

Note for others interested in street tree replanting.

Tree Replanting Project 2019 - 21 Bathwick Estate Residents Association (BERA)

Aim of this note

To help inform and encourage other Residents Associations/interested groups to plant street trees in their areas - making them more attractive places to live, encouraging interest in environmental issues, and reducing pollution.

Introduction

Bathwick Estate roads were planted with mostly pollarded Limes and Crab apple trees. Over time about 30 trees have been lost. BERA decided to engage in replanting to restore the ambience the trees afforded the neighbourhood and this note covers the challenges and issues we encountered.

We feel there has been a dramatic mindset change recently regarding trees due to heightened awareness of the vulnerability of the planet. This is evidenced by government and local administrations making commitments to achieving carbon neutrality and ecological enhancement. Due to this, now is the most favourable time for many decades to implement tree planting projects.

Process

In our experience, having a residents' representative is needed to encourage and gain neighbourhood support. The residents' representative holds a position of trust in the neighbourhood and helps set the terms, strategy, and boundaries of the project locally, and does the work of liaising with residents and Council representatives to deliver the project.

This requires considerable perseverance. We believe that a representative gets better traction if they are acting on behalf of the local Residents' Association - we feel this reassures residents that there is a genuine consensus behind the initiative as opposed to a non-appointed resident canvassing for trees and possibly being seen as a self-interested 'busy-body'.

Funding

In our case the local representative was a volunteer and therefore not a cost.

BathNES Council has some money allocated for tree planting but not enough to do everything it would like. In addition, the Council also holds Section 106 money. Section 106 funds are generally ring fenced for a specific purpose and geographical location. Section 106 funding has been superseded by Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding. Both of these are a local tax on developers to mitigate the impact of a development on amenities/services, or to provide needed facilities in the local area.

External Funding - urban tree planting isn't as consistently funded as rural tree planting (ie Forestry Commission woodland creation schemes etc.) and funding from government for urban trees is released sporadically. Consequently we have to

ensure that schemes which are not immediately deliverable can be banked and applied for when funding is found/released.

We believe the BathNES area can benefit from being within '*The Forest of Avon Community Forest*' which will direct government money to target urban and rural tree planting priorities.

Bathwick Estate Experience

Location

The Estate is bounded by Bathwick Street, Beckford Road, the railway and the Avon River. It contains a mix of flats and houses, row, detached and semis, about 400 dwellings on seven roads.

Parking on pavements is an issue mainly on Forester Avenue and Rockcliffe Road. Forester Road is the main and rather grand straight entry/exit road, and Rockcliffe Avenue is similarly wide and slopes up to the east giving a view of Bath.

As the estate does not have a through road, it is relatively traffic free and self-contained. It has many long-standing residents, including families with young children who walk to school. Working from home has increased during Covid. The Bathwick Boatman Restaurant, and the Boating Station are popular.

Project Sponsor

BERA, the Residents Association sponsored the project (not financially), working with BathNES Council. It is helpful to have a sponsor acting objectively to provide guidance, support, act as a sounding board, and to help resolve issues should they arise.

Plantings/Species

The initial aim was to replant the missing 30 trees but during the project we added additional sites to achieve more complete coverage.

A pilot planting of 8 trees went in April 2019 and the main planting of 44 trees in February 2021 making a total of 52. With the existing 66 trees (about 60% lime, 15% cherry, 15% crab apple, and 10% rowan), the Estate now has a total of 118 trees.

The idea of the pilot was to see if we could work with the Council, and because we appreciated that issues would likely arise which we had not anticipated. The pilot planting consisted of flowering cherry and hawthorn, chosen to be similar to species already in the locations where they were to be planted.

For the main (and much larger) planting I got somewhat carried away with the idea that the trees will be there for a very long time, and so all aspects should be given much more in-depth consideration.

Broadly the question is, '*Which tree goes where*' in order to get the best, '*Look of the street*'. In addition to wanting a good layout, ie a pleasing visual spacing, I wanted a mix of tree types giving a variety of blossom colours, scents, leaf size, shape, colour, and autumn colour.

But reality is rather harsh! Not all tree species grow well in a street environment, and they all have their height, canopy width, root spread characteristics, time to maturity, and disease susceptibility. The net result was that we ended up with a more limited list of tried and tested species as follows

Tree species (main planting)

1. Upright Hawthorn *Crataegus mono* 'Stricta'
2. Turkish Hazel, *Corylus colurna*
3. Pyramid Hornbeam *Betula pend* 'fastigiata'
4. Upright Cherry *Prunus sargentii* 'Rancho'
5. Flowering Crab apple *Malus baccata* 'Street Parade'
6. Field Maple *Acer camp* Streetwise
7. Ornamental Cherry *Prunus* 'Spire'
8. Mountain Ash *Sorbus auc* 'Sheerwater seedling'

Five of each were ordered.

