

The development of urban forestry in the Republic of Ireland¹

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Summary

The development of urban forestry in the Republic of Ireland is described, from its origins through to the early part of 1997. It begins by charting how the concept was initially promoted through a few pioneering projects and with the first Urban Forestry Conference, Dublin, 1991. Government recognition and support for the concept was evident from an early stage, most notably through the Forest Service's grant aid schemes for urban woodland. The Tree Council of Ireland has acted as a catalyst for action on urban forestry in a wide range of activities. The Environmental Conservation Organisation (ECO), one of its member organisations, has also played a leadership role in promoting the concept nationally and by building a network of interested organisations and individuals. The Second National Conference on Urban Forestry, held in Limerick, 1996, heralded the beginning of an urban forestry movement throughout Ireland and has stimulated interest in the development of comprehensive urban forest management systems by local authorities in the Republic.

Introduction

This paper charts the development of urban forestry in the Republic of Ireland, from its origins through to the early part of 1997. It draws on published literature from relevant journals and periodicals, conference and seminar proceedings, and from the local and national press. Unpublished material has also been used, mainly in the form of internal reports, promotional literature and committee minutes. These secondary sources have been supplemented by a considerable amount of original research. A questionnaire about urban forestry was circulated to delegates at the Second National Conference on Urban Forestry, held in Limerick, March 1996. Although only 10 replies were received, these contained some useful material which formed the basis of further research. A series of seven tape-recorded interviews were subsequently conducted with six individuals who had played a prominent role at various stages of the development of urban forestry in the Republic.

Although the concept of urban forestry emerged in North America in the late 1960s, it was not until the beginning the 1990s that it began to be recognised by many relevant professionals in the Republic of Ireland. A literature search of relevant Irish journals and periodicals undertaken for this study revealed no papers or articles on the subject and little mention of the term before that time. There may be a number of reasons for this. The Republic is a predominantly rural country with few major urban centres. The initial perception of urban forestry, as it was being developed and promoted in North America during the 1970s and 1980s, may have been of a concept that was primarily concerned

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with multi-million dollar programmes focusing on major cities (Johnston, 1996a). This may not have been regarded as relevant to the vast majority of the country, especially when much of central and local government was operating under severe financial constraints.

The position of the professions most relevant to urban forestry, i.e. forestry itself and arboriculture, has traditionally been different throughout Ireland to that of either Britain or North America (Johnston, 1996b and 1997). Irish forestry had always been concerned almost exclusively with commercial timber production in rural areas (Neeson, 1991), often with a public image that was not entirely sympathetic to environmental considerations (Fearon, interview, 1996). While this position has some parallels with forestry in Britain, the preoccupation with rural areas has been even more accentuated. The forestry profession in the Republic of Ireland had never sought a role in the management of urban trees and is only now beginning to consider this as the urban forestry movement develops.

Urban trees and woodland in the Republic are the overall responsibility of local authorities which employ a wide range of professionals, such as horticulturists, landscape architects and engineers, to undertake their management (Boylan, interview, 1996). Very few of these professionals are foresters and, more significantly, very few are arboriculturists. As a profession, arboriculture in the Republic has no independent representative body or recognised structure. The specialist post of Tree or Arboricultural Officer within a local authority, common in Britain and North America, does not exist to any extent. Those responsible for urban trees are invariably not specialists in this field and usually have a range of additional responsibilities (Mulloy, interview, 1996). The lack of specialist posts within local authorities may have been responsible for the slow adoption of new developments in urban tree management. Until the mid-1970s, standards of maintenance and management, even in Dublin, were frequently outdated (Boylan, interview, 1996) and invariably based around the individual tree with little perspective of the overall tree resource (Mulloy, interview, 1996).

In 1982, the publication of the first Irish textbook on urban trees represented an important contribution to the dissemination of knowledge on the subject (Mulloy, 1996). Entitled *A Manual on Urban Trees* and written by John McCullen and Richard Webb (1982), this is still used as a standard reference work (Webb, pers. comm., 1996). It contained little mention, however, of the overall management of the urban trees and the term 'urban forestry' was not used.

A major advance in promoting discussion and action about trees and forests at a national level came with the formation of the Tree Council of Ireland in September 1984 (Boylan, 1996). Although concerned with trees in both urban and rural situations, the Tree Council immediately began to play a major role in promoting urban tree planting and management. The structure and aims of the organisation were similar to its counterpart in Britain, with representatives from relevant public, professional and voluntary sector organisations and a brief to act as a national 'umbrella' body for trees. The initial funding to establish the Tree Council came from the Forest and Wildlife Service of the Department of Fisheries and Forestry.

The same month as the Tree Council was founded, the first public lecture on urban forestry to be given in the Republic was delivered by Andy Lipkis of the TreePeople project in Los Angeles (Boylan, interview, 1996). While visiting Ireland, Andy and Katie Lipkis contacted Jan Alexander, who had been inspired by TreePeople's work and who was now organising some small projects in the rural north-west. A few years later, Alexander and Ciaran McGinley formed a new voluntary organisation, Crann, to promote

tree planting throughout Ireland (Trench, 1987). Crann's first project was a forestry training scheme for the young unemployed, based in Co. Leitrim (Neeson, 1991; Anon., 1986). In planning and undertaking the training scheme, it gained advice and assistance from the Forest of London Trust (Hickey, 1988; Anon, 1987a) which was developing a city-wide urban forestry initiative in England (Johnston, 1991). The Tree Council also assisted Crann with the donation of tools and equipment (Boylan, interview, 1996). Through its early association with TreePeople and the Forest of London Trust, Crann was to have a significant impact on the initial development of urban forestry in the Republic.

