

# THE TURN OF TREES

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ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY  
2022 to 2025

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PAGE:

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**HEALTHY, ACCESSIBLE,  
FUNCTIONAL AND RESILIENT  
URBAN FORESTS CREATED  
FOR TODAY AND FOR FUTURE  
GENERATIONS.”**

# 1. TURNING POINT

There has never been a more important decade ahead for the environment. Radical and extensive action is needed over the coming years to avert catastrophic and irreversible damage to nature and the climate. The potential impacts to people, communities and wildlife across the globe are existential in nature if the right action is not taken by the right point in time.

**Cities and their inhabitants stand to bear a significant proportion of the impact of the climate and ecological emergencies. More than half of the world's population is living in urban areas, and in the UK this figure is over 80%.**

Many cities are already experiencing temperatures that are significantly higher than surrounding rural areas, taking neighbourhoods to the edge of liveability – a trend that will increase further and cause a raft of health and wellbeing implications. Severe storm and flood events are increasing at devastating rates, with the effects most often felt by the most vulnerable communities.

Yet, cities have an enormous role to play in curbing the worst case scenarios from materialising. We must be putting our urban environments on the frontline of tackling the climate and ecological crises.

As an ever-expanding evidence base proves, trees and woodlands are one of the most effective nature-based solutions for mitigating climate change through their role as a carbon sink, for adapting to climatic shifts such as increased temperatures and rainfall, and for providing habitat to protect and enhance biodiversity and bio-abundance.

Whilst trees have historically been within the fabric of urban design in the UK, disparities in the levels of tree cover and high quality green space across and within urban areas is stark. We must work to level up these inequities.

As a leading national charity, Trees for Cities must play a significant role. Our work is at the heartbeat of this fightback. As we have been doing throughout our lifetime, we need to continue to step forward and step up to help address the challenges.

The existential issues we face can be turned around, but only with colossal, coordinated and collective action. It is the Turn of Trees to play a leading role at this turning point.



## 2. TURNING TO EXPERIENCE

Trees for Cities has been transforming urban green spaces for almost three decades. The organisation was founded when tree planting in towns and cities was a niche sector, an activity undertaken primarily for the aesthetic benefits. It has played a key role in pioneering urban environmentalism and bringing to the forefront the massive role that trees and green places play in the health and wellbeing of communities and in providing life-supporting ecosystem services.

**Over these years, we have learned from experience (and at times, of course, mistakes) and have honed our approaches through tests and trials. We believe we have developed the organisational 'wisdom' to roll out highly effective programmes at a national and international level, and to be a definitive voice for urban trees within the sector.**

What sets us apart is that we work at the intersection between people and the environment, and target our efforts in the places where social and environmental deprivation overlap. Our unique UK-wide position in this marketplace is as relevant and important as ever.

Our organisational resilience, based on the strong foundations laid over the years, was highlighted through the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the enormous challenges that presented themselves over this period, we persevered in delivering our tree planting and schools programmes across the country and came through the worst of the pandemic in robust organisational health.

As well as working across the UK, we have been delivering projects through international partners for seventeen years, predominantly in East Africa. Following an assessment of our international programme, we have determined that looking forwards it is most effectively focused on supporting our schools programme in relation to the shared environmental needs of young people across global cities, and also in augmenting our messaging and campaigns through bringing wider perspectives and viewpoints.

There remains a stark gulf in the level of focus and resourcing that exists for urban trees and greening between industrialised countries and those of the Global South; through our communications and storytelling, we aim to raise the voice for urban trees at a global – not just regional – scale.

## 2A. GENERATION TREE (AND BEYOND)

Our previous Generation Tree strategy aligned our work against three core pillars of activity: Plant, Protect, Promote. Plant refers to the physical delivery of tree planting and greening projects, primarily in community spaces and schools. Protect refers to ensuring the trees that we and others plant are appropriately cared for in their establishment period and are protected from damage, disease and distress thereafter. Promote refers to widely disseminating to the general public and key stakeholders the extensive values and benefits of urban trees. Plant, Protect and Promote must be viewed as cyclical and mutually reinforcing in order to create the most effective and lasting difference.

Historically, the significant majority of our work and resources were focused on the Plant pillar, but we have been progressively diversifying our work more into Protect and Promote so that we have a holistic set of activities for achieving the **organisational goal** that sits at the apex of our **Theory of Change**:

**“Healthy, accessible, functional and resilient urban forests created for today and for future generations.”**

This new strategy continues on this journey – aiming to achieve the optimum balance between Plant, Protect and Promote to most effectively and efficiently move towards achieving this organisational goal.

This will by no means result in us planting fewer trees, but to place even greater focus than we have in the past on the two other pillars, as they provide the support structures for trees to survive and thrive.

## 2B. ACHIEVEMENTS

Since our first trees took hold on the streets of London in 1993, Trees for Cities has planted over 1.5 million more in parks, estates, streets and woodlands across in excess of 50 cities and towns in the UK and internationally. Alongside these activities, we have transformed the outside spaces of 200 schools in order to inspire and enable a new generation of young people to enjoy the many lifelong benefits of nature.

Whilst these are important figures, the full story can only be told when we consider the impacts of the change that these projects have made to urban communities and nature. We have developed a Theory of Change to articulate and guide our approaches towards monitoring and measurement, and have invested in resources and systems to best understand the change that we are making. We have become the first environmental organisation to be recognised with a social value certificate (level 2) by Social Value UK.

Through the course of our previous strategy – much of which overlapped with the unexpected challenges of the Covid pandemic – we planted over half a million trees, and hence amplified our tree planting efforts by finding ways to safely work through the restrictions.

