

Sheffield becomes first city in Europe to take part in new pilot for urban tree management certification

Sheffield has recently been awarded a certificate of compliance for managing its street trees sustainably by the world's largest Forest Certification Scheme, PEFC UK (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification).

Over the last eighteen months, the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership, of which the council and its highways contractor, Amey are part, has been working with PEFC UK, to develop a standard of certification for Trees Outside Forests (TOF) or in this instance, urban trees.

Sheffield is participating in a pilot scheme designed to test a demanding certification standard. As a result, Sheffield has become the first local authority to have its urban tree management assessed against the new criteria and judged to be compliant.

This innovative and trail blazing milestone has enabled the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership to achieve a key objective outlined in the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership Strategy, following months of dedication and collaborative working, which included representatives from Sheffield City Council and Sheffield Tree Action Groups being involved in a working group of national street tree specialists to develop the standard of certification.

Liz Ballard, Chair of the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership said:

"We are really excited about what is essentially a world first for Sheffield and our street trees. As part of the Street Tree Strategy, the partnership were keen to find a way to independently check how well our street trees are being managed. Fortunately, PEFC, a Sheffield based company who work globally, offered their expertise to provide just the scheme we needed. Their new audit of our street trees is the first of its kind in Europe and it's been great to work alongside them. Knowing that the management of our street trees meets this demanding international standard is a real step forward and shows just how far we've come."

Until recently only forests and woodlands could be certified by these standards as proof of being managed sustainably. However, a recent change in the PEFC standards has allowed PEFC UK to develop an appendix to their UK endorsed forest certification scheme, UKWAS (UK Woodland Assurance Standard) to allow for Trees Outside Forests to also be certified.

Last November the certification body Soil Association Certification undertook an audit based on the draft standard of certification. Prior to the audit, Soil Association Certification also conducted a stakeholder consultation to gather information from all interested parties. The audit found that Streets Ahead is in compliance with the new draft standard, which is a fantastic achievement for all who have contributed to improving the management of street trees in Sheffield.

Rob Shaw, Technical Manager and the Auditor on the TOF audit from Soil Association Certification said:

"Soil Association is delighted to be working with PEFC UK and the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership on this ground breaking initiative. The audit was both unusual and interesting but the commitment and dedication from all the people involved at Sheffield City Council, Amey and the Partnership really shone through. We look forward to continuing the journey and look forwards to full endorsement of the Trees Outside Forests extension to the PEFC UK Scheme."

Applauding this first for Sheffield, Alun Watkins who heads up PEFC in the UK, commented:

“We are delighted that Sheffield has become the first city in Europe to be audited against our new TOF criteria. Their participation will help us fine tune the standard, before it is submitted to PEFC International later this year for endorsement.

“We expect the Trees Outside Forests standard to be fully endorsed by Spring 2023 and look forward to Sheffield being awarded the first ever certificate for sustainably managing its street trees”.

The audit, which has been undertaken by industry professionals, means Sheffield’s management of street trees has been found to be at an exemplary standard, and Sheffield residents can benefit from a pioneering tree management process.

With a particular focus on the standard of works being carried out by tree surgeons and reviews of the routine safety and survey processes that take place all across the city’s tree stock every day, the audit looks at how these factors feed into the wider management of maintaining a safe and healthy tree stock in public areas.

In recent years, Sheffield City Council has committed to promoting and enhancing a network of street trees that the city can be proud of; with the publication of a Sheffield Street Tree Partnership Strategy in 2021 and the creation of a dedicated partnership group who continue to positively, actively and sustainably steer the sustainable management of Sheffield’s urban forest.

The partnership includes representatives from Sheffield City Council, Amey, Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust and Sheffield Tree Action Groups.

Sheffield’s trees and woodlands are one of the city’s greatest natural assets and contribute to its reputation as one of the greenest cities in the UK. They provide benefits for the people of Sheffield, as well as making urban areas and local neighbourhoods attractive and healthy places to live and work.

Executive member for Housing, Road and Waste Management at Sheffield City Council, Councillor Paul Wood said:

“This certification signifies a real achievement for Sheffield and is testament of the hard work and tenacity of the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership. By working together with our partners, we have successfully developed and enhanced the way we manage our street trees, becoming the first authority in Europe to be assessed against this innovative criteria.

“What’s more, through the delivery of our new Street Tree Strategy and in line with our recently published Street Tree Guidelines, we are continuing to make positive and significant progress with our approach to managing highway trees across the city; ensuring their longevity for many years to come.”

PEFC UK is the National Governing Body of PEFC International, the world’s largest Forest Certification Scheme. It has 1.5 million hectares of certified forest in the UK and 330 million hectares in total worldwide.

A copy of the certification can be found on the council’s webpages.