

# TREE CARE AND PROTECTION



Tim Oliver,  
technical sales  
manager, and  
managing  
director Gary  
Hurlstone.

## Setting the standard for delayed biodegradable tree shelters

Exploring the story behind NexGen, a UK company using British wool to develop shelters that protect young trees without harming the environment.

**N**EXGEN Tree Shelters is the first UK company to commercialise a range of long-lasting, fully biodegradable tree and shrub shelters, spiral and vole guards – a fascinating fact in itself. However, the story behind how Gary Hurlstone, NexGen's founder and MD, came to design the company's innovative wool-based tree shelters is also fascinating.

In the mid-1980s, Gary's father, Graham Hurlstone, invented the Tubex Tree Shelter. Tubex fast became the market leader and is still going strong today. Of course, 35 years ago the climate crisis wasn't so high on the agenda and few of us considered the need to use sustainable materials that biodegrade without harming the ecosystem.

Today, things are very different and we're all too aware of the urgent need to find alternatives to plastic and do everything we can to protect the environment.

Gary's commitment to reducing the environmental impact of plastic in the countryside and protecting the planet for generations to come is why he started NexGen. He took his father's original design and, working with foresters, landowners and industry experts, spent four years on painstaking research and development, looking for the perfect material.

### A HARD ACT TO FOLLOW

Gary had three criteria the new tree shelters had to meet. They had to perform as well as or better than plastic, they had to be environmentally friendly and they had to be cost-effective.

NexGen Tree Shelters is the result. The whole range is made from 100% biodegradable materials that are pH and ecotoxicity neutral and break down into CO<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>O and nitrogen. Rather than harm the ecosystem around the trees, NexGen's shelters feed it and provide a natural habitat for mosses and lichens that attach to the shelters and create a rich biodiversity.

### ANOTHER INDUSTRY FIRST

Key to the performance of NexGen's shelters is their longevity. Independent tests have proved they last for at least five years, and the company is now working with Impact Solutions and the Sustainable Certification Group to develop a new industry standard that recognises both the longevity and biodegradability of tree shelters.

Because of how well its shelters perform, NexGen is soon going to add a five-year warranty to the entire range. Tim Oliver,

NexGen's technical sales manager, said: "I've been working in the industry for 20 years and believe this is a first and sets the standard for delayed biodegradable tree shelters."

### WHY WOOL?

Wool is the perfect material for NexGen's shelters because it's 100% natural, sustainable, renewable, biodegradable and durable. Plus, it's readily available in the UK. Since September 2022, NexGen has been buying 78,000 square metres of wool a month from over 1,200 British sheep farmers. And because it uses wool of a lower grade than that used by clothing manufacturers, it's creating a new market for fleeces that would typically have been buried, burned or dumped.

### MORE INNOVATION

The other main ingredients in NexGen's shelters are cashew nutshell liquid (CNSL) and castor oil – both natural, renewable and biodegradable materials. CNSL is an agricultural by-product of the cashew nut industry, defined as waste or processing residue. Castor oil is a vegetable oil made from the pressed beans of the castor oil plant that grows widely across tropical and sub-tropical regions. Both CNSL and castor oil are alternatives to petrochemicals and used in a wide range of applications and markets.

### SUPPORT FOR BRITISH INDUSTRY

To avoid using plastic, NexGen had metal ties specially designed for its tree shelters. Made in the UK from British steel, the ties come attached to the shelters and are releasable for beating up. Although they start to rust as soon as they're exposed to the elements, they last for more than five years and biodegrade without causing environmental harm.

Plus, the whole NexGen range is manufactured here in the UK.

### WHY NEXGEN

Gary chose the name NexGen because it reflects he's the next generation of his family to invent a high-performance tree shelter. And it illustrates a belief the NexGen team shares: that future generations should enjoy the same environmental, economic and social benefits and opportunities we do today.

You can read more about NexGen Tree Shelters at [www.nexgen-ts.com](http://www.nexgen-ts.com).