Through the lens of Protect and Promote we have launched a range of new initiatives which we will continue to build on and improve, such as:

- **Youth Panel** – to garner the voices of young people to help guide our efforts.
- **Community Hub** – to provide individuals and communities with a centralised place to access information, advice and networks.
- **Tree Cities of the World** – in partnership with the Arbor Day Foundation, we launched this programme across local authorities in the UK, with 19 already on board.
- **Healthy Cities Campaign** – to promote the multiple health benefits of urban trees.
- **Trees for Streets** – an innovative online platform that allows urban residents to sponsor and look after new trees on their streets.



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## 2C. LEARNINGS

Over recent years, there has been enormous and unprecedented 'noise' around trees in general; the landscape is undoubtedly moving at a fast pace – one that we must adapt to and stay at the front of. Over a comparatively short period, we have learned a number of lessons and gained yet more experience, which forms the basis of this new strategy. Some of the key learnings and observations from this period are as follows:

I. Whilst the pandemic has increased the appreciation of green spaces – to the significant benefit of the urban environmental sector – it has also demonstrated how **interconnected environmental health is with physical, mental, societal, economic, and educational health**. This will change funder priorities and mean that our work will increasingly need to be linked to health, well-being, community resilience etc. It will call for deeper and more intricate cross-sector partnerships.

II. Community engagement – or more accurately **community involvement** – is widely stipulated as a core component of need and activity within many local and central government plans and strategies. Yet, in reality, there remains very limited opportunities for communities to really get involved and influence at a local level. Both communities and local authorities need complementary resources and knowhow in order to create genuine, widespread social engagement around urban trees. Stakeholders across the sector view community engagement as a key aspect of what we are genuine experts in.

III. The level of political, public and media focus on tree planting is at unprecedented levels. Increasing tree planting rates, in particular, has become a key strand of government policy and in playing a central role in achieving local and national net-zero ambitions. Whilst this is hugely positive, many councils still struggle to maintain their current tree stock and so increased demand on planting will further heighten this issue. This constraint needs concerted focus. There should, clearly, be just **as much focus on tree establishment rates as planting rates**.

IV. The ambitions to vastly increase tree planting rates has created an unprecedented **pressure on two key resources: tree stock and land**. These risk being a constraining factor for meeting targets. Supply chain issues and tightening biosecurity requirements have hampered imports and placed even further demand on locally grown stock. Furthermore, the land-use strategies required to reach local and national canopy targets have not, in most cases, been agreed upon to meet demand – a particular constraint for urban and peri-urban tree planting.

V. Our Generation Tree campaign has coincided with the proliferation of the **young people's** climate movement. The demand from children and youth to be stakeholders in the future of the planet is loud and needs to be met. Young people need to continue to be given the educational opportunities to be immersed in nature and to gain from the lifelong benefits it brings. They need the mechanisms to turn their energy into action.

VI. **Sustainability and social responsibility** has risen up the business agenda at remarkable rates over these recent years. This presents opportunities, but also challenges. Whilst harnessing the potential could be transformational, the risk of working with the wrong business in the wrong way has increased proportionately. It is important that the efforts of the business community are pointing and pointed in the same – most impactful – direction.

VII. A proliferation of central and local government policy has developed of late, but there remains a gulf between **policy and plans**. The 'how to' now needs the most focus of all: the delivery plans that will turn words into action.

VIII. Organisations need to design-in **flexibility to shocks**. The pandemic did not feature on our risk register and so like most organisations we were unprepared and had to create new and rapid response mechanisms. This situation has shown us that in regards to our delivery approaches and organisational structures and resources, we need to create as much plasticity as possible and not get stuck into past, outdated modes of planning and thinking.



### 3. TURNING THE CORNER

Our organisational vision for the world that we are aiming to live within is:

“  
**URBAN TREES FOR ALL. BY ALL.**”

In other words, our work and this strategy is at its core about **tackling inequalities** (health outcomes, deprivation levels, tree canopy cover etc.) and **focusing on social and environmental justice** – ensuring that the wide benefits of trees are not just for the few but for all. And, achieving this will only happen if everyone has a role to play in planting, protecting and promoting their urban trees.

Our organisational vision is underpinned by our **mission** – the statement of our organisation’s core purpose:

“  
**TO IMPROVE PEOPLE’S LIVES BY PLANTING TREES IN TOWNS AND CITIES.**”

In order to achieve our vision and mission and to influence transformational change, it is essential that at a strategic level we plan and act through two fundamental lenses:

Firstly, it is imperative to set a plan based on **the system** within which we work. The enhancement and protection of our urban forests sit within a complex system. There are multiple stakeholders with goals that are at times complementary and at times competing; there are inflows and outflows of resources (money, trees, land, people etc.) which interact in feedback loops that aren’t always well understood; there are time lags between interventions and change – to name but some of the facets of this system. In order to ensure that we are intervening in the most impactful way, we need to be planning within and constantly monitoring the system’s components and responses.

Creating lasting impact certainly cannot be achieved through taking a linear approach, yet the sector has (arguably perhaps) done so over past decades through its ‘top heavy’ focus on planting, without sufficient emphasis placed on the supporting structures needed to ensure survival and sustainability. Whilst we will plan to continue to plant many trees, we will place greater attention than before on the Protect and Promote pillars of our work.



Secondly, to make long term change we need to plan within a **longer term horizon**. Transformational change to the system in question will not happen overnight and needs an architecture within which the best decisions can be taken and the resources can be best utilised. The transformational change that is both needed and possible will align with and complement an array of longer term strategies and policies that have been developed by central governments over recent years (and many local authorities are now starting to develop parallel plans and ideas).

Some of these key strategies include:



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**These strategies and policies are underpinned by the new UK Environment Bill, which has cemented long term legal requirements and bolstered policies and approaches linked to natural capital solutions.**

This also helps pave the way for implementation of the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) which replaces the Common Agricultural Policy and places much greater focus on environmental health.

All of these long term, systemic developments have trees as a key component and hence create new opportunities for Trees for Cities.

The 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are gaining progressively more traction across local authorities and businesses. These goals have a target date of 2030 and so also provide an important longer- term framework around which to structure our programmes.

