

Peer reviewed paper

The development of urban forestry in Northern Ireland¹

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Abstract

Urban forestry in Northern Ireland has made excellent progress since the concept was given government recognition in 1990. This progress has been achieved against a background of severe economic difficulties exacerbated by political instability and widespread civil unrest. Despite an erratic and low level of funding, the Forest of Belfast project has developed as a model for a planned, systematic and integrated approach to urban tree management which could be replicated by other public and voluntary sector organisations outside the Greater Belfast area. With the prospect of an end to 'the Troubles', there could soon be an opportunity for urban forestry to make a major contribution to the regeneration of Northern Ireland's towns and cities.

Key words: urban forestry, Northern Ireland, urban tree projects,
central and local government, voluntary sector

Introduction

This paper charts the development of urban forestry in Northern Ireland, from its origins through to June 1998. It draws on published material in relevant journals, periodicals, conference proceedings and in the press. Unpublished material has also been used, mainly in the form of internal reports. These secondary sources have been supplemented by a considerable amount of original research. A questionnaire seeking information and opinion on the development of urban forestry in Northern Ireland was sent to 19 individuals known to be involved in the field. Eleven replies were received, containing valuable information for further research. A series of nine tape-recorded interviews were subsequently conducted with eight individuals identified as having played a prominent role in urban forestry in Northern Ireland. Some material was also taken from three tape-recorded interviews with individuals based in Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

Although geographically part of the island of Ireland, Northern Ireland is governed as part of the United Kingdom. It was created in 1921, following the partition of Ireland, out of six of the nine counties of the Province of Ulster (Kee, 1980). It is often popularly referred to as 'the Province' or 'Ulster', although three of Ulster's counties are under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Ireland. The only major city in Northern Ireland is Belfast, whose urban area contains approximately one-third of the total population of 1.6 million people.

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From the late 1940s, Belfast experienced a steady decline in its traditional heavy industries, leaving a legacy of extensive dereliction and wasteland. The government's early attempts at economic regeneration were having little impact when the situation deteriorated further in the late 1960s. Widespread civil disturbances and armed conflict, known as 'the Troubles', broke out across much of Northern Ireland (Bew and Gillespie, 1993).

As a result of the deteriorating political situation, the Northern Ireland Parliament was suspended in 1972 and many of the executive powers normally vested in local government were replaced by 'direct rule' from central government agencies (Bew and Gillespie, 1993). These changes in statutory responsibility have had a significant impact on many aspects of the planning and management of urban trees and landscapes, which are now largely under the control of various sections of the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) (DoE(NI)) (Hunter Blair, 1996; Parkinson, interview, 1997). The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, another government agency, has responsibility for trees and landscapes on publicly owned housing estates. Local authorities in Northern Ireland, however, continue to manage their own parks and open spaces and are responsible for the daily management of highway trees under agency agreements with the DoE Roads Service (1993).

Local authorities in Northern Ireland, like those in the Republic of Ireland, have not developed specialist Tree Officer posts. At a time when the creation of these posts was becoming common in Britain, local authorities in Northern Ireland were losing many of their statutory responsibilities for urban trees under the direct rule policy. While the Northern Ireland Forest Service has been at the forefront of the development of urban forestry, foresters are not directly involved to any significant extent in the management of urban trees. There are also very few arboriculturists in Northern Ireland, the professional background most associated with Tree Officers in Britain. The planning and management of urban trees is invariably undertaken by a wide range of other professionals, particularly horticulturists and landscape architects, who usually have additional responsibilities for other aspects of landscape management. Belfast City Council is still the only local authority in Northern Ireland with a specialist Tree Section. There are no arboriculturists working in any of the central government agencies.

Initial recognition of the concept

Interest in urban forestry in Northern Ireland emerged initially in the early 1980s among a small group of civil servants at the DoE(NI) (Boyd, interview, 1996). Against a background of continuing economic and environmental decline, the DoE(NI) was constantly looking for new ways to help regenerate the many depressed areas of Northern Ireland, particularly in Belfast. At that time, the DoE(NI) had an imaginative Landscape Section which was particularly receptive to some of the innovative approaches to urban landscape management then emanating from Britain. The Landscape Section worked closely in a support role with other sections of the DoE(NI), such as the Belfast Development Office (BDO), the Planning Service and the Works Division. It was through these regular contacts with the Landscape Section that David Boyd, a Senior Principal Officer in the BDO, first heard the term 'urban forestry'. Through his work in the BDO, Boyd was to play a crucial part in gaining official recognition for the concept of urban forestry in Northern Ireland (McClellan, interview, 1996).

The role of the BDO, as a branch of the Urban Affairs Division of the DoE(NI), focused

on promoting economic and environmental improvements throughout the Greater Belfast area (Cadden, interview, 1996). Boyd recognised immediately the potential of urban forestry as a new and radical approach to 'greening' derelict and vacant land. His interest was fostered by Ross Anderson of the ASH Partnership in Glasgow, a pioneer of urban forestry in Britain, who was then engaged as a consultant to the Urban Affairs Division on urban regeneration initiatives (Boyd, interview, 1996).

To promote urban forestry within the relevant public and voluntary organisations, Boyd decided to organise a 1-day seminar on the subject. Andy Lipkis of the TreePeople organisation in Los Angeles, an early pioneer of urban forestry in the United States, was visiting Dublin at this time and accepted an invitation to give a presentation at the event. Roy Stirrat (interview, 1995) of Northern Planners in Glasgow, another pioneer of urban forestry in Britain, also agreed to give a presentation.

The BDO's seminar was held in Belfast in September 1984, marking the beginning of the development of urban forestry in Northern Ireland. It was successful in promoting the concept, not only to senior officials within the DoE(NI), but also to officials from Belfast City Council, the Forest Service and a number of other relevant organisations and agencies (Boyd, interview, 1996). Most importantly, the seminar achieved Boyd's major aim of convincing his own Under-Secretary within the DoE(NI) that urban forestry was a concept with sufficient relevance to Belfast to justify substantial funding. Consequently, urban forestry became a part of the programme of the Urban Affairs Division of the DoE(NI) in 1985, and Boyd was able to allocate initial funding of some Stg£100,000 from his own budget at the BDO.

Boyd's deputy at the BDO was Eddie Cadden (interview, 1996), who became responsible for translating Boyd's initial interest in urban forestry into practical action. It was Cadden's commitment to the concept, perhaps more than any other factor, that was to lead to the development of a series of practical initiatives in the Belfast area which rapidly established urban forestry in Northern Ireland.

