



Barrell on... Standards for arboriculture

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We all know that the British Standards Institution (BSI) excels at publishing standards, but developing them is a different matter. Large groups of interested parties passing judgment on detail that peripheral members do not fully understand may work for making a cup of tea (*BS 6008:1980 Method for preparation of a liquor of tea for use in sensory tests*), but there is mounting evidence that it is not so effective for Arboriculture.

In 2005, BS 5837 was published with some rather surprising mistakes and inconsistencies. Most notably, 'arboriculture' was incorrectly spelt and the daylight advice was so far off the mark that it is unusable. Three years on, it remains uncorrected and an acute embarrassment to the Arboricultural Profession. Indeed, when I recently enquired about complaining, BSI revealed it has no published complaints procedure, and that I should send my comments to the committee I was complaining against!

In 2008, BSI caused further disappointment by brokering the development of BS 8516:2008 - *Recommendations for tree safety inspection*, without any reference to the National Tree Safety Group, an initiative with huge cross-profession support. This caused such widespread disquiet that there are now serious questions about its future (HW, 25/09/08). Such mastery of misjudgment begs the question – is there a better way?

In contrast, the London Tree Officers' Association (LTOA) has a different approach. It sets up small, focused working groups, populated by specialists who deal with the technical issues on a daily basis. Those issues are analysed and worked into a draft, which is then widely consulted, adjusted and published. Their *Joint Mitigation Protocol* for dealing with subsidence tree management is an excellent example, setting out a relevant and representative standard of guidance that is a credit to the Profession.

The LTOA success demonstrates a credible alternative to the BSI template, although it would be naive to ignore the kudos that flows from BS endorsement. The lesson is obvious; best practice guidance on trees is best developed by tree specialists and then taken to BSI to publish at the end of the process, and not the other way round!

