Barrell on… Trees: more trouble than they're worth?

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Trees: more trouble than they're worth?

Trees damage services, take up too much space and cost too much money; three historic myths that are real barriers to modern urban greening.   Of course, the evidence does not support these misconceptions, but they still remain commonly quoted reasons not to plant new trees.

Tree roots do not damage services installed using modern products tolerant of the small distortions caused by root growth. Indeed, there is now reliable guidance clearly stating that services can be placed near trees provided "adequate protective measures" are taken.

Another feeble excuse is that there is not enough space. Yet, even in the highest density developments, various technologies now allow the creation of rooting volumes that can support tree growth in the most hostile of environments. Above ground, a wide variety of species and forms allow tree selection to fit the space, rather than having to design the space to fit the tree.

Regarding costs, the initial supply and planting can be expensive, but tree benefits increase exponentially with growth and soon repay those costs, with a significant net gain over the lifecycle. The problem in the past has been realistically valuing those benefits, but help is here with a new system called i-Tree that calculates a pound value for the eco-services that trees provide.

London is in the process of completing the world's largest i-Tree survey to establish the value of its tree canopy cover. Through a collaboration of the Arboricultural Association, Forest Research, the Greater London Authority, Treeconomics and a host of volunteers, data from over 700 sample plots has been collected and the value of London's trees is due to be published early next year.

Placing a reliable value on tree benefits is the first step to dispelling the grand myth that trees are more trouble than they are worth.