Early practical projects in Belfast

Following the DoE(NI) seminar in 1984, the relevance of urban forestry became apparent in some practical urban regeneration initiatives already involving the BDO (Cadden, interview, 1996). The Colin Glen Forest Park was being developed as an area of public open space in West Belfast which would provide a 'green finger' for recreation and conservation, in contrast to the dense residential developments of the vast new housing estates in Poleglass and Twinbrook. The idea for the project had initially come from Peter Deahl of the DoE(NI)'s Landscape Section and its practical implementation had begun under an Action for Community Employment (ACE) scheme, a government funded training and employment scheme that engaged long term unemployed people. The BDO was requested to provide some funding for the project. It did this by employing consultants and contractors to undertake landscape and engineering works which were beyond the expertise of the workers on the ACE scheme. This initial funding came out of the BDO's allocation for urban forestry.

In 1989, the Colin Glen Trust was formed as a registered charity with responsibility for the management of the Forest Park which comprised 80 ha of scenic woodland, river, open grassland and wildflower meadows. This exciting initiative has become a major environmental education resource for school children as well as a popular recreation area for the people of West Belfast. While it generates some income through its golf course and other

leisure facilities, it receives the vast majority of its funding from various central government agencies (Colin Glen Trust, 1993). In 1996, it won an award in the Highly Commended category of the ILAM Open Space Management Award (Anon., 1996a).

The development of the Colin Glen had a significant impact on many professionals involved with trees and the urban environment (Bankhead, pers. comm., 1996; Hunter Blair, 1996). The transformation of this previously neglected landscape into a 'green oasis' in West Belfast has been widely praised as an example of what is possible in both 'urban greening' and employment creation. While the project has evolved more as a leisure and environmental facility rather than as an urban forestry initiative, it is still an excellent example of multi-purpose woodland management on the urban fringe.

At the same time as funding Colin Glen Forest Park, the BDO was also looking at positive uses for the extensive area of reclaimed land in the Harbour area adjacent to the M2 motorway (Cadden, interview, 1996). Known as the North Foreshore, this was being used as a waste disposal site with the intention that it be eventually developed as part of the Harbour Industrial Estate. Due to problems of land settlement and landfill gases, however, it would not be possible to build on the site for many years. Urban forestry seemed an ideal solution and Cadden commissioned the ASH Partnership to design and implement a forest-type planting scheme over much of the site (Anon., 1989). The trees would provide an intermediate productive land use and create an attractive landscape framework whenever the site was eventually developed for industrial use. The trees are now 10 years old and have already dramatically improved the quality of the landscape for people approaching the city on the M2 motorway.

Belfast has very few street trees (ASH Partnership, 1989), in comparison with Dublin or cities of a similar size in Britain. Although a programme of systematic planting had taken place immediately before and after the first world war, many of these trees had disappeared or were in poor condition by the late 1970s. A survey by Belfast City Council in the early 1980s found that out of a total of 5,500 mature street trees, some 3,900 required tree surgery. The data from this survey were then incorporated into a computerised inventory which continues to be used by Belfast City Council in the management of the trees, acting as agents for the DoE Roads Service. In 1984, a street tree planting programme commenced in some of the previously treeless streets in the city centre. By May 1989, 1,700 trees had been planted, with funding from the BDO out of its allocation for urban forestry. From June 1985 to February 1987, some 3,000 of the existing 3,900 trees in poor condition were pruned by Belfast City Council staff or by contractors engaged by them. Funding of Stg£70,000 for this maintenance work was again obtained from the BDO out of its allocation for urban forestry.

The Belfast urban forestry initiative

The growing interest in urban forestry in Belfast was given official government recognition when the establishment of an extensive urban forest was included as an objective in the *Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001* (DoE(NI), 1990). The draft document was issued by the DoE(NI) in November 1987 and the final document was published in 1990. This was probably the first time that the establishment of an urban forest had been included as an objective in a regional planning document for any urban area in either Ireland or Britain. In developing the draft plan, sections of the DoE(NI) had been invited to submit papers highlighting themes and initiatives which they regarded as relevant (Cadden, interview,

1996). As many of these had mentioned the importance of urban forestry, this was formalised as one of the objectives.

In March 1988, Boyd (interview, 1996) and three other senior officials from the DoE(NI) attended the 1st UK Urban Forestry Conference, held in the West Midlands. John McClean, Director of Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland (CVNI), also attended. They were greatly impressed by the event and particularly interested to learn that there were already some established projects in Britain (Boyd, interview, 1996). Although Cadden (interview, 1996) was unable to attend the conference, the enthusiasm of his colleagues and the exciting literature they brought back encouraged him to begin exploring the possibility of a major urban forestry project covering the whole of Belfast.

In July 1988, the BDO commissioned the ASH Partnership to undertake an extensive study of the potential for a city-wide urban forestry initiative in Belfast (ASH Partnership, 1989). The first part of the study comprised an evaluation of the street tree programme in the city, with recommendations for future planting and maintenance. The second part of the study examined the relevance of urban forestry to Belfast, referring to examples of existing projects in Britain. It concluded with a series of recommendations for the establishment and implementation of an extensive urban forestry programme over a 10-year period. These included the formation of a Steering Committee of relevant public and voluntary sector organisations to direct the initiative, and an Urban Forestry Task Force to coordinate the planting and maintenance programmes. The Task Force, comprising a Director and other specialist staff, would cost nearly Stg£2 million over the period. The planting and maintenance programmes called for an expenditure of some Stg£20 million. The results of the study and its recommendations were contained in a consultative document, which has become known as the ASH Report, submitted to the BDO in May 1989.

In the summer of 1989, when the ASH Report was circulated among the relevant public and voluntary organisations in Belfast, it was given a mixed reception (Cadden, interview, 1996). While most supported the idea of a major urban forestry project, concerns were expressed regarding the total cost of the proposed programme. While the BDO had been aware that the report's recommendations would call for significant levels of expenditure, a cost of Stg£22 million was not anticipated. Although surprised by the amount, the BDO had never intended this to be met by 'new' monies added to the BDO's existing budget or by any other single source. In its view, the cost of the programme could be met through a mixture of private and public funds from a range of agencies and organisations. The ASH Report had not described how the funding would be raised and when this was explained to the various organisations and agencies by the BDO, their initial shock began to subside.

Although the BDO's proposals were now generating a more favourable reaction, other public agencies were hesitant to offer any financial contribution to the initiative (Cadden, interview, 1996). As discussions on a possible funding package were making little progress, the early enthusiasm for the initiative began to dissipate. In an effort to maintain interest, Cadden organised several study trips for small groups of central and local government officials in Belfast to look at what was being achieved through urban forestry in Britain.

At the same time as trying to develop a city-wide urban forestry project, Cadden (interview, 1996) was also pursuing a nature conservation strategy for Belfast. This was also linked to clearly defined objectives in the *Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001*. On behalf of the BDO, he commissioned a team of consultants to conduct a survey and to produce a detailed nature conservation strategy document. The strategy, entitled *Nature in the City*

(DoE(NI), 1992), was published in March 1992. The information gathered in the survey was placed on a computerised database at the Ulster Museum. The concept of urban forestry was specifically mentioned, with the strategy recommending that the database be used to help determine species and site selection in future tree planting programmes for the city.

