Valuing our urban trees III

When is tree not a tree?

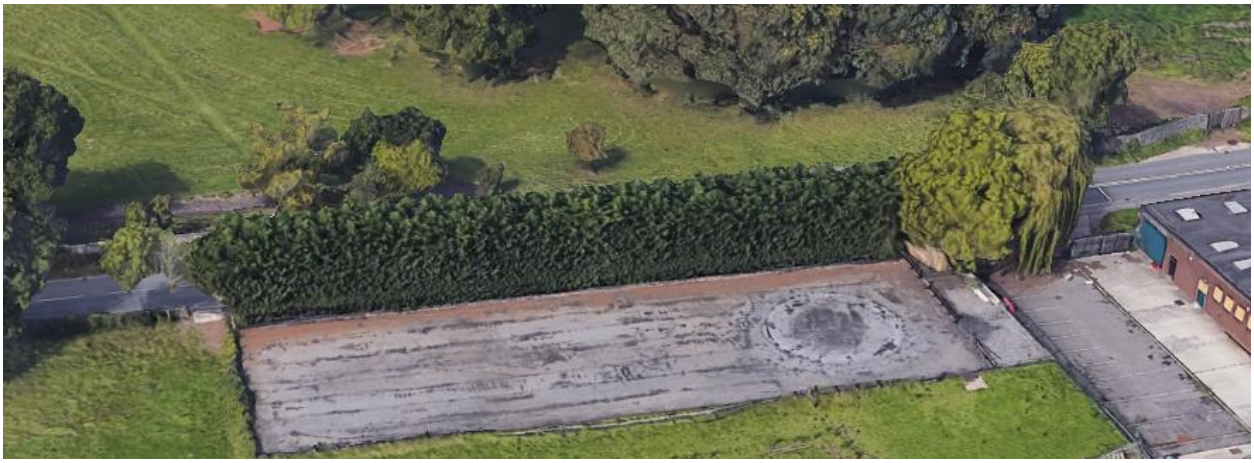

Figure 1 Leyland cypress trees on the boundary of the former Police Dog & Horse Training Centre, Bristol.

The *Biodiversity Metric 3.0 (BNG 3.0) User Guide* defines Urban Tree habitats as follows:

Individual Trees	Young trees over 75mm in diameter measured at 1.5m from ground level and individual semi-mature and mature trees of significant stature and size that dominant their surroundings whose canopies are not touching but that are in close proximity to other trees.
Perimeter Blocks	Groups or stands of trees within and around boundaries of land, former field boundary trees incorporated into developments, individual trees whose canopies overlap continuously.
Linear Blocks	Lines of trees along streets, highways, railways and canals whose canopies overlap continuously

These habitats are measured by area (hectares). Using this measurement and other parameters (distinctiveness, condition and strategic significance), their baseline biodiversity value is calculated in area biodiversity habitat units (ABHUs).

BNG 3.0 also includes separate calculations for two types of linear habitat, one of which is 'Hedgerows and Lines of Trees'. These linear habitats are measured in kilometres. Using this measurement and the same parameters used for ABHUs, their baseline biodiversity value is calculated in hedgerow biodiversity units (HBUs).

Hedgerow habitats are a feature almost unique to the British Isles, but 'Lines of Trees' have been included as a linear habitat as they 'display some of the same functional qualities as hedgerows'.

Box 8-2 of the BNG 3.0 User Guide (Figure 2) uses this key to help identify Hedgerow or Line of Trees habitat types:

