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There is a hidden threat to our heritage trees. The National Trust has a reputation for delivering the highest standards in conserving architectural heritage, but it seems that philosophy is not so rigorously applied to environmental assets.

Heritage trees are living links to the past and bridges to the future, a natural connection between departed ancestors and generations to come. But conservation can be expensive and it seems that the National Trust would rather save money than heritage trees of special interest.

This was exposed last year when it felled the Duke of Wellington Cedar, originally stating it "had to be felled immediately for safety reasons". Faced with a backlash from the international tree profession, the National Trust was forced to admit that local management costs and landscape considerations also influenced its decision.

Contrast this rather brutal approach to that taken by English Heritage relating to the proposed felling of three beech trees to restore an historic view at Kenwood House in Hampstead Heath, London. The agency has an effective policy for external consultation and received around 200 responses when its plans were advertised. It listened to concerns and last month opted to keep the trees.

By example, English Heritage has demonstrated that an honest and open dialogue is a modern approach that helps balanced decision-making. At the other extreme, the National Trust still seems to prefer a more secretive alternative, where local agendas are allowed to trump stated national heritage conservation objectives.

This bottom-up management structure may work well for architectural assets, but clinging to such an ineffective mechanism for managing trees of special interest is failing the wider community. English Heritage is setting the standard and the National Trust has some work to do if it is to meet modern expectations for such a respected institution.