Crann sa Chathair

Although Crann was concerned more with rural areas, in early 1987 it began to consider developing a community based urban forestry project in Dublin. Aware of the progress being achieved by TreePeople and the Forest of London Trust, it had also been looking at ways of involving its rapidly growing Dublin membership. As the city's Millennium was to be celebrated in 1988, this was seen as an opportune time to launch a major project as part of those celebrations. To promote the project, Crann persuaded the Tree Council (1987a) to invite a director of the Forest of London Trust to give a public lecture on urban forestry in Dublin, June 1987. The Trust also agreed to act as technical advisers to the proposed project (Tree Council, 1987b).

In September 1987, Crann (1987) produced a proposal for a major tree planting project in Dublin entitled *Crann sa Chathair* ('tree in the city'). The document, which was largely copied from the Forest of London's own project proposal, was distributed to interested organisations. It would be a community based project that aimed to plant 10,000 trees, divided equally between 10 districts throughout the city. This modest target was regarded as achievable and one which would reflect the theme of the millennium celebrations. The trees would be planted by local community groups, mainly on publicly owned land in their area. With the help of Crann's Dublin members, the groups would raise much of the funding to purchase the trees, thus hoping to ensure they were more valued as a community asset (Alexander, 1988). Although Crann had initiated the project, *Crann sa Chathair* would operate as a partnership of public and voluntary sector organisations, co-ordinated by a Steering Committee.

The proposed project received a major boost in October 1987, when Allied Irish Bank (AIB) agreed to provide IR£20,000 in sponsorship to fund its core administration (Anon., 1987b). The Tree Council (1987b) was also very supportive and offers of assistance were made, including the identification of suitable planting sites. *Crann sa Chathair* was formally launched in December 1987 at a civic reception in Dublin, attended by An Taoiseach and the city's Lord Mayor (Anon., 1988). The event attracted wide media coverage and gave a tremendous boost to the project's public profile.

The *Crann sa Chathair* project spanned the whole Millennium year and eventually succeeded in its aim of planting 10,000 trees. It also included some educational and arts events, designed to raise awareness and appreciation of trees among community groups (Johnston, 1992). Unfortunately, the project suffered from poor organisation which severely limited its impact, particularly in its practical tree planting work. Although significant in being the first project in the Republic to be promoted as an urban forestry initiative, its achievements remain the subject of debate (Boylan, interview, 1996). It undoubtedly promoted the concept of urban forestry in its project proposal and literature (Fearon, interview, 1996). The widespread media coverage it received certainly raised the

profile of urban trees in the minds of many Dubliners, thousands of whom were involved directly in planting and educational events. The project was able to respond to the increased environmental awareness among the city's population at that time and to demonstrate the potential for a practical expression of this through community tree planting (Maddock, interview, 1996).

In its practical aim of establishing 10,000 trees, the project was not successful (Boylan, interview, 1996). Although no complete survey of the plantings has been undertaken, it has been estimated that 90% of the trees had died within 6 months of being planted (Maddock, interview, 1996). This assessment is supported by local authority staff (Boylan, interview, 1996). Although a study of a few sites was undertaken, the results were never compiled into a report (Forrest, pers. comm., 1996).

The failure of the tree plantings was largely due to the project's organisational difficulties, in particular, its poor relationship with the local authorities on whose land many of the trees were to be planted (Boylan, interview, 1996). The failure to form the proposed Steering Committee raises doubts about whether Crann (1988) had intended the project to be a partnership initiative. While the project generated tremendous publicity, Crann appeared unwilling to share this with its potential partners, something which might have encouraged them to respond more positively. Crann also failed to mobilise its Dublin membership to provide fund-raising support for the community groups, with the result that most of the trees were eventually purchased out of AIB's funding for administration. Although the Forest of London Trust had provided advice and material support for the project, this advice was invariably not followed (Johnston, 1992).

Although Crann sa Chathair had been conceived as an urban forestry initiative, its organisational difficulties resulted in it being more of a limited community tree planting and educational project. While many professionals were disappointed with its lack of success, there was also a feeling that the experience gained from the project could be usefully applied in future initiatives (Fearon, interview, 1996).

Developments with the Tree Council

In its efforts to promote urban trees, the Tree Council continued to be involved in a number of initiatives focusing on urban areas (Boylan, 1996). Many of these took place during National Tree Week, which had now been established as an annual event to promote trees and their planting and care. During Dublin's millennium year of 1988, the Tree Council and Dublin Corporation established a 16 ha Millennium Arboretum at St. Anne's Park in the city. In 1990, the Council supported the work of the Tidy Towns Committees, a series of partnership bodies carrying out civic improvements throughout the country. It offered every Committee a special discount on the purchase of trees for their projects and also distributed some 10,000 trees among the winning towns in the previous 1989 Tidy Towns Competition.

The Tree Council was also keen to promote high standards of tree management, particularly in urban areas, through its educational activities (Boylan, 1996). In June 1990, it organised a seminar on tree care at University College Dublin (UCD), addressed by Alex Shigo of the United States Forest Service. The seminar, which was highly attended, was followed by a 4-day workshop attracting 20 participants. Both events were a great success and played a significant role in convincing Irish professionals of the need to adopt more modern methods of tree care. National publicity for Shigo's visit was obtained when he was interviewed on a popular television programme.

