

Tree Equity Score (Woodland Trust)

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1 Executive summary

The Woodland Trust and Centre for Sustainable Healthcare have partnered with American Forests, the US non-profit organisation that created Tree Equity Score, to bring Tree Equity Score to the UK.

This briefing explores the motivations that lie behind the Tree Equity Score, and its potential impact on local councils.

2 What is tree equity?

According to the Woodland Trust:

“Tree equity is the idea that all communities have equitable access to the benefits of trees where they live. While some urban areas enjoy abundant greenery and tree cover, others lack these essential natural assets.”¹

The Woodland Trust then continues that tree equity:

“...must be embedded into urban forest planning, and that doesn't just mean planting. Plans must also include caring for and protecting trees - both newly planted and existing - to ensure they continue to thrive and improve the quality of life of residents for years to come.”

¹ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/protecting-trees-and-woods/benefits-of-urban-trees/tree-equity/>

The UK's total woodland cover is just 13%, with towns and cities faring even worse. Studies from Forest Research have revealed that urban tree cover varies wildly, ranging from as little as 3% in Fleetwood, Lancashire to 45% in Farnham, Surrey.

3 Why is tree equity important?

Studies have shown that trees in urban areas can:

- Improve ecosystems and boost biodiversity;
- Reduce air pollution;
- Create attractive environments where businesses want to invest and people want to live, work and play;
- Create a sense of place, beauty and heritage

The absence of trees is not just an aesthetic discrepancy — it can impact human health and wellbeing. Neighbourhoods devoid of trees often wrestle with the urban heat island effect, where concrete and asphalt absorb and magnify heat and elevate the risk of heat-related illnesses.

Some studies have linked long-term exposure to green surroundings to health benefits such as living longer. Conversely, unsheltered sidewalks can deter residents from walking, exercising or socialising outdoors.

4 Calculating the Score

The Woodland Trust and Centre for Sustainable Healthcare have partnered with American Forests, the US non-profit organisation that created Tree Equity Score, to bring Tree Equity Score to the UK.

The Tool calculates a Tree Equity Score out of 100 for urban neighbourhoods. The lower the score, the greater the need for trees – a score of 100 means tree equity has been achieved.

Tree Equity Score UK is a map-based application that was created to help address disparities in urban tree distribution by identifying the areas in greatest need of people-focused investment in trees.

5 Potential impact on councils

In answering “*How to use your Tree Equity Score?*” The Woodland Trust website makes the case for “*Lobbying your council*”. The website urges users to:

“Write to local decision-makers with your Tree Equity Score and ask what they're doing to help address the disparities in tree cover where you live.”

6 APSE Comment

APSE fully supports the efforts of the Woodland Trust in helping to bring attention to the unequal access to woods and trees which exists in the UK. APSE believes everyone should have easy nearby access to the benefits of trees and this score goes a long way to identifying – and helping to bridge – the discrepancies in access to greenery and tree cover across the UK. However improving access to trees and woodlands must be properly resourced to ensure that the right species of trees are planted in the right location and equally resources must be found for the long-term maintenance and management of tree stocks at a local level, including tree inspection regimes to ensure the maximum health benefits alongside community safety.

Across several research publications, [seminars](#) and campaigns – including our “[Post Pandemic: Green Urban Spaces](#)” report – APSE has made the case for local authorities putting in place dedicated trees and woodlands strategies. APSE remains a valuable resource for our member councils on all matters relating to trees and woods, be they urban or rural.

The APSE Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Network provides APSE member councils with excellent opportunities to look at the strategic, operational and technical issues facing local authority parks, horticulture and grounds maintenance teams. With regular online meetings and briefings, discover how your council can benefit from getting involved with the APSE Network [here](#).

Matt Ellis, Principal Advisor
mellis@apse.org.uk

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Association for Public Service Excellence
3rd floor,
Trafford House,
Chester Road, Manchester M32 0RS.
telephone: 0161 772 1810
fax: 0161 772 1811
web: www.apse.org.uk

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