Over this strategy, we will further embed the SDGs into our proposals, reports and communications, particularly those such as Good Health and Wellbeing (3), Quality Education (4), Sustainable Cities and Communities (11), Climate Action (13), Life on Land (15), and Partnership for the Goals (17).

Plant, Protect, Promote is in itself a systemic approach – it is a means of avoiding linearity and ensuring joined up thinking around planning, delivery and monitoring.

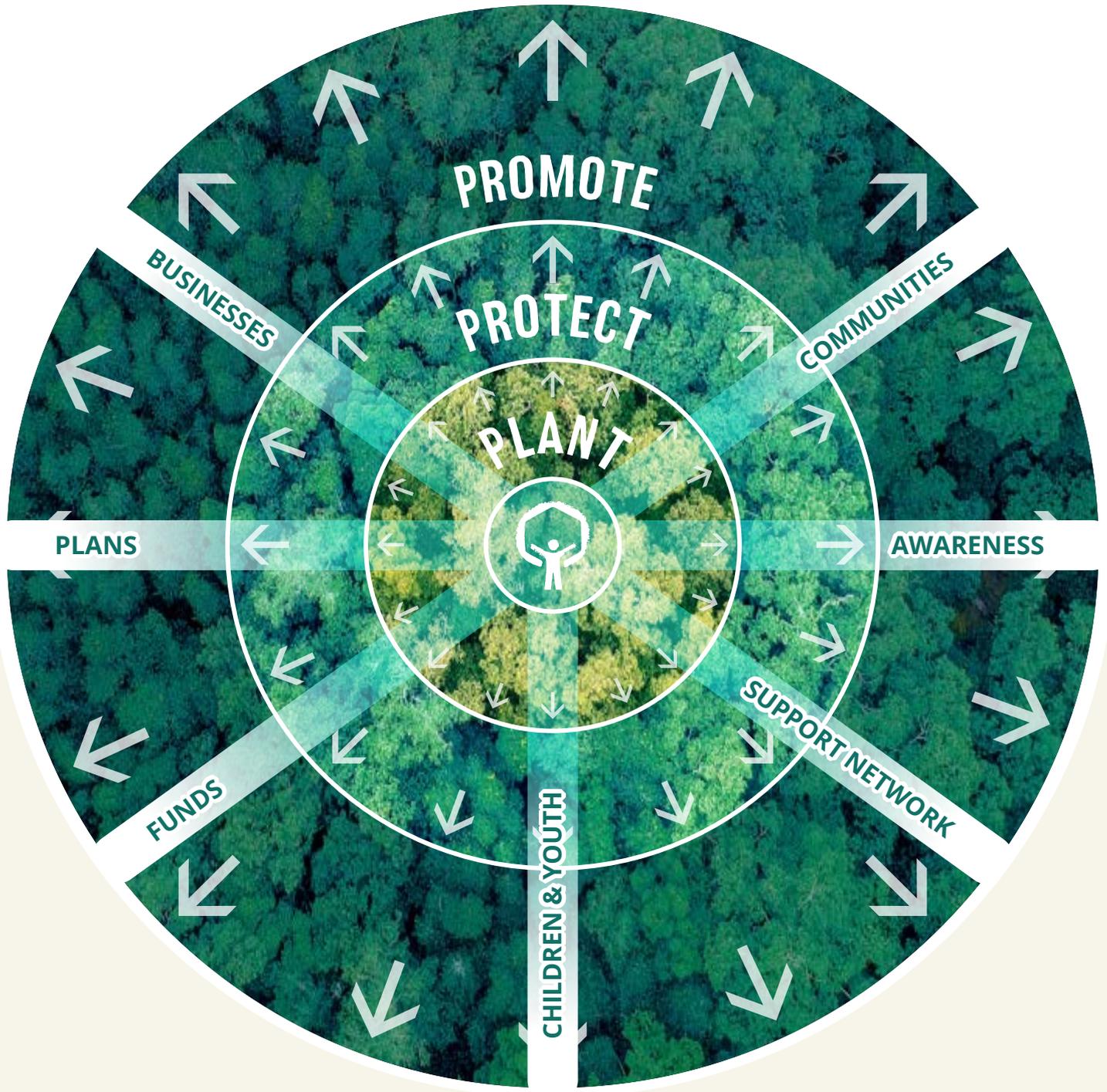
The following section identifies seven core elements of the urban forest system and what we believe needs to be achieved over the next decade by and within each of these elements to achieve the transformation.

All these seven elements need to be acting across the Plant, Protect, Promote pillars if we are to see systemic change. None can influence only one pillar. None can be in silo and acting alone – all must interlink and interplay.

Our three-year activities and objectives sit within these elements in order that we can plan to have the optimal influence on the system within which we are a key player.

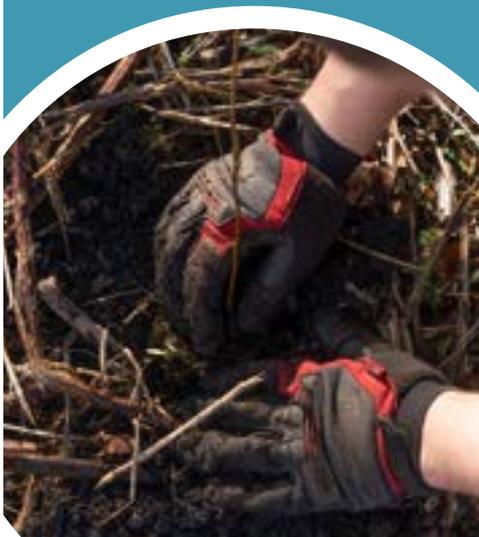


# THE CORE ELEMENTS OF THE URBAN FOREST SYSTEM:



### I. Communities & People:

Individuals and communities in all urban areas need the motivation, the knowhow and the support to plant, maintain and protect trees in their local areas. Diversity and inclusivity must be at the core of all action.