Although the Tree Council had yet to embrace the concept of urban forestry, one of its member organisations was to play an important role in gaining recognition for this through a highly successful community involvement project in Finglas, Dublin.

The Finglas Community Tree Nursery

In April 1990, the Environmental Conservation Organisation (ECO), a national voluntary organisation for young people, launched its Community Tree Nursery in Finglas, a district in north-west Dublin (Finnegan, 1996). As well as propagating trees for use in the Finglas area, the project aimed to work with local schools in environmental education programmes and to involve community groups in the planting and care of trees. The tree nursery was located on a small plot of land donated by a local convent (Finnegan, interview, 1996). Rory Finnegan of ECO was appointed as the project supervisor and a further six staff were provided by Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS), a government training agency (Cassells, 1990). The trainees would undertake the practical work of developing the nursery and would also received regular practical and theoretical instruction as part of a structured course (Finnegan, interview, 1996). A large number of young seedlings were donated by a Crann member with some additional stock donated by Dublin Corporation. Having an instant supply of young trees meant that the nursery could distribute these immediately rather than having to wait for its own stock to develop from seed.

As the first community tree nursery to be established in the Republic, it soon gained widespread publicity for its work (Finnegan, interview, 1996). As well as distributing trees to local schools, it began to attract requests for trees from schools throughout the country. Every effort was made to include an environmental education programme for each school in addition to simply providing it with trees. Many local schools regularly visited the nursery to help with practical work. In the project's second year, contacts were built with local community groups and, with the agreement of Dublin Corporation Parks Department, it began to involve groups of residents in the planting and initial maintenance of trees on publicly owned land. This was very successful, due largely to the good working relationship the project had established with the Parks Department. From residential gardens and small groups of trees in nearby open spaces, the work then expanded to establishing a small community woodland on local authority land.

The project's funding from FÁS supported the supervisor's post, the trainees and much of the materials and equipment (Finnegan, interview, 1996). An additional two staff each year were provided by the Schools Industrial Link Scheme. The project also raised IR£10,000 in sponsorship from local businesses, an impressive achievement which demonstrated the project's high standing in the local community. In the first few years of its operation, the project won a number of awards, including the AIB Better Ireland Award worth IR£5,000. In early 1995, the nursery relocated to a new site in nearby Glasnevin.

While not attempting to be a comprehensive urban forestry initiative, ECO's project made a significant contribution to promoting the concept in the Republic. Finnegan (interview, 1996), the driving force behind the initiative, was enthusiastic about urban forestry and particularly keen to explore the potential for community involvement in urban tree planting and management. As ECO's representative on the Tree Council, he was able to build personal contacts within many relevant organisations to promote not only the Finglas nursery but the concept of urban forestry (Fearon, interview, 1996). Most importantly, the project was an outstanding success which impressed and inspired many professionals (Collins, interview, 1996).

The Forest of Limerick project

The early interest in urban forestry in the Republic came to the attention of two individuals in the Department of Energy's Forest Service, John Fearon and Fergal Mulloy. Both were to play an important role in the concept's future development. Fearon (interview, 1996), a senior civil servant, was trying to promote a more positive environmental image for the forest industry which was being criticised in the media for some of its commercial plantations in rural areas. He was initially attracted to the term 'urban forestry' as he believed this might be a way of promoting urban residents' understanding and appreciation of forestry practice in rural areas. As Fearon researched the subject, he immediately recognised its value in improving the quality of the urban environment through the development of a strategic approach to the management of all urban trees and woodland. Fearon's interest in urban forestry was shared by Fergal Mulloy of the Environment and Research Branch of the Forest Service, and the two began to discuss how the concept could be developed practically in towns and cities in the Republic.

Fearon recognised that a very effective way of promoting urban forestry was through the various forestry grant aid schemes administered by the Forest Service. While previously limited to rural forestry, there was scope to extend these into urban areas under the government's EU-cofinanced 1989-1993 Forestry Operational Programme (Mulloy, interview, 1996). After drafting proposals for a new grant scheme for urban woodland, Fearon submitted these to the Minister for Energy, Robert Molloy, who became enthusiastic about the proposals and about urban forestry in general.

Fearon (interview, 1996) decided that the best way to promote urban forestry, and to pioneer the new grant scheme, was to find a major urban centre where the local authority and other relevant agencies could be sufficiently enthused to develop a practical project. Initially, he found some resistance to the concept as most professionals viewed trees from either a forestry or parks perspective. For them, forestry was something which belonged in the countryside and urban trees were the province of parks management. They had difficulty in understanding the relevance of this form of forestry which aimed to embrace entire urban areas. Fearon, however, eventually met David Deighan of Shannon Development who was enthusiastic about the concept. Shannon Development then approached Limerick Corporation, with which it worked closely, with a proposal to develop a partnership urban forestry project for the city (Madden, 1996). This was welcomed by the local authority as it had been considering ways to utilise its substantial areas of vacant land in and around the city. The full proposal, which emphasised large scale tree planting, seemed to offer a solution for much of this land. There was also an opportunity to launch a project that would have considerable public and media appeal. In 1991, the city would be celebrating the 300th anniversary of the Treaty of Limerick, creating an opportunity to link the project with the city-wide celebrations.

Following initial discussion among interested parties, it was agreed to launch a project entitled the Forest of Limerick (Madden, 1996). The Forest of Limerick Advisory Group (FLAG) was then established to develop the project with representatives from the Forest Service, Limerick Corporation, Shannon Development and local community and business groups. While developing plans for the project, Fearon (interview, 1996) and Mulloy undertook a study tour of the Forest of Cardiff project in Wales. They were impressed by its community and promotional activities, aspects of the project which influenced the development of their own proposals.

