

Bristol Tree Forum meeting Filwood Community Centre 5 Feb 2024.

Minutes

Present: Mark Ashdown (Chair), Jim Smith (vice-Chair), Vassili Papastavrou (secretary), John Tarlton (treasurer), Stephanie French, Danica Priest, Chris Wallace (Tree Champion Coordinator and data smith)

Tree champions: Simon Bishop, Rob Griffin, Anne Silber and Angela Truell

Apologies: Sean Harding, Dougal Matthews

1. Date and Place of Next Meeting. 10th April 7pm at Art Park (143 Wells Rd. BS4 2BU) with thanks to Anne for organising.
Following that we plan to hold meetings on Monday 3 June and Tuesday September 3rd.
The AGM will be held in November (date to be determined by Vassili to avoid any clashes with other Council meetings)
2. Reports from Officers. John reported that there was £1,300 in the BTF account with an anticipated £500 to be spent for the big tree give away. Chris has taken over the job of coordinating tree champions from Jim, together with managing the Trees of Bristol database, which combined is a major workload.
3. Developing the roles of Tree Champions:
Chris had provided a report to the meeting which sets out the important role TCs have in delivering the goals of the new Tree Strategy. The report is appended to these minutes.
At present there are around 24 TCs plus the committee members.
Danica suggested periodic social events such as meeting in a pub.
Chris is working towards a Tree Champion meeting in March.
Plymouth Tree Champions fill in a diary to indicate what they have done in a typical week/month. An Instagram page was also suggested together with a number of action points

Action Point. We all seek to recruit TCs who can offer something from the wide range of activities

Action Points: The Committee discussed the action points in Chris's report which is appended and agreed that we should take these forward.
4. BTF has made contributions to 3 major consultations in Bristol. Mark reported that the BTF had submitted comments on the draft Local Plan which is not fit

for purpose, working closely with BPF and BCS.

In addition Mark reported that we had commented on the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy and the Allotments Strategy.

Finally the BTF has been asked to comment on the current draft of the Bristol Tree Strategy which is still a work in progress. A problem with the tree strategy is that it does not appear to be under the aegis of the new Local Plan.

5. Major Planning Applications:

We continue to watch developments regarding Hengrove Park, the Zoo, Brislington Meadows, Baltic Wharf and St Mary le Port.

In addition we were concerned to see the poor quality of biodiversity “net gain” indicated in the New Fosse Way site. Here the plan is that the new grassland will be mowed and fertilised, which is not how you create species-rich grassland habitat.

6. The Committee agreed that BTF should be represented at the Festival of Nature 1-2 June and perhaps give a talk. Jim will take the lead in arranging that. The BTF will suggest the planting of a Memorial Tree following the stabbing to death of two teenagers in Knowle.

7. AOB. In discussion we agreed that in the run up to the elections we should meet with the Greens plus the other parties and consider hosting hustings.

Vassili Papastavrou 23 Feb 2024

Bristol Tree Forum: Tree Champions Status report

Chris Wallace Feb 5th 2024

Tree Champions and Bristol City Council

The relationship between BTF and Bristol City Council provides the framework for the role of Tree Champions, whether it be when challenging the actions of BCC or supporting their aspirations to maintain and increase the Urban Forest.

Relations with the Tree and Parks staff has been relatively constructive over the years, although there have been times when relations with tree officers have been rocky. For a number of years, BTF has been involved in a working group to develop a Tree Strategy for Bristol, and this work is now nearing completion. In the Tree Strategy document, BTF is essentially seen as being of value for its network of Tree Champions. The current draft states “BTF has established a network of **Tree Champions** covering each Council Ward to help advise residents on tree issues.”

The list of actions contains a number of references to BTF but mainly in the context of Tree Champions: e.g.

TC7	Map non-BCC open land outside residential areas to establish possible tree planting areas, applying TIC to this to establish priorities.	Partners identified 2024, land mapped 2024, landowners established 2025, ha canopy delivered by year	TBC, possible role for Tree Champions	Be a Tree Champion
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PP3	Grow role of BTF Tree Champions to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advising people on tree issues and proposals. • Supporting people in planting, caring for and managing trees. • Adding and updating Tree Data Hub content. • Engaging people in experiencing and celebrating trees and woodlands. 	Funding secured (see PP1), activity days undertaken by year	BTF (TBC)	Be a Tree Champion
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PP4	Expand and integrate range of sponsorship options enabling individuals and organisations across the city to support local tree planting, care and woodland management.	Complementary suite of sponsorship options produced, promoted on Data Hub 2024	BCC, FOAT, WT, BTF	Your support invited
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In addition, the strategy now recognised the value of the Trees of Bristol Website with its own cross-cutting concern:

