



PRESS RELEASE

Bristol Tree Forum's What Do They Know Account Spoofed

On 2 February we became aware that someone had used the Bristol Tree Forum's name to set up a new **What Do They Know** Account. They then issued this request to the Bristol City Council in our name:

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This is a plain-text version of the Freedom of Information request "Stoke Lodge heritage officer advice". The latest, full version is available online at http://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/stoke_lodge_heritage_officer_adv.
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From: Bristol Tree Forum
To: Bristol City Council
Date: 2 February 2022
Dear Bristol City Council,
Stoke Lodge is a listed building. It's not clear whether this has been given due consideration in applications made for development in the park. There isn't anything on the public planning website under the application numbers 17/00864/F 18/05206/A and 20/01826/F. As it should be a serious consideration for planners we'd expect the council's heritage experts to have been asked for comments. Under the Freedom of Information statutes please can you send copies of all comments sent to the planner by the conservation team for these applications?
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Yours faithfully,
Bristol Tree Forum
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From: Bristol City Council
To: Bristol Tree Forum
Date: 2 February 2022
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Dear Bristol Tree Forum

Environmental Information Regulations 2004

Thank you for your request received on 2 February 2022. Unfortunately, we are unable to deal with your request for the following reason:
Not a valid request

Please resubmit an information request using your full name.

Yours faithfully
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Customer Relations Officer
[email address]
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The Council rejected the request at first because it failed to use a 'full name', so the spoofer then issued a fresh, identical request - but this time used the name of a deceased member of the Stoke Lodge community who was never involved with the Bristol Tree Forum.

We immediately wrote to What Do They Know to advise them of the impersonation. This is what we said:



I have been advised that someone has set up a What Do They Know account in the name of 'Bristol Tree Forum'. These are the details of the account: https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/user/bristol_tree_forum_2.

They have issued two Freedom of Information requests directed to Bristol City Council. These are they:

*https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/stoke_lodge_heritage_officer_adv
https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/stoke_lodge_heritage_officer_adv_2*

*Please be advised that this has been done without the authority of **The Bristol Tree Forum** committee and it is not an authorised account.*

Our Account name is 'The Bristol Tree Forum' (https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/user/the_bristol_tree_forum). No one but the writer is authorised to use our account or has access to it.

Please take steps to investigate this matter and close this spoof account.

We also advised Bristol City Council of what had happened.

Having investigated the matter, **What Do They Know** have today written to say:

Thank you for your email and the extra information regarding the name on the correspondence.

We have now completed our investigation of your concerns around impersonation regarding requests:

*https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/stoke_lodge_heritage_officer_adv
https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/stoke_lodge_heritage_officer_adv_2*

We have acted to remove the names that are suspected as being impersonations and have prevented the user from making any further requests using that account.

Should you have any further concerns please let us know.

We want to thank What Do They Know for dealing with this matter so promptly.

Quite apart from the potential for upset and distress caused by using the name of a deceased person, we repudiate the attempt to use our good name to make spurious FOI requests that gave unnecessary work to already overworked BCC officers while attempting to damage our reputation. It is clear that this was the intention from remarks posted on Twitter just a few hours later with a screenshot of the request.



[What Do They Know](#) provides an important and valuable service by making all the Freedom of Information requests they process freely available. For someone to abuse the service they provide, and manipulate their site in this way, is disgraceful.

The Bristol Tree Forum
8 February 2022