



barrell
TREE CONSULTANCY

Taking the profession forward

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Taking the profession FORWARD



Top award for a top man: Jeremy Barrell, 2001 AA Award Winner, receives his elm plaque from new AA chairman Jan Poinik.

Who better to contribute a regular column to 'essentialARB' than Jeremy Barrell*. To say he is well-known and respected in the industry is a considerable understatement. Throughout his eventful career (see Profile p10) he has pursued innovative solutions that have eluded the rest of the pack. His considerable contribution to the profession was recognised at the end of last year when he was presented with the prestigious AA Award – the tree world's highest accolade.

Receiving the 2001 AA Award is a great honour; anyone should be glad to receive it once before the end of their career and then coast to retirement. Sadly, I believe there is still too much poor practice and injustice to sit back and shut up, so I will continue to expose those on the wrong

side of the line and championing those who get it right.

In an effort to make this Award work for trees, I have prepared three short reviews that reveal a snapshot of arboriculture in 2001, highlighting the issues I think will make a real difference in 2002.



Good for developers, bad for trees. Some consultants are advocating taking only the largest stem of multiple stem trees to decide the BS 5837 distance of protective fencing, resulting in unrealistic protective zones.



Left: Heavy-duty ply on a scaffold-braced framework is the way to protect trees on development sites.

Below left: Board fencing is effective on this Compton Developments site in Poole, while chestnut piling (below) is not.



BAD PRACTICE

Thousands of good trees are lost on a yearly basis because of mismanagement on development sites. It is all too easy to be distracted by the talk of unscrupulous developers or ineffective local authorities and miss the underlying and main problem.

BS 5837 is now 11 years-old and totally out-of-date in terms of reflecting best practice on the ground. Sharp operators have learnt how to work the system:

- paling fencing is great for accidentally encroaching tree protective zones;
- the tree surveys section is so complicated and ambiguous that even the experts cannot get close to agreeing;
- issues that result in realistic future pressure to fell are nicely tucked away out of sight;
- and, arboricultural method statements are not even mentioned.

These loopholes make it easy for developers to destroy trees and make it hard for tree officers and consultants to save trees.

However, I am not here to preach doom and gloom this time; for a change, the future looks bright for trees. During the last five years, the negatives of 5837 have been creeping up on BSI and, at last, a revision is imminent.

The authorisation, the money, the will and the revision team are all more or less agreed, and it will soon be under way. It is very rarely that individuals can significantly influence the system they work in and so

this opportunity should be gratefully grabbed. BS 5837 is **one of the most influential documents in the tree world** and this revision is a once-in-a-career chance for individuals to make a difference.

Soon it will be time to expose bad practice, close all those loopholes and report the weaknesses in the system that prevent effective tree retention. All tree people should be preparing their horror

stories, recalling those nightmares and getting ready to make their voices heard. What we say and do now about the last 10 years will have a profound influence on what we can achieve as a profession in the next 10 years.

INJUSTICE

In contrast to the plight of trees on development sites, quite the reverse is happening as local authorities rush to update their failing old area tree preservation orders (TPO).

Tree owners are becoming the victims of over-zealous TPO update officers who are keen to put TPOs on anything that looks like a plant rather than read the rules and interpret the guidance. Councillors in their political haze easily manipulate the TPO system to amplify this injustice. All this is

being done in the name of trees and, realistically, there is not a thing the abused tree owner can do because there is no right of appeal.

I sense a Human Rights case emerging out of this soon.

I have a catalogue of dead trees, dying trees, dangerous trees, trees that are parts of hedges and trees that will never be visible from public viewpoints that have been included in TPOs. Perhaps it is understandable if there is a rush to get a provisional TPO

in place with no time to go into detail. However, it's absolutely unforgivable for this to prevail after confirmation when all the detail is there before the decision makers. This is occurring on a regular basis across the country so it is not an isolated problem.

I know the system is at fault, not the people. TPOs are made and confirmed by the same authority and there is no right of appeal to safeguard justice. We have



This dying oak was included in a confirmed local authority TPO.



This willow with severe basal defect was recently included in a confirmed TPO by an over-zealous authority.

A severely damaged Leyland cypress, also included in a confirmed TPO by a local authority. Note the shattered stem in the crown and the remnants on the ground.

councillors making the final judgement whose prime objective is to represent their constituents, not objectively assess two sides of a situation and arrive at an unbiased decision.

They are being asked to act as judges or inspectors who are trained to be impartial and deliver justice. How can they do anything but deliver an amateur service while coping with all their other duties and the pressures of staying in office.

A change to the system would require new legislation, which is not a realistic option. However, with the revision of the government guidance for TPOs on the horizon, local authorities could be advised to seek an independent opinion, with councillors ratifying the decision rather than making it. Whilst not completely removing the corruption factor from the system, it would represent a significant step towards addressing the injustice that is commonplace now.

THE STATE OF THE PROFESSION

The fundamental basis of good management of any system is to have accurate and reliable data and descriptions of the items that are being managed. Get the basic data wrong and there is little hope of getting the management that flows from that data right.

Therefore, I find it incredible to see so-called tree consultants producing survey information that is simply wrong, using survey methods that are manipulated to suit their needs and getting away with it on a daily basis. Even more disturbing is the fact that they are taking this information to court, to inquiries and to local authorities without being effectively challenged.

Some argue this is the reality in all professions so why try to clean up this one. I prefer the more positive stance that arboriculture is still a young profession and the mindset of secrecy and closed ranks



does not have to prevail here as it has elsewhere. Part of the solution is with organisations and institutions working towards an effective environment of regulations, guidance and documentation that encourage the best and penalises the worst.

However, I believe that the main responsibility lies with individuals. Many consultants need to improve their data collection and presentation but, equally as important, tree officers must also reject substandard submissions. Easier said than done in a culture where complaining and

rocking the boat is frowned upon.

Wicked as it sounds, the knee-jerk reaction is to name and shame the culprits but in reality, focusing on the negatives is not a sustainable way forward. Whilst the culprits must remain anonymous, exposing the detail of bad practice is a positive step and it is up to individuals to do it. Towards this end, I have dedicated a section of my website to discussion groups where disgruntled tree managers can publicly air their grievances with multiple benefits; the bad practice is exposed, its extent is established in a public forum and a consensus view may result.

This is still an experimental concept but I believe it has the potential to become a strong basis for combating the worst and initiating change for the better.

With the revision of BS 5837 imminent, the opportunity for change in the working environment is here. If that is to work for the benefit of the arboricultural profession, a change in attitude must evolve with more individual responsibility for policing best practice.

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