To provide the staff necessary to implement the project, Mulloy suggested that it should incorporate a training programme for unemployed people (Fearon, interview, 1996).

Together with Deighan, he secured the agreement of a local training agency, People Action Against Unemployment Limerick (PAUL), to engage 10 trainees each year to work on the project, during which they would receive instruction in forestry and horticultural skills. A suitable course was designed and a forester from Coillte, Jim Gibbs, was seconded to the project to act as supervisor and instructor.

A detailed proposal produced by FLAG succeeded in securing funding for the Forest of Limerick as a pilot project under the 1989-1993 Forestry Operational Programme (Madden, 1996). As it was envisaged that the project might eventually be replicated in other urban areas, it was agreed that it should be closely monitored by the Forest Service. This would ascertain the level and type of grant assistance appropriate to encourage urban forestry projects elsewhere in Ireland.

The Forest of Limerick was launched in March 1991 by Minister Molloy, to coincide with the 300th anniversary of the Treaty of Limerick (Madden, 1996). Tree planting began on four separate sites totalling approximately 15 ha. While three of these were established with little difficulty, the fourth proved less successful, due mainly to waterlogging and methane seepage arising from its former use as a landfill site (Collins, 1995). Several community planting activities were organised, including an imaginative scheme to dedicate the trees on one of the sites to local children born during the city's tercentenary year (Mulloy, interview, 1996).

After two successful years, the PAUL training scheme ended in 1993 when the initial sites had been planted (Madden, 1996). This seemed to trigger a loss of momentum in the project and the FLAG advisory group dissolved as a formal body soon afterwards (Collins, interview, 1996). The responsibility for the new woodland then passed to Limerick Corporation. Due to lack of resources, however, the local authority was not able to undertake all the necessary maintenance or develop any new sites.

The first two years of the Forest of Limerick gave the Forest Service encouragement to continue its promotion of urban forestry and to develop new grant schemes for urban woodland (Fearon, interview, 1996). It had achieved its objective of demonstrating the potential of urban forestry in a major urban area, particularly the value of an effective partnership of organisations working together and involving the local community and business. The early success of the Forest of Limerick did more to promote urban forestry in the Republic than any previous initiative and it clearly defined a model for urban forestry practice that could be replicated in other towns and cities (McConville, pers. comm., 1996). One of the most successful aspects of the project was the PAUL training course which resulted in 17 of the 20 trainees obtaining permanent employment (Madden, 1996). The course also helped to create a positive image for the project as it was seen to address the problem of high unemployment, a major concern among the local community. The loss of momentum in the project since 1993, however, has meant that its plans to develop into a comprehensive urban forestry initiative, with a strategic approach to the management of Limerick's entire urban tree resource, have yet to be realised.

The Urban Forestry Conference, Dublin, 1991

A firm commitment to the concept of urban forestry was now evident among a small group of professionals working with some national organisations, most of whom were also involved with the Tree Council. Following the success of the Forest of Limerick as a pilot project, the government now wanted to introduce and promote its new Planned Recreational Forestry Scheme, a grant package introduced into the 1991-1993 Forestry

Measures of the Operational Programme for Rural Development. To promote both the scheme and urban forestry in general, the Tree Council and the Forest Service agreed to jointly organise a national conference on the subject. Although a major conference on forestry and the environment had been organised by the Royal Dublin Society in October 1990, this had hardly mentioned urban forestry (RDS, 1990). A conference devoted solely to the subject was viewed by the organisers as a 'voyage of discovery' as there was still little knowledge of the concept in Ireland (Mulloy, interview, 1996).

The Urban Forestry Conference was held in UCD, June 1991. This one-day event attracted nearly 50 registered delegates, although the numbers actually attending the event may have been significantly greater. In the opening address, Minister Molloy (1991) outlined the forthcoming Planned Recreational Forestry Scheme, aimed at promoting the amenity and multi-objective aspects of forestry. The Minister also urged local authorities to take the lead in developing urban forestry projects, and emphasised the need for the local community to be involved at all stages in these initiatives.

The conference programme included several papers on various aspects of urban forestry given by both Irish and overseas speakers. The keynote address was by Fergal Mulloy of the Forest Service, with other contributions from Mark Johnston of the Forest of London Trust, Mike Kirby of the Countryside Commission in Britain, Ken Ellis from the Northern Ireland Forest Service, Neils Bundgaard from the Ministry of the Environment, Denmark, and Simon Bell of the Forestry Commission in Britain (Tree Council, 1991).

The conference's most significant achievement was in marking the government's official recognition of urban forestry, as clearly stated in the Minister's opening address (Molloy, 1991). The presence of the Minister undoubtedly contributed to the media coverage the conference received in the national press (Walsh, 1991). The fact that the event had been organised by the Forest Service and the Tree Council and addressed by the Minister, substantially increased the credibility of urban forestry in the eyes of many professionals. The presence of speakers from outside the Republic also demonstrated that urban forestry was a concept that was recognised internationally. Prior to the conference, understanding of urban forestry among professionals in the Republic had been quite limited, and the event was an important learning experience for those attending (Mulloy, interview, 1996). It also stimulated interest in urban forestry throughout the Republic, particularly its potential for community involvement (Sweeney, 1991; Henderson, 1992). In September 1992, a seminar on urban forestry entitled *Trees in Town* and the Urban Forest was organised by Crann in association with Tipperary NR County Council, the Tree Council and the Irish Tree Society, at Roscrea (Collins, 1995).