The Forest of Belfast

In the summer of 1991, Cadden decided to make another attempt to promote a city-wide urban forestry initiative for Belfast (Johnston, 1995). As a first step, he decided to form the Urban Forest Technical Group. This would be an advisory body to the BDO comprising representatives from the major relevant public and voluntary organisations. Its aim would be to generate discussion on how best to proceed with any project. In July 1991, the BDO commissioned the ASH Partnership to form the Technical Group and to progress the initiative. ASH then recruited Mark Johnston, formerly of the Forest of London Trust, to undertake the work.

The early development of the Forest of Belfast

The first stage of the initiative involved gaining official support for it from the relevant public and voluntary organisations. Several organisations were invited to nominate representatives to serve on the Technical Group. Maurice Parkinson, Head of Belfast City Council's Parks and Amenities Section, agreed to act as Chairperson.

The Technical Group's first meeting was held in August 1991, attended by representatives of the BDO, DoE Landscape and Planning Sections, the Forest Service and two voluntary organisations (Johnston, 1995). After this initial meeting, other public sector bodies were included, such as Belfast City Council, Castlereagh Borough Council, DoE Roads Service, DoE Countryside and Wildlife Branch, and the NI Housing Executive. Separate Community Action and Public Relations Subcommittees were formed, to include small voluntary organisations and to develop a promotional strategy for the initiative. To encourage an interest in urban forestry among individual professionals, the Technical Group organised a 1-day seminar at Malone House in March 1992. This successful event attracted almost 100 individuals and included speakers from Northern Ireland and Britain. The keynote address was given by Dick Abbott of ACRT, a leading urban forestry consultancy practice in the United States.

To assist in developing a promotional strategy, the Technical Group obtained the part-time services of a public relations consultant (Johnston, 1995). The time the consultant would spend working on the project was donated free by his company as a form of sponsorship. His first task was to produce a name for the project. The 'Forest of Belfast' was chosen as a title as projects with a similar name had already proved to have popular appeal in London and Cardiff, conveying something of the aims and vision of an urban forestry initiative. An attractive logo was designed and a range of promotional material produced.

To attract private sector interest in the Forest of Belfast, representatives from local companies were invited to a business lunch at Belfast Castle in June 1992 (Johnston, 1995). They were given a short presentation on the proposed project which highlighted its potential for sponsorship. Much of the success of the event was due to a television feature on the initiative broadcast by BBC Northern Ireland the previous week. In the year following the lunch, most companies present made some contribution to the project.

After much discussion by the Technical Group, the basic outline of the project was agreed. The Forest of Belfast would act as a partnership project, not as a separate tree planting and management agency (Johnston, 1995). Its role would be to promote and coordinate urban forestry events and activities by its partner organisations, to help raise funds for these, and to organise public relations and community involvement at events, when required (Anon., 1992a).

The Forest of Belfast was launched at an open-air event at Shaws Bridge on 18 June 1992. This featured the unveiling of a huge commemorative stone symbolising the commitment to the project by many different organisations and their determination to make it succeed. The launch was attended by the Permanent Secretary to the DoE(NI), the Lord Mayor of Belfast and over 100 invited guests and school children. It gained wide media coverage, including a feature on local television (Anon., 1992b). Shortly after the launch, further events involving school children were held. A children's 'Teddy Bears Picnic' was held in the Botanic Gardens, with 120 young people from all over Belfast taking part in an afternoon of environmental games (Anon., 1992c). Painting and creative writing competitions on the theme of trees were also organised through local schools, sponsored by *Irish News*, a local newspaper (Anon., 1992d, 1993a).

Before the launch of the Forest of Belfast, the Technical Group had agreed that the appointment of a full-time Urban Forester for Belfast was a priority (Johnston, 1995). The BDO had expressed a willingness to fund the post but hoped other public bodies would contribute. After discussions lasting several months, a funding package was agreed which still left the BDO effectively funding the post. In January 1993, Johnston of ASH was appointed as the Urban Forester. This appointment marked a significant development in urban forestry in both Ireland and Britain (Forest of Belfast, 1993). The post was unique in being supported by a partnership of public bodies with a brief to coordinate a comprehensive urban forestry initiative throughout a major city embracing several local authority districts.

The Urban Forester immediately began to concentrate on the more technical aspects of the project. The underlying aim of the Forest of Belfast was still to produce an urban forestry strategy for the city. Any meaningful strategy, however, would have to be based on a comprehensive survey of the existing urban forest and its potential for expansion. Due to the high cost of employing consultants to undertake a tree survey, the Technical Group enlisted the help of Enterprise Ulster, a government funded training and employment agency. From March 1993 through to the summer of 1995, several unemployed graduates were engaged to collect data. The survey methodology was based on two recently completed surveys in Britain (Cobham Resource Consultants, 1993; DoE, 1993).

Some members of the Technical Group wanted to produce an urban forestry strategy as soon as possible, rather than wait for the results of the survey. They hoped this might prompt the BDO into immediately increasing its funding for the Forest of Belfast. A discussion paper on the strategy was produced by the Urban Forester in March 1993. Several written comments were received from the Technical Group and these were included in a further discussion paper in August 1993. A draft public relations strategy for the project was produced by the public relations consultant in November 1993.

While work was progressing on the tree survey and strategy, community events and activities continued. The Forest of Belfast's Tree Warden Scheme was launched in April 1993, the first such scheme to be established anywhere in Ireland (Johnston, 1995). The scheme was organised on behalf of the Forest of Belfast by CVNI, with funding of Stg£5,000 from the BDO released to engage the part-time services of one of its Urban

Field Officers to coordinate the scheme and to organise training courses for the tree wardens. By the end of 1993, 20 tree wardens had been recruited and most were busy organising events and activities in their area in support of the project.

In June 1993, the Forest of Belfast organised a 2-day 'Tree Fair' festival held in Belvoir Park Forest on the outskirts of Belfast (Anon., 1993b). This entertaining and educational event on the theme of trees, forests and wood involved over 150 exhibitions and displays, including several from Britain and the Republic of Ireland, and attracted approximately 15,000 people (Johnston, 1995). The visual and performing arts formed a major part of the event, the centre-piece being a large wood sculpture entitled 'The Tree of Life' which remains on the site as a permanent memorial to the event. Much of the funding for the Tree Fair was provided by the Forest Service, although commercial sponsorship also played a significant role (Anon., 1993c).

