

# BRISTOL TREE FORUM

## Minutes of Committee Meeting

Date:	12 February 2026
Format:	Online (Zoom)
Chair:	Chris Wallace
Minutes by:	Transcript auto generated by Zoom
Attendees:	Chris Wallace, John Tarlton (Treasurer), Vassili Papastavrou (Secretary), Mark Ashdown (Vice-Chair) Stephanie French Sophie Payne, , Luke Cooper, Gaby Solly (Arts Tree Champion), Anne Silber, Dave Jones, Dougal Matthews, Jim Smith, Lisa Sweeney

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## 1. Introductions

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The Chair welcomed attendees. Two members were introduced to the group:

- Gaby Solly – resident of Bishopston, Bristol; involved in campaigning with Bristol Tree Forum; artist; newly appointed Arts Tree Champion.
- Sophie Payne – previously based in Eastern Bristol, now residing in Fishponds; assisted with the constitution.

## 2. Information Platform Update

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Chris Wallace presented a new approach to managing and documenting Bristol Tree Forum activities using a [shared online platform](#). Key points:

- The platform allows registered members to create and edit events and projects.
- The platform currently lacks information in several areas; members were asked to contribute content relating to their own projects and activities.
- An event hosted at TDAG was noted as a useful example of using the platform to record notes on attended events

## 3. Officer Reports

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### 3.1 Treasurer's Report – John Tarlton

Current balance: £2,004.36. Movements since the last report:

- Room hire for the previous meeting: £50.00.
- Speaker fee (Julian Heights talk): £200.00.
- Donation received: £9.25 (net of Stripe commission on a £10 donation).
- New account maintenance fee: £3.00 per month.

John noted that the £3/month fee is manageable at current fund levels but should be reviewed if reserves decline. The group was cautioned against complacency given the speed at which funds can be depleted.

The bulk of existing funds were attributed to Triodos and income donated to BTF following work by Chris Wallace and Mark Ashdown on the development of the Biodiversity Gain Site - <https://bgs.bristoltrees.space/sites>.

### 3.2 Secretary's Report – Vassili Papastavrou

Vassili reflected positively on the recent Annual General Meeting, noting the quality of talks and discussion. He highlighted the attendance of representatives from Bristol City Council's Transport Department, describing them as aligned with the Forum's values. He proposed that the Forum consider creating a formal project to engage with the Transport Department more systematically.

Discussion followed regarding the Portway project, where several tree pits remain empty and risk being tarmacked over permanently. It was noted that Bristol City Council Highways maintains a map of tarmacked tree pits. John Atkinson was identified as the key contact with access to this data.

Anne Silber reported that she, Angela Truell, and Robert Griffin had been liaising with James Coleman (BCC Transport) regarding the Bedminster Bridge transport scheme, which involves the felling of several trees. The Forum succeeded in preserving one willow on the grounds that it affects the bank of the cut. Other trees on the roundabout are to be removed for visibility reasons. Angela is to forward the Council's response to Mark Ashdown and Chris Wallace. Chris Wallace suggested creating a project entry to track this matter.

## 4. Project Updates

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### 4.1 Membership: NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations)

Chris Wallace proposed that the Forum join the NCVO now that it has a constitution permitting membership. Sophie Payne confirmed the benefits include template policies, training, and events, though the organisation has experienced some internal changes in recent years. Membership is free for organisations with an income under £30,000.

Vassili Papastavrou agreed to investigate and pursue an application.

### 4.2 Membership: Open Spaces Society

Chris Wallace proposed joining the Open Spaces Society at a cost of £45 per annum. The Society has previously provided valuable support on campaigns, including the Stoke Lodge town and village green application. Mark Ashdown and Dave Jones are individual members. Dave Jones

raised a question about the Society's position on tree planting on open spaces; this was addressed and considered not to be a concern. The proposal was put to the group and approved.

### 4.3 Membership: Parks Forum

Chris Wallace reported that attending Parks Forum meetings has proved valuable, notably providing an update on the restructuring of Richard Fletcher's section at Bristol City Council. Members are encouraged to attend future meetings.

