

Making London's Woodlands Work - Evidence Base



Introduction

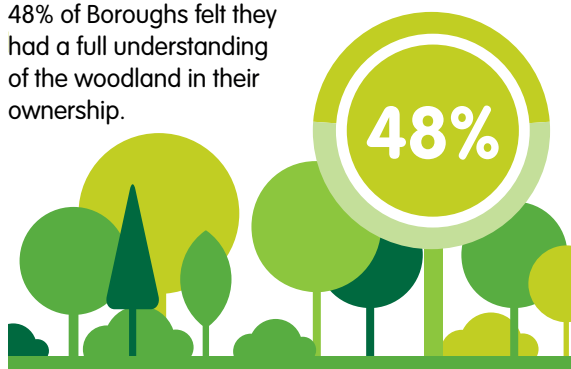
London's woodlands provide a range of environmental, social and economic benefits. To ensure that these are fully realised they should be sustainably managed – including selective cutting of trees – to create a diverse habitat, improve public access, generate woodland products and ensure the woodland is contributing to cleaning London's air and reducing the adverse impacts of climate change.

Ownership and management of London's woodlands is not well understood, with a general perception that much of it is owned and managed by public bodies such as Boroughs and other non-governmental organisations.

This project sought to better understand the condition of London's woodlands and identify opportunities to increase the level of sustainable management for social, environmental and economic benefit. This was done through mapping work, a survey and workshops that generated feedback from the majority of London's Boroughs plus other key landowners. These organisations geographically cover 97% of London's woodland area. This leaflet summarises some of the findings and more detailed information can be found at www.lantern.uk.com.

Woodland Distribution and Ownership

48% of Boroughs felt they had a full understanding of the woodland in their ownership.

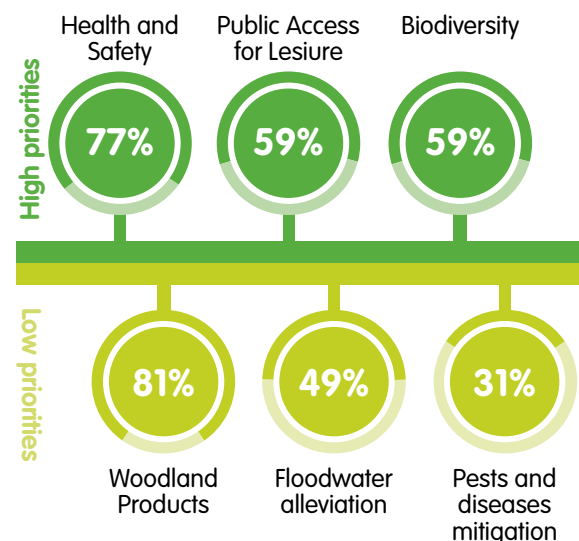


We know that woodland ownership is broadly shared between public and private owners. In London there are hundreds of owners which make cohesive management at landscape scale complex. The lack of consistent ownership and

management recording creates a challenge for strategic analysis and planning.

Of the 12,899 hectares of woodland in London, some groups of trees currently defined as woodland by the Forestry Commission are within a parkland or garden landscape and may not be managed in traditional woodland terms. It is important that sustainable woodland management principles are still applied to such areas to protect, improve and expand the tree canopy.

Management Priorities



Health and safety was a high priority for 77% of survey respondents. The provision of public access and biodiversity were also ranked as high priority, whilst woodland products were a low priority for 81% of local authority respondents. Some responses indicated management priorities that are 'target led', short term and do not reflect the woodlands needs or issues.

Management Planning and implementation

41% of respondents have a tree and woodland strategy, varying in the level of detail and degree of implementation. 21 out of 27 boroughs have some form of management plan across some or all of their woodlands. 15 with plans have recorded activities taking place whilst 3 boroughs without plans have management activities taking place.