Grant aid and urban woodland projects

As previously mentioned, the Forest Service's Planned Recreational Forestry Scheme, which had been announced at the conference, was introduced into the 1991-1993 Forestry Measures of the Operational Programme for Rural Development (Collins, 1995). The scheme was designed specifically to encourage the planting of predominantly broadleaf woodland which facilitated public access and incorporated public recreational facilities. Grant assistance was also available to upgrade neglected woodland for recreational purposes and to encourage community involvement and educational work.

The scheme was significant in being the first time that grant aid could be obtained for the recreational and community development of woodland in the Republic. It was also an

opportunity for local authorities to develop their own woodland for these purposes, particularly those in and around urban areas. Despite the attractive grant levels, the scheme experienced a slow uptake initially, possibly due to concerns among public and private landowners regarding public liability (Collins, 1995). Another factor limiting its uptake in urban areas was the exclusion of the Dublin area from the scheme.

With the widespread publicity given to the new scheme, interest in urban forestry in the Republic began to focus increasingly on the development of urban woodland. A number of local authorities outside the Dublin area began to develop urban woodland initiatives to take advantage of the grants. In Clonmel, Co. Tipperary, the Corporation proposed to plant 10 ha of woodland on three separate sites near the town centre (Collins, 1995). The first site, at Carrigeen, was planted in the 1993/94 season, with the other two sites completed the following season. In order to safeguard the long term survival of the woodlands and to ensure their compatibility with future residential and industrial development, they were incorporated into the Clonmel Municipal Borough Development Plan. The project was complemented by high levels of community involvement in the management of publicly owned trees and open spaces within surrounding residential areas.

In Co. Wexford, two separate initiatives were developed by Wexford Corporation and Wexford County Council (Collins, 1995). At Trespan Rock Park, near Wexford town centre, the Corporation commissioned Coillte to produce planting proposals to improve the amenity value of the park, increase visitor numbers and to involve local community groups in practical conservation work. The planting was carried out during the 1993/94 season with grant aid from the new scheme. At a tree planting ceremony at Trespan Rock Park in advance of National Tree Week in February 1993, Wexford County Council announced the launch of an initiative to plant one million trees throughout the county over the next 10 years (Pepper, 1993). Although the planting would eventually be carried out in both rural and urban situations by a wide range of public, private and voluntary organisations, the proposals did include two urban woodland projects on land owned by the County Council at Carcur, Wexford Town, and at Creagh, near Gorey (Collins, 1995).

ECO's leadership in urban forestry

ECO's early interest in urban forestry had grown following the success of its Finglas Community Tree Nursery. In January 1992, the organisation issued a document entitled *Growing in the City*, which outlined its urban forestry policy and its intention to promote the concept throughout Ireland (ECO, 1992). Later that year, ECO approached the Forest Service (then located within the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry) with a proposal to initiate a postgraduate study of urban forestry in Ireland at UCD. John Mc Loughlin, ECO's Chairperson and activist on the Tree Council, was keen to promote urban forestry and he was to play a major role in encouraging ECO to become more closely involved. Mc Loughlin had recognised the potential of urban forestry in improving the quality of the urban environment through his permanent post as Coillte's Chief Environmental Officer. The Forest Service agreed to fund the research proposal, with support from the EU under the 1989-1993 Forestry Operational Programme. Professor John Gardiner of UCD subsequently approached one of its recent graduates in forestry, Kevin Collins (pers. comm., 1996), with the suggestion that he undertake the study as a postgraduate research thesis in the Department of Crop Science, Horticulture and Forestry. After reading some British literature on urban forestry in the university library, Collins became enthusiastic and agreed.

The research initially involved discussing the topic with leading members of the Tree Council and other relevant organisations. The fact that research on urban forestry was now being conducted at UCD and funded by the Forest Service, helped to give credibility to the project. As part of the research, Collins and Mc Loughlin undertook a study tour of the Forest of Belfast project, an urban forestry initiative that had recently been launched in Northern Ireland (Johnston, 1995). Their study tour of the project, and the subsequent involvement of several organisations from the Republic in its Tree Fair event in June 1993, was the first significant cross-border contact between professionals in Ireland in the field of urban forestry.

The research thesis, submitted in August 1994, was the first major review of urban forestry in the Republic of Ireland (Collins, 1994). In addition to a detailed review of the concept of urban forestry, the thesis included a case study of the potential for urban woodland creation in the form of an urban woodland proposal for Finglas. Based on a series of detailed site and community surveys, the so-called Finglas Wood project was intended to demonstrate how the principles of community involvement and urban woodland design and management could be applied in practice.

In September 1994, ECO (1995a) launched its Urban Forestry Programme to promote the concept's application in the Republic among local authorities, relevant organisations, community groups, young people and the general public. The programme would provide support to local authorities and other organisations wishing to develop urban forestry projects under the forthcoming grant aid for urban woodland contained in the Operational Programme for Agriculture, Rural Development and Forestry, 1994-1999. As part of this programme, ECO appointed a Community Forestry Officer, later retitled Urban Forester, to lead the initiative. This was the first post to be specifically created to promote urban forestry in the Republic and was funded, together with the rest of ECO's Urban Forestry Programme, by the Forest Service under the 1989-1993 Forestry Operational Programme.