### 4.4 Conservation Advisory Panel

Mark Ashdown has been serving on Bristol City Council's Conservation Advisory Panel since mid-last year. The panel's remit covers listed buildings and historic monuments. Mark has been advocating for the recognition of trees as cultural heritage objects. He cited the Forum's argument in the Stoke Lodge CCTV planning application – that specimen trees, particularly two large Turkey Oaks, carry historic value – which was noted by the planning authority.

Mark also referenced the Heritage Trees Bill (currently stalled in the House of Lords) and the Sycamore Gap tree as examples of the need for stronger legislative protection for culturally significant trees.

### 4.5 Memberships Inventory

Chris Wallace has carried out an audit of the Forum's organisational memberships. Dougal Matthews added himself as a member of Bristol Naturalists during the meeting. Members acting on behalf of the Forum in an official capacity were asked to log those connections in the platform.

### 4.6 Social Media

Mark Ashdown manages the Forum's presence across Twitter/X, Bluesky, Threads, and LinkedIn. Chris Wallace and Sophie Payne have been added as admins on Facebook. Jane Valentine has also expressed interest in contributing. Mark indicated willingness to hand over or share administrative responsibilities should others wish to take on a more active role. Vassili Papastavrou noted the growing quality of discussions on LinkedIn and Mark's effective engagement there.

### 4.7 Tree Champion Half-Day Event

Planning is required for the next Tree Champion half-day event. Stoke Lodge was again suggested as a potential venue, contingent on finding a suitable Saturday when the venue is already open to avoid incurring caretaker costs. Chris Wallace and Stephanie are to coordinate on a date.

### 4.8 Trees of Bristol Website

Chris Wallace reported that AI bots, active while he was travelling in South Africa, exploited the Google Maps API on the Trees of Bristol website, generating an unexpected cost of £185. Security measures have since been put in place, though the risk cannot be entirely eliminated due to the large number of pages the site generates.

The group agreed that the cost should be borne by the Forum rather than by Chris Wallace personally, as it was an unforeseen and industry-wide problem. John Tarlton raised the question of future prevention; Chris noted that switching to OpenStreetMap from Google Maps is one option but would involve significant development work. The website is running within free usage limits this month.

#### **4.9 Volunteering with Bristol City Council**

After two years of negotiation, Bristol City Council has indicated willingness to offer training for Tree Champions to survey trees and carry out minor works in open spaces (though not on streets due to safety concerns). Helen Humphreys (BCC) confirmed two training sessions will be offered – one in May and one in September. Chris Wallace is hoping to invite Helen to the April meeting to present the scheme.

#### **4.10 Beuys' Acorns – Art Project (Gaby)**

Gaby presented the Beuys' Acorns project by artist duo Ackroyd & Harvey. The project is inspired by Joseph Beuys' 1982 work 7,000 Oaks in Kassel, Germany, in which basalt stones were placed in the city and removed one by one as oak trees were planted.

Ackroyd & Harvey have grown saplings from acorns collected from those original Kassel oaks and are planting circles of seven oaks in partnership with cultural institutions across the UK (including in London, Richmond, Norwich, and Surrey Hills; with Kew Gardens, Manchester, and others in discussion). Bristol has been proposed as a future planting site.

Key immediate requirement: the saplings (approximately 2 metres tall) must be moved from Surrey to a holding location in Bristol before the end of March, as they will otherwise exceed the size limit permitted for movement out of the Oak Processionary Moth protected zone.

Gaby noted that Avon Needs Trees may be able to assist with finding a foster site. John Tarlton offered contacts from the tree giveaway scheme who have land and may be able to provide temporary hosting. The group brainstormed potential permanent planting sites, including outside City Hall, Ashton Court, and Bennett's Patch/White's Paddock (Avon Wildlife Trust). A circle of approximately 17 metres in diameter is required. Planting is envisaged for November/December this year or early next year.

#### **4.11 Festival of Nature (FoN)**

The deadline for event proposals to the Festival of Nature is 2nd March. A tree walk similar to last year's successful Castle Park walk was discussed, but the chair expressed a preference for something more ambitious and thematically aligned with the Forum's objectives – for example, a walk exploring the challenges of urban tree planting, or an event raising public consciousness about tree politics in the city.