In the autumn of 1993, the Forest of Belfast commissioned four community murals on the theme of people and trees, funded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and a local paint retailer (Anon., 1993d). Over 200 people of all ages helped local artists paint the murals which promoted a powerful and colourful message about the importance of trees. In December 1993, the Forest of Belfast organised a 'Tree Dressing Day' competition for schools and community groups, sponsored by the *News Letter*, a local newspaper (Anon., 1993e). This was the first event of its kind to be held in Northern Ireland, and with over 50 trees 'dressed' throughout Belfast, it was probably the largest environmental art event ever held in Ireland.

During the Forest of Belfast's first year, Stg£40,000 of sponsorship was raised to fund the project's community events and activities (Johnston, 1995). This amount was equal to the level of the BDO's core funding for the initiative. As the working relationship between the Urban Forester and the project's public relations consultant was proving so productive, the BDO agreed to employ the latter on a 1-year contract once the corporate sponsorship had ended.

During the Forest of Belfast's first planting season in 1992/93, its partner organisations planted a total of 160,000 trees (Johnston, 1995). Although there were no data to compare this total with previous years, most organisations reported an increase in planting as additional resources were committed to the project. In March 1993, the Forest of Belfast received Stg£20,000 from the BDO for community tree planting schemes coordinated by two of the project's voluntary organisations (Anon., 1993f). To give a boost to street tree planting in Belfast, a sponsorship scheme was launched by the DoE Roads Service, aimed at private companies and individuals (DoE Roads Service, 1993).

By the end of 1993, just as the project was becoming established as a major initiative in Belfast, its progress was disrupted by some unexpected events. Following an internal reorganisation of the BDO prompted by a financial crisis within the whole of the DoE(NI), Cadden (interview, 1996) was relieved of his responsibilities for urban forestry and assigned to other duties. He was replaced by officials who did not regard the Forest of Belfast as having a high priority in the current financial climate. The loss of Cadden as an enthusiastic advocate for urban forestry within the BDO at a time when it was experiencing financial difficulties was to have serious consequences for the Forest of Belfast. Although the project's Urban Forester and public relations consultant had been informed by the BDO that their contracts would be renewed, this decision was reversed (Johnston, 1995). The sudden departure of the Urban Forester in January 1994 was to have a damaging effect on the Forest of Belfast (Cadden, interview, 1996). For over a year, the project was without a full-time officer to coordinate and develop it. During this period, much of

the project was 'in limbo' and its public profile was significantly lowered. Valuable work, however, continued with the Tree Warden Scheme and technical aspects of the Forest of Belfast. The reduction in activity also allowed for a period of reflection on the future direction of the project (Hunter Blair, interview, 1997).

The Forest of Belfast since 1994

When renewed funding for the Forest of Belfast was eventually obtained from the BDO, the Technical Group, now referred to as the 'Steering Group', was able to advertise for another full-time officer. In February 1995, the Forest of Belfast began a new chapter in its development with the appointment of Dr Ben Simon as Forest Officer, a post with similar responsibilities to the Urban Forester. Simon (interview, 1997) had several years of experience in tree planting and conservation management with the Ulster Wildlife Trust.

During the Forest Officer's first year in 1995, the Forest of Belfast was able to make two significant advances towards its long term aim of becoming a comprehensive urban forestry initiative (Forest of Belfast, 1996). The first was the publication, in June 1995, of the results of the tree survey (Segoviano, 1995). This recorded, for the first time, the nature of the tree cover in different parts of the city, by each of the five local authority districts. The Belfast City Council area, by far the largest, was further divided into seven distinct zones. Most importantly, the survey provided sufficient information about the species, age, location, condition and ownership of Belfast's trees to develop a comprehensive and appropriate long term strategy for planting and management.

The second significant development was the production of the urban forestry strategy, issued at the same time as the survey results (Forest of Belfast, 1994). The document began by stating the aims and objectives of the Forest of Belfast. These included highlighting the need to conserve the city's existing trees and woodland, encouraging increased levels of new planting, and promoting community interest and involvement in the care and protection of the city's urban forest. While the strategy expressed the hope that the survey results would enable future resources to be targeted at areas of greatest need, its only quantified targets related to tree planting. These consisted of proposed increases in the percentage of tree cover in various zones over the next five or 10 years (Forest of Belfast, 1994). Achieving these targets would cost Stg£5,170,000 over the next 10 years, with a further Stg£750,000 required for maintenance. The calculations were based on the cost of planting whips at 2 m centres with an annual increase of 27 ha of new planting. While the strategy did not indicate how funding would be obtained, it did identify some priority sites for tree planting.

As well as these planting targets, the strategy also listed some broad recommendations aimed at enabling the Forest of Belfast to continue its valuable work in other aspects of urban forestry (Forest of Belfast, 1994). These included the continued employment of the Forest Officer, the further development of the Tree Warden Scheme, and a commitment to regularly update the tree survey. Core funding for the Forest of Belfast of Stg£32,000/year was recommended to enable it to undertake this work.

While the strategy did not include detailed management plans, there were good reasons for this. In view of the limited and unpredictable funding for the project, it would have been unwise to set too stringent targets in case these could not be achieved (McClellan, interview, 1996). Although this would not allow precise monitoring and evaluation of the project, the Forest of Belfast did not have sufficient resources to conduct such an exercise (Parkinson, interview, 1997). Furthermore, as the Forest of Belfast was not an executive

organisation and could only encourage and facilitate the efforts of its partners, setting precise planting and management targets would not have been appropriate (Hunter Blair, interview, 1997). The publication of the strategy and the city-wide tree survey were landmark developments in urban forestry, as this was the first time that either had been achieved anywhere in Ireland.

The Steering Group was now keen to expand its membership to include relevant public and voluntary organisations not previously involved in the Forest of Belfast (1994). After repeated invitations over the previous few years, Newtownabbey Borough Council and Lisburn Borough Council finally joined the Steering Group, together with a small number of additional voluntary organisations (Forest of Belfast, 1996, 1997).

As well as gaining the participation of more organisations, the Forest of Belfast was keen to foster greater interest in urban forestry among individual professionals. A seminar was held at Belfast Castle in May 1997, including presentations on the progress of the Forest of Belfast, the importance of sustainable development and the role of trees in urban regeneration (Forest of Belfast, 1998). One of the speakers was Nerys Jones, Executive Director of the National Urban Forestry Unit in England. A further seminar was held in February 1998 at Malone House, addressing trees and development in the urban area. It included two speakers involved in urban forestry in Scotland, David Jamieson of the Edinburgh Urban Forest Project and Simon MacGillivray, Director of the Scottish Greenbelt Company. The seminar attracted over 100 delegates and did much to raise the profile of urban trees in relation to planning issues. This was a subject which the Forest of Belfast had been trying to highlight for some time, given the ineffectiveness of planning controls in Northern Ireland to protect existing trees and to ensure adequate and appropriate new planting.

