

## Inventory of evidence and programmes relating to trees and forests and (peri-)urban regeneration and place-making

Urban regeneration and place-making have formed important parts of government policy for many years. Increasingly, it is now recognised that greenspace can make a substantial contribution towards furthering these agendas and providing benefits to urban societies. In 2010, an inventory of evidence on the benefits of green infrastructure was compiled by Forest Research for the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Building on this project, it was acknowledged that there was a need to better understand the specific role that trees, woods and forests can make within the urban context. As a result, the inventory discussed here was created.



### Background

There is a growing evidence base to support the assertion that greenspace can play a significant positive role in the delivery of urban regeneration and place-making efforts. However, there exists relatively little evidence for, or evaluation of, the specific or unique role that trees and woods can play within these agendas.

### Objectives

This research aimed to:

- Identify and draw together social evidence and examples of practical programmes relating to trees, woods and forests and urban regeneration and place-making.
- Highlight gaps in the current evidence base.

### Methods

- Literature searches were undertaken using both academic databases and the web.
- For part one of the inventory, focusing on social evidence, only evidence that mentioned trees, woods and forests specifically and that was published in the last twenty years was included. Selected evidence was then grouped into six themes.

- For part two of the inventory, focusing on practical programmes, data was only gathered on multi-site programmes (at least 5 sites), operating at a national or regional level, and/or covering a total area of at least 1.5 square miles.

## Findings

Evidence suggests that it is important that woodlands are located close to where people live to secure the maximum social benefits from them. Trees and woods are an important part of cultural identity; projects, activities and events in urban woodlands can provide a useful expression of local identity and encourage a sense of ownership over wooded places. There is also strong evidence that trees and woods can provide restorative and therapeutic benefits and improve cognitive functioning. Evidence relating to the potential for trees and woods to encourage physical exercise is inconclusive. Trees can be significant elements in improving perceptions of place, which can in turn lead to increased residential property values and an enhanced willingness to pay for goods and services at locations with more greenspace. Woodlands and woodland-based interventions can help build a stronger sense of belonging, improve social inclusion and community cohesion, and enhance community capacity to achieve shared goals through increased social capital. However, concerns about safety, crime and anti-social behaviour act as a barrier to woodland access for many people, especially women, those from an ethnic background and children (because of their own and their parents' perceptions).

## Recommendations

The inventory highlighted various gaps in evidence. Specifically, more research is needed on:

- How to overcome barriers to woodland access and target specific under-represented groups such as ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.
- The role of trees and woods in the cultural landscape and cultural practices of people and communities in urban areas.
- The health and well-being benefits of trees, woods and forests within a UK context, since much of the current evidence base comes from the USA and Europe.
- The impact of trees on business settings for both consumers and businesses.
- How woodlands and trees differ from other types of greenspace in terms of their potential to provide social benefits, including health and well-being benefits, social interaction and community cohesion.

### Partners

Forest Research, Forestry Commission

For further information contact: [Amy.Stewart@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Amy.Stewart@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

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### Reports and Publications

Stewart, A. and O'Brien, L. 2010. *Inventory of social evidence and practical programmes relating to trees, woods and forests and urban/peri-urban regeneration, place-making and place-shaping*. Forest Research, Edinburgh