Bristol Tree Forum public meeting

2 August 2017 minutes

Attendance Bristol City Council:

Cllr Charlie Bolton, Cllr Asher Craig (Chair), Gemma Dando, Richard Ennion, Peter Mann, Shaun Taylor.

Attendance External:

Avon Wildlife Trust: Eric Heath

Bristol Tree Forum: Mark Ashdown, Stephanie French, Peter Harnett, Vassili Papastavrou (minutes) and John Tarlton

Forest of Avon Trust: Jon Clark

BCR Streetscene Group: Rob Umphray

University of Bristol: John Tarlton

University of Birmingham Chris Bouch

Woodland Trust: Catherine Brabner-Evans and Ross Kennerley

1. **Introduction.**

   Councillor Craig welcomed the participants and summarised the present financial situation within Bristol City Council, which is being forced to make substantial cuts to its services. In response to a question as to whether there is an acceptance that the cut in the street tree maintenance budget will result in fellings in 3-5 years, Councillor Craig agreed that there would be knock on effects.   The purpose of the meeting was to work together to find a solution to the problem and mitigate the impact. The cuts in budgets across the council would have consequences.

   It was decided that the group would focus on street trees but also consider the context of Bristol's other publicly owned trees (in parks and on estates). Its Minutes would be published and its next meeting would be held in mid-September.

2. **Alternative models of supporting trees in cities – trust models including sponsorship, civic ownership**

   It was acknowledged that existing examples are for planting trees rather than maintenance. A number of participants expressed the view that it was extremely hard to obtain money for maintenance, despite the well-known value of the urban trees and the various benefits (e.g. health and well-being, water retention, cooling effect) that they provide. One idea was to use sponsorship plaques which would indicate that the maintenance of a particular tree was sponsored.

3. **Tree maintenance concerns, epicormic growth and local community involvement**

   The implications of the cut in tree maintenance from £240,000 to £53,000 (£187,000 cut) was discussed. Pollarding cannot be done by members of the public, but Rob Umphray provided details of a Community payback scheme that has already been undertaken by

Community Payback along the Gloucester Road. It turns out that the insurers would not accept the risk of getting members of the public to work on highways, in particular, stepping out into the road and working on busy pavements. However, very quiet residential roads may be a different matter. This means that in general the removal of epicormics growth will also have to be done by professional contractors.

It was agreed that street tree maintenance is a core council service which cannot be done by volunteers.

Action: Shaun Taylor to consider a flexible approach to allow communities to undertake certain works to highway trees where risk was considered lower and training / guidance could be provided to mitigate risk further.

Councillor Craig suggested two possible immediate and short term solutions for the shortfall in funding for street tree maintenance. The first was to use some of the money that remains within the "One Tree Per Child" budget, whilst maintaining that project at a slower pace. The second solution is to access some of the approximately £4 million CIL fund (sum equivalent to a 15% allocation of total CIL receipts). Councillor Craig offered to come back to the next meeting in September with the outcome of her discussions re "One Tree Per Child", including taking into account the partnership approach to delivering this project and using CIL funding (both the 15% that is currently determined locally and the remaining 85% that is currently retained wholly by the Council).

4. **Tree planting initiatives and the future of woodland creation**
   There was a discussion regarding the present sponsorship scheme for street trees where trees to replace stumps or in existing tree pits cost £295 and street trees on new sites cost £765 (plus the cost of an engineered tree pit if needed). The scheme was seen as extremely successful and Richard Ennion was congratulated for getting it underway. It was felt that a dramatic increase in costs would result in sponsorship drying up and may result in existing sponsors (such as the University of Bristol) withdrawing. It was also acknowledged that delaying planting in existing sites may ultimately result in much greater expense as a vacant site only remains "current" for a period of about 5 years. Richard Ennion also confirmed that £295 was a true and genuine reflection of the actual cost of planting a tree in an existing site. **It was decided to maintain these sponsorship costs at the existing level and not implement the proposal to increase all tree costs to £765. This will require further "internal" discussion at BCC.**

   "One tree per child" was discussed and the educational value of the project was stressed with good feedback from the schools involved.

   The representative from the Woodland Trust suggested that it might be a mistake to separate street trees from the wider context.

In terms of a way forward it was agreed to look into new funding sources and the possibility of setting up a Trust for the future. It was felt that it is possible to raise funding for tree planting and this would be pursued.

It was also agreed to start the process of preparing a Tree Strategy for Bristol

5.   **Future for trees in parks**
Discussions regarding Bristol's parks are ongoing and the Newcastle initiative of creating a Mutual Parks Trust is being explored, as well as Newcastle's success in obtaining £1 million public health funding. A visit to Newcastle is planned.

6.   **Next Meeting**
The next meeting of the Group would be mid-September when Councillor Craig should be able to provide further information regarding the short term/immediate funding of street tree maintenance.

Vassili Papastavrou 3 August 2017
(note these minutes have not yet been formally approved by the participants of the meeting)