### II. Awareness:

Awareness drives action. All stakeholders need to be aware of how vital urban trees are for underpinning our quality of life, aware of the threats our trees and environments face, and aware of how to make a difference.



### III. Children and youth:

All children need to be growing up and educated within a society and structure that puts nature connection at the core. Young people need opportunities to amplify their voices and take positive direct action. Trees and the environment must be a career route that is enhanced to create a thriving green jobs sector.



### IV. Support network:

Civil society organisations need to be in operation across all parts of the country in order to support communities and local authorities to achieve their goals and realise their potential. The network needs to branch beyond traditional environmental organisations and effectively embed other cross-sector entities.



### V. Plans:

All local authorities must have high quality urban forest management plans, tree strategies, spatial plans and land strategies with targets to significantly enhance, maintain and protect their urban tree canopy.



### VI. Funds:

Urban local authorities, NGOs and communities need ring-fenced funding for trees and green spaces that is appropriate for achieving strategic targets within the stated timeframes.



### VII. Businesses:

The private sector has enormous potential to help drive transformational change to our urban forests and needs to be further brought on that journey through harnessing and targeting its support and resources.



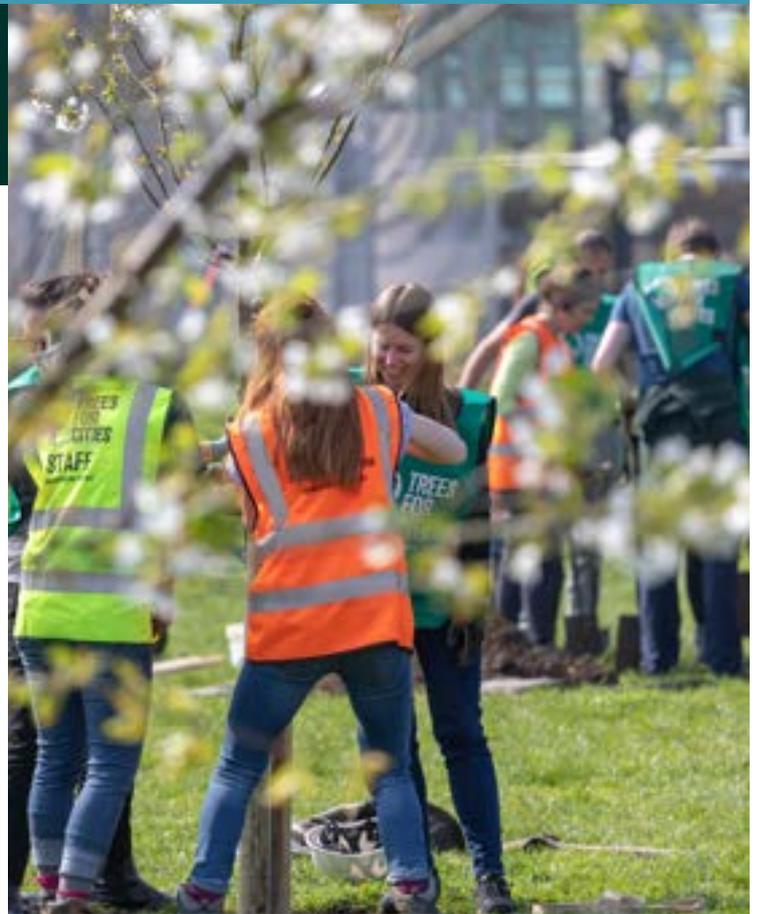
## I. COMMUNITIES & PEOPLE:

### **INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES IN ALL URBAN AREAS NEED THE MOTIVATION, THE KNOWHOW AND THE SUPPORT TO PLANT, MAINTAIN AND PROTECT TREES IN THEIR LOCAL AREAS. DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY MUST BE AT THE CORE OF ALL ACTION.**

True transformational change will only happen if the base is empowered and supported. The base of our urban areas are its people and communities. Whilst there is significant talk of community involvement and engagement, the reality is that this remains highly limited and restricted in most urban communities. Local authorities rarely have the resources and skills to engage deeply at a community level. The demand from the base to be involved needs to be met through more widespread and creative initiatives.

#### **Within the next decade...**

-  A thriving and connected network of community groups must exist across all urban areas
-  All communities need on-hand access to the tools, materials and support in order to advocate for, plant and protect their trees and green spaces
-  Local authorities need to have community involvement embedded into their strategies and have the skills and resources to engage effectively



**Over the next three years, we will do the following to support the above...**

-  We will continue to scale up our tree planting and woodland maintenance programmes to reach more towns, cities and communities, and through doing so develop the hands-on skills for people to take up their own initiatives – with a particular focus on the places and groups most ‘forgotten’
-  We will create a national community engagement strategy to deliver a UK-wide programme to promote local involvement and co-design, upskill local authorities, and provide access to best practices across the wider community engagement sphere
-  We will further develop our Community Hub to ensure that communities and individuals have access to the tools, materials and networks in order to run independent tree planting and maintenance initiatives
-  We will roll out the Trees for Streets platform nationally so that as many people as possible have a chance to take an active role in greening their streets

## II. AWARENESS:

### **AWARENESS DRIVES ACTION. ALL STAKEHOLDERS NEED TO BE AWARE OF HOW VITAL URBAN TREES ARE FOR UNDERPINNING OUR QUALITY OF LIFE, AWARE OF THREATS OUR TREES AND ENVIRONMENTS FACE, AND AWARE OF HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.**

Whilst a new environmental awakening appears to be taking shape, there remain substantial challenges. Firstly, messages need to be disseminated to a much wider audience and not just a subset of society. Secondly, current rhetoric risks creating widespread eco-anxiety and the perception of futility and predetermined outcomes, whereas through collective positive action – particularly in regards to trees – society can help turn the tide. Thirdly, the true transformational multi-beneficial role of urban trees is still poorly understood by most people beyond the sector.