Gaby suggested a canopy experience (e.g., a ropewalk or elevated platform) as an innovative option. Public liability insurance would need to be in place; Vassili Papastavrou is to check the renewal date. Luke Cooper noted that Parks volunteers who have completed the relevant health and safety training may be covered under the park's insurance, subject to age restrictions. A placeholder event entry will be submitted if no specific proposal emerges in time.

#### **4.12 Tree Giveaway – John Tarlton**

Since 2020, the Forum has given away over 12,000 saplings. This year, six species are offered: oak, grey alder, hawthorn, hornbeam, beech, and crab apple (reduced from 13 species last year to simplify logistics).

Approximately 2,200 requests have been received. The giveaway has been rescheduled from the weekend of 21st February to the first weekend of March, as John is scheduled for a long-awaited medical procedure on 20th February. Trees will be delivered to John's home the preceding week and distributed from there.

The giveaway request window is now to be closed; Mark Ashdown was asked to update the website accordingly. John will reach out if assistance is needed with packing, and the group volunteered to help.

Discussion included the possibility of emailing past recipients to request photographs of their trees, for use as publicity material. John confirmed this is feasible as all contact details are held on spreadsheets. The group noted that survival/establishment rates are unknown and flagged research suggesting that a small charge may improve establishment rates. The Forum's donations button was noted as the mechanism for those wishing to contribute.

#### **4.13 Trees for Streets**

Work is continuing with Liz Barker of Trees for Streets. Bristol is noted as the only city actively engaging citizens in promoting the tree sponsorship scheme. The Forum has mapped all available sponsorship sites. Jane Valentine is developing joint publicity materials for the scheme. The initial pilot ward will be Hartcliffe, working with local councillor Tom Raynard. A further update and the auditing of trees planted under the scheme three years ago will be discussed at the April Tree Champion meeting.

#### **4.14 Tree Walks Programme**

The first tree walk of the new programme takes place this Sunday in St Andrews Park, with nine attendees registered via Eventbrite. Liz Barker may also attend. The walks are intended to function as both social events and purposeful engagements with specific tree-related themes. Anne Silber and Angela have proposed a walk in Totterdown. Chris Wallace will provide feedback at the next meeting. The walks are currently open to Tree Champions; future walks may be opened to FOSAP members and the wider public.

### **5. Planning and Policy Matters**

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#### **5.1 Bristol Local Plan**

Mark Ashdown provided a status update. The Planning Inspectors have completed their public examination and have recommended a series of main modifications to the draft Local Plan. The Council is expected to publish a revised version for consultation.

The key concern for the Forum is that the original proposal to designate approximately 176 sites as Local Green Spaces (LGS) – affording them protection equivalent to Green Belt land – has been abandoned following Inspector criticism. The Council has replaced LGS designation

with a lower-tier 'Protected Open Space' or 'Reserved Open Green Space' category, which provides weaker protection and allows developers to apply for development if land is deemed surplus to open space need.

Mark has written to key councillors, including Jenny Bartle (Green Party), who responded without addressing the substantive concerns raised. The current administration is considered unlikely to reverse its position. Mark noted that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is also under revision; the consultation closes in early March. Under the proposed NPPF, only land with LGS designation will have meaningful protection from development pressure.

John Tarlton noted that he recorded an interview on the issue for the One Love, One Planet programme, which generated significant listener concern. The group agreed that once the formal re-consultation is published (expected to include a six-week period), the Forum must respond to the new wording on protected open space, which is a new modification and therefore open to comment.

## **5.2 Baltic Wharf**

John Tarlton shared video footage of trees being felled at Baltic Wharf, illustrating how rapidly green spaces can be cleared. The felling is done; attention is now focused on enforcing the planning condition requiring 162 replacement trees.

John reported that the Council has produced a map purporting to identify 12,000 potential tree planting sites within a one-mile radius of Baltic Wharf. However, this document is considered to be without evidential basis – it includes tree pits marked on bridges and other unsuitable locations with no ground-truthing. The document appears to have originated from a university research exercise.

