



## Barrell on ... reforming urban tree management

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Historically, English tree management has been neatly divided along rural and urban lines. The Forestry Commission has done a great job managing our national forest resource, but there has been no such approach applied to urban trees. Instead, local councils have randomly interpreted weak and confused Government guidance to deliver a patchwork of variable-quality urban tree populations. Our urban tree resource is depleted and its resilience severely compromised.

In that context, Francis Maude's decision to retain a reformed Commission in England has to be applauded. It recognises the Commission's achievements in the rural sector, while still leaving the door open to apply that template of success to the urban resource. The commitment of the coalition Government to "managing and expanding sustainably England's trees, woods and forests" is further evidence of this progressive approach, although how that is applied to urban trees remains to be seen.

It is obvious that reform of urban tree management is desperately needed - the current hotchpotch of responsibility spread between the Forestry Commission, Natural England, CABI and the Department for Communities & Local Government is disjointed, uncoordinated and has failed to deliver to full potential.

It makes sense to have a national tree strategy covering both rural and urban sectors, administered by one body. With its proven track record, the Commission has the credentials to lead, but will be hamstrung if the urban and rural sectors are not given equal weight.

This is the first opportunity for decades to apply the proven forestry business model for consistency and sustainability in urban tree management. A national management framework covering all trees would be a radical move, but what a legacy for realising their full potential towards achieving climate change targets. Whether the coalition Government has the short-term courage to run with such a long-term vision is another matter.

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