

Arboretum towns

What's in a phrase? Are the trees in the town? Or is the town in the trees? Read on to find out...

by Keith Sacre and Kenton Rogers

When speaking of trees in the urban environment it is always in that order. It is the trees which are in the town. Use the same words in a different order and an entirely different perspective on the same thing is created. The town in the trees has an entirely different feel to trees in the town.

Two towns in the UK appear to have embraced this idea and are working towards becoming arboretum towns (or civic arboreta).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'arboretum' as quite simply, 'a botanical garden devoted to trees.' Other definitions include:

- a plot of land on which many different trees are grown for study or display
- a place where trees or shrubs are cultivated for their scientific or educational interest
- a facility where trees and shrubs are cultivated for exhibition.

One definition actually included a comparison between arboretum and museums, as special places, walled, where entrance is specifically for those with a scientific or educational interest in trees and shrubs.

Always there appears to be a separation, the arboretum and the city or town in which it is located, a tree population separated and not part of a continuous urban forest servicing.

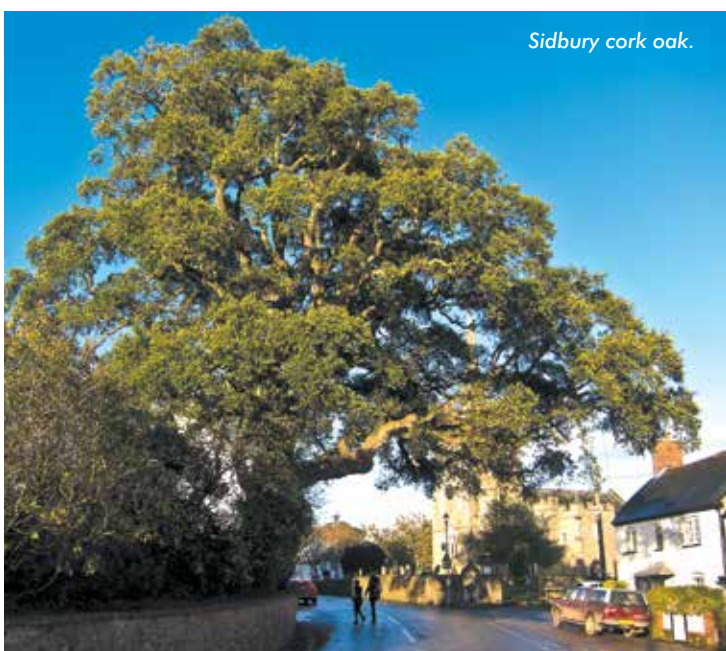
While it would be daft to belittle or question the validity of arboretum as narrowly defined and the educational and scientific benefits they provide, the question currently being posed by the Sidmouth Arboretum Group and The Friends of Lewes Urban

Arboretum project is, can the definition of an arboretum not be widened to encompass whole towns?

Sidmouth Arboretum was launched in May 2012 with the express intention of creating a civic arboretum which covers all the public and private land within the jurisdiction of Sidmouth Town Council. Sidmouth is situated in the Sid Valley and is part of the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is also served by many footpaths and crossed by two long-distance paths, the East Devon Way and the South West Coast Path.



Hugh Angus, Chair of the Sidmouth Arboretum Group, on one of the tree walks. Trees in the 'arboretum' are located on public and private property and during the guided walks private gardens open their gates too.



Sidbury cork oak.

The group states that every tree in the Sid Valley is potentially an arboretum tree and has significant trees mapped and listed, with the information publicly available on their website. A series of tree trails have been identified, there is an annual tree day (the next one is planned for June 28th) and community planting undertaken. All of these activities link into the three stated aims of the arboretum group; to acknowledge the rich heritage of trees, to guide and encourage new planting and to enhance the visual welcome to the coast and countryside.

Lewes is situated in East Sussex and is now the largest town in the newest UK National Park (being included in the South Downs National Park) which became fully operational in April 2011. Like Sidmouth, there is easy access to a long-distance path, the South Downs Way, and there are clearly defined objectives which are the protection, restoration and enhancement of the Lewes treescape, with all the environmental and wellbeing benefits involved, the provision of educational and interpretive material, the boosting of tourism and addressing some of the consequences of climate change and current tree disease outbreaks.

In March 2013 a report into the feasibility of Lewes becoming an arboretum town was published. The report identified significant trees in the Lewes town area, looked at tree collections and land ownership, new planting opportunities and tree species selection. It concludes that, 'there are sufficient ornamental trees of note to constitute an interesting and meaningful town-wide 'dispersed' arboretum and that there are opportunities to extend this by planting new sites as they become available, replacement planting of lost trees and the infill of sites referenced in the report.'

Common to both projects is the fact that they are both community-led and have a clear recognition that trees provide many benefits which include shade during the hot summer months, the interception of pollutants, carbon sequestration and absorption, rainwater interception and the slowing of the rate at which this water enters main drainage systems and, perhaps more importantly to most people, they provide beauty, particularly in urban areas.

There is also recognition that tree populations are dynamic. Trees age and die and while they can be conserved they cannot be preserved and that any tree population needs replenishing if it is to maintain the level of benefits it provides for the community. This replenishment, in urban areas, is largely through the intervention of people managing existing trees and the planting of new ones. There has also been a realisation that without appropriate baseline information such basic questions as to which species to plant, where to plant them and the contribution any new planting makes to the overall tree population are difficult to answer.

The Lewes project recently made use of the i-Tree canopy model, evaluating the land cover of over 1,200 randomly selected points in Lewes to discover that Lewes currently enjoys a 26% tree canopy cover.

Both the Sidmouth and Lewes Arboretum projects have now undertaken to conduct a full i-Tree Eco study this summer.

The i-Tree Eco model demonstrates the value of the 'urban forest' to local businesses, communities and policy makers. It provides information on the structure and composition of the tree population within any given geographic area, in this case Sidmouth and Lewes, and gives values in terms of the benefits provided for the community. It also expresses these benefits in monetary terms. For example, a recent study in Torbay demonstrated that the town's trees stored £5.1 million worth of carbon and removed 50 tons of pollutants from the air every year, a service worth £1.4 million per year.

The i-Tree Eco projects in both towns are community-led with some professional consultancy input from Treeconomics.

Sidmouth will sample 250 randomly selected plots while



This large copper beech in Lewes was successfully relocated in the grounds of Shelley's hotel; an example of a clearly valued tree being preserved.

Lewes will sample 220. All data collection will be carried out by volunteers who will be trained by Treeconomics. In Lewes the project has been adopted by Plumpton College with students undertaking data collection and processing. A detailed explanation of i-Tree is beyond the scope of this article but further information can be obtained from Kenton Rogers at Treeconomics (kenton@treeconomics.co.uk).

The i-Tree Eco survey is only the first stage, and both groups intend to use the information gathered not only as a means of engaging with all stakeholders in emphasising the importance of the urban forest and tree population management but also as a means of drawing up comprehensive management plans for their respective project areas.

So is there a new and developing model under construction? This is a model which recognises the value of arboretum in the conventionally defined sense but steps outside its inevitable constraints and moves towards towns in the trees rather than trees in the towns and perhaps an enhanced definition of arboretum.

For further information on Sidmouth Arboretum Town visit: sidmoutharboretum.org.uk

For further information on Lewes Arboretum Town visit: <http://friendsoflewes.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/lewes-arboretum-fol-report-1.pdf>

For information on either project, or i-Tree Canopy or i-Tree Eco, contact Kenton Rogers kenton@treeconomics.co.uk or Keith Sacre keith@barchamtrees.co.uk



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