

Bristol Tree Forum Annual Meeting draft minutes

Wednesday 26th November 2025 City Hall

1. Welcome

Mark Ashdown (Acting Chair) welcomed approximately 30 participants and speakers to the meeting.

2. Urban trees, Green Infrastructure and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems

Alan Berridge and Helen Wigginton. Bristol City Council Engineering Design Team.

The presentation ([available here](#) - it's well worth taking a look) outlined various impressive urban street tree planting initiatives delivered as a part of road infrastructure changes in Bristol (e.g. active travel projects), focusing on sustainability and green spaces. Slides showed the challenges for planting new trees and retaining existing trees in hard landscape. The issues include utilities (which are not always in the places they are thought to be), active travel standards, and historic structures affecting tree planting. In addition, many of the existing large street trees have roots very near the surface causing damage to pavements: if they are to be retained in the long term, pavement and road levels sometimes need to be raised or replaced with more flexible coverings such as Flexipave.

The schemes are usually part of active travel projects which include repurposing the public realm to make it a more pleasant environment and speeding the flow of buses. The scheme nearest to the meeting is the change to Park Street and the area outside the West of England Academy but there are many others being progressed elsewhere in Bristol. In addition to the specific local schemes, various strategic corridors have been identified for tree planting and urban greening. There are multiple aspects to the work (sustainable urban drainage, air quality, biodiversity, climate change, and public health initiatives).

The work is clearly impressive. It is challenging both to retain existing trees where possible as changes are made, and to maximise opportunities for planting new trees. We appreciate the consideration given to urban street trees by the BCC Engineering Design Team.

3. Julian Hight - Britain's Ancient Trees

Julian Hight was our invited speaker - thanks Julian. He gave an excellent presentation of a lifetime on the lookout for ancient trees with some excellent photos. Julian is a Heritage and Ancient tree specialist and chairman of Ancient Tree Forum Wessex. He is also the author of a number of books including:

[Britain's Tree Story](#) - [World Tree Story and Britain's Ancient Forest, Legacy and Lore](#). [Julian's website](#) is an excellent source of further information.

The following parts of the meeting are described in more detail in the presentation which was shown to participants and is available [here](#).

4. Mark Ashdown - Review of 2025

Mark, as acting Chair, spoke briefly of some of the main events of 2025.

- The Bristol Draft Local Plan examination by the Planning Inspectorate is unfolding. The main BTF concern is that green spaces in Bristol will no longer have the statutory

protection offered by the Local Green Space Designation

- Biodiversity Net Gain -The BTF drafted the response made by the Canopy Coalition (see below) to [the Defra Consultation](#).
- Yew Tree Farm & the cemetery expansion. The BTF is pleased to hear that some of the most important trees on Yew tree Farm have now been protected by TPOs from BCC and North Somerset Councils. The cemetery expansion is now going ahead.
- Baltic Wharf. A shocking 84 trees on the site have now been destroyed, despite the fact that only 38 sites for the 162 replacement trees have been found. The money for the replacements has been contributed to the Section 106 fund but given that no more replacement sites have been found in the last year, there is no sign that the remainder (beyond the initial 38) will be planted. There is no planting date even for the first 38.
- Bristol Zoo Gardens - At the time of the AGM, the Judicial Review judgment was still awaited. However, since the AGM the judgment has come out and the JR has failed.
- The BTF contributed actively to the Brislington Meadows appeal which unfortunately failed. However the planning application has returned with an application for approval of reserved matters. In the circumstances, the BTF is still trying to ensure an optimum outcome for as many of the important veteran trees as possible.
- The BTF is contributing actively to the development of the Canopy Coalition which is a nationwide coalition of tree protection groups.

5. Chris Wallace - Tree Champion Network

Chris, who is leading the Tree Champion network, gave a summary of events in the current year and provided suggestions for activities in 2026. There are currently 25 engaged TCs and 12 disengaged. During the year we organised a half-day meeting focused on Planning Applications. In addition there are active WhatsApp groups and collaboration on small projects which include response to planning applications and other work on own tree-related projects. Two tree walks were arranged with the U3A Treehugger group at St Monica Cote Lane and the other with the public at Castle Park with Festival of Nature. For 2026, Chris proposes that we get out and meet other TCs, learn about trees; care for street trees; raise awareness of the value of the Urban Forest. In time we could become the Friends of Urban Trees Group. There are three featured projects: Tree walks (just us), Tree Sponsorships (with Trees for Streets) and Surveying Street Trees (with BCC). More information about Chris's proposals for 2026 is available in [the presentation to the meeting](#).

6. John Tarlton - 2026 Tree Giveaway

John is once again organising the Tree Giveaway which is now in its fifth year. The giveaway will be publicised in the New Year with a collection date in late February. The trees planted in previous years have been plotted on a map. Whilst they are mainly close to Bristol, planting sites include North Wales, Norfolk and Cornwall. 12,000 trees have so far been given away.

7. Treasurer's Report

John Tarlton, as Treasurer, presented the accounts for the year. In addition to some smaller donations, he drew attention to a donation of £1,000 from the Triodos Foundation and a donation from Intouch GS in recognition of our work mapping BNG sites. The balance at the end of the year was therefore healthy at £2,198

8. Adoption of new Constitution, Safeguarding Policy, joining NCVO and writing to the

Charity Commission

The [new BTF Constitution](#) which was approved by the committee in May 2025 was formally adopted by the AGM. The BTF is now an unincorporated charity. In addition the [Safeguarding Policy](#) which was approved in February 2025 was formally adopted by the AGM. It was agreed that the Secretary should apply for NCVO membership and write to the Charity Commission to explore the possibility of BTF becoming a registered Charity.

9. Election of Officers

Chair: Mark Ashdown announced that he would stand down as Acting Chair. Chris Wallace was then proposed, seconded and adopted unanimously as Chair

Vice Chair: Jim Smith agreed to stand down as vice-Chair. Mark Ashdown was then proposed, seconded and adopted unanimously as vice-Chair

Secretary: Vassili Papastavrou offered to stand as Secretary for another year and was adopted unanimously as Secretary.

Treasurer: John Tarlton offered to stand as Treasurer for another year and was adopted unanimously as Treasurer.

10.AOB

There was no AOB.

Vassili Papastavrou

Secretary

19 December 2025