



# Community Tree Guide: grow your planting project in 4 easy steps



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# Your guide to getting started



Urban trees offer numerous benefits for people and nature. From improving air quality to boosting physical and mental wellbeing. However, trees and their benefits are inequitably distributed. This guide aims to support community groups in urban areas who want to improve [tree equity](#) in their town or city.

It's essential that any planting initiative is tailored to the unique needs of that community and local landscape, ensuring that trees thrive and deliver their full potential for the long term.

**If in doubt, it's important seek advice from an arboriculture or forestry professional.**

Your guide to making it happen:

- An overview of the key actions involved in planning a community tree planting initiative.
- Ways to engage and work with your community and local partners.
- Practical advice on tree planting and long-term care, with links to additional resources if you want to dig deeper into a topic.

**There are four steps to explore**



Analyse



Communicate



Plan



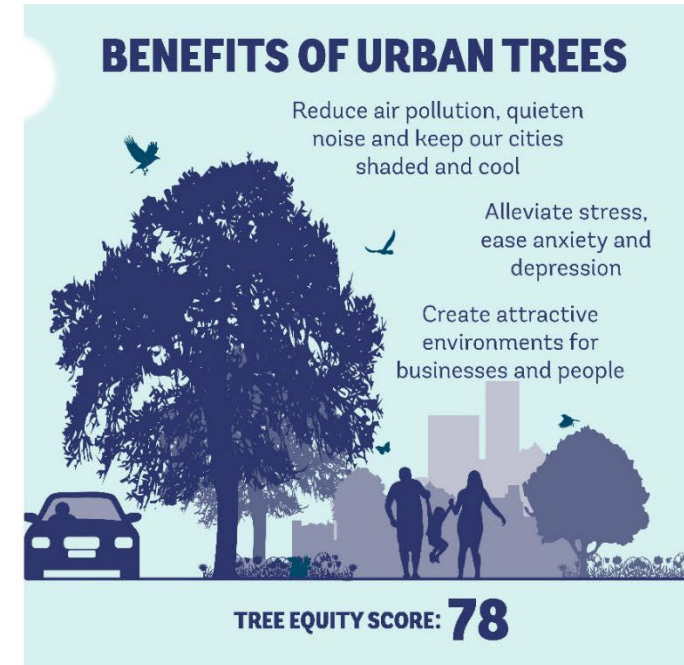
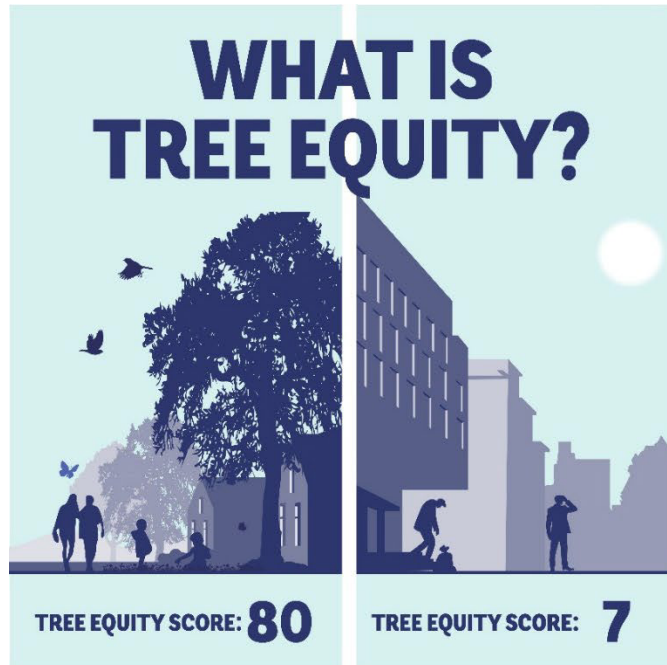
Action



# 1. Analyse: understanding where trees are most needed

## Assessing tree equity and community priorities

Before starting any tree planting initiative, it's crucial you understand where trees are most needed. Whether you're working across a whole town or city, or in a hyperlocal area, the Tree Equity Score can help you identify where low canopy cover overlaps with other social and environmental challenges. The score considers factors like air pollution, temperature, health, and income, helping you prioritise where trees can have the greatest impact.



# 1. Analyse: key actions



- 1. Use the Tree Equity Score tool:** this free-to-use tool will provide insights into your area's tree cover and highlights where planting would be most beneficial. If you are working across multiple neighbourhoods, it can be a great way to prioritise your efforts.
- 2. Analyse existing local plans:** investigate existing urban forest master plans, greening strategies, or neighbourhood ward plans. Aligning your goals with these plans can help build a stronger case for tree planting, especially when talking to politicians.
- 3. Check if you're in a Community Forest area:** all of England's Community Forests have plans that coordinate tree planting across their areas, so it's important to let them know what you're planning. They are the experts and may be able to support and advise your initiative.
- 4. Assess organisational capacity:** consider what is realistic for your group based on available resources, staff, and volunteer capacity. Remember it's okay to start small and build up over time.



