



DCMS call for evidence:

Contribution of gardens to UK's economy and tourism

Written evidence from the Ancient Tree Forum, May 2019

1. The Ancient Tree Forum (ATF) has pioneered the conservation of ancient and veteran trees and is the main UK organisation concerned solely with their conservation. The ATF seeks to secure the long-term future of ancient trees through advocacy of no further avoidable loss, good management, the development of a succession of future ancient trees, and seeking to raise awareness and understanding of their value and importance. The ATF campaigns for UK Governments to recognise their international responsibilities towards the amenity, biodiversity and heritage provided by ancient and veteran trees.
2. Through the Ancient Tree Forum's engagement with owners and managers of parks and gardens or responses to planning applications we have direct knowledge and experience of the issues that they face in balancing income, and usually accompanying increases in footfall and major events, with sustainability.
3. The Committee highlights the research conducted by VisitBritain relates to parks and gardens yet does not mention parks in the questions for which it wishes to see written evidence. Often parks and gardens are intertwined, pleasure gardens are a part of a larger park or large gardens have significant major trees. This is too narrow a focus and in our response we concentrate on the value of parks to tourism and the economy.

Executive Summary

4. Keystone, iconic ancient and other veteran or champion trees play a significant role in parks and gardens however they are vulnerable to loss and damage through neglect or poor management. There is evidence that these rare trees are in decline and threatened.
5. The value of special trees is more than the mainstream ecosystem benefits of all trees they provide additional heritage, aesthetic, special biodiversity, health and wellbeing, community engagement benefits.
6. Growth in development and tourism and therefore visitor numbers is in some cases unsustainable and needs to be managed very carefully to protect valuable trees
7. The ATF would wish to see special recognition of Trees of National Special Interest and ancient wood pasture and parkland priority habitat. Best practice management should be encouraged through incentives but also backed up by appropriate regulation, policy and national guidance.

**How can gardens across the UK be supported to attract visitors and to ensure their future sustainability?**

8. The aim of the Ancient Tree Forum, often in partnership with other organisations such as the Woodland Trust, Tree Register of the British Isles and English Heritage, has focussed on raising awareness of best practice in the sustainability ancient and other veteran trees. This has been primarily through publications such as the two handbooks: Lonsdale (2013) "Ancient and other veteran trees - further guidance on management" or Read (2000) "Veteran Trees: a guide to good management". There is also a joint publication "Ancient Tree Guide no 8 - Ancient trees and events" which draws attention specifically to the conservation and management issues related to the juxtaposition of special ancient and veteran trees with visitors to important parks and gardens. In addition there are now a number of other publications and videos developed through EU programs (Erasmus) and partnerships i.e. VetTree and VetCert that is sharing expertise across Europe and raising awareness internationally of the exceptional UK population of these rare trees. Alternatives to EU funding to allow this to continue are essential.
9. The above publications emphasise the importance of protecting the roots of trees and the soil on which sustain them. Damage to roots and soil is detrimental, but compaction of soils is easily caused even by regular footfall i.e. 'people pressure'. Even more damaging is compaction from cars and heavy vehicles or direct severance of roots associated with new construction. Planning policy in England (NPPF/ Standing Advice) fully recognises the significance of ancient and other veteran trees and recommends a minimum buffer around such trees that should be protected from any form of development.
10. Large trees with major limbs, especially those with significant hollowing trunks and cavities are often perceived as being an increased risk to people and property even where specialists with experience in management of veteran trees, with or without modern equipment such as tomography, would recommend that the risk is reasonable and within the law.
11. Through the circulation of the Gardens Trusts list of planning application, which they compile as a statutory consultee, the ATF sees many significant planning applications aimed at provision of more and improved visitor facilities especially car parking. This implies increasing pressure on very special heritage parks and gardens through footfall (and other activities such as off road biking) often without a carrying capacity assessment. In addition there are single or one off events (usually involving large audiences) like concerts, festivals, which do not require planning permission because they are allowed under GDPO however these can have a very significant impact including during construction, the event itself and deconstruction. As the committee has identified the majority are places to which people return but are being put at risk from relentless and escalating demands and the need to generate new income.
12. Many ancient, champion and other heritage trees in gardens and parks are of national or even international value and yet have no protection. Owners and managers may be completely unaware of their values as there is no system of recognition of value of such trees comparable with Listed Building or National Nature Reserve status. The Ancient Tree Forum and Woodland Trust have called for a system to recognise them as Trees of National Special Interest (TNSI). As with Listed Buildings, a national agency should establish the list of TNSI and local authorities should have a duty to monitor them and where necessary protect them through Tree Preservation Orders or Conservation Areas.