#### **Within the next decade...**

-  Everyone with a stake in the urban environment – from residents to policymakers – needs to be very aware of how crucial healthy urban forests are in helping to prevent and buffer the environmental challenges of our time
-  All urban communities wanting to take action need to have the knowledge and skills to establish the right trees in the right places in the right way, and to be aware of how to be involved and where to seek support
-  Urban environmentalism needs to be mainstreamed within the environmental movement and sector, with a particular focus on funders and policymakers



#### **Over the next three years, we will do the following to support the above...**

-  We will place significant focus on growing our communications platforms to reach new and harder to reach audiences, in order to create and strengthen a social movement for urban trees
-  We will launch a new multi-media national campaign for urban trees with a powerful call to action around the immediate need to plant and protect trees, which will complement our ongoing Healthier Cities and Generation Tree campaigns
-  We will create a new 'tree truth' initiative which will aim to provide real time information to all stakeholders around how the urban tree sector is performing, what the threats are, where the needs remain etc. – ensuring we are holding ourselves and others to account
-  Supported by our own data and international projects, we will raise awareness of the vital roles that urban trees play to communities around the world

### III. CHILDREN & YOUTH:

## ALL CHILDREN NEED TO BE GROWING UP AND EDUCATED WITHIN A SOCIETY AND STRUCTURE THAT PUTS NATURE CONNECTION AT THE CORE. YOUNG PEOPLE NEED OPPORTUNITIES TO AMPLIFY THEIR VOICES AND TAKE POSITIVE DIRECT ACTION. TREES AND THE ENVIRONMENT MUST BE A CAREER ROUTE THAT IS ENHANCED TO CREATE A THRIVING GREEN JOBS SECTOR.

The thriving urban forests of the future rely upon a generation growing up with the means and motivation to allow them to reach their potential. There is unprecedented energy and demand from young people to be guardians of the environment (from local to global) yet not enough hands-on opportunities to take action. Environmental career options remain more on the fringe despite the prospect of the transition to a green economy.

#### Within the next decade...

-  All schools need to have nature-based activities centred within curriculums alongside the infrastructure (onsite or offsite) and skills to deliver such programmes
-  All young people need channels to take direct environmental action at their local level, which may include tree planting and maintenance
-  The green economy must be a front-of-mind and attractive career option for young people leaving school and university



#### Over the next three years, we will do the following to support the above...

-  We will roll out our newly created Schools Strategy, with a particular focus on honing our holistic, multi-beneficial green infrastructure design concept to those schools in the highest need. This will integrate with our international projects to broaden the benefits to children beyond the boundaries of the UK.
-  We will further deepen the links between community tree planting and schools, with a particular focus on increasing tree-related activities and/or activities within a woodland setting for educational and engagement purposes
-  We will roll out our London Youth Panel model to other towns and cities in order to create a more nationwide 'steering and action committee' of young voices to guide our ambitions and activities – with particular links to the youth climate movement
-  We will continue to be a supporter of paid traineeships for young people from ethnic minority groups communities, with a particular focus on building in green economy job opportunities into new programmes in target local authorities

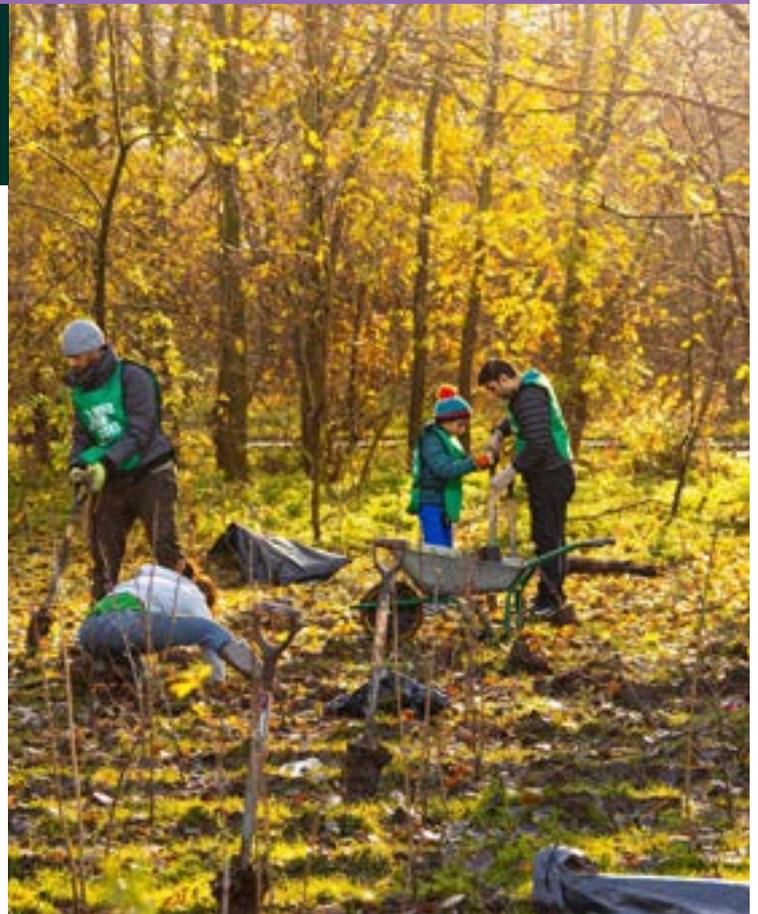
## IV. SUPPORT NETWORK:

### **CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS NEED TO BE IN OPERATION ACROSS ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY IN ORDER TO SUPPORT COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS AND REALISE THEIR POTENTIAL. THE NETWORK NEEDS TO BRANCH BEYOND TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AND EFFECTIVELY EMBED OTHER CROSS-SECTOR ENTITIES.**

Civil society bodies within the tree and woodland sector need to play a key role in supporting communities and local authorities across all parts of the country. However, at present the distribution of this support network is uneven and some parts of the country are being left behind in regards to support received – which also naturally increases the disparity in financial resources across locations. The increasing realisation that the environment sector cannot work in a silo but must operate alongside health, wellbeing, educational etc. calls for a radical reorganisation of how civil society in a broader sense creates effective cross-sector working and partnerships – which again must be omnipresent and not biased towards a subset of geographical regions.

