



OUR OPINION

Candid thoughts from our members

Is working with trees heaven?

Sharon Hosegood FICFor and **Tracy Clarke** MICFor discuss the methodology and approach for a 'live' case study that Sharon is involved with

Dealing with passionate people well and being able to communicate the right outcome relies on the experience, knowledge and professionalism of an arboricultural consultant, particularly when the outcome may not be what people want to hear. This was so in the case of a threatened Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) at the Durning Library in Kennington, London. It not only called on the application of science and experience, but also our own creativity.

Lambeth Council owns the tree and, for the past eight years has wanted it removed, but local residents disagreed. So, where do we start when we're called in to help save the tree? Firstly, ask whether the threatened tree is important, why it is, what does that mean to whom, and what tools can be called on to work this out?

We need to consider the tree's amenity value. Systems available to help us make our case include:

- VTA – Visual Tree Assessment
- The Helliwell System – Visual amenity valuation of trees and woodlands, Arboricultural Association Guidance Note 4 (Rodney Helliwell FICFor, 2008)
- CAVAT – Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees (Chris Neilan, 2008)
- i-Tree Eco



(www.itreetools.org)

In this case, the VTA found the mature tree to be in a fair condition with some structural faults which were not likely to be significant. A CAVAT assessment already formed part of the background information, and the tree replacement value was assessed at around £54,000, which seemed a fair assessment based on the tree species, its age, form and function in its location. A 'visual envelope' of the tree's visibility was drawn up.

Surveys are currently under way in the UK to help quantify the ecosystem benefits of the UK tree population. Sharon referred to the species data from nearest i-Tree Eco survey (Victoria Business District), to give an indication of the tree's eco values. The threatened tree had already been plotted on Treezilla (www.treezilla.org), an online platform that is readily

available to establish a tree's ecosystem value.

This tree was the subject of a High Court order preventing its removal until the Council had fully considered the impact of its removal on the conservation area. A structural engineer report verified that the tree was causing structural damage to a nearby wall; a PICUS Sonic Topography inspection report confirmed the presence of a small area of internal decay.

Local people attached great value to the tree, so a meeting was held with Kate Hoey MP, a representative of the Duchy of Cornwall, and local residents. The Council had alluded to replacement tree planting, so we wanted to secure the detail of this to help us persuade them not to fell. The argument for delayed felling, while new trees were established, was put

forward. The Council thus delayed their decision making to fully consider our proposals. The decision, on the 27 July 2015, was to fell the tree but, for the first time, the Council will be seeking community views for new planting.

Securing new planting, if the council insisted on felling, is a pragmatic approach. Aiming for excellence in installation, contact has been made to a supplier who may assist in showcasing its products in a way that will benefit all. A recommended mix of species for the new trees will dilute the monoculture of London street trees.

In short, we need to be analytical, creative, rigorous and persistent. Then we must listen, negotiate and communicate to secure continual canopy cover.

■ As we went to press we heard that, sadly, the tree was felled in August.

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Read more about this case at:
<http://bit.do/Lambethtree>