While very limited resources were now available to the Forest of Belfast for promotional work, it began to again attract significant media coverage of its events and activities (Simon, interview, 1997). The continuing progress of the Tree Warden Scheme was particularly helpful in generating public interest in the project (Forest of Belfast, 1996, 1997). Although the impact of the scheme was still limited by the lack of a full-time coordinator, many excellent planting events and other activities were organised (McClellan, interview, 1996). During the 1995/96 season, 8,000 trees were given away free by the Forest of Belfast to individual Tree Wardens and local groups for community tree planting schemes (Forest of Belfast, 1996). In the 1996/97 season, a further 10,200 trees were supplied for community planting at more than 50 sites (Forest of Belfast, 1997). Although these were planted throughout Belfast, efforts were made to ensure a high proportion were planted in areas identified as having low levels of tree cover.

In early 1997, the Steering Group was able to secure substantial funding for its community tree planting efforts. An application was approved under the European Union's Peace and Reconciliation Fund for Stg£120,000 over a 3-year period (Simon, interview, 1997). This grant aid was 75% funded by the Peace and Reconciliation Fund, 20% funded by Belfast City Council and 5% funded from the resources of the Forest of Belfast project. The funding, however, was only for the trees and did not include the provision of a post to coordinate the plantings (Parkinson, interview, 1997). This had to be done by the Forest Officer in addition to his existing commitments, with the post-planting maintenance undertaken by the groups carrying out the planting (Simon, interview, 1998). During the 1997/98 season, approximately 40,000 trees were planted at nearly 150 sites (Forest of Belfast, 1998), with the majority of the plantings undertaken to a high standard (Simon, interview, 1998). The Forest of Belfast continues to ensure its community tree planting

schemes are exciting and imaginative events. One of the most successful was its 1-day 'Plantathon' event, held in November 1997 (Forest of Belfast, 1998). During the day, approximately 200 adults and children planted 5,900 trees to create a hedge over 1 km long on the edge of Ormeau Park in South Belfast.

In another measure to promote the planting activities of the Forest of Belfast, some schemes undertaken by its partner organisations have included the erection of a sign-board to promote the scheme as part of the project (Simon, interview, 1997). Some publicity for the Forest of Belfast was also obtained through the sponsorship by Phoenix Natural Gas of tree planting in the city centre (Anon., 1997a). The DoE Road Service's street tree sponsorship scheme, however, has proved less successful, with very few trees being sponsored (Parkinson, interview, 1997). This is probably due to the high cost of each tree and a lack of promotion for the scheme.

In September 1996, the Forest of Belfast organised another 2-day Tree Fair event in Belvoir Park Forest (Forest of Belfast, 1996). This attracted nearly 4,000 visitors and included displays and demonstrations by a wide range of public, private and voluntary organisation. Once again, the event included a strong element of the arts and crafts. The Forest of Belfast also commissioned three sculptures on the theme of woodland, sited on the banks of the River Lagan opposite Belvoir Park Forest. In April 1998, a third fair was incorporated into Belfast City Council's Spring Flower Show, held at Malone House and Barnett Demesne (Simon, interview, 1998).

While the Forest of Belfast was now making excellent progress, it had still not managed to increase the level of its core funding which was limiting any substantial development of the project. In 1997, the vast majority of this, only Stg£25,000, was still being provided by the BDO, with an additional Stg£6,000 from the Housing Executive (Anderson, interview, 1997). None of the Forest of Belfast's other partners were making any significant financial contribution, although Belfast City Council was providing office accommodation for the Forest Officer and bearing some of the ancillary costs associated with the post. Following the departure of Cadden, the BDO itself had been playing a far less proactive role in the Forest of Belfast. Its involvement was now mainly concerned with providing a secretariat to the Steering Group and acting as the 'banker' for the project.

In March 1997, the future of the Forest of Belfast was again placed in doubt when the BDO was merged with Making Belfast Work, another section of the Urban Affairs Division of the DoE(NI) (Anderson, interview, 1997). The merger had followed a Public Expenditure Survey which had imposed severe cuts in the budget of the Urban Affairs Division. The BDO's existing funding for the Forest of Belfast was due to expire at the end of the 1997/98 financial year, and there was no indication that the Belfast Regeneration Office (BRO), which had assumed the BDO's role in the project, would be able to continue its funding after that time (Parkinson, interview, 1997). Following several months of uncertainty, the situation was temporarily resolved when the BRO announced that it would continue to support the Forest of Belfast in the short term (Lucas, pers. comm., 1997). Any extended period of funding would depend on an evaluation of the achievements of the Forest of Belfast and an assessment of its future direction. In the meantime, however, the BDO's annual funding of Stg£5,000 to CVNI for the Tree Warden Scheme had ceased (Simon, interview, 1998). In the 1997/98 financial year, this was provided out of the Forest of Belfast's own budget. In April 1998, a further Stg£2,500 was provided out of this budget to enable the scheme to continue for a further six months. Unless, however, an alternative source of funding for the scheme can be secured, its future looks bleak.

In the spring of 1998, the BRO commissioned a financial consultant to undertake an evaluation of the Forest of Belfast, partly with the aim of developing an 'exit strategy' should the BRO decide not to continue its funding (Simon, interview, 1998). The consultant's report, however, found that the BRO's funding represented excellent value for money and recommended that it should continue. It also recommended an additional member of staff to assist the Forest Officer and that the partner organisations make some regular and direct financial contribution to the project. The acceptance of the consultant's recommendations by the BRO and the Forest of Belfast's Steering Group would mean a far more secure future for the project after the periodic uncertainties of the past.

Since its launch in 1992, the Forest of Belfast has achieved a remarkable level of success with a limited and unpredictable level of resources (Hunter Blair, interview, 1997). This success was formally recognised when the Forest of Belfast received the Urban Forestry Award for 1997 from the Royal Dublin Society in its annual Irish Forestry Award (Forest of Belfast, 1997). The project has developed successfully into a wide ranging initiative embracing most aspects of the planning and management of trees and woodland in the Belfast area. The Steering Group has always been conscious of the need to develop a planned, systematic and integrated approach to the management of Belfast's urban forest and continues to make steady progress in this regard. While the Forest of Belfast may not yet have achieved the level of planting envisaged in the strategy, its partner organisations are planting significantly great numbers of trees, and tree cover in many areas of Belfast is undoubtedly increasing (Parkinson, interview, 1997).

The Forest Service and grant aid

The Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture (Northern Ireland) is the forestry authority for Northern Ireland and an entirely separate organisation from the British Forestry Commission. Although not directly involved in urban tree planting to any great extent, it has been keen to encourage it through the allocation of grant aid. A report on proposals for community woodlands was produced by the Forest Service in conjunction with the DoE(NI), culminating in the launch of the Community Woodlands Initiative in October 1992 (Forest Service, 1993). A major feature of the initiative was the expansion of the Forest Service's Woodland Grant Scheme to include a Community Woodland Supplement, an additional Stg£950/ha, to encourage the creation of new woodland close to towns and cities. Although there was little response to the Community Woodland Supplement in the first few years, there has been steady growth in the total amount of this grant paid out, as local authorities and other landowners have become more aware of the scheme (Forest Service, 1995, 1996, 1997). A successful seminar for local authorities on the potential for community woodlands was held at Pomeroy Forestry School in June 1993 (Forest Service, 1994).

