



## **Minutes Bristol Tree Forum Committee meeting 7<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

Mark Ashdown (Chair), Richard Ennion (BCC first part of the meeting), Stephanie French, Sean Harding, Dougal Matthews, Vassili Papastavrou (sec), Jim Smith, John Tarlton (Treasurer), Chris Wallace (Datasmith)

Tree Champions: Robert Griffin, Megan Lewis and Diane Mullaney

### **1. Introduction from Richard Ennion (BCC) on Trees for Streets and other BCC planting projects**

Richard introduced the collaboration between BCC and Trees for Streets, which is operating at a national level to sponsor street trees. BCC has signed up to a one-year initial collaboration. On offer for sponsorship will be existing available locations, plus an invitation for residents to propose and sponsor a location outside their house - limiting this to grass verges initially. We'll see how this goes and consider widening the scope of land that residents can propose tree planting (and support financially). It will be targeting householders and private businesses. The collaboration with Trees for Streets will go live at the end of March - reserving promotion until April / May. This will give time to iron out any teething issues and benefit from better weather when people are more likely to be amenable to sponsoring trees. Richard invited Bristol Tree Forum members to support tree planting through the Trees for Streets collaboration - setting out a role for Tree Champions to be a 'first filter' in doing ground checks on locations suggested by residents that we may need to decide are not progress-able due to site constraints - these 'eyes on the ground' will be vital intelligence (and capacity). This was supported by Tree Forum members and Richard will come back with more details including an offer of training for Tree Champions. Vassili suggested that, given the climate emergency and the desire to increase canopy cover, there could be a move towards planting more large-form trees where appropriate. Richard said that he agreed with this principle but noted that 'where appropriate' was a key consideration. BCC's stance is that we need to select trees that will 'fit the space' as they mature - avoiding the need for expensive pruning as large trees in small spaces inevitably need to be managed on a pollard cycle. There is an opportunity to define 'reasonable' as we progress a tree strategy and tree planting plan. Stephanie mentioned an example solution where a maple that was too large for the locations had been pollarded but failed as a result and the selected replacement tree was a fastigate tulip tree - thereby providing stature, but not the bulk of a more open grown specimen. BCC is taking on some more tree planting officers in support of the ambition to plant more trees in the city and this will provide more capacity to support tree sponsorship via the collaboration with Trees for Streets. Sean urged that where there is planting on verges it needs to be where trees are not likely to be damaged by vehicles or their roots compacted. Mark said that one of the advantages of this new approach is to identify new sites as well as the present approach which is replacement of lost street trees. Richard then left the meeting.

### **2. Reports from officers**



John (Treasurer) reported that there is slightly less than £5,000 in the account following the payment of the Arboricultural Association and the purchase of trees. Mark (Chair) reported that long-standing scheduled meetings with BCC to discuss ash dieback and latterly the new Environment Act were twice cancelled. In addition to commenting on several extant planning applications, Mark has focused on the process for contributing to the development of a new Local Plan. We need to come up with examples of good local plans from elsewhere and to ensure that the Mitigation Hierarchy is included in the local plan.

### **3. Letter to councillors/planning committee members**

There remains a problem that most councillors are not aware of Bristol's existing green planning policies. Council planning officers do not draw attention to these existing policies and make the erroneous claim that there is no mechanism to implement Bristol's climate and ecological emergency declarations. Mark and Stephanie have already prepared drafts. John will take this to the next stage and finalise an email to councillors.

### **4. Big tree give-away**

John reported that the approach was slightly different to last year (when Maelor Nursery was heavily discounting oak trees because COVID had disrupted planting). Seven hundred white birch and 300 alder were purchased and John worked with Oakupy to distribute 900 oak trees. In addition, excess trees from FOAT (of a variety of species) were distributed. This meant that a total of 4,500 trees were given away.

### **5. Meeting with BCC Trees and Woodland Manager**

Mark and Vassili reported back on their positive meeting with this newly-appointed officer. The BTF looks forward to working with him.

### **6. Building housing developments around existing trees. Update on discussions with TDAG and Woodland Trust**

Although Bristol has local planning policies to retain existing trees especially when they are on the edge of the site, these are not applied. As a result, developers clear sites of all trees, even those at the edge of the site. This problem is outlined in a [blog](#). Vassili reported on discussions with the Trees and Design Action Group and the Woodland Trust to hold an expert workshop resulting in a short publication that will show examples where housing developments have been built around existing trees and outline the issues (the benefits of retaining existing trees, good urban planning, cost, housing density, building up not out, and foundations).

### **7. "Backdating" of the Publication Date of Documents on the Bristol City Council Planning Portal**



The backdating of the publication date of documents (our interest is tree-related documents) on the Bristol City Council planning website represents a substantial problem in commenting on planning applications. We have tried to address this since June 2020. Some key tree documents are only made available close to the planning decision (in one case on the day before the committee meeting and sometimes not until afterwards). Yet it is impossible to address this problem when incorrect publication dates give the impression that the documents were available for some time. Regular screenshots of the document list on the planning portal show this remains a problem. This remains a problem despite an undertaking from the Head of Development Management in February 2021 that correct publication dates would be listed. This undertaking was given following intervention from the Local Government Ombudsman, but an FOI showed that no instruction had been issued to Planning Officers. Following Vassili's update to the committee, the committee unanimously by a show of hands and formally endorsed the taking of this matter to the Local Government Ombudsman for consideration.

#### **8. Festival of Nature**

Jim raised the issue of participation in the Bristol Festival of Nature. Whilst we don't want to hire a stall on our own, Jim is going to look into possibilities for sharing space on another stall. In addition, Sean is going to update the BTF leaflet to include information about our websites.

#### **9. Update on activities by Tree Champions (Jim and Stephanie)**

Jim and Stephanie noted that we now have 35 tree champions, of which three participated in this meeting. Dougal has set up a Mailchimp account which will be the main approach for contacting tree champions and was first tested on the day of the Committee meeting. Jim informed the committee that he has planted 125 whips in five local primary schools

#### **10. Veteran tree survey workshop**

The committee agreed that a veteran tree survey workshop which Sean offered to run would be a great idea. Dougal offered to host the workshop close to Victory Park. Sean and Dougal will come back with further details.

#### **11. Report back on moisture sensors and the student project on ecology reports**

Chris reported that the remote moisture sensors are now being manufactured (circuit boards being made in China). About 10 sensors have been made and six have been sold to Earthwatch for monitoring their tiny forests plus BCC will purchase three. The graphical data dashboard is available [here](#). A UWE student is using Trees of Bristol for canopy surveys. In addition, an environmental work placement student is looking at Ecology Reports written for developers in a systemic way. The quality of these reports is rather variable and there seems to be no proper critiques of them by the BCC ecologist.

#### **12. Any other business.**



Stephanie reported that the Bristol Tree Replacement Standard was not being applied for the replacement of a substantial walnut tree for planning application 21/02301/H. The tree being felled is 36cms - The BTRS calculates three replacement trees, but the Planning Officer capitulated and decided that there was only “room” for two trees, when the applicant should have also paid for a third tree off-site.

Megan reported that the Merchant Venturers are going to plant 7 trees in November for the Jubilee.

It was proposed that we hold our next meeting (7pm on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2022) in person at Filwood Community Centre

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