Some woodlands within London are thought by those responsible for them to be critically threatened. Threats to woodlands included pests and diseases, public misuse, lack of management and development. Boroughs noted the perceived threat of development as being ever present.



The national average percentage of woodland in management is 57%, and this study has identified that more of London's woodlands are managed than official figures suggest (25%).

Resources

Non-borough organisations taking the survey noted staff resources and public concern as their biggest management issues. Boroughs noted the level of woodland management activity being affected by the availability of dedicated staffing resources or specified budget.

8% of survey participants felt that the resources committed to woodland management in their borough reflected their priorities and 40% said their priorities were not at all reflected in their allocated resources.

There was no correlation between the amount of woodland cover and either budgets or staffing levels. Boroughs noted a lack of dedicated woodland staff within their teams. There was a general view that support needs to be tailored to reflect urban forestry context/needs, such as bespoke funding and management plan templates.

Working in increasingly resource constrained times will necessitate investigating new ways

of working and alternative funding if uplift in sustainable management is to be achieved.

Community involvement and engagement

Community woodland groups regularly begin in response to a perceived threat to a local site or from a position of local interest. Types of engagement varied between sites. Community woodland groups tend to focus on lighter woodland management using hand tools. Only two boroughs out of 26 that answered monitored the level of public usage of their woodlands.

The study highlighted scope for community engagement and recognition of the benefits this could generate. It highlighted significant concerns about engaging local communities but there are good examples where such engagement has been effective and could be replicated elsewhere. Community involvement could help deliver woodland management but would need support to be effective.

Advocacy

There was a call for a high level of advocacy needed across London and within boroughs. Woodland management is currently seen by many as a cost and potential management benefits (economic, social and environmental) are not factored in.

The benefits of urban woodland management need continued promotion amongst the general public, so people are not fearful of tree felling and recognise that sustainable management increases social, environmental and economic benefits. A suite of London/urban focussed advocacy materials could aid future activity. Case studies demonstrating good examples of sustainable woodland management would help demonstrate real world activity and benefits.



Conclusions

Some of London's woodlands are considered to be under critical threat from a range of pressures. A lack of information, sustainable management plans and resources at landscape and local scale also mean that, although woodlands provide a valuable recreational resource, the environmental and economic potential of London's woodland is not being fully realised.

Common barriers to management are lack of long term/strategic thinking, resources, public perception of tree felling and lack of recognition of the benefits that woodlands provide.

There are good examples of well managed woodland for social, environmental and economic benefit that can be applied across London – see www.forestry.gov.uk/london-awards for exemplars. There are also opportunities to develop new approaches to increase the level of woodland management.

Initiatives to help realise the value of woodlands either economically, environmentally or socially such as development of wood product markets, payment for ecosystem services provided or development of leisure opportunities could provide the incentives needed to help manage London's woodlands in the future.

Call for Action

To increase the level of woodland management and realise the enormous benefits they provide we need:

Collaboration - As many of London's woodlands are relatively small it would be more beneficial for woodlands to be managed at the landscape scale as networks; with management plans and funding co-ordinated across multiple sites.

New approaches - by sharing existing good practice and developing new ways to increase management activity including provision of training, market development for wood products, community group management and encouraging landscape scale approaches. We will test collaborative working and new approaches in the Great North Wood area of London.

Sustainable plans - Tree strategies and woodland management plans should be produced to better understand the woodland resource and define long term sustainable objectives / activities. Plans will also help develop a strategic and consistent evidence base on woodland management ownership and management status. FC funding is available to produce woodland management plans

Promotion of the benefits of managed woodland - Continued promotion of the benefits of sustainable management to woodland owners and the public will highlight the benefits that managed woodland provides. We will publish up to date advocacy and good practice guidance on a single readily accessible site.

The FC will also use this study to inform future measurement of management activity and the application of woodland regulations, standards and incentives. Further analysis of the information collected will also refine the overall picture of London's woodlands.

