

GREENBELT WOODLAND CREATION ADVOCACY RESEARCH REPORT



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Executive summary

Background

One of CPRE London's year 1 deliverables for the London Urban Forest Plan (LUFPP) was the commissioning of a woodland creation research report. Carried out by external consultants this was delivered in September 2023. It was a comprehensive and detailed report and this document is intended to provide a succinct summary.

Introduction

The report set out an evidence base for how to advocate for woodland creation in London's Green Belt. It is primarily concerned with the area of Green Belt within the boundary of Greater London but its findings are relevant to the metropolitan Green Belt as a whole.

It is at the same time a toolkit of evidence for how advocacy might be focused most effectively.

The research is intended to help advance Goal 5 of the London Urban Forest Plan which aims to create more woodland in London and in the London Green Belt.

Woodland creation and tree planting aid adaptation to climate change by enhancing our resilience to extreme weather events. These methods can also help to support wildlife and connect local communities with the natural environment.

Furthermore, increased woodland cover in the London Green Belt provides an opportunity to support local businesses and provide local communities with the many benefits and products that trees provide.

It could be the beginning of a renaissance of woodland culture in London's Green Belt.



Policies and strategies

There is a considerable array of national and local strategies that may affect decisions to create new woodland.

On a national level the Government is committed to delivering substantial increases in woodland cover, driven by the challenges posed by climate change.

Locally, all local authorities are looking to develop tree and woodland strategies to complement their Local Plans and Local Nature Partnerships. These are all positive signs which would benefit from greater coordination.

The report provides a useful summary of the most relevant policies and strategies.

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Key Recommendations:

1. Develop a public-facing campaign for 'The Tree Ring', a continuous ring of trees running primarily through Green Belt. (Now underway)
2. Consider creating The Tree Ring Community Forest, bringing the Green Belt and the land between Green Belt protected areas under one woodland creation umbrella. (Community Forest funding bid submitted March 2024)
3. Use woodland opportunity map being produced by Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC 1 (GiGL) as tool for prioritising advocacy work on woodland creation. Mapping should include information about land ownership and woodland types within the opportunity areas and be clearly ground verified by community groups and local biodiversity officers or other green space staff. (Done)
4. Engage a strong and identifiable champion or ambassador who is vocal, and backed by robust evidence and widespread support
5. Use opportunity of Tree and Woodland Strategies being produced by local authorities to advocate for increased woodland creation in London's Green Belt as a core aim and use them as tools for advocacy to a wider group of stakeholders. This should be supported by the recently launched Woods Means Business campaign to promote tree planting to farmers and other landowners.
6. London Urban Forest Partnership members, including the GLA, should collaborate to support nursery sector to create robust tree supply chain. Advocacy will be wasted if there aren't enough saplings to plant or skilled people to implement planting schemes.
7. Ensure there is an open mind to novel approaches to woodland creation and new planting. The diverse nature of London's Green Belt, its landscape, population, ecology, and land-use can be mirrored in the diversity of its woodland or other treescape creation. We need simple messages and a positive, can-do approach. Crafting messages that all stakeholder groups can get behind is more likely to create momentum and influence policy makers.

Other key sections of the report included:

An overview of recent woodland creation initiatives

International, national peri-urban and Green Belt specific initiatives have been considered to examine what they have achieved and what lessons can be learnt. It is clear that those initiatives engaging with a wide variety of stakeholders have more chance of securing successful woodland creation.

The realities of woodland creation

The report then addresses practical questions regarding sufficiency of nurseries and appropriate landscape grants. It addresses the reality that while there is a wide variety of grants for woodland creation, they could be better coordinated within the Green Belt to improve uptake. Likewise, adequate planting stock exists but may not be focused enough on the particular needs of the area.

Obstacles to woodland creation

Barriers fall into a number of categories related to cultural attitudes towards woodland.

Skills can be lacking among those considering planting, compounded by a lack of easily accessible advice; the time scales involved in woodland creation can be off-putting; the conflicting pressures over land use, including 'hope value' arising from the prospect of more lucrative uses; the semi-urban nature of the Green Belt. These can all act as obstacles to tree planting.

Advocacy

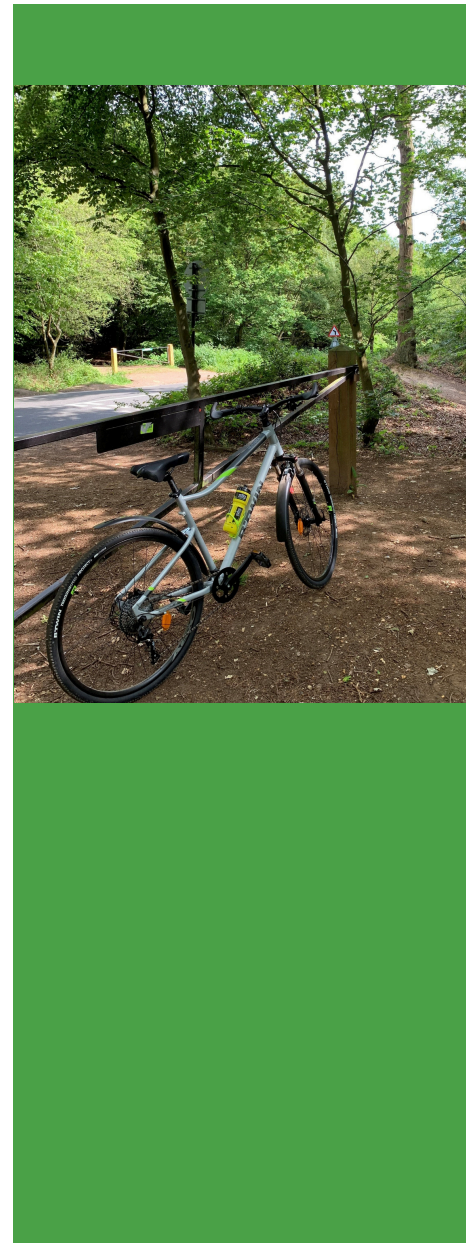
The report identified a number of stakeholder groups. We have taken these as the basis for an expanded list of stakeholders in our Tree Ring Communications plan:

1. Owners of London's trees and woodlands
2. Non-governmental organisations
3. Local/regional government
4. National government and arms-length bodies
5. Community groups
6. Members of the public, including potential donors, volunteers and supporters
7. Media
8. Supply chain companies

Finding relatable messages by stakeholder group will be vital for increasing woodland cover.

Recent Initiatives review

The report provides both background and ideas through summarising similar projects from international, national and more local levels. Some of the local initiatives cited, such as the Hainault Forest Extension, could be further extended within the Tree Ring project.



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