



## Barrell on... The shocking state of trees suffering in new developments

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### The shocking state of trees

Drive anywhere in the UK and you will find tree planting on new developments in a dreadful state. Dead trees, dying trees, strimmed trunks, long stakes instead of short, no mulching, planting too deep, poor nursery stock, wrong species, unsustainable locations, and the absence of any coherent design strategy are the most obvious.

Name a bad practice and the landscape industry is delivering it in bulk, all amid a public facade promoting precisely the opposite. Of course, there are exemplars, but the majority that I see are shameful, evidencing a failing landscape profession within a failing planning system. While research and innovation have moved forward at pace, implementation on the ground is a distant aspiration, so can it be turned around?

Sustainable communities, of which landscapes are an essential component, don't just happen — they must be designed. Current priorities must drive good planting design, most notably using trees with significant impact, and create resilience to both climate change and the meteoric increase in tree pests and diseases.

The solutions are simple — use big trees to optimise future benefits and a greatly increased species palette to reduce the risk of wholesale tree losses.

Instead we see designers clinging to outdated philosophies focused on the repetition of visual characteristics at the expense of species diversity and suitability. Single-species avenues are a great example — an historic construct with undoubted impact and grandeur, but vulnerable to premature loss from unexpected pests. Such features have no place in modern design. Mixing multiple species of similar form still delivers impact with the bonus of resilience, but the concept has yet to filter into design vocabulary.

Perhaps the most unforgivable missed opportunity is small species planted where there is space for bigger specimens. The species is right for the site but wrong for sustainability, a theme of failure consistently repeated across the country.

Finally, we endure a planning system struggling to keep up with the pace of change. Councils should refuse designs that fail to satisfy basic criteria, yet substandard submissions and substandard decisions continue to degrade urban landscapes without challenge.

Between them, designers and planners are creating urban environments so unfit for purpose that it's time to question the competence of the "professionals" responsible for such poor delivery.

