

## Minutes Bristol Tree Forum Committee Meeting 17 January 2022

Present: Mark Ashdown (Chair), Stephanie French, Dougal Matthews, Vassili Papastavrou (Secretary), John Tarlton (treasurer), Chris Wallace (Datasmith and ToB website). Tree Champions: Robert Griffin, Megan Lewis, Diane Mullaney, Mark Newman

### 1. Reports from Officers

Our Treasurer reported that £5,619 is in the account. Expenses for renewing the BTF websites are expected. The trees ordered for the tree give-away have not yet been paid. The membership of the Arb Association will be renewed.

### 2. AGM quick debrief.

An in-person AGM, was hosted by Councillor Martin Fodor in City Hall with around 30 people attending. The details are [here](#). The existing Officers were re-elected and Dougal Matthews was elected to the Committee from amongst the Tree Champions. The [BTF constitution](#) was amended to bring it back into line with that of the Bristol Parks Forum. We saw a video presentation from [Mayor Rees](#), a talk from Richard Ennion (BCC) and a talk from Councillor Martin Fodor on the work that the Scrutiny Committee that he established is doing on urban trees. Jim Smith provided an update on the work of Tree Champions.

### 3. St Mary Le Port. Post mortem and next steps.

The proposal which was accepted will result in the removal of some very substantial trees that have been there since the 1960s. These trees are on the edge of the development site and if Planning Policy BCS9 had not been ignored, they would have been retained. There are few sites for the 156 replacements (required under BTRS) within 1 mile of the site. Planning Policy DM17 is only satisfied when trees are planted rather than just money handed over: despite the lack of a planning condition, apparently the Planning Authority will somehow require the developer to ensure that trees will be planted. When asked by a committee member whether more account of the Climate and Ecological Emergencies should be taken, the Head of Development Management made the statement that there were no policies in place to do this, despite there being long established policies such as BCS9, DM15 and DM17 which could be applied.

The final comments from the BCC Arboricultural Officer were only made available by the Planning Office on the eve of the committee decision but the publication date was then backdated which gave the impression that the report had been made available ten days earlier. These comments stated that the application should not have been validated because key arboricultural reports were missing. The Planning Committee did not appear to be aware of this report. Other arboricultural information that was a part of the application has yet to be made publicly available.

It was agreed to send emails to Councillors to alert them to the key Bristol green planning policies as these seem to be de-prioritised or ignored by Planning Officers

#### **4. Quick summary of status of other big planning applications**

On a number of sites (Novers Hill/Western Slopes Brislington Meadows) we are seeing the redrawing the boundaries of the SNCI designation to benefit developers without any apparent due process. Other applications to watch are Yew Tree Farm and Ashton Vale Meadows close to the Park and Ride.

#### **5. Petition on Brownfield sites and full council debate**

John Tarlton summarised the progress regarding the petition to ensure that only genuine brownfield sites are labelled as brownfield. Councillor Richard Eddy's cross-party motion to protect the Green Belt and Bristol's Green spaces was passed by the Council on 7 September 2021 without any votes in opposition. However, we are now seeing sites that do not fall within the NPPF definition being called brownfield sites. A 6,000 signature petition triggered a 15 minute debate at Full Council on Tuesday 11th January 2022. There was good support from the Lib Dems and the Conservatives. Labour was against and the greens were unsupportive. At the same meeting, a Trees in Front Gardens motion proposed by the Lib Dems was supported by all parties and adopted. The Greens (Councillor Emma Edwards) and Conservatives (Councillor Sharon Scott) made the point that protecting existing trees was also crucial, as front garden trees are unlikely to contribute much to tree canopy for decades. Councillor Ellie King announced that there is soon going to be a council tree strategy and planting plan. It will be a full audit of tree planting opportunities and possible sources of grant funding. The BTF is hoping to be consulted and that the strategy will look also to protect existing urban trees.

#### **6. Great Tree Give Away**

John Tarlton reported that the BTF has a total of 1,000 trees on offer (600 birch and 400 alders) plus 1,000 oak trees in collaboration with the Oakupy project. 115 oak, 230 birch, 105 alder and 748 of "any" species have been requested and many of those applying would like more trees if these are available. OTPC has also put in requests. Trees will be delivered early Feb.

#### **7. 7 Tree Champions update**

Four Tree Champions joined this meeting. Stephanie French reported that during the first and second lockdowns a lot of new tree champions were recruited. She, and Jim Smith, took the new champions through a series of sessions on planning. There are various other aspects to look after trees, so keep emailing members of the committee if you want help and advice. We really appreciate the local input of Tree Champions.

#### **8. Moisture monitoring.**

Chris reported that the soil moisture sensors that were developed and trialled last summer are now in production, with PCBs (Printed Circuit Boards) manufactured in China. The sensors provide live data on soil moisture content and soil and air temperature. Since the establishment period is a dangerous time for trees (the major loss of trees is during this

period), it is anticipated that this data will provide early warning of failing trees and allow their carers to prioritise watering of critical trees. Data gathered by the sensors also enables comparison of different soil types and planting conditions such as depth of mulch to help in future plantings. Six sensors are now being bought from BTF by Earthwatch who are behind the tiny forest in Southmead. Three are being bought from BTF by BCC for use on the OTPC project.

## **9. Student projects with UWE and Bristol Zoo**

Chris Wallace has been working with UWE and the Zoo on BTF hosting student projects. The project with Tim Bray at the Zoo will involve the application and critique of our tool for canopy analysis. The UWE work placement project is with a student on the MSc in Sustainable Development and will look at the independence of expert reports on ecology and biodiversity which are provided by developers for planning applications, to explore the possibility of citizen science alternative surveys and to prepare an every-day guide to such reports.

The committee supports these projects as a formal collaboration with BTF and relevant BTF members agree to assist with these projects to ensure a satisfactory student experience.

## **10. Tree Fundraiser and charitable status.**

Dougal indicated that there are opportunities for match funding for tree planting. It may be easier if BTF had charitable status: Dougal will investigate and report back to the Committee on the pros and cons of charitable status.

## **11. Communication, collaboration with other Groups, and the establishment of Tree trails**

Dougal will check out the use of Mailchimp for communications. Dougal is working with the Parks Forum and the Bristol Wildlife Groups to secure stronger links with the Bristol Tree Forum and to generate Tree trails.

## **12. One Tree per Child**

The team has grown to eight which is fantastic news. The BTF would like to thank the team for its incredible work, and the high standards of the plantings, particularly street trees. BTF will publicise the forthcoming tree planting opportunities for the remainder of the season. Historical OTPC plantings should be mapped by BTF to determine their success rates and calculate their contribution towards increasing tree canopy. Now that the OTPC team is bigger, maintenance of previous plantings will become easier. For example, the orchard planting in Stoke Park will need to be maintained.

Any other business

Questions remain about the meaning of Bristol's objective of 'Doubling Bristol's Tree Canopy by 2046' since there are varying figures (from 11% to 18%) for the baseline tree canopy value. The figure obtained from the i-Tree Eco survey three years ago is much lower than the figure obtained using the i-Tree canopy methodology as implemented in our own Canopy

Survey tool, which has since been validated by comparison with Bluesky's TreeMap product. It is believed that Richard Ennion is in discussion with the One City Plan team on this issue and on a methodology to be used for future tree canopy surveys.

**Vassili Papastavrou**  
**Sec Bristol Tree Forum**  
**19 Jan 2022**