CC3	Develop Trees of Bristol database and website to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhance understanding and appreciation of the city's trees. • support recording and analysing actions which contribute to the goals of the tree strategy. 	Public engagement with the website Community feedback on the website and its usability.	BTF in collaboration with BCC, FoAT, WT and private landowners	Be a Tree Champion
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And BTF are also included as a partner in the development of a Tree Hub led by FoAT, which seems to be concerned with strategy and policy:

CC1	Create Bristol Tree Data Hub hosted by FoAT and with links to partner websites, setting out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priorities for tree and woodland planting incorporating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Baseline tree canopy data and monitoring - Guidance and information - Impact criteria 	Hub established 2024, All information added 2025	FoAT , supported by BCC, WT, BTF	Your support invited
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mapping of tree planting opportunity. • BCC/ landowners' responsibilities for trees including tree safety, how to care for/manage them, planning and permitted tree felling, tree replacement standards and where to get tree services from. • How responsible sourcing can benefit trees globally. 			
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Clearly, we need to grow the network of Tree Champions (in the broad sense) if we are to fulfil these expectations.

To Do: A meeting with Richard Ennion and other BCC staff to discuss how Tree Champions and BCC volunteering groups can be better coordinated, to discuss the role of TCs in the Tree Sponsorship scheme and identify training possibilities with Tree Officers. This is pencilled in for Week commencing 19th February Action: Chris + one Committee member + 1 TC

Where we are now (Feb 5th 2024)

Members

The list of contacts now contains 84 names including 9 committee members. I personally emailed every one on the list at least once personally, and once or twice more in bulk emails to non-responders. None of the three councillors on the list has responded.

I learnt a lot from these communications about their past experiences with BTF and their interests. As of 2 Feb, we have 24 contacts (excluding Committee) which I have designated as live Tree Champions, who were all invited to the next meeting.

Within this group, the degree of engagement varies greatly. The number on each Ward is shown on the Ward map. <https://bristoltrees.space/trees/wards/ward-info.xq>. Contrary to Richard Ennion's expectations, over 40% of wards have no Tree Champions.

This graph shows the distribution of the number of Tree Champions by deprivation rank: <https://bristoltrees.space/trees/wards/ward-info.xq?mode=table&x-axis=6&y-axis=14>

It is noteworthy that some recent new TCs have come to BTF via personal contact and this remains the best way to grow the membership. Our campaign work and social media posts also attract attention.

Record-keeping

There is now a rudimentary contact management system implemented in a spreadsheet. This has replaced the previous Word list and the MailChimp list. It contains as much detail as I can gather on the people, their interest and status and also records the sequence of communications I have had with each one. Bulk email lists are created using spreadsheet formula and used as bcc in an email from me.

I did investigate the use of a proper CRM but the effort and cost could not be justified at the time.

To do: Make the list available to BTF Committee members. It is important to know the current status and email address when dealing with members. Action: Chris

Tree Champion Activities

The prime activity for Tree Champions has been to be aware of planning applications in their Ward which affects trees and to comment on those which will lead to tree loss. It is vital that we do our utmost to preserve existing trees, knowing how many trees have to be planted and how long it takes to compensate for such losses.

However, there is a range of activities which also contribute to the health and size of the Urban Forest and community involvement with, and appreciation of, this increasingly valued resource. These include finding locations for new trees and gathering funding for their planting; monitoring our trees for disease and damage; documenting the Urban Forest; increasing the community knowledge of our tree assets - ecologically, environmentally and for our well-being; connecting with groups with shared interests to pool resources. We also need experience in a range of professional areas which increasingly affect the state of the Urban Forest: planning; ecology and the emerged Biodiversity Net Gain. The TC hub sets out these in more detail.

One benefit of a wider range of activities is that it has the potential to draw in a wider group of volunteers across the age range and a wider range personal experience and interests. Diversity is also important for gaining funding.

Support

Website

The information hub for Tree Champions has been steadily enhanced over the past few months.

<https://bristoltrees.space/trees/TCs/home.xq>

It now includes information about the Committee members, relevant events, related organisation and key documents. The section on the campaigns that the committee and TCs are engaged in is important to allow all members to see what is going on.

Guidance on activities needs more updating and consolidating since they are currently in several formats and locations, and largely focused on planning.

Social contact

Personal contact and social networking are also important to support TCs. A WhatsApp group has been set up but is dormant through lack of active TCs and the difficulty for some members of using Smart Phone apps. A training and social event is pencilled in in March, but this needs funding and support from other Committee members. TCs are invited to meetings but do not have a formal role in such meetings

To Do:

1. Develop the contents of the TC hub: Action: All

2. Plan the event in March: Action – At least one Committee member to help Chris.
3. Redesign the BTF WordPress menu to signpost the TC hub and Trees of Bristol site :
Action: Mark
4. Change name of BTF Committee Meeting to BTF Members Meeting with a standing item “report from Tree Champions” Action: Committee

Training

The provision of training for TCs is an important benefit which can be offered to volunteers.