13. Valuable trees with all their heritage and biodiversity values are extremely vulnerable and can be cut down and destroyed in minutes or hours with the loss of centuries of irreplaceable history, habitat and beauty often just to be burnt. Similarly, but more insidiously and by degrees less dramatically tree can be damaged often unintentionally, through lack of understanding or through lack of or bad management about the needs of trees, leading to a damaging cycle of intervention by pruning and an irreversible spiral of decline further decline. There is evidence that such valuable are being lost at an unsustainable level and this needs to be urgently addressed. Trees in historic landscapes are not immune from the general long term effects of aerial pollution and many have suffered pollution damage from changed agricultural practices. New stresses eg from disease, pests or climate change, means trees need to be in best of health to have best chance of surviving into future so we can hand on this legacy to future generations.

The Contribution of gardens, park, ancient and other veteran trees to public good and tourism.

14. The contribution of heritage trees, especially champion, ancient and veteran trees to parks and gardens and therefore public good is considerable. A few of the key values are highlighted in this section.
15. Historic tree value: There has been a long history of interest in trees and their associations with parks and gardens since at least John Evelyn's time in the reign of Charles II. Evelyn's two volume publication "Sylva" was the first to list the champion trees by girth in the British landscape at the time. Evelyn was responsible for the planting of many sweet chestnuts at Greenwich Park which are magnificent ancient specimens today. Since Evelyn's time, many have followed in his footsteps to discover big, old trees. The interest in special trees continues today through the work of the Tree Register of the British Isles (Trobi) that record champion trees of all species that exist in England and also through the Ancient Tree Inventory database which is maintained by the Woodland Trust in partnership with the ATF and Trobi. Others, such as David Douglas travelled to the most remote places around the world to find new species and introduce them into a UK setting. Our arboreta such as at Kew are internationally famous. Also as result of losses in their country of origin, collections in the UK has helped to conserve the genomes of rare tree species. Some parks and gardens are host to national collections of species which also provides an international role. Many historic trees such as pollards and open grown trees had other original purposes such as providing replacement wood for the estate buildings, fuel or for sale for e.g. ship building.
16. Citizen Science, engagement of volunteers and communities of interest: The Ancient Tree Inventory, hosted by the Woodland Trust, is a database with information about the locality, size and condition of ancient, veteran and notable trees built up, verified and maintained primarily through the efforts of citizen scientists. Further data on important trees, especially rare and unusual trees is available by a third NGO partner - the Tree Register of the British Isles. Through the work of these three organisations one can see the value of trees to gardens and parks. Moreover, the dedication of volunteers says something more about their recognition of the value of what they are contributing towards developing a national picture of these assets.
17. Historic park and garden value: The UK has a world renown reputation for its history and conservation of gardening and landscape design. Many other countries have tried to emulate the English Garden with its special characteristics such as water features, vistas and flowing landforms. The earliest designers however mainly built on an older landscape, which were deer parks dating from at least the early mediaeval or Tudor



eras which retained large old trees to provide shelter and fodder for the deer or structures in which huntsmen could take cover. The Ancient Tree Forum is very concerned that the parks and gardens that are often the essential settings, for the built historic environment, and are historic in their own right, are extremely vulnerable. Many are at least hundreds of years old (eg 'Capability' Brown landscapes over 250 years old) and established by the aristocracy for their leisure and recreation however incorporate valuable habitat structure recognised as priority wood pasture and parkland. The UK retains many such historic landscapes compared to the rest of Europe and they help to make the British landscape so quintessentially unique.