## 2. Communicate: get people excited about your idea



### Engaging with your community and building partnerships

Once you've identified the areas where trees are needed most, the next step is to communicate your idea and start building relationships. Community involvement is key to the success of any planting initiative, from getting people excited about the idea to ensuring long-term care of the trees.

The **Tree Equity Score** provides a powerful way to tell the story of tree coverage in your area. By highlighting disparities in canopy cover, it shows where trees are needed most to address social, environmental, and health inequalities. Whether you're presenting to local councillors, applying for funding, or engaging local residents, the Tree Equity Score offers clear, evidence-based insights to support your case.

Community engagement should be thought of as **an ongoing process**, rather than a one-time effort. It's about creating a framework that guides your project from start to finish, ensuring that every step is informed by the **community's input and needs**.

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## 2. Communicate: key actions



- 1. Start conversations early:** use existing channels such as community meetings, social media or local newsletters to find out what's important to people when considering tree planting. You may wish to consider [setting up your own local group](#) or [arranging a community meeting](#). Early engagement builds community interest and investment in the project.
- 2. Talk to your councillor:** elected councillors can play a crucial role in community initiatives. Securing their support can greatly strengthen a tree planting initiative. Use the **Tree Equity Score** to highlight the need for more trees in your area and contact your [local councillor](#) to advocate for their involvement. Also consider [contacting your local MP for their help to protect woods and trees](#).
- 3. Build key relationships:** work with local authorities, environmental organisations and housing associations. Local authority officers can have limited capacity, but they have a wealth of knowledge on urban forestry. They can guide you in navigating permissions and other bureaucratic processes. There are also organisations such as the [Arboricultural Association](#) and the [Institute of Chartered Foresters](#) that hold directories of tree professionals who offer expertise in planning, planting and aftercare.
- 4. Set expectations:** be clear about what the project aims to achieve and the roles different people can play, whether that's in planning, planting or aftercare.

	When collaborating with the local authority:	When collaborating with housing associations:	When collaborating with businesses:
Who to speak to:	Identify the <b>landowner</b> and the appropriate department, such as <b>Highways</b> or <b>Parks</b> . Find a <b>tree champion</b> within the team to advocate for your project and help navigate any <b>bureaucratic processes</b> .	Speak to key contacts like the <b>property manager</b> , <b>community liaison officer</b> , or <b>resident services coordinator</b> as they can help facilitate communication and support for your project.	Reach out to local <b>business groups</b> like the <b>Rotary Club</b> and <b>Chamber of Commerce</b> . Contact <b>local business leaders</b> and the <b>Mayor's office</b> for their connections and influence.
What to ask:	Inquire about <b>current site uses</b> that might limit planting, <b>seasonal uses</b> like sports pitches and ask if <b>service checks</b> can be done to identify utilities. Request alignment with <b>local plans</b> and explore how your project can support broader community goals.	Inquire about <b>residents' needs</b> , any <b>landscaping restrictions</b> , and preferences for <b>tree species</b> that are <b>visually appealing</b> .	Inquire about <b>available funds</b> or <b>grants</b> to support your tree planting efforts. Ask if they are interested in <b>sponsoring</b> or participating in <b>planting events</b> and request help in <b>publicising</b> the event through their <b>networks</b> and communications.
What to say:	Clearly communicate the project's <b>goals</b> and <b>community benefits</b> . Address past <b>concerns</b> about tree planting, such as issues with trees growing too close to buildings and <b>emphasise thoughtful design</b> to avoid future problems.	Clearly communicate the project's <b>goals</b> and <b>community benefits</b> . Address past <b>concerns</b> about tree planting, such as issues with trees growing too close to buildings and <b>emphasise thoughtful design</b> to avoid future problems.	Highlight the <b>community benefits</b> of the project, including <b>environmental improvements</b> and <b>local aesthetics</b> . Explain how their involvement enhances their <b>CSR profile</b> and <b>reputation</b> . <b>Emphasise</b> the importance of funding <b>maintenance</b> for long-term success.
Common issues and solutions	Be aware of <b>varying levels of support</b> due to often <b>limited funding</b> for trees. Tailor your approach and avoid <b>over planting</b> by focusing on sustainable numbers in suitable locations. Consult with the community to <b>prevent wasted resources</b> and ensure broad support. Plan for ongoing <b>maintenance</b> , possibly involving volunteers.	Ensure <b>residents</b> are well informed to prevent worries. Choose <b>visually appealing trees</b> to enhance the area without overwhelming residents. Plan for <b>ongoing care</b> by discussing maintenance responsibilities, possibly involving the housing association, local council or volunteers.	Maintenance concerns can be a major issue. Address this by developing a <b>clear maintenance plan</b> with assigned responsibilities. Encourage businesses to sponsor maintenance activities or volunteer their staff for <b>gardening days</b> . Highlight the long-term benefits of well-maintained trees and the positive image it creates for the business.
Top tips	Align your project with local authority plans <b>early on</b> to secure support and permissions. <b>Regular communication</b> with the authority can help address any concerns and ensure a smooth process.	It is important to build <b>strong relationships</b> with key contacts and maintain <b>clear, ongoing communication</b> .	Promote the project as part of the business's <b>CSR initiatives</b> , reinforcing their <b>commitment</b> to the <b>community</b> and <b>environment</b> .