In 1994, the Forest Service approved a Community Woodland Plan for Greater Belfast which had been prepared by the Forest of Belfast's Steering Group. The plan identified major areas of existing woodland and areas of opportunity for new planting (Forest Service, 1995; Chambers, interview, 1996). A similar plan for the Craigavon area has also been prepared by Craigavon Borough Council and approved by the Forest Service. The production of these plans has promoted a significant increase in planting in both areas. The Forest Service's grant schemes continue to encourage new urban and urban fringe tree planting projects (Hunter Blair, interview, 1997). The new Glenside Forest of 70 ha has been planted by RMC Quarries Ltd. adjacent to Hannahstown in Belfast, most of which received grant aid.

The Forest Service has also been keen to encourage applications for its tree management grants. In 1996, it paid this grant to Rathfern Residents Association to bring into management 10.5 ha of neglected woodland owned by the Housing Executive on the slopes of Carmoney Hill, on the northern outskirts of Belfast (Forest Service, 1997).

The Forest Service's Belvoir Park Forest has recently received much recognition as a model of multi-purpose woodland management in the urban fringe (Hodge, 1995). In 1996, it won the Urban Forestry Award in the Royal Dublin Society's annual Irish Forestry Award (Forest Service, 1997). Located in south Belfast just 4 km from the city centre, a significant section of this 75 ha forest has been under threat for several years from plans by the DoE Roads Service to build a new relief road. These plans have met with sustained and vigorous opposition from local conservation and community groups (Anon., 1992e). To many people, it is inconceivable that a public body should be involved in a major 'greening' initiative for Belfast, while at the same time proposing to destroy and degrade a large part of the city's most valuable woodland asset. While the matter is still unresolved, a major road through the forest seems increasingly unlikely (Simon, interview, 1998).

The Forest Service has consistently been very supportive of the concept of urban forestry and has made a major contribution to the development of the Forest of Belfast (Johnston, 1995). Much of this is due to the enthusiasm of its Planning Branch which has played an active role on the project's Steering Group since its formation. With the recent development of an urban forestry project in Derry, the Forest Service intends to play a similarly constructive role in that initiative.

Urban forestry in Derry

Following the launch of the Forest of Belfast in 1992, there was much discussion among the Steering Group about the possibility of similar projects in other towns and cities in Northern Ireland. Much of this discussion centred on the prospects for urban forestry in Derry, the second largest city in the region. Although Derry has a legacy of fine trees and parks from Victorian times, much of this is situated on the outskirts of the city (PRONI, 1984). Large areas of Derry, like Belfast, have been economically depressed for many years and the city has also suffered greatly from the Troubles.

The Londonderry Development Office (LDO) had been showing an interest in the Forest of Belfast from an early stage (McClellan, interview, 1996). The LDO has very similar responsibilities in Derry to the BDO in Belfast, and is also part of the Urban Affairs Division of the DoE(NI). It saw a similar project in Derry as an opportunity to bring together the many different public and voluntary organisations and work with local community groups to 'green' some of the more depressed and desolate parts of the city. The LDO's interest was fostered by the Forest Service which had targeted Derry as one of the areas where it was keen to see a substantial uptake in its Community Woodland Supplement (Hunter Blair, interview, 1997). Some members of the Forest of Belfast's Steering Group also began visiting Derry to discuss urban forestry with professionals there.

Although interest in urban forestry was initially slow to develop in Derry (Simon, interview, 1997), the LDO became increasingly convinced that some form of project based on the Forest of Belfast model would be of benefit to the city (Magowan, interview, 1998). In March 1997, it commissioned CVNI to produce a Development Plan for the implementation of an urban forestry strategy in Derry. CVNI's plan recommended the

establishment of an urban forestry project including community tree planting programmes, educational activities with schools, and many other community-based activities (CVNI, 1997a). It was hoped that the major public and voluntary organisations in the city would join a Steering Group to help develop the project. Much of the emphasis of the Development Plan was on the contribution an urban forestry project could make to the aims of Local Agenda 21. Communities in Derry could be empowered to make a real and lasting improvement to their own neighbourhood (Magowan, interview, 1998).

The Development Plan was approved by the LDO which then invited a wide range of public and voluntary organisations to participate in a Steering Group (Magowan, interview, 1998). Public sector bodies agreeing to attend included the Housing Executive, Derry City Council, the Forest Service and the Industrial Development Board. Funding for the project over a 3-year period was approved by the LDO to enable CVNI to implement the Development Plan. CVNI then requested its Local Field Officer, John Magowan, to work full-time on the project as its coordinator.

The first stage in developing the practical aspects of the project involved an extensive series of meetings with local community groups to encourage their interest and involvement (Magowan, interview, 1998). Once interest had been secured, residents were invited to attend a programme of courses run by CVNI giving basic instruction on various aspects of tree planting and management. CVNI's approach to the project was to encourage local groups to do as much of the planning and planting as possible. CVNI's role was to act as a catalyst for community action and to provide groups with the expertise to carry out the work. Community groups would also be encouraged to seek grant aid and local sponsorship for their planting schemes.

The project, entitled 'Trees in the City', was officially launched in December 1997 at a tree planting ceremony attended by the Mayor of Derry and children from local schools (Anon., 1997b). At the launch, it was announced that the project intended to plant 200,000 trees throughout the city by the year 2000. Following the launch, CVNI organised a wide range of tree planting events and other activities throughout the planting season, to involve community groups and to help promote the project. Some publicity was generated by setting up small educational displays in shopping centres and libraries (Anon., 1997c). On a number of occasions, free trees were given away to shoppers and community groups.

Trees in the City is still at an early stage in its development (Magowan, interview, 1998). Some successful tree planting schemes have already been undertaken and a few of these have been funded by a small amount of commercial sponsorship. Much of the work in the first season has, however, been taken up with building support for the project among community groups and schools. By the end of the project's first year of funding, in March 1998, 53 community groups had registered a formal interest in participating. At the end of its first planting season, 55,000 trees had been planted (Anon., 1998). CVNI expects a considerable increase in the volume of tree planting when the project becomes fully operational by the 1998/99 planting season (Magowan, interview, 1998). By that time, the project aims to have in place a network of voluntary Tree Wardens who will be invaluable in providing direct assistance to community groups in their locality. Plans for a considerable number of planting schemes have recently been submitted to the Forest Service and are awaiting approval for grant aid.