#### **Within the next decade...**

-  There must be genuine coverage across the UK of civil society tree and woodland organisations supporting community and local authority initiatives
-  Cross-sector partnerships with local and national entities focused on health, wellbeing, education, inclusion etc. must be highly developed and in operation at a national level – e.g. to roll out a ‘natural health service’ to all
-  Central and local governments need to be working across departments in a highly effective manner in order to maximise the multiple benefits of the urban environment



**Over the next three years, we will do the following to support the above...**

-  **Using mapping resources and data, we will design our delivery plan with a primary focus of filling identified gaps, either directly or through local capacity building. This will expand our ‘forgotten places’ programme accordingly**
-  **We will undertake feasibility studies with the intention of opening new Trees for Cities entities to expand our presence in Scotland (and the north of England) and Wales (and the west of England)**
-  **We will develop our first strategic national partnerships with entities outside of the traditional tree and woodland sector**

## V. PLANS:

### **ALL LOCAL AUTHORITIES MUST HAVE HIGH QUALITY URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLANS, TREE STRATEGIES, SPATIAL PLANS AND LAND STRATEGIES WITH TARGETS TO SIGNIFICANTLY ENHANCE, MAINTAIN AND PROTECT THEIR URBAN TREE CANOPY.**

“If You Fail to Plan, You Are Planning to Fail”. Despite the enormous increase in focus on trees, woodlands and urban environments over recent years, there remains a significant disconnect between ambition, targets and rhetoric and the ‘nuts and bolts’ plans that are in place to deliver against these. Only around a third of local authorities in England have tree strategies. Strategies that are in place vary significantly in content, depth and quality. There is no effective dissemination of national targets to a regional or local level. Spatial and land use plans – in the respect of green infrastructure – remain largely elusive, making systematic and long term programme level interventions difficult to develop. The concept of ‘right tree, right place’ must run through all plans.

#### **Within the next decade...**

-  All (urban) local authorities need high quality urban forest management plans, and/or tree strategies with targets aligned with national targets and requirements which will enhance, maintain and protect their trees and woodlands. Associated ‘sub-strategies’ such as community engagement need developing alongside tree strategies
-  All (urban) local authorities need spatial and land use strategies that identify and plan for high quality interconnected green networks that place green infrastructure on par with other forms of physical infrastructure



**Over the next three years, we will do the following to support the above...**

-  **We will support local authorities to use DEFRA’s tree strategy toolkit to develop high quality tree strategies, and support cross-departmental planning activities with teams from highways, health, education, air quality etc.**
-  **We will specifically partner with local authorities and communities to identify the (often small) fragments of land that are underused and can have huge potential if transformed into green ‘community oases’. We aim to play a leading role in the government’s Nature for Climate programme**
-  **We will place a renewed focus on helping to develop and deliver local plans linked to flood risk management and the urban heat island effect – the two most prominent impacts of climate change that cities are facing**
-  **Where feasible, we will mainstream rewilding (natural regeneration) into our plans and designs and support local authorities in developing rewilding plans**

## VI. FUNDS:

### URBAN LOCAL AUTHORITIES, NGOS AND COMMUNITIES NEED RING-FENCED FUNDING FOR TREES AND GREEN SPACES THAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR ACHIEVING STRATEGIC TARGETS WITHIN THE STATED TIMEFRAMES.

Funding and financing naturally play a pivotal role in achieving our green ambitions and potential at a local to national level. Following the publications of the government's 25-year environment plan and the England Tree Strategy, a raft of new funds have been made available – for example, in England around £750m has been earmarked for the Nature for Climate programme. Whilst these are positive steps, budgets of many local authority tree and green teams are at historical lows and many local authorities are struggling to maintain their existing tree stocks let alone before further thought is given to increasing tree cover. Funding needs to be increased and diversified, ring-fenced and protected, and targeted to the most in need and high impact programmes.

#### Within the next decade...

-  All (urban) local authorities need funding and staff resource levels that are commensurate with their green ambitions and potential, which is planned for over the long term, and protected. Funding must be ample to enhance green infrastructure, not just to maintain a status quo
-  Funding needs to be distributed equitably across all regions. Currently there is a significant skew, for example, towards areas where community forests are in operation, but this risks leaving behind urban areas in other regions of the country



Over the next three years, we will do the following to support the above...

-  We will work alongside target local authorities and other organisations to develop high impact bids to a range of funders (government and non-governmental) in order to reach areas most in need and level up investment
-  We will continue to advocate for further investment into urban tree programmes and to work constructively with sector bodies to ensure that political parties deliver on their policies, promises and pledges
-  We will work with our partners and funders to identify and develop non-traditional, innovative funding mechanisms for our programmes – using our Trees for Streets platform as an example of blending private and public finance

## VII. BUSINESSES:

### THE PRIVATE SECTOR HAS ENORMOUS POTENTIAL TO HELP DRIVE TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE TO OUR URBAN FORESTS AND NEEDS TO BE FURTHER BROUGHT ON THAT JOURNEY THROUGH HARNESSING AND TARGETING OF ITS SUPPORT AND RESOURCES.

Businesses can be one of the most important players in the urban forest system, yet there remains significant untapped potential. They not only have massive resources and skills to contribute, but workforces that are ever keener to take direct action and influence corporate strategy, as well as customers that want to be buying from ethical providers. The proliferation of sustainability, CSR and ESG agendas is extremely positive, but the urban environment needs to be mainstreamed into these approaches and better coordination is needed across the business community to ensure that the impact is greater than the sum of the parts. There is a risk that while businesses are under such scrutiny to charge towards net zero and show their green credentials either their funding choices are not optimised or a new wave of greenwashing could arise.

