

Thought Leadership on biophilia

Stories on climate change, global warming, out-of-control fires in the hotter parts of the world and the flash floods in the cooler areas abound. Temperatures in tree-lined streets compared to those in streets that are 'canyons' (the ground has been sealed off by man-made constructions) vary by 10 degrees C. We have created a universe of man-made materials that in many ways imitate nature but cannot replace it. Building cities that cut us off from the earth, we find ourselves out of sync; emotionally unbalanced, driven towards achievement and unhappy.

The biophilia hypothesis suggests that we have an innate need for connection with nature. Moving to the country will not solve all our problems and I, for one, love the diversity and mental stimulation of city life. So how do we address these issues? At the charity, [Golden Leaf of London](#), we created before and after images of how London could look if vegetation were integrated into the infrastructure of London. We created images depicting four sections of the A4 road that currently cut London in half, to show how it might look if it was planted on either side with vegetation. Not just any vegetation, but indigenous plants that are relatively easy to grow, are resilient to pests and diseases and are relatively easy to maintain. It would turn this road into an avenue that could potentially unite London for the first time.

Research shows that the impact of trees on a street is that the traffic naturally slows down by approximately [7-8%](#). The value of the land around a tree-lined street increases significantly. The ambient temperature is reduced, and a sense of wellbeing is created in any space that incorporates vegetation.

If it is so obviously an improvement, why do cities not adopt a more proactive approach to creating green spaces and integrating vegetation into the urban structures instead of the decorative tokens, such as planters, around skyscrapers? It comes down to maintenance. Planting trees is easy but who will maintain them? Who will pay for the maintenance and who will take responsibility for the wellbeing of these natural areas? Some solutions include working with charities that specialise in training the homeless and unemployed in horticulture. Programmes to rehabilitate ex-offenders could provide cost effective solutions to maintain the planting, creating a circular economy. Also, corporates and individuals along the route will be encouraged to sponsor a section which will supply funds to pay for this.

The burning question is not 'how will it be done?' The real question is 'what do we want to do?' And I do wonder if our passion for technology and the glorification of our own intelligence comes above a true appreciation of how miraculous and essential our natural environment is.

Being a collaborative project, we are asking people to step up and make suggestions as to how they would like to see it work.

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Further reading:

<https://www.streettreesforliving.org/benefits-of-street-trees>

<https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/englands-green-space-gap>

<https://www.fastcompany.com/90553968/simply-letting-forests-regrow-naturally-could-suck-up-8-9-billion-tons-of-co2-a-year>

<https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/implementing-london-plan/london-plan-guidance-andspgs/all-london-green-grid>

www.goldenleafoflondon.org

<https://www.nationalparkcity.london/frontgardens>