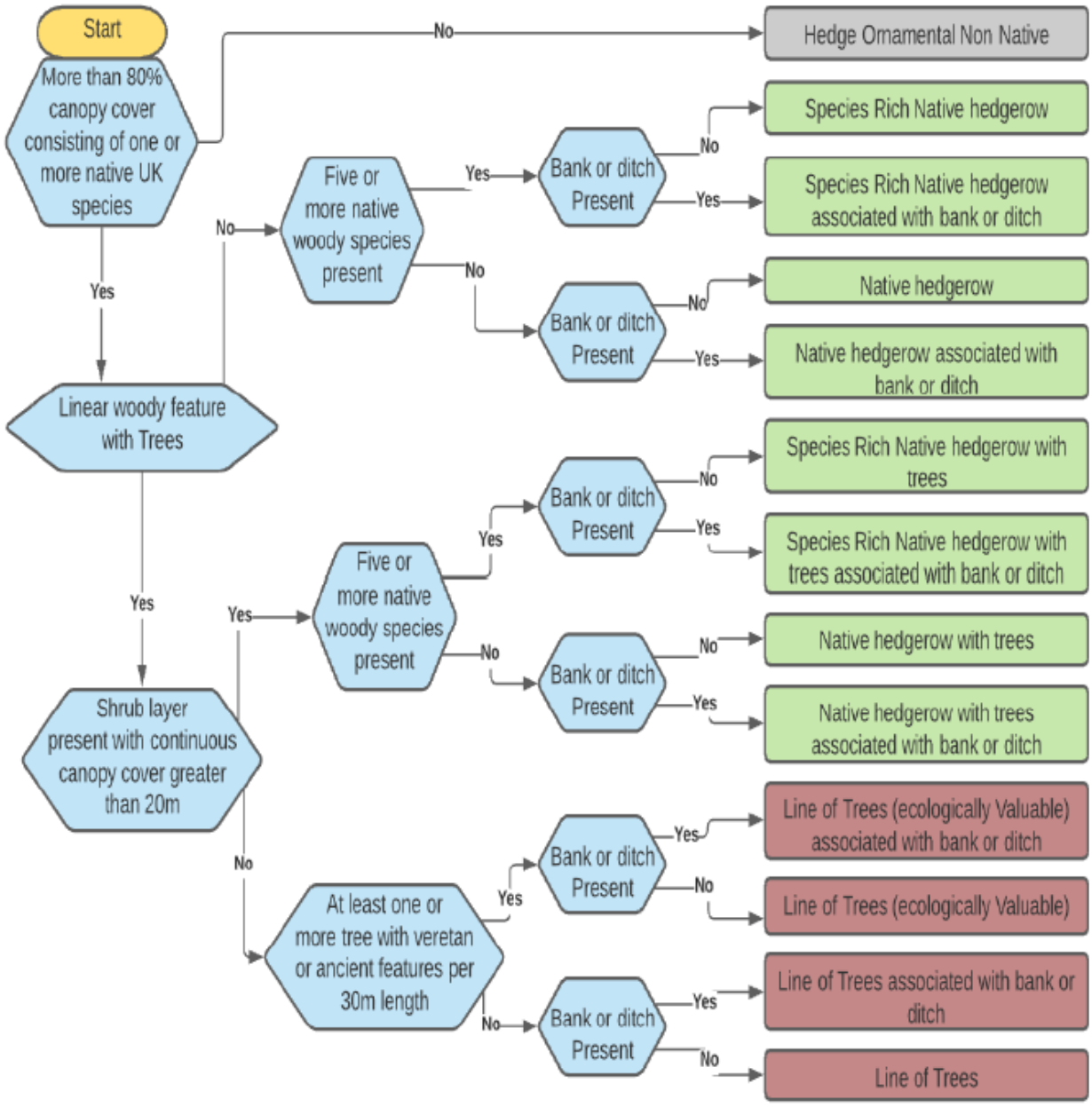

Figure 2 Box 8.2 - BNG 3.0 User Guide

The BNG 3.0 User Guide states that 'Urban trees are considered separately to lines of trees in the wider environment, since they generally occur in an urban environment surrounded by developed land'. However, it is possible for disagreements to arise where the site is not clearly part of 'an urban environment', even though the trees fall within the Urban Tree habitat definition as either Perimeter or Linear Blocks.

A recent example demonstrates the issue. It involved 34 Leyland cypress trees growing along the boundary of the former Police Dog & Horse Training Centre on Clanage Road, Bristol, on the edge of the city. These trees were planted to form a screen between Clanage Road and the training centre (Figures 1 & 3).

This issue was argued before the Planning Inspector when the Secretary of State called the matter in (21/20034/CALLIN) following a grant of planning permission for a change of use to a touring caravan site.

It was agreed at the inquiry that these trees had been planted between 1.5 to 2 metres apart, had developed average stem diameters of 33 cm and had grown to about 10 metres high and eight metres wide. The whole row is about 72 metres (0.072 km) long.