#### Within the next decade...

-  The level of input and resources from the private sector into our urban trees and environments needs to increase by many multiples. All businesses need to understand how crucial urban forests are in relation to sustainability agendas.
-  Business workforces need a step change in opportunities to take direct action, with tree planting and maintenance being a principle option
-  The business community, particularly larger corporations, need to be working in a fully joined up manner to ensure that efforts are coordinated and complementary and supportive of the holistic urban forest system



Over the next three years, we will do the following to support the above...

-  We will further grow our corporate volunteering programme, in particular to support projects and regions most in need – e.g. the ‘forgotten places’ and strategic partner local authorities
-  We will launch a new offsetting scheme which will provide businesses with a ‘gold standard’ UK tree planting service which will more comprehensively build in the multi-beneficial impacts of trees as well as ensuring our partners have robust carbon reduction plans in place
-  We will put together a business steering group to advise on how to best coordinate the efforts, harness the opportunities and amplify the impact of the business community



## 4. TURNING IT INTO ACTION

In order to deliver this strategy, we will need our organisation to evolve and strengthen further, with some key areas of particular focus: technology; facilities; structures, people and processes; income generation; partnerships; and environmental performance.

### 4A. TECHNOLOGY

**Technology will play a huge role in our work over the course of this – and future – strategies, and there are a number of areas that we will need to focus on over the coming years.**

Firstly, in the post-Covid period, we will need to ensure we have the right equipment and IT in order to work most effectively. We will need to transition from having predominantly static desk-based equipment to hardware that can be mobile and move between desks and docking stations.

We will need a communications and telephony system that is equally less stationary, making better use of Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) technology. Our file storage processes and systems will also require an upgrade to adapt to this more mobile approach.

Secondly, we will need to rethink our meeting spaces and IT to allow for the blended meetings that are

likely to be a new reality for the foreseeable future. Underpinning this requirement will be the software to run the most effective online and blended sessions.

Thirdly, as we grow in size and complexity, our internal systems need to keep pace with this change. We have successfully implemented new finance and customer relationship management systems in recent years, and over this strategy, we will plan to adopt new project management and monitoring and evaluation systems to keep pace with our growing programmes. What is crucial is that these systems are not delivered in isolation, but as far as possible are integrated and ‘talk to each other’ so that their functionality and potential are optimised.

Lastly, to underpin our external communications and fundraising activities, we need to stay at the front of the pack in regards to our website, social media platforms and the supporting backend systems that allow us to be as effective as we can.

In order to deliver all of the above, we will need to invest in new skills and resources across the staff and board in order to ensure that we have the knowhow to realise the full potential of the technological opportunities that are in front of us.

### 4B. FACILITIES

**Once we have a clear picture of how working arrangements will be best structured in the post-pandemic period, we will review our requirements in regards to our office and working spaces.**

Given that it is highly likely that we will adopt a blended working approach (between home and office for many staff members), there will henceforth be a reduced requirement for desk space, although not necessarily consistently through the working week.

We need to be providing good quality office and desk environments to allow staff to work as effectively as possible when they want and need to be in office. However, from a financial

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perspective, we have a duty to ensure that we make full use of our spaces and don't pay for more than is needed.

With online meetings now a daily reality, we will need more smaller spaces available that individuals and small groups can use for online or blended meetings when requiring peace and quiet, discretion and privacy.

We will also ensure that the facilities, equipment and fleet for our on the ground delivery teams are continuously improved to help sustain high quality delivery at all times.

We will factor all of these considerations into deciding how and where we make our base as we look to the future.

## 4C. INCOME GENERATION

**This is a strategy with the ambition to maximise impact. To do so, we will need to ensure healthy and consistent levels of income.**

Our drive to plant trees and to deliver projects in schools will still be at the core of our work and so we would anticipate that the majority of our fundraising will remain focused in these areas; however, as we broaden into this more systemic approach, we will need to diversify our funding sources and partnerships accordingly.

We have developed deep relationships with a number of grant-making institutions and will work closely to understand their interests and ambitions as well as providing

guidance around how they can continue to achieve best value for money through their investments.

As described, we will find new ways to expand our relationships with businesses and aim to work together beyond single years or interventions to achieve longer term and sustainable impact. As we achieved through our corporate volunteering programme, we will optimise earned income opportunities as this provides the funding to invest in other activities and organisational development needs.

As we continue to raise awareness, we will aim to engage more widely and deeply with the general public and hope that they will continue to support us on this journey. We will in particular look to boost our individual programmes linked to regular giving, payroll giving and legacies and will invest accordingly in these areas. We aim to increase unrestricted funding so that we have the funds to invest in organisational development activities as well as projects and interventions that are traditionally more difficult to raise income for (such as campaigns, community engagement programmes etc.).

Lastly, we will aim to access the nascent yet growing funding streams linked to payments for nature-based solutions and ecosystem services.

## 4D. STRUCTURES, PEOPLE AND PROCESSES

**Our organisational structure will need to continue to evolve in order to adopt and adapt to the changes outlined in this strategy. We will**

**review our current structure to ensure it is as fit for purpose as it can be and is most adaptable to future potential shocks such as those experienced through the pandemic.**

Alongside any structural adjustments will be a need to invest in more resources in areas of particular focus and relevance to the ambitions of this strategy, such as community engagement, marketing and communications, and technology.

Through our Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) committee, we will identify a set of requirements and actions to ensure that D&I is central to all policies and approaches linked to recruitment, behaviours, communications, training etc. so that we build a fully inclusive workplace. Of equal importance, D&I must continue to be a primary lens through which we plan and deliver our work with communities and volunteers. We are, and aspire to improve being an organisation with a culture where every voice is welcome, heard, and respected.

