

The Cambridge Canopy Project issues a 'call to action' to city residents



7th July 2020, by Dr Matthew Ling, Project Lead, Cambridge Canopy Project



Introduction

Earlier this year Cambridge City Council launched the [Cambridge Canopy Project](#). This initiative aims to increase tree canopy cover in the city. This will help to make the city more resilient to the impacts which are likely to be realised as a result of climate change and to help mitigate against them.

The project is part of a broader European project called [Nature Smart Cities](#). Six other cities across Belgium, France, The Netherlands, and England are pilot testing different 'green infrastructure' approaches to build climate resilience as part of this project. In other words, each of the project cities will be using natural solutions in place of more traditional built or

engineered options. For example, sustainable urban drainage, rain gardens, or permeable paving.

Trees are superheroes!

In Cambridge, the project is focussed on the use of trees as a form of green infrastructure. Trees are like the superheroes of the natural world, providing us with a vast array of benefits. For example, trees clean the air and provide the oxygen we breath; provide shelter from extremes of hot and cold; have positive impacts on our mental well-being and physical health; regulate our climate; provide materials for building, heating or cooking, and eating; and support whole networks of animals, plants, fungi, insects, and more.



Growing our Urban Forest

The headline aim of the Cambridge Canopy Project is to increase tree canopy cover in the city by 2%, from the current level of 17% to 19% by 2050. To achieve this growth, we need an additional 16,000 trees across the city. Whilst 2% sounds very modest, in reality it equates to more than 80 hectares (or approximately 100 football pitches) of additional tree canopy cover in the city.

This additional tree canopy cover will provide increased shading, helping to prevent excess localised heating by the sun in the summer months which creates a process called the Urban Heat Island effect. The increased number of trees will also help to intercept rainfall, increase rainwater infiltration into the ground, and take up more water from soils. In combination, these processes will help to reduce the threat of flash flooding resulting from intense rainfall during storm events.

Cambridge City Council, through the Cambridge Canopy Project, will be planting 2,000 trees across public open spaces in the city. An additional 1,500 trees will be given away to residents through the '[Free Trees for Babies](#)' scheme. Whilst it would be great if all 16,000 trees could be planted in public open spaces, there are various limitations which mean this is practically difficult to implement. For example, the available opportunities for tree planting are becoming few and far between as the city is already quite well stocked with trees.

Therefore, to hit our 16,000 new trees target we need 12,500 more trees to be planted.

This is where the residents of Cambridge come in!

We need you!

Private residential land makes up about 40% of the total land area of the city and is the single largest land cover type. In this portion of the city there are more than 40,000 homes with gardens. This is where the biggest opportunity for tree planting exists in Cambridge. If each one of the residents with a garden [planted a single tree](#) we would grow our urban forest substantially, and by doing so it would make a meaningful contribution to combatting the impacts brought about by climate change.

A core principal exists when planting trees, that is 'the right tree in the right place'. Cambridge City Council's highly skilled and knowledgeable tree officers ensure that the right tree is always selected for each planting location in the city. This is based on a consideration of the trees' mature size and shape, micro-climatic and environmental conditions, and any nearby constraints or stresses. With this same approach, it is possible to find a tree to suit almost any sized garden. The project will develop guidance to help residents select and plant a tree to meet their needs.

The Cambridge Canopy Project is issuing a call to action to the residents of the city; **we need your help to plant more trees!**



The list of benefits we receive directly and indirectly from trees is huge. By planting at least one tree in your garden – even if this is a small variety in a large container on a patio – you will start to realise some of these benefits. But better than that, you will be contributing to growing our collective urban forest – that is all trees in the city across all ownership types. By doing so, you will be helping to support the provision of benefits that will be realised by all residents and visitors to the city, for example, cleaning our air, cooling our city, and helping to fight climate change.

If you want to know more about the Cambridge Canopy Project, or help with selecting or planting a tree, please visit our [website](#), follow us on [Twitter](#), or sign-up to our [monthly newsletter](#).

We are also currently collecting the views and insights of city residents regarding trees and gardens. If you have 10 minutes to spare, it would be a great help if you would consider completing our [survey](#).

Ends:

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