Stephanie has run sessions on planning and the interface with the council. I believe Jim has run the occasional session on tree-planting.

Training can be offered by other organisations. The One Tree Per Child team is keen to offer training on tree planting and maintenance. Even if TCs are not going to be directly involved in these activities, it is good experience to gain. Other subjects for training include assessing the state of street trees, knowledge of tree diseases and other threats, and tree identification.

To Do: Find out what training TCs would like, organise and schedule sessions in the coming year. Action: All

Funding

I have been working with Alex Stone at FoAT to acquire funding which initially appeared to be available. An extensive bid document was prepared for this but sadly these funds turned more difficult to access than thought. A bid is being developed for Quartet but it is not clear from the criteria that BTF qualifies.

To Do: A new bid for funding to Quartet’s Express Grant Programme, aided by Alex Stone, FoAT (by 12 Feb) <https://quartetcf.org.uk/grants/express-grant-programme/> Action :CW

Formalisation of Membership

Hitherto, Tree Champions have been very informally managed. This has led not only to a lack of knowledge of who our Tree Champions are, but also an ignorance of what experience and connections they have, what training they have undertaken and crucially what they are actually doing as Tree Champions, if anything.

Taking a lead from other voluntary groups, we need to formalise the contract between BTF and volunteer.

This needs to set out explicitly: what we can offer them and what they will offer us.

We can offer: Our information hub; access to experienced members for advice; training in a range of subjects; an annual meeting for training and networking; identity in the form of a branded hi-viz vest, and leaflets explaining what BTF does.

They can offer: permission to retain name, email address and other personal details (for GDPR); optionally, permission to use their name on the website; an annual diary

showing activities and time spent in their role as a TC; their time and commitment to the aims of BTF.

To Do:

1. Write the contract (“Agreement”)
- 2 Distribute to TCs for signature

Affiliations

Networking with national and other local organisations provides BTF and its members with educational material, the opportunity to develop new skills and to share experiences. Over the last few months I have explored a number of such organisations.

The Tree Council <https://treecouncil.org.uk>

The Tree Council was established in 1974 as a direct response to the devastation caused by Dutch elm disease in the 1970s. Building on the momentum of the successful "Plant a Tree in '73" campaign, the Council aimed to unite local tree groups and spearhead nationwide efforts for tree planting and protection. The Tree Council coordinates a network of local groups of Tree Wardens <https://treecouncil.org.uk/tree-wardens/> who “...are local tree champions who plant, look after and stand up for the trees in their patch”. Despite the broad remit, the focus of their role is tree planting, as evidenced by the list of what tree wardens do and the contents of the guidance hub. Although there are some notable exceptions of long-standing groups such as Plymouth Tree People, most Tree Wardens are run by their local council.

BTF emerged in 1998 from a grassroots movement against excessive tree felling in Bristol. They aimed to provide a platform for public voice and advocate for better tree management practices within the city. As competition for scarce space in the city has increased, especially with demand for more housing and multiple demands on street space, the threat to existing trees and the difficulty of finding space for new trees have both increased.

When BTF was formed, membership of the Tree Council was considered but Clive Stevens didn't like the term “Tree Warden” (Vassili, personal communication) and probably other aspects of the organisation and BTF went its own way with ‘Tree Champions’.

I contacted the Tree Council last year to explore the possibility of some association to gain access to their resources but it became clear that they were not at all interested in working with us. At the time I pointed to the benefits of independence since much of our work involved scrutiny of the Council. However in the latest communications, the need to be aligned with the Council was re-emphasised, and indeed it was suggested that they would approach BCC with a view to setting up a council-led Tree Warden organisation. It would seem that the aims and methods of our two organisations are incompatible.

Arboricultural Association <https://trees.org.uk>

For general interest in trees and planning we have much to gain from membership of this group, and we have all benefited from the excellent material and webinars. Our membership has recently lapsed, but I would recommend renewal £75a year

To do: Membership renewal if the committee agrees.

Plymouth Tree People <https://plymouthtrees.org/>

This group, though independent of Plymouth City Council, is a member of the Tree Council and has been for years. They felt that membership was very useful too them. This was one reason why I pursued the connection with the Tree Council. However, they are very keen to help us and share resources. Many of the ideas I have had about our setup have come from discussion with them and their website.

The Conservation Volunteers <https://www.tcv.org.uk/>

This nation-wide organisation supports volunteer groups working in the areas of nature conservation. There are a dozen or so member groups in Bristol, which now includes BTF.

National Council of Volunteer Organisations <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/>

This national body for volunteer organisations provides a range of advice and training which will help us to develop a more professional approach to our Tree Champions

We have applied for membership which is free to us

References

Bristol Tree Forum – Tree Champions and Tree Giveaway Bid: 30 November 2023