We will also appraise and improve how we work collectively. Technology will not in isolation make us more effective and efficient, but needs to work in unison with our processes and ways of working. We have in some respects become overly complex in how we plan and deliver our work, and as such a number of our core organisational processes need to be redesigned, streamlined and simplified. We will place particular focus over this strategic period on analysing and improving our ways of working.

## 4E. PARTNERSHIPS

**The need for highly effectively partnerships run throughout this strategy.**

For us, partnerships come in many shapes and sizes. We partner with local authorities, with other NGOs, with private contractors, with schools, with funders, to name but some. Partnerships can be for one off pieces of work or for multi-annual arrangements. Partnerships can have commercial responsibilities or transactions or be solely focused on procedures and principles of joint working practices.

We will look at the longer term horizon and build strategic partnerships around this, becoming less reactive as opportunities come up and more proactive to steer the direction of funders and supporters.

The current array of partnerships needs to be effectively and efficiently managed. As such, our partnership arrangements and agreements will be reviewed and enhanced to ensure that they are best fit for the multiple purposes that they serve.

## 4F. ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

**For every reason, we have a duty to ensure that we maintain a focus on our own environmental performance and that we are taking all possible actions to minimise any negative impacts such as emissions and waste within our operations, supply chains and facilities.**

We have recently undertaken an environmental audit and will use this as the basis for creating a refreshed plan for how we lighten our own footprint and move towards being a fully regenerative organisation.

We have taken steps to adopt a greener fleet, but still have further to travel and will assess how we can make best use of evolving clean tech options and opportunities.

As we further develop and expand our UK-wide delivery programmes, we will also consider in more depth how we can select and support partners, suppliers and contractors to align with our environment performance objectives.

We will adopt the same principles that we would expect of our corporate partners – that all measures should be taken to make the operations of the organisation as sustainable as possible, and then look to internally offset any residual and unavoidable emissions.



# 5. TURNING UP THE IMPACT



## 5A. TARGETS

As described, the depth of our impact will come from optimising our role within the urban forest system. Each of the objectives that sit under the seven system elements listed above will have specific targets that will be closely tracked through the course of this strategy. In addition to these metrics, we will aim to achieve the following targets through our direct work under the Plant, Protect, Promote pillars:

### PLANT: Through our projects and programmes...

- 600,000 more urban trees will have taken root in high need, high impact locations
- 400,000 urban dwellers will have higher quality green space in their local area
- 15,000 urban dwellers will have planted a tree for the first time
- 25,000 more primary school children will have access to high quality green space and/or activities

### PROTECT: Through our influence and support...

- 95% of the large trees we plant in parks, streets and estates, and 90% of the trees in our new woodlands will be in good health after an establishment period of 3 years
- 50 new community groups will be taking coordinated action (e.g. via our events and Community Hub) to protect and enhance their local trees
- 25,000 urban dwellers will learn about planting and protecting urban trees

### PROMOTE: Through our communications and promotion...

- Three quarters of people who plant with us will plan to take further action for urban trees
- 50% more people will be connecting with us through our communication platforms
- Twice as many PR, press and media outcomes will be being generated and spreading the word about urban trees and their benefits

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## 5B. MONITORING & EVALUATION

With our Theory of Change now developed, we will ensure that impact monitoring and evaluation is embedded deeply through our programmes and communications, and that the Theory of Change is actively used and stays live.

To date, our work has predominantly focused on aspects of our environmental impact (such as tree numbers, area and canopy cover), and, whilst there is further work to be undertaken in this space, we will place particular focus on defining our social impact targets and measurements.

To achieve this, it is important that our data gathering is diverse and representative of the people we are working with and for. For example, communities that take part on our projects do often not have English as their first language. It is vital to ensure that we do not skew our impact monitoring through inadvertently creating disparities linked to language or accessibility.

## 5C. REPORTING & COMMUNICATING

The data and information that we collect will not only improve and diversify reporting to our funders, but will also help in better communicating the what, how and why of our work to a wider set of audiences. As such, there must be purpose to every piece of data that we chose to gather.

To achieve a balance between quantitative and qualitative reporting, we will create more case studies on stories of change to people and the environment – for example, we plan to add to the growing bank of information around the ecosystem service impact of urban trees.

With a new monitoring and evaluation system in place and appropriate data migrated, we will aim to understand more clearly the impact of past projects so we can better tell the story of our first 30 years.



## 6. TURNING TO NOW

A strategy provides a roadmap of where we intend to go and broadly how we aim to get there. But the environment around us is uncertain and ever-changing, and, as we saw with the Covid pandemic, good plans must blend rigidity with flexibility, and at times, there is a need to adapt to changing circumstances and opportunities. Over the years, ahead there will undoubtedly be a plethora of risks that will need close monitoring and mitigating.

**Examples of risks that may become more prominent are the availability of urban land for tree planting, a constraint on tree stocks due to high demand and import restrictions, potential economic difficulties linked to regional and global events, extreme weather events due to a shifting climate – to name but some.**

We will continue to ensure we have a robust governance process for risk management and that we design and build in resilience to changes, shocks and uncertainties. However, what will be unfaltering will be our focus on driving forwards towards our organisational vision, mission and goal.

There is much further work to do to bring the aims and objectives in this strategy to life, to define targets and to track progress against this roadmap. This phase of work will involve the input of a wide range of stakeholders both within and outside of the organisation.

This strategy is as much for our beneficiaries, partners, funders, supporters, associates and collaborators as it is for our colleagues. It aims to provide a joint and joined up call to action – our sector works within a system that relies upon collective rather than individual intervention.

**NOW, AT THIS TURNING POINT, WE GET BACK TO WORK TO ENSURE THAT THERE CAN BE URBAN TREES FOR ALL, AND BY ALL.**





**HEALTHY, ACCESSIBLE,  
FUNCTIONAL AND RESILIENT  
URBAN FORESTS CREATED  
FOR TODAY AND FOR FUTURE  
GENERATIONS.**



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