Birch was added where supply not available.

Trees may have a significant public health benefit by reducing fine particulate pollution, adding to the value of trees which can be easily undersold as visual amenity. The best trees for air quality are those with hairy leaves like birch and the BBC has a good programme explaining this.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1m0KylS04ZqwcsWP5Q8MQQq/the-big-air-pollution-experiment>

Planning/Managing

Perseverance and common sense are needed to ensure a smooth project. It will take time (in our case three years) – so be prepared to commit to the long haul. However as the rate of tree planting project implementation is currently accelerating rapidly, it could well be shorter. Trees can only be planted in autumn/early spring and if a window is missed then there's a delay until the next one.

Liaison with residents.

We chose to liaise (talk to and leaflet) residents with a suitable planting location outside their house, contacting some 40 – 50 households, often several/many times. This was about 75% of the work, and it took a long time – most liaison was in this setup stage, but liaison continued throughout the project with a steady stream of questions as more people came 'on board'.

Most residents took the view, *'That's great, fine with me, yes, please just get on and do it'*, but there were a significant proportion with a preference, eg who wanted the tree to *'obscure the view we don't like'*, *'not obscure a view we do like'*, *'to be on the*

boundary between houses', plus the usual 'husband wants it/wife doesn't', type of issues. There were a few unexpected and strongly expressed views mostly around personal parking issues, but these may not be experienced in your area as parking pressure may be lower.

It is important to set such issues in context. 90% of residents consulted were not just 'neutral' or 'pleased', but extremely positive and very grateful that trees were going in to enhance the neighbourhood that we all share.

The Council Officer on the project with long experience of public engagement re tree planting/issues (who supplied the following italics) found a *'remarkably high level of positivity and feels this comes down to the allegiance the representative of the Residents Association has with the residents in the neighbourhood'*. He felt that, *'A council officer would not get this level of positive traction. It was also an unexpected outcome of this initiative that a huge amount of community cohesion was created around the trees and the empathy that came from tree planting narratives'*.

Pits

Pit cutting and edging is done by a contractor, paid for and managed by the Council. Trees go into pits 70x60cm cut in the pavement, ie 60cm back from the curb inside edge and 70cm along it, they are then staked and caged (outer edge of cage set to the inside edge of the curb) for support and protection against cars and vandalism. The remaining available pavement must be 1.2m wide or more so that pedestrians and buggies can pass easily.

Depth – pits should be cleaned out to 50cm or deeper if there is rubble present. It's important to remove obstacles to growth as deep as necessary.

Soil is usually required to make up for the rubble removed and to make a fertile soil volume to support growth. This 'brought in' soil was a mix of topsoil made up for trees.

Stakes need to be high enough - to shoulder level - to support the tree, and stays attached from the top of the stake to the tree to prevent whip/damage in wind. We sustained some chafing in the pilot planting with trees rubbing on the cage edges.

Cages are about 6' tall which helps to protect against car damage and vandalism. It's important to ensure top growth doesn't chafe on, or grow out through, the cage. They need to be about 60cm diameter and set to the inner edge of the pavement to deter car wheels coming close alongside and causing soil compaction around the tree base.

Other factors

a) Old tree locations may be impractical to replant due to large roots from previous trees still being present. If the tree died of something, the site may be problematic.

b) Tree root access downwards is surprisingly restricted due to the concrete foundations of both the road curb itself and the new pit edging. These foundations make the 'window for downward rooting' surprisingly limited.

Note: trees are more 'wine glass shaped' than is generally appreciated, meaning that while roots do grow down, they fan out to horizontal rapidly – but they need to get down under the pit edging to do that.

c) Utilities/services – the position of services on location maps seems to usually be ‘indicative’, i.e. street maps are often not very accurate (to within a few feet or more) and contractors have to take care. We hit an unexpectedly shallow gas supply.

Planting

Planting is done by a Council team, paid for and managed by the Council. Trees come in at 10 - 12cm circumference, and usually 3 - 4m high, and ‘bare rooted’. This size of tree with ‘bare roots’ (ie not in a container) will have suffered the loss of much of its smaller roots when it was dug up – so will desperately need watering until it’s fine root system re-establishes.