In March 1995, ECO launched a report entitled *A Strategy for Urban Forestry in Ireland*, based on the research thesis (Collins, 1995). At the launch of the report, Jimmy Deenihan (1995), Minister for State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, stressed the complimentary nature of ECO's Urban Forestry Programme with the efforts to promote urban forestry and urban woodland being undertaken by the Forest Service. Nearly 200 copies of the report were distributed to relevant organisations and individuals (ECO, 1995a). The report played an invaluable role in promoting urban forestry throughout the Republic and established ECO as a leading organisation in the field. It also included an account of the Finglas Wood project as a model for urban woodland creation and community involvement for organisations wishing to develop their own initiatives.

Following the launch of the report, ECO (1995a) undertook a series of talks on urban forestry to a wide range of organisations and community groups. As a national youth organisation, ECO was particularly keen to involve young people with urban tree planting and management and a special effort was made to promote practical projects among ECO's associated clubs and schools. In May 1995, ECO launched its *Community Forestry Resource Pack*, a pack aimed at post-primary level students and members of the public interested in becoming involved with trees and urban forestry in their locality (ECO, 1995b). Sponsored by the Electricity Supply Board (ESB), some 2,000 copies were distributed to ECO members, affiliated schools and interested community groups.

Through its Urban Forestry Programme, September 1994 to December 1996, ECO was able to play a leadership role in the development of urban forestry throughout the Republic (Collins, 1996c). This was particularly important at a time when the pioneering Forest

of Limerick project had lost momentum. With the support of other national bodies such as the Tree Council and the Forest Service, it kept interest in urban forestry alive, by developing its own initiatives, advising on those of other organisations and community groups, and by initiating and maintaining the beginnings of a national urban forestry network of interested organisations and individuals. ECO was to continue this work and play a leading role in several subsequent initiatives.

Further grant aid for urban woodland

In February 1995, the Forest Service launched two new forestry grant schemes which gave further emphasis to the recreation and amenity potential of woodland. The first, the Urban Woodland Scheme, was aimed at supporting the establishment or development of urban woodland by local authorities, specifically for public enjoyment and recreation (DAFF, 1995a). The second scheme, the Amenity Woodland Scheme, was available to other woodland owners and was aimed at supporting a wide range of recreational projects (DAFF, 1995b). Both schemes were supported by the EU under the Operational Programme for Agriculture, Rural Development and Forestry, 1994-1999.

The Urban Woodland Scheme was specifically designed to encourage urban woodland projects within the context of the growing interest in urban forestry (Collins, interview, 1996a). Due to the limited funding available for the scheme and its termination at the end of 1999, grants would be made selectively (Connelly, 1996). To ensure that as many local authorities as possible should benefit from the scheme, it specifically included the Greater Dublin area. While technical assistance on the development of a suitable project would not be available from the Forest Service, local authorities could obtain this advice from forestry consultants or from ECO.

Ireland's Second National Conference on Urban Forestry, Limerick, 1996

With the growth of interest in urban forestry since the first conference, the Tree Council began to consider holding a second event (Collins, interview, 1996a). The first conference had been organised largely with the aim of promoting the Planned Recreational Forestry Scheme and as work was proceeding on the development of the Urban Woodland Scheme, it seemed appropriate to organise a second event to coincide with its launch. In the summer of 1995, a conference organising committee was formed. It was decided to hold the conference in Limerick, partly in the hope that this might give fresh momentum to the Forest of Limerick project. Funding for the event, jointly organised by the Tree Council and ECO, was then obtained from the Forest Service and the EU, and Shannon Development.

As the first conference had focused on the theoretical aspects of urban forestry, it was decided to ensure that the majority of presentations at this conference highlighted practical examples of current urban forestry projects (Collins, interview, 1996a). As no comprehensive projects had yet been developed in the Republic and early initiatives were concerned mainly with urban woodland, speakers from seven separate ongoing initiatives in Britain, Northern Ireland and the United States were included in the programme.

Ireland's Second National Conference on Urban Forestry, held in Limerick City, 27th-29th March 1996, was attended by 119 delegates (Tree Council, 1996). The opening address was given by Minister Deenihan, underlining the government's continuing support for urban forestry. The programme of speakers was supplemented with a field trip to one of the sites of the Forest of Limerick project and discussion workshops on various

aspects of urban forestry. The event was considered a tremendous success by its organisers (Collins, interview, 1996a). The broad scope of the programme ensured that delegates were left in no doubt that urban forestry included all the trees in and around urban areas, and not just urban woodland. As the event took place over a 3-day period, there was much time for delegates to mix informally and to exchange experiences, ideas and opinions.

The Second National Conference on Urban Forestry heralded the beginning of an urban forestry movement in Ireland. While the first conference in 1991 had generated much interest and there had been a number of significant developments since that event, it was at the second conference that the diffuse network of individuals, organisations and projects came together and matured into a clearly identifiable movement. As urban forestry is essentially a local authority function, the presence of many local authority delegates at the conference had also marked a 'coming of age' for urban forestry. The presence of 10 delegates from Northern Ireland, including two speakers, illustrated the all-Ireland nature of the event, reinforcing the early contacts that had been made between professionals either side of the border. The publication of the conference proceedings was also a landmark in Irish urban forestry literature (Tree Council, 1996).

Developments since the Second National Conference

In April 1996, a month after the Limerick conference, Crann (1997) held a one-day seminar in Dublin entitled *Trees in Urban Spaces*. A large part of the proceedings comprised a discussion forum on community involvement in urban forestry, the overall theme of the seminar. While the Limerick conference had been a national event aimed primarily at professionals, the seminar was designed to attract representatives of voluntary and community groups in the Dublin area with the aim of increasing their involvement in the planting and caring of trees (Collins, interview, 1997).

