

130,000 trees to be planted in English towns & cities

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/urban-tree-challenge-fund>

Sheffield Tree Action Groups (STAG) welcomes the announcement of the Urban Tree Challenge Fund and the focus on planting trees in urban areas. DEFRA have rightly stated the benefits that urban trees bring to communities – “Trees in urban areas improve health and wellbeing, connect people with the outdoors, absorb noise, reduce flood risk, reduce temperatures through shading, and create green spaces to help communities come together”. These are arguments that campaigners in Sheffield used when trying to get Sheffield City Council to change its plan to fell half of our 36,000 street trees. Sadly it took years of bitter dispute, court battles, wrongful arrests and direct action by concerned citizens to halt the Council’s misguided policy of tree removal. Almost 6,000 mostly healthy trees were felled until work by the contractor Amey was halted in March 2018.

If the objective of planting more urban trees is to be meaningful, we need existing mature urban trees to be protected. It would be a travesty if Councils used funds to plant saplings whilst removing mature trees to reduce maintenance costs due to budget pressures. We need to see an obligation or duty on Councils to preserve mature urban trees so that any new planting produces a demonstrable increase in the urban canopy. The lesson from Sheffield is that their policy of felling mature trees and replacing them on a one to one basis with saplings was short-sighted and hugely destructive to the local environment. The DEFRA announcement today is welcome but 130,000 saplings does not replace the volume of trees felled in recent years by Councils like Sheffield and companies like Network Rail clear felling great swathes of trackside trees. Significant loss of trees and habitat will result from housebuilding and infrastructure projects such as HS2 in the coming years.

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[DEFRA press release below for reference:](#)

A new £10 million plan will see more than 130,000 trees planted across England’s towns and cities, Environment Secretary Michael Gove announced today. Through the Urban Tree Challenge Fund, grants will be made available over the next two years to green urban areas and meet the government’s target to plant one million urban trees by 2022. Planting more trees is crucial in the fight against climate change, because trees store carbon and can help make our towns and cities more resilient. Trees in urban areas improve health and wellbeing, connect people with the outdoors, absorb noise, reduce flood risk, reduce temperatures through shading, and create green spaces to help communities come together. The scheme, which will be administered by the Forestry Commission, will be open to individuals, local authorities, charities and NGOs. Grants will fund the planting of trees and the first three years of their care to ensure they can flourish into the future.