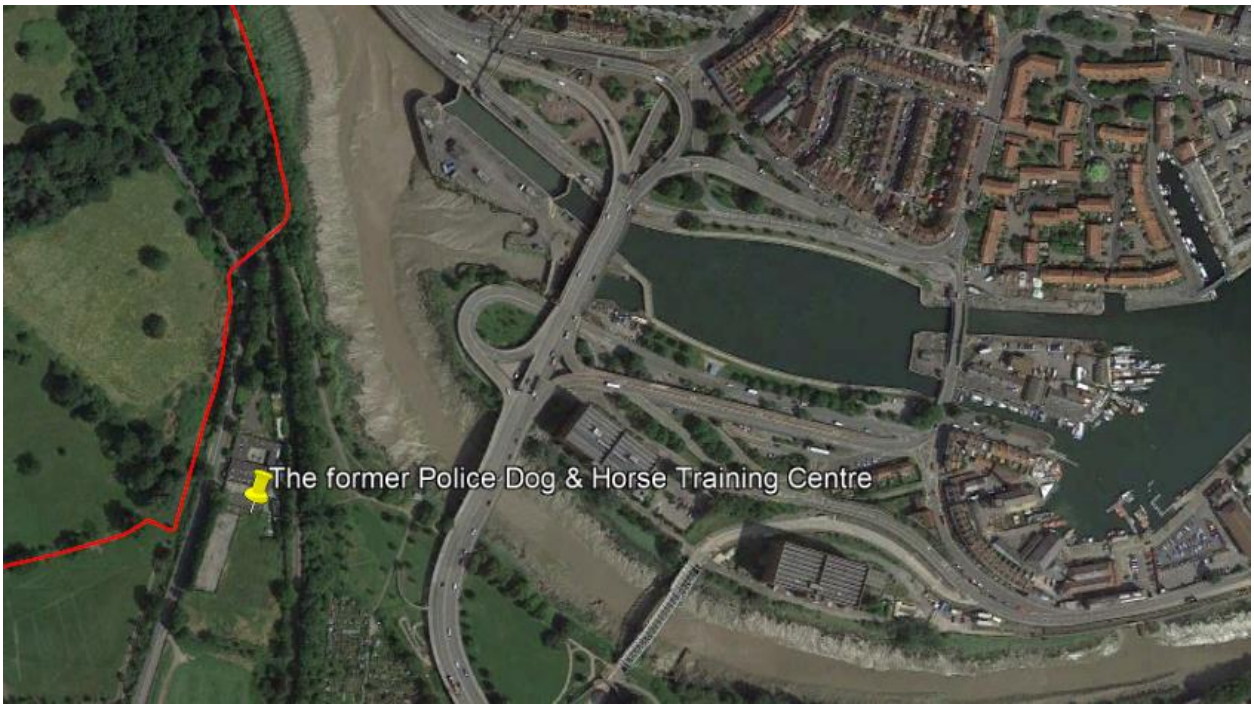

Figure 3 The site on the edge of the city (red boundary line)

Using the flow chart at Box 8-2 above, the developer's ecologist argued that these trees were a Hedge Ornamental Non-native habitat. So, using the BNG 3.0 calculator, they would be assessed as a linear habitat 0.072 kilometres long. This habitat type is given a **Very Low Distinctiveness** (score 1) and has a **Poor Condition** (score 1)[1]. Because of its location, it was given a **Strategic Significance** of **Within area formally identified in local strategy** (score 1.15). As such, the baseline habitat value is calculated as 0.072 x 1 x 1 x 1.15 = 0.08 HBUs.

We argued that these trees formed an Urban Tree habitat and that, using the BNG 3.0 calculator, it should be treated as 34 Medium-sized trees with a combined area of 0.1384

[1] The Very Low Distinctiveness and Poor Condition criteria are the only options available for this habitat type under BNG 3.0.

hectares with a **Medium Distinctiveness** (score 4) and is in **Poor Condition** (score 1) – even though it was agreed that the trees were in good condition and could be categorised as B2 using BS 5837:2012. Because of its location, it was given a **Strategic Significance** of **Within area formally identified in local strategy** (score 1.15). On this basis, the baseline habitat value is calculated as 0.1384 x 4 x 1 x 1.15 = 0.64 ABHUs (nearly 8 times the HBU value).

Whilst Rule 4 of the BNG 3.0 User Guide (page 37) states that '... the three types of biodiversity units generated by this metric (for area, hedgerow and river habitats) are unique and cannot be summed', it is clear that adopting either of these two approaches will result in very different outcomes when assessing biodiversity net gain.

In our view it is vital not to undervalue baseline habitats by the selective use of the definitions given in BNG 3.0.

A decision on the planning inquiry is expected by early February 2022.

Bristol Tree Forum

New Year's Day 2022