Crann also continued to be involved in practical tree projects in the Dublin area. In November 1996, it organised a highly successful parade through the city centre on the theme of trees involving musicians, theatre groups and the general public (Anon, 1996). The publication of Crann's seminar proceedings in May 1997 was another major contribution to Irish literature on urban forestry (Crann, 1997). The increase in professional interest in urban forestry immediately following the second conference was also reflected in the publication of two articles on the subject in the widely-read trade magazine, *Irish Timber and Forestry* (Larkin, 1996; Collins, 1996d).

In early 1996, the Royal Dublin Society introduced an Urban Forestry category to its prestigious Irish Forestry Award (RDS, 1996). These annual awards, which aim to encourage good practice, are funded by the Forest Service and the EU. In its first year, the urban forestry category focused on outstanding examples of urban woodland development but in 1997 this was broadened to all aspects of urban forestry, including city-wide projects and street tree programmes (RDS, 1997).

In July 1996, the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry issued a policy document entitled *Growing for the Future: A Strategic Plan for the Development of the Forestry Sector in Ireland* (DAFF, 1996). This was the first time that such a strategy document had been produced for the entire Irish forestry sector. However, it contained no detailed reference to urban forestry, a surprising omission given the Forest Service's now substantial involvement in the field.

In January 1997, the Tree Council embarked on a 3-year programme specifically aimed at promoting urban forestry among local authorities throughout the Republic. The

programme, which included the establishment of a new post of Urban Forester, is funded by the Forest Service with the support of the EU under the Operational Programme for Agriculture, Rural Development and Forestry, 1994-1999. This initiative by the Tree Council represents one of the most significant advances yet made in the overall development of urban forestry in the Republic. It recognises that the participation of more local authorities is crucial to further progress, something originally highlighted by Minister Molloy (1991) in his opening address to the first conference in 1991. In the absence of specialist Tree Officer posts, it is unlikely that many authorities currently have a sufficient level of expertise or resources to become significantly involved (Brogan, pers. comm., 1996). The Urban Forester will provide some of this technical support, although the time devoted to individual local authorities will be quite limited (Collins, interview, 1997). The aim is to establish a small number of model projects with selected local authorities that can then be used to illustrate the benefits of urban forestry practice to other interested local authorities. Local authorities are also now becoming more aware of their obligations under Agenda 21 of the United Nations 1992 Earth Summit and there is an opportunity to promote the role of urban forestry in fulfilling these obligations, both in creating a sustainable urban environment and in encouraging greater public participation in achieving this (Collins, interview, 1996a).

In March 1997, the Tree Council (1997) launched its National Tree Week with the theme of ReLeaf Our Towns. Not only did this theme aim to highlight the importance of urban trees and woodland but the Council's promotion of the event clearly stated its continuing commitment to the concept of urban forestry (Powers, 1997). At the end of Tree Week, Conservation Volunteers Ireland (CVI), a leading practical conservation organisation, announced its Millennium Urban Forest Campaign (CVI, 1997). President Mary Robinson formally launched the project which had secured substantial sponsorship from Bord Gáis. Although CVI had always been involved in urban tree planting activities, this high-profile project signalled its much closer involvement in urban forestry (Collins, interview, 1997). Focusing on Dublin's urban areas, the project aims not only to plant 50,000 trees by the year 2000, but to achieve this through an extensive community involvement and education programme (CVI, 1997). The project has already developed partnership arrangements with South Dublin County Council and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council regarding the management of urban woodland in Tymon Park, Tallaght and Rathmichael Wood, Shankill. Although at an early stage, these partnerships are proving successful in effectively managing the woodlands, clearly indicating the potential for local authority and voluntary sector co-operation (Collins, interview, 1997). CVI have also appointed an Urban Woodland Officer with responsibility to support this work (CVI, 1996).

International contacts, research and education

The early development of urban forestry in the Republic was influenced more by initiatives in Britain than by those in North America, where the concept first originated. This is evident from the replies given in the research questionnaire and interviews conducted for this study. It was not until the Urban Forestry Conference in 1991, however, that regular contact between Irish and British professionals began to blossom. In August 1993, nine delegates from the Republic attended the 3rd UK Conference on Urban Forestry, Manchester, contributing substantially to the network of professional contacts between the two countries.

Regular contact on urban forestry between professionals in the Republic and the United States did not begin until the summer of 1992, when the Tree Council considered developing a Global ReLeaf programme in Ireland (Boylan, 1996). Global ReLeaf was an international tree planting initiative co-ordinated by American Forests, a national voluntary organisation based in Washington DC which had played a leading role in the development of urban forestry in the United States (Johnston, 1996b). The Tree Council's contacts with American Forests led to its Director, Paddy O'Kelly, attending the Sixth US National Urban Forestry Conference in September 1993, the first Irish professional to attend one of these events.

The early contacts between urban forestry professionals in the Republic and those in other countries were much expanded by ECO through its Urban Forestry Programme. Following the publication of its strategy report, copies were sent to several leading overseas academics in the field (ECO, 1995a). As overseas interest in developments in the Republic increased, ECO organised several study tours for visiting individuals and groups, including delegations from Finland, California and England. In September 1995, its Urban Forester attended the Seventh US National Urban Forestry Conference in New York and held discussions in Washington with senior officers of American Forests (ECO, 1996). As a result of ECO's efforts, developments in the Republic gained widespread recognition within the international urban forestry movement.

