



## Barrell on ... local lessons for Parliament

*Horticulture Week Opinion*

BTC/35/2009



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As the fallout from political and banking gluttony washes over us all, credible leadership seems to be a scarce commodity, and even the hope for one is fading. In a world where the horizon was fixed at the next bonus payment or the next election, all too often personal agendas were the priority and the concept of delivering benefits to the wider community was a rarely acted-upon ideal.

Trees do not fare well in such a climate; they take many years to grow big enough to make a difference and, where they do survive, they are under continual pressure because it is hard to put a value on the benefits they deliver.

We all know intuitively that trees are good, but the temptation to go for short-term profit at the expense of long-term sustainability is just as real for our local politicians as it is for their Westminster colleagues. Trees are a soft target and they have been badly beaten up in the scrabble for local government fame and fortune.

Against such a depressing backdrop, it was refreshing to attend the recent launch of the Wealden Ancient Tree Project, a pioneering initiative to catalogue all the ancient trees within Wealden District Council (WDC) in East Sussex. As part of the national Ancient Tree Hunt ([www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk](http://www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk)), the project is leading the way in raising public awareness of our rich heritage of very old trees. Although an obvious worthy cause, what is remarkable about this project is that it has been championed by a local politician, councillor Chantal Wilson, with an eye on the greater good rather than the next election.

Superficial talk of saving trees and planting more, purely for political mileage, is common - we hear it every day - but action on the ground is rare indeed. Not so in East Sussex, where the chairman of WDC has personally driven the project, applying old-fashioned virtues of passion, enthusiasm and the public good, rather than letting ideals of profit and personal ambition rule.

Lessons from the provinces may be hard for Westminster to swallow, but this one may be worth a look.

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