### 3. Plan: involve people early and often



#### Getting feedback helps inform your decisions

Once you've gathered community support and assessed where trees are most needed, it's time to plan your planting and engagement activities.

Throughout planning, remember to involve people early and often. **Create multiple avenues for feedback.** Consider public meetings, online surveys, face-to-face discussions or a combination of these. Dedicated communication channels, such as newsletters or a social media groups, can help residents stay informed and involved. **Keep the lines of communication open** for feedback even after planting, as this can help improve future activities.

Deciding where to plant is critical to the success of your project. Consider the suitability of the locations in terms of land ownership, soil type and long-term tree health. Engage with local authorities early on to ensure the chosen sites comply with land use regulations or utility checks.

Start by looking around your community for potential tree planting spots (these could be parks, school grounds, street verges, community gardens, or even private gardens if residents are willing to participate). Ask local authority tree officers if they can share a list of possible planting locations.

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### 3. Plan: key actions



- 1. Set a tree planting goal:** align your goal with your organisation's resources, including budget and volunteer availability. Your focus could be to increase canopy cover, plant a specific number of trees, or engage volunteers. For example, aim to plant 50 trees in the first year with a five-year goal of increasing canopy cover by 5%. Use this [tree canopy calculator](#) to help set a goal.
- 2. Select planting locations:** at this stage, it's essential to get professional advice from a local authority tree officer or an arboriculture expert. Choose suitable spaces for long-term tree health, considering local feedback, utilities, soil type, and existing biodiversity. Use tools like [TDAG Species Selection Guide](#) to choose the right species for each location, enhancing [biodiversity](#) and reducing risk of future losses to pests and diseases. Check for underground utilities like water, gas, and electricity lines.
- 3. Get clarity on aftercare responsibilities:** ensure clear agreements on watering schedules, mulching, and ongoing care to ensure trees establish and thrive. Landowners are usually responsible for tree safety, but community groups can support care efforts.
- 4. Sourcing trees:** secure healthy, locally sourced trees. You can apply for free tree packs from the [Woodland Trust](#) - a great resource for community groups looking to plant trees at no cost. For larger projects or specific tree species where you may need to buy trees from local nurseries, ensure trees are appropriate for your site conditions and sourced from reputable suppliers to avoid issues with pests or diseases. It is highly recommended to buy [UK sourced and grown](#) – trees grown from seed in the UK.

## 4. Action: put your planting plan into action



### Bringing everything together on the day

Now your planning is complete you can bring your planting project to life on tree planting day, ensuring that everyone involved is equipped to care for the trees long term.

This is a great time to acknowledge the contribution of volunteers and partners by making the planting day a celebratory event. This could include sharing stories of how the trees will benefit the community or inviting local councillors or media to the event.

Birmingham Tree People also worked to turn their planting activities into inclusive and celebratory events, using creative and collaborative techniques such as poetry and tree-care rituals to encourage people to share their own connections to trees and nature.

Sharing your story with the community can inspire future involvement and keep the momentum going.







## 4. Action: key actions

- 1. Deliver the planting day:** the success of your planting day relies on good preparation and clear communication. Ensure all volunteers know their roles, tools and trees are prepared and safety protocols are in place. [TDAG have created this guidance on best practice for planting large trees](#).
- 2. Tell your story:** after the planting day, share the success of the project with your community to keep the momentum going. Storytelling is a powerful way to inspire others and celebrate the hard work of everyone involved. Consider inviting key community leaders and local councillors, using social media and local press to recognise community involvement.
- 3. Plan for aftercare:** aftercare is critical to the long-term success of your tree planting project. Newly planted trees require regular attention, especially in the first few years. For best practice guidance on tree care and ensuring tree health through proper watering, mulching, and protection from pests or damage, read the [Woodland Trust's Guide How to Care for Your Trees](#).
- 4. Training for future projects:** ensure the long-term success of your project by offering training to volunteers and community members, building a core group of trained people empowered to take on leadership roles in future planting and maintenance.

There's a good choice of both formal and informal training opportunities. These include a [Level 2 Certificate in Arboriculture](#), short online courses through [Open University](#) and [FutureLearn](#) and informal training through local tree organisations may also offer in-person training based on the specific needs of your volunteers. Friends of Hodge Hill Common gained onsite training through Birmingham Tree People so they could run their own planting days independently.





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