Last minuters

Two requests were made at the very end of planting from residents who wanted to be included, and we just had enough time to supply their request for a tree outside each of their houses.

Maintenance

While the trees planted are owned by the Council, residents are very much involved. In the first year water each tree with two buckets every week, and in dry spells two buckets every few days – and water whenever the soil around the base looks dry of course. (Some have asked if overwatering is possible, answer ‘no’, water will drain away). Putting a good volume on each time is essential to encourage roots grow down - *little and often* watering is not sufficient.

In the pilot stage with eight trees, watering was shared by neighbours, and all trees established well. But a more formal commitment is needed because I never knew if watering had actually been done.

We hope to achieve establishment of all the 44 trees (main planting), but in a more organized way – by allocating a “carer” to each tree, someone who will water and take responsibility for it. Residents seem keen to take this on, involve children and take pride and “ownership” of trees outside or near their homes.

Tree carers need to look out for browning of leaf edges - which means water stress. In the second year, monitor, and water if needed. After that they should be sufficiently established and just need an eye kept on them.

To help this along, trees have been labelled on the cages with horizontal laminated labels, each containing one of eight tree positive messages. On the label front there’s a space for ‘*Cared for by No. xx*’. People/families keen to help maintain them have their house number and or names displayed on the label. On the back the species’ common name is handwritten, and the label attached to the tree’s cage (see example in rolling pics on the website, see below). Hopefully labelling in this way will encourage involvement, ensure watering, and get the tree established. Once the labels went up I received requests from residents and children who also wanted to be involved too, great! In some cases, local children took up the watering outside an older person’s house – using their garden tap and watering cans. Most trees are now allocated.

Residents can be encouraged to plant up around tree bases. In our case several ‘guerrilla gardeners’ have planted snowdrops, crocuses, small daffodils and primulas around the bases of the new trees which looks wonderful. Hollyhocks which already grow around existing trees will appear later in the year, and three volunteers are

helping to trim the existing lime trees and will help to look after all trees in future, eg adjust holding straps, weed at base, and ensure branches don't chafe on cages etc.

Press coverage/promotion

Keeping a photo record of pictures taken during the project stages is recommended, for personal and press use. Make a note of which pictures are cleared (ie permission given by those in the pics) for use in the press.

At the project's completion, the three local radio stations and maybe five local press outlets gave us coverage – an opportunity which we used to encourage listeners/readers to consider planting in their own situations.

Subsequently we reported on the project to promote tree planting at a meeting of FoBRA (the Federation of Bath Residents Associations) which in turn led to a Zoom briefing where those interested in planting in their areas could learn more. About six representatives attended some of whom now have tree projects underway.

The future across all of BathNES

1. The main objective of this note is to encourage others to 'get planting'. We want to share (above) what we've learnt, and to encourage everyone to take a look and see what's practicable their area and then to get on and do it!
2. There is an encouraging level of support and expertise available from the Council which makes tree replanting a practical proposition and not just in Bath, but across the whole of BathNES's 136 square miles.
3. This is a great opportunity to take proactive steps towards a cleaner, greener living environment at a time when many of us feel powerless in the face of climate emergency.

Tree planting makes a real contribution which will pay huge dividends for the future of our planet.

Best Wishes and Happy Planting!

Alasdair

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27 April 2021. © Alasdair Barron

Post event comments

Coming into this project, we had little experience to go on. Hopefully others can benefit from our experience in this document to help them achieve their objectives more easily.

Some ideas for further consideration follow.

1. Use a). 'every house leafleting', followed by b). personal discussion with householders with a proposed tree location outside. This might reduce liaison time somewhat, but more importantly by informing everyone it should help to get all residents on board, and in the early stages of planning. This should make the project

easier in the long run. There needs to be a deadline date included by which comments need to be submitted.

2. Form a small, committed team to share the work, of maybe four people who are *'in for the duration'* each of whom can make decisions for the group.

3. 'Lift up cages. Currently, cages are stapled to the tree support posts. To facilitate the weeding needed in the future, it would be helpful to have a way of fixing so that cages could be lifted. Eg cages could be secured by two hook bolts, and then lifted to sit on the same bolts to give a gap at the base, weeded, and then moved back to ground level.

4. Think about press coverage. Yes, it's nice to have a completed project, but use that opportunity to encourage others to get planting.

5. The Council is currently writing a 'Tree and Woodland Delivery Plan', this will identify the priorities for tree planting, which the Council will focus resources on.

Ends