



Bristol Tree Forum Annual General Meeting

Monday, 25 November 2024

Bordeaux Room, City Hall, Bristol

Agenda

1. Welcome & introductions (Mark Ashdown, Chair)

Mark introduced the meeting which approximately 21 people attended, including Councillors Eddy and Lavan. A number of apologies were received and noted. We were grateful to Councillor Andrew Varney for booking the room in City Hall for our meeting.

2. The Bristol Tree and Woodland Strategy (Richard Ennion, Horticultural Services Manager, Bristol City Council)

Richard presented the Bristol Tree and Woodland Strategy which has recently been adopted as a Bristol One City Plan. The strategy aims to increase Bristol's canopy cover from the current 18% to 20% by 2040. In addition, the strategy will ensure that Bristol's woodlands meet the "Managed for Wildlife" standard by 2030. Tree canopy is uneven through Bristol: the areas of greatest deprivation usually have the lowest canopy and the strategy intends to address this by prioritising tree planting in areas with the fewest trees.

3. The year in focus (Mark Ashdown)

A brief summary was given of some key issues during the year as follows:

A new **Draft Local Plan** was submitted to the Secretary of State in April 2024. The history of the development of the plan and the various BTF submissions is summarised [here](#). Unfortunately, the BTF contributions were largely ignored. In order to address the many flaws in the current draft, BTF submitted [a detailed statement](#) to the Planning Inspector and requested to participate in the Inspector's hearings. The local plan will shape the way that Bristol develops over the next twenty years, so it is a great shame that comments from local organisations were ignored.

Biodiversity Net Gain represents a major change in the planning process which has come into force under the new [2021 Environment Act](#). The BTF, and in particular Mark, has spent a considerable amount of time understanding the details of the new planning requirement for BNG. It is a complex issue which is not being properly implemented by the Local Planning Authority with BNG assessments often unavailable or made available at the last minute, or incorrect. There is a danger that Bristol's biodiversity will be [exported elsewhere, perhaps far from the city](#)

The South Bristol Cemetery expansion into land used by Yew Tree Farm has been an ongoing concern, due to the important trees and other biodiversity such as priority grassland on the site. A [decision was taken at the Public Health and Communities Policy Committee on 11 Oct](#)



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to scale back the expansion and instead look for extra burial capacity within the existing cemetery on the short term. In addition, alternative cemetery drainage options will be considered which do not require an attenuation pond to be built with associated pipes past important trees and replacing some of the grassland.

The nationally important collection of trees in **Bristol Zoo Gardens** is under threat from the development on the site. A judicial review has been launched. Many trees will be lost and the [development will result in a biodiversity net loss](#)

Three separate but overlapping planning Applications for **Bedminster Green** will collectively result in the loss of [84 trees](#). It has been incredibly difficult to disentangle the implications for trees as the different applications used different numbering systems, surveys and calculations for the trees. Biodiversity Net Gain calculations, if properly implemented, would require [400 replacements to be planted](#).

Canopy is a nationwide umbrella urban tree protection group with the BTF as an active participant. It has been recently established and led by groups in Haringey and Plymouth which have also witnessed tree destruction in their areas. Local groups share expertise and the BTF contributed a presentation on BNG, which is a topic other local groups are struggling to grapple with.

4. Planting woodlands and controlling invasive species - the work of Protect Earth (Phil Sturgeon)

[Protect Earth](#) is a newly-established charity which, “works with landowners, environmental organisations, and the general public to achieve an outcome that is beneficial for everyone. We help land owners plant trees on their land, and we buy degraded farmland to reforest ourselves”.

Phil showed examples of how Protect Earth works with farmers to create shelter. Protect Earth has planted 110,000 trees and 130 acres of forest.

5 The Tree Champion Network: progress, feedback and the future (led by Chis Wallace, Tree Champion Coordinator and Datasmith)

Chris introduced the work he has done improving resources for Tree Champions. A [Tree Champion page](#) provides news and a Tree Champion WhatsApp Group has been established. In March 2024 a [half day workshop](#) was held in Stoke Lodge. A further workshop is being planned for Feb 2025 to look at urban tree maintenance issues. There are still several areas of Bristol where we need local tree champions and Chris urged anyone thinking of taking on this role to get in touch.

6 Reports from Officers

John Tarlton (Treasurer) reported that at the beginning of the year the balance was £1391.90 and had dropped to £745.03 by the end of the year. As a result of the poor state of the finances



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it had been decided not to do the big tree giveaway this year. However Phil Sturgeon (Protect Earth) kindly offered to fund this project.

Chris Wallace (Tree Champion Coordinator and Datasmith) introduced the work he has done improving resources for Tree Champions. A [Tree Champion page](#) provides news and a Tree Champion WhatsApp Group has been established. In March 2024 a [half day workshop](#) was held in Stoke Lodge. A [Planning Awareness Centre](#) was developed to help tree champions identify planning applications of interest and to coordinate activities. We have been lacking on organised activities for Tree Champions which makes it difficult to retain their interest. In the coming year, training sessions on a number of aspects of our work, particularly on Biodiversity Net Gain, responding to planning applications and using the [Trees of Bristol](#) site are sorely needed. A workshop on the care of street trees is planned for February 2025. Only half of the wards have Tree Champions so recruitment is urgent and new tree champions are always welcome.

7 Update on proposed new constitution & election of Officers

During the year, the committee had made progress on updating the BTF Constitution and associated documents. However, due to concerns expressed as to whether the new draft would be appropriate, it was not proposed for adoption and more work will now be done to the draft.

Mark Ashdown has resigned as Chair: we would like to thank him for all his hard work in this role. There were no proposals for a new Chair, so this post is currently vacant. The other members of the existing committee were re-elected unopposed and unanimously: Jim Smith (Vice-chair) Vassili Papastavrou (Secretary) John Tarlton (Treasurer) Stephanie French (Planning Advisor) Chris Wallace (Datasmith)

8 No items were raised under AOB.

Vassili Papastavrou (Secretary) 09 Dec 2024