloads/Bankside_Urban_Forest.pdf

www.unionstreetorchard.org.uk/contributors