Trees in the City is envisaged by the LDO and CVNI as more of a community-based tree planting project rather than a comprehensive urban forestry initiative. It does, however, have the potential to expand into the more strategic aspects of urban tree management, particularly if Derry City Council became more actively involved. The suc-

cess of the project in embracing some of the wider aspects of urban forestry will depend on the extent to which the members of the Steering Group can be encouraged to develop their existing tree planting and management operations through the initiative. A long term and comprehensive strategy and management plan embracing the city's entire urban forest could then be developed and implemented.

Two major tree planting projects for the Millennium

Apart from projects in Belfast and Derry, there are not yet any other urban forestry initiatives in Northern Ireland embracing entire urban areas (Hunter Blair, interview, 1997). Two major tree planting projects for the Millennium have, however, been recently launched, and these have the potential to make a major contribution to the 'greening' of urban and urban fringe areas.

On 30 September 1996, the Woodland Trust launched its 'Woods on your Doorstep' project to plant 92 new community woodlands close to where people live (Anon., 1996b). Although the Trust had been established for over 25 years in Britain, it had not previously been active in Northern Ireland. To create these woodlands, the Trust will work in partnership with the Housing Executive, local authorities, landowners and community groups (Cregg, 1996). Local community groups are being encouraged to help plant the woodlands as a way of marking the forthcoming Millennium with a lasting environmental improvement to their own areas. Funding of Stg£5 million has been obtained from the Millennium Commission, with a smaller contribution from the local Dufferin Foundation (Anon., 1996b). The total cost of the project is estimated at Stg£10 million. Most of Northern Ireland's local authorities have already pledged support for the project, while the Housing Executive has set aside land close to its estates and will be providing financial assistance towards the long term management of each site. Work began on planting the first woodland in March 1997 at a site in Kilcooley, near Bangor in Co. Down (Drake, 1997). Residents of a nearby housing estate helped plant the trees, assisted by local primary school children (Doherty, 1997). This was followed the next day by the planting of a second woodland near Enniskillen in Co. Fermanagh. Although still at a very early stage in its development, the Trust has already recruited several full-time specialist staff for the project. The scale of Woods on your Doorstep should ensure it has a major impact, not only on the landscape, but also on professionals concerned with the creation and management of urban woodland in Northern Ireland.

The second major project is CVNI's 'Millennium Tree Campaign', launched on 25 March 1997 (CVNI, 1997b). Although not a specifically urban initiative, much of the planting will also take place in and around towns and cities in Northern Ireland. CVNI had been encouraged by the success of its 'Million Tree Campaign' when, after 12 years of sustained effort, the millionth tree was eventually planted in March 1994 (McClellan, interview, 1996). It is hoped that a further 1.5 million trees will be planted throughout Northern Ireland under the Millennium Tree Campaign by March 2000, representing approximately one tree for every person living there. It aims to encourage and support local community groups to undertake the planting themselves on suitable sites in their respective neighbourhoods. They will be assisted by a network of 'Tree Champions', a type of tree warden scheme where individuals with experience of trees and working with communities will aim to inspire local action and provide support for the practical work. While the focus of the project is on community tree planting, there is also considerable emphasis on environmental education. As part of the project, there will be a wide ranging programme of

courses, exhibitions and displays on topics such as the conservation value of trees and woodland, tree identification and surveys, and how to grow trees from seed. Financial support for the project of Stg£85,000 over a 3-year period has been obtained from the Esso Living Tree Campaign, with smaller amounts from the Paul Getty Trust and other sources. A further Stg£200,000 was recently obtained from the European Union's Peace and Reconciliation Fund, and smaller amounts are being secured through landfill tax applications (Humphreys, pers. comm., 1998).

By June 1998, the project already had 2,600 formal registrations of interest from individuals and groups (Humphreys, pers. comm., 1998), and there are hopes that this will rise to 5,000 at the height of the project (CVNI, 1998a, 1998b). A total of over 387,500 trees have also been planted. A telephone advice line has also been established to assist community groups and individuals wanting to plant trees or grow them from seed.

There will inevitably be a degree of overlap in having two major community tree planting projects throughout Northern Ireland to mark the Millennium. Although CVNI and the Woodland Trust see their projects as complementary (McClellan, interview, 1996), there could be some confusion in the minds of the public unless each project is promoted with a distinct identity. The practical focus of the two projects, however, is slightly different. The Woodland Trust initiative is concerned with sites of approximately 2 ha, while CVNI's will concentrate on much smaller sites. It also remains to be seen what impact these projects will have on both the Forest of Belfast and the new initiative in Derry, and how successfully they can be integrated in a wider strategic approach to urban forestry.

Social, political and economic factors

Any account of urban forestry in Northern Ireland would be incomplete without some reference to the special social, political and economic difficulties which prevail there. The Troubles impinge on almost every aspect of life, not least the quality of the urban environment and attempts to 'green' its towns and cities.

While the origins of the conflict are complex, they are a reflection of the different political aspirations between the Unionist community, which seeks to remain part of the UK, and the Nationalist community, which seeks to end the partition of Ireland. The lack of an acceptable resolution to these deep-rooted divisions has led to widespread civil disturbances and armed conflict over the past 30 years, with many thousands of people killed or seriously injured (Bew and Gillespie, 1993). Enormous damage has also occurred to property and industry through a sustained bombing campaign. The level of violence subsided with the paramilitary cease-fires of 1994, enabling the British and Irish governments, together with the political parties, to engage in negotiations to find an acceptable political solution. The historic agreement achieved at the multi-party talks on 10 April 1998 offers hope that the Troubles may at last be coming to an end (Northern Ireland Office, 1998). The agreement paves the way for the establishment of a devolved elected Assembly for Northern Ireland which, together with new cross-border bodies, could assume many of the powers currently exercised by central government.

The struggling Northern Ireland economy receives enormous financial support from the British government (Bew and Gillespie, 1993). With the huge additional cost of the security operation, this has been estimated at Stg£8.5 billion/year (Coogan, 1998). This has been supplemented in recent years by increasing support from the European Union (Farrell, 1998). As a result of Northern Ireland's preoccupation with its difficulties, environmental issues have remained low on the political agenda (Cadden, interview, 1996).

With the prospect of an end to the Troubles, urban forestry could become a major force in helping to deliver the regeneration of its towns and cities that is so urgently needed (Johnston, 1994). There has been evidence recently that public concern for trees and the urban environment may be growing. Not only has the threat to Belvoir Park Forest galvanised some well coordinated opposition, so also have the activities of a number of utility companies that have been digging up almost every street in Northern Ireland. Guidelines for this work have sometimes been broken, resulting in dead and dying trees and considerable disquiet among nearby residents (McKeown, 1997).