18. Aesthetic value: Trees are often the unsung backcloth for parks and larger gardens, the fabric against which the colour and texture of plants and flowers are highlighted. In urban settings, growth of cities and towns has often engulfed previous rural historic stately homes and estates e.g. Richmond Park. The presence of long established ancient trees give the landscape an 'air of antiquity' as Oliver Rackham once wrote that was so highly valued by the owners and designers of these grand estates and are still so today.
19. Ecosystem services: All trees provide ecosystem services (i.e. the benefits for human beings from healthily functioning ecosystems such as providing food and clean water, regulating climate, oxygen production as well as spiritual and recreational benefits). However, some trees bring other additional benefits such as heritage value through age, place and origin or through beauty. As trees age they change and start to provide features such as hollowing trunks and cavities or substantial volumes of dead/decaying wood which is important to rare and threatened wildlife. Oliver Rackham emphasised in several publications that 'ten thousand oaks of 200 years old are no substitute for one 500 year old oak.' Conserving these trees is a biodiversity priority. Where there has been a long continuity of such habitat on a site, providing new habitat to replace that which has been lost is essential or it will lead to localised extinction of rare associated species. Many parks with their associated pleasure gardens have an origin as grazed wood pastures. There is scant recognition of this priority habitat and even less general awareness of the issues that face them in terms of sustainability. Some of the great parks and gardens of London are based on historic mediaeval or Tudor hunting grounds - Hyde Park and Kensington Palace Gardens, Richmond and Bushy Parks, Greenwich Park. The Ancient Tree Forum is pleased to see that Royal Parks and City of London are becoming world leaders in demonstrating best practice in managing their tree populations for sustainability. However, their experience and knowledge needs to be followed elsewhere.
20. Health and wellbeing: it is well known that trees are extremely beneficial to health and wellbeing. Encouraging people to enjoy gardens and parks should be a high priority for improving the physical and mental wellbeing of the population. However this knowledge comes at a time when funding for municipal parks and gardens is shrinking and many authorities are trying to minimise costs by franchising them out to NGOs who are expected to raise essential income through charging for facilities or through events which can easily damage the delicate fabric of the site or destroy places for quiet enjoyment.

The role of garden design and landscaping in best supporting community spaces and community connections

21. Trees, open spaces, gardens and parks are known to have a major part to play in community wellbeing and livability in urban areas.



22. Developments are all too frequently taking advantage of pre-existing parks and gardens and there is no, or far too little, accompanying allocation of resource to help manage them sustainably to meet increased demand and accompanying pressures. Also the proportion and quality of open space provision associated with new development is often poor and has usually resulted from 'land left over from planning' which again leads to excessive pressure on existing places which are some of the most important places in England. There needs to be recognition of the role of adequate provision and good design of parks and gardens in enhancing urban life.
23. Many local authorities have outsourced their parks and gardens to charities or NGOs but they are usually less well-resourced and therefore have to generate income to meet their commitments. Charities maybe able to access funding that Local Authorities are unable to source, but they take on the risk at a time when funding is more difficult to obtain e.g. Heritage Lottery Fund reduction in income or potential loss of EU funding. Development should play a more long term role in setting up associated informal recreation facilities.

What the Ancient Tree Forum would like to see

24. The ATF would like to see far more concerted action across government departments to address the separate elements which are needed to deliver better care and protection. Long established, tried and tested regulation e.g. Tree Preservation Orders and Conservation Areas and new policy e.g. National Planning Policy Framework and Standing Advice are helpful however we would wish to see the recognition of valuable trees extended and recognised throughout government departments i.e. legislation/ regulation, policy and guidance as well as incentives through, grants or subsidies and cascaded out to government agencies and to local authorities.
25. Incentives need to be attached to public good which maybe for features already designated but also needs to extend beyond the designation system. New approaches should be trialled such as incentives for introduction of sustainable transport to assist visitors to access properties in carbon neutral way.
26. ATF would wish to see the creation of a statutory register of valuable trees (Trees of National Special Interest - TNSI) due to age, size, condition, rarity and cultural or historic associations. A national designation would encourage and incentivize partnership working and trees in the list would be monitored on a regular basis. They are a 'public good' and therefore financial support should be available to owners for best practice advice and financial support in the same or similar way to habitats of national value and to heritage features. The process of establishing a database of TNSIs is underway in Wales and in Scotland, led by the Woodland Trust actively supported of the ATF and the Tree Register of the British Isles.
27. Ancient wood pasture and parkland should be identified as such on Natural England's inventories and best practice guidance developed to advise owners on management. Subsidies should be developed that incentivise owners to recognise this habitat and help them manage it to high standards including encouraging appropriate new tree establishment.
28. There should be greater mechanisms of support for small organisations that are trying to raise awareness and standards of care for important heritage or biodiversity features in England. This includes replacement of

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Ancient Tree Forum



those international funding opportunities (e.g LIFE or Erasmus) which allow sharing of expertise with other countries.