The chair of the Economy and Skills Committee has publicly cited this map as evidence that replacement trees can be found, accepting the Council's position uncritically. John has submitted a formal complaint to the Council regarding the conduct of the replacement tree process and the accuracy of the document. Mark Ashdown has additionally complained that tree protection barriers around the remaining trees at Baltic Wharf have been removed, with piling and concrete work proceeding up against those trees.

The Forum's position is that tree replacement should be a planning condition, as was the case with the Metrobus/Avon Crescent application, so that compliance can be formally monitored and enforced.

## **5.3 Stoke Lodge**

Stephanie provided an update on two concurrent issues relating to Stoke Lodge:

- **Local damage:** During the erection of a fence by Cotham School, excavation was carried out amongst the root zones of trees with Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), including mixing concrete in the holes. The Council's planning department inspected the following day and found no evidence of damage – a finding the Forum considers inadequate, given that tree damage from root disturbance typically manifests over years, not days.

- Legal breach: Under planning law, any works within the root protection area of TPO trees require a planning application and an arboricultural method statement. The Council chose not to require a planning application from Cotham School, which Stephanie considers contrary to law, noting that the relevant legislation uses the word 'must'.

Stephanie has submitted written questions and complaints to the Economy and Skills Policy Committee on multiple occasions, receiving responses from the same officers responsible for the decisions in question. A statement has been submitted for the Monday meeting of the Economy and Skills Committee. Mark Ashdown has referred the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman.

## 6. Any Other Business

- Tree stakes: John Tarlton requested approval to purchase additional small square-section tree stakes for future guerrilla planting activities. Approved by the meeting.
- Platform reminder: Chris Wallace reminded all registered users of Trees of Bristol to add content to existing project entries and create new ones as appropriate, to improve documentation and shared understanding of the Forum's work.
- Tree walk this Sunday: Members were reminded of the St Andrews Park walk. Dougal Matthews indicated his intention to attend.

## 7. Action Points

Responsible	Action
Vassili Papastavrou	Investigate and complete application to join the NCVO.
Chris Wallace	Complete application to join the Open Spaces Society (£45 fee approved).
Vassili Papastavrou	<a href="#">To engage with BCC Transport Department.</a>
Angela / Anne Silber	Forward BCC Transport response (Bedminster Bridge) to Mark Ashdown and Chris Wallace.
Chris Wallace	<a href="#">Create a project to track the Bedminster Bridge tree felling matter.</a>
Chris Wallace &	Coordinate on a date for the next Tree Champion half-day event.

Responsible	Action
<b>Stephanie</b>	
<b>Chris Wallace</b>	Implement further safeguards for the Trees of Bristol website to limit future AI bot API costs.
<b>Chris Wallace</b>	Invite Helen Humphreys (BCC) to present the Tree Champion training scheme at the April meeting.
<b>Gaby Solly</b>	Await response from Avon Needs Trees re: temporary foster site for Beuys' Acorns saplings. Report back to Forum.
<b>All members</b>	Consider suitable permanent planting sites for the Beuys' Acorns circle (~17m diameter) in Bristol.
<b>Mark Ashdown</b>	Close the tree giveaway request window on the website.
<b>John Tarlton</b>	Email past tree giveaway recipients requesting photographs of their trees for use as publicity material.
<b>All members</b>	Submit proposals for a Festival of Nature event by 2nd March. Chris Wallace to submit a placeholder if needed.
<b>Vassili Papastavrou</b>	Check expiry date of public liability insurance and arrange renewal before the Festival of Nature.
<b>Mark Ashdown</b>	Send a copy of the Baltic Wharf tree planting map (Section 106) to Chris Wallace for the project record.
<b>Mark Ashdown</b>	Continue to monitor and respond to the Local Plan re-consultation when published.
<b>All members</b>	<a href="#">Review proposed NPPF changes</a> and submit comments before early March consultation deadline.
<b>John Tarlton</b>	Purchase replacement tree stakes for guerrilla planting (approved).

Responsible	Action
All members	Add content to the <a href="#">Trees of Bristol project platform</a> , particularly for projects not yet documented.

– End of Minutes –