The DoE(NI)'s recent discussion paper entitled *Shaping Our Future*, outlining a development strategy for Northern Ireland, does not give much indication that urban trees are about to be given any immediate priority by government (DoE(NI), 1997). The document contains a few lines about their benefits but no reference to any specific measures to improve the situation. A far more encouraging document entitled *Environmental Strategy for Northern Ireland* was produced the previous year by Northern Ireland Environment Link (1996). If its recommendations in regard to urban trees were widely adopted, this would have a dramatic impact on the quality of the urban environment. The strategy specifically stresses the contribution that urban forestry can make to the urban environment, and the valuable work carried out under the Forest of Belfast project.

As a consequence of the Troubles, Northern Ireland is unique in being the only region in Western Europe where security considerations play a significant role in urban forestry (Johnston, 1995). Trees and shrubs can provide cover for paramilitary attacks and opportunities for planting have often been very limited, particularly in the vicinity of security installations and near the 'peace lines' dividing the two communities in many urban areas. A complete demilitarisation could mean a lifting of many of these restrictions. Tree planting events and activities could also have a major role in helping to bring people together to heal the scars in their environment and the divisions in their community. Trees can be powerful symbols of peace and hope, and a healthy and vibrant urban forest in Northern Ireland's towns and cities would be to everyone's benefit.

Contacts with the Republic of Ireland and Britain

The initial development of urban forestry in Northern Ireland has been influenced more by developments in Britain than by those in the Republic of Ireland. This is evident from the replies given in the research questionnaire and interviews conducted for this study. This is understandable given the earlier development of urban forestry in Britain, Northern Ireland's history of institutional links with Britain, and the fact that many of its relevant professionals received their professional training there.

Contacts on urban forestry between professionals in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland began to develop in the early 1990s. Although a few delegates from Northern Ireland attended the first Irish Urban Forestry Conference in Dublin in June 1991, it was only with the launch of the Forest of Belfast project that regular contacts were established (Johnston, 1997). The Forest of Belfast has continued to provide a focus for these cross-border contacts. It recently began cooperating with Conservation Volunteers Ireland, a major voluntary organisation in the Republic, to promote the planting of yew trees in graveyards and churchyards (Forest of Belfast, 1998). The rapid growth of urban forestry in the Republic since the early 1990s (Johnston, 1997) is also beginning to have an impact on professionals in Northern Ireland. Their interest has been stimulated by the increasing number of initiatives there and the dissemination of information about these through

organisations such as the Tree Council of Ireland (Collins, interview, 1997). It has also been fostered by their attendance at relevant conferences. Ten delegates from Northern Ireland attended the Second National Conference on Urban Forestry in Limerick, March 1996, and six delegates attended the Third National Conference in Galway, April 1998. The programme for both of these events included speakers from Northern Ireland, outlining the Forest of Belfast initiative (Hunter Blair, 1996; Simon, 1998), the work of Belfast City Council's Parks and Amenities Section (Holdsworth, 1998), and the value of partnership structures in urban forestry (Johnston, 1996). Further cooperation includes a recent joint survey carried out by the University of Ulster and the Tree Council of Ireland, studying local authority urban tree management practices in the Republic (Johnston *et al.*, 1998). With the growth of cross-border contacts, the development of urban forestry in Northern Ireland can be viewed increasingly in the context of a wider Irish urban forestry movement.

Conclusions

The initial interest in urban forestry in Northern Ireland came from a few civil servants who were able to engage existing British expertise to help develop a small number of major projects. With the success of these projects, urban forestry in Northern Ireland has grown to embrace an increasing number of organisations and individuals. While there is now significant interest, the contribution of a few influential and committed individuals will probably continue to be crucial in such a relatively small locality (Sneddon, pers. comm., 1996).

Funding for urban forestry from the DoE(NI) has been erratic, particularly following the end of Cadden's involvement at the BDO. At the same time as the BDO has been hesitant about urban forestry, some of its funding priorities have been questioned publicly as representing very poor 'value for money' (Anon., 1997d). Hopefully, the recent reorganisation within relevant section of the DoE(NI) will encourage the agency to promote urban forestry more vigorously. Of all the government agencies in Northern Ireland, the Forest Service has probably played the most consistent and constructive role, with the Housing Executive providing valuable support on some specific projects.

While the predominantly rural character of Northern Ireland may always limit the extent of government interest and support for urban forestry (Gordon, pers. comm., 1996), there is also a widespread belief among professionals that little progress can be expected until its political and economic difficulties are resolved (Parkinson, interview, 1997). Most also believe that, with the implementation of an agreed political settlement, the 'greening' of its towns and cities will receive a much greater priority and the opportunities for urban forestry will increase significantly. Its development so far in Northern Ireland has been restricted by the limited powers of local government. Although many relevant central government powers could soon be devolved to a new Assembly, it remains to be seen how this will effect the structure and function of local government. With much wider responsibilities for urban trees, and with the additional staff this would require, local authorities in Northern Ireland could play a far greater role in urban forestry, similar to that of their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland and Britain (McClellan, interview, 1996; Parkinson, interview, 1997).

Despite the current limitations on local government, Belfast City Council and its involvement in the Forest of Belfast project remains a model for planned, systematic and integrated urban tree management, providing an example to local authorities throughout

Ireland. There is still a need, however, for authorities outside the Greater Belfast area to embrace the concept of urban forestry and to develop their own surveys and strategies (McClellan, interview, 1996). The Forest of Belfast itself offers an excellent model for this, and is probably the most advanced city-wide project in the whole of Ireland.

To be taken seriously, urban forestry needs to be included in planning documents, and it needs real resources to be allocated to achieve planned objectives (Holdsworth, pers. comm., 1996; Lynch, pers. comm., 1996). It is hoped that the Forest of Belfast's recent highlighting of planning issues (Simon, interview, 1997) will soon begin to have a major impact on these aspects of government policy.

Support for urban forestry among the voluntary sector has been invaluable in developing its community aspects, with CVNI playing a leading role from the outset. There does, however, need to be greater recognition from all sectors that urban forestry is more than just an opportunity to promote community involvement with urban trees. Despite the weak economy, high levels of unemployment and the urgent need for urban regeneration in Northern Ireland, the potential for major urban forestry projects to provide training and employment through environmental improvement initiatives has yet to be explored to any great extent (Smyth, pers. comm., 1996).

After many years of focusing on social, political and economic issues, most people in Northern Ireland have little experience of having a creative input into their local landscape and environment (Magowan, interview, 1998). As environmental issues gain more attention, there is the potential to link these with urban forestry solutions. The vision of everyone working together to 'green' urban areas has to be linked with issues such as transport and pollution, creating a sustainable urban environment, and the obligations under Local Agenda 21 (Parkinson, interview, 1997).

The continuing development of urban forestry in Northern Ireland will depend on a strong and productive partnership between the public, private and voluntary sectors, as symbolised by the Forest of Belfast's commemorative stone. In view of what has already been achieved through some very difficult times, the prospects are encouraging.

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