Academic research in the subject has begun to reflect the growing interest in urban forestry in the Republic. While the research project at UCD was completed in 1994, another significant project had been initiated much earlier. In 1990, Dublin Chamber of Commerce considered a proposal to undertake an assessment of the city's environment, including a major survey of Dublin's tree resource (Dick, pers. comm., 1996). The Dublin Urban Forest Project eventually began in 1993 and involved compiling an inventory of over 6,000 of the city's street trees and other trees and woodland in selected parks (COFORD, 1996). This was the first time such a survey had been undertaken in the Republic and its completion has provided the city authorities with an opportunity to use the information as the basis of a comprehensive urban forest management plan.

In April 1993, forestry research in the Republic was given a major boost with the launch of COFORD, the government's National Council for Forest Research and Development (Anon., 1993). The formation of COFORD indicated the government's recognition of the need to promote and co-ordinate forestry research throughout the Republic. The aims of its initial five-year research programme were clearly set out in its publication entitled *Pathway to Progress: A Programme for Forest Research and Development* (COFORD, 1994). Although directly concerned with rural commercial forestry, some research is being conducted into tree planting on difficult sites that has a direct application to urban trees (Mulloy, interview, 1996). There is a possibility that COFORD might extend its research into urban tree management when its current research programme ends in 1999.

Further opportunities for urban forestry research have recently emerged through the COST programme (Collins, interview, 1997). This is a pan-European research co-operation initiative within different sectors of industry, including the forestry sector. The forestry sector of the programme is itself divided into several different COST Actions studying different aspects of the industry. COST Action E12, entitled Urban Forests and Trees, aims to promote co-operation and regular liaison in research into urban trees and woodland among the member countries that have signed the Action's Memorandum of Understanding, which include the Republic of Ireland. While the COST Action is still at

an early stage, its European dimension and the involvement in its working groups of some leading Irish academics, promises to substantially raise the profile of urban forestry research in the Republic.

Academic education in urban forestry has also recently received some attention. The undergraduate courses in forestry and horticulture offered at UCD recently included some elements of urban forestry (Collins, interview, 1997). There is also a steady growth of interest among postgraduate students wanting to undertake research projects in the subject. However, there are not yet any distinct courses in urban forestry at any college or university in the Republic.

Conclusions

Since the beginning of the 1990s, steady progress has been made in the development of urban forestry in the Republic of Ireland. An ever-increasing number of organisations have come together, at a national and local level, to promote the concept as a modern approach to the management of the Republic's urban tree resource. An effective partnership of relevant public, private and voluntary sector organisations, so crucial to this approach, has been a feature of almost all initiatives since Crann sa Chathair, the Republic's first urban forestry project.

Of the various professions that are relevant to urban forestry, forestry itself has played a leading role and much progress has been due to the commitment of a small number of foresters. In the absence of arboriculturists and specialist Tree Officer posts within local authorities, the participation of other professionals directly involved in the planning and management of the urban tree resource, such as planners, landscape architects and parks managers, will be crucial to further progress.

Local authority involvement at a practical level remains largely confined to urban woodland, encouraged by the availability of grant aid. Their involvement has yet to embrace the management of other urban trees and these are still widely regarded as outside the remit of 'forestry'. For many professionals, urban forestry has had the appearance of a 'grant driven bandwagon' to promote urban woodland rather than as a planned, systematic and integrated approach to the management of the entire urban tree resource (Webb, pers. comm., 1996). The strategic aspects of urban forestry have yet to be widely recognised or implemented. The number of local authority delegates at the Second National Conference on Urban Forestry was, however, an encouraging sign of a growing interest in the concept among existing staff. With the establishment of the Tree Council's new urban forestry initiative, specifically aimed at local authorities, this position should improve.

Of the relevant government agencies, the Forest Service, with EU support under various forestry related operational programmes, has played the most prominent role in the development of urban forestry. It initiated the Forest of Limerick project and, using this as a successful pilot project, developed the first grant aid scheme for urban woodland. Ministerial support for this work from an early stage was vital in ensuring its success. Grant aid schemes for urban woodland have provided an increasing number of local authorities with a much-needed financial incentive to pursue these initiatives. The Forest Service has also facilitated a number of once-off initiatives such as conferences and Urban Forester posts with ECO and the Tree Council that have increased the recognition of the concept throughout the Republic. While limited by its statutory remit, Coillte has also been very supportive from an early stage. The Department of the Environment and Local

Government, the government agency with overall responsibility for the Republic's urban environment, has, however, yet to embrace urban forestry or play any direct role in its development. This may be due to continuing misconceptions regarding the broad scope of urban forestry and a lack of awareness that it is primarily a local authority function.

The early involvement of some national voluntary organisations has been another crucial factor in the development of urban forestry. Crann has consistently played an important role from the outset and ECO's contribution has been even more significant as the first voluntary organisation to really embrace the concept and promote it nationally through its Urban Forestry Programme. Not only did ECO develop the beginnings of a national urban forestry network, it also did much to gain international recognition for developments in the Republic.

As the national 'umbrella' body for trees and forests, the Tree Council has consistently shown vision and leadership. In its role as a catalyst for action, it has been very successful in stimulating interest in urban forestry and in encouraging its member organisations to become involved. It has provided a vital link between the public, private and voluntary sectors, encouraging a wide range of practical projects and played a leading role in organising the first and second conferences. Its new urban forestry initiative, supported by the Forest Service and the EU, is one of the most significant developments in recent years and should lead to much greater local authority involvement. Since the Second National Conference in 1996, the beginnings of a national urban forestry movement has emerged in Ireland, led by the Tree Council and many of its member organisations.

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