

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

Aim of this note

To 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 once planted with lime trees and over time about 30 trees had been lost. BERA decided to engage in replanting, and this note covers the challenges and issues encountered.

There has been a dramatic mindset change regarding trees due to heightened awareness of the vulnerability of the planet. National Government and local administrations have made commitments to achieving carbon neutrality and ecological enhancement. Because of this, now is the most favourable time for many decades to implement tree planting projects.

Process

A local process owner is needed to set the terms, strategy, and boundaries of the project locally, and to do the work of liaising with residents and Council representatives to deliver the project. This requires considerable perseverance.

Funding

In our case the local process owner was a volunteer, and therefore not a cost. BERA were fortunate in that our funding came from Section 106 funds that were still available. Section 106 funds are generally ring fenced to a specific purpose and geographical location. Section 106 funding has been superseded by Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding. This is a tax on developers to mitigate or provide needed facilities as a consequence or condition of the granting of a development planning permission.

The current situation is that urban tree planting isn't funded like rural tree planting (ie Forestry Commission woodland creation schemes etc.) and funding from government is released sporadically. Schemes not immediately deliverable can be banked and applied for when funding is found/released.

There is increasing amounts of external funding available and we can benefit from being within 'The Forest of Avon Community Forest' who will direct government money to target these and other regional priorities. The Council is also considering a tree sponsorship scheme for members of the public and business/corporates to pay for trees where money is not available.

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 giving a view of north Bath.

As the estate is self-contained and does not have a through road, it is relatively traffic free. It has many long-standing residents, including families with young children who walk to school, and parents many of whom will increasingly work from home. The Bathwick Boatman Restaurant, Boating station, and B&Bs are popular.

Project Sponsor

BERA, the Residents Association sponsored the project, working with BathNES Council. It is helpful to have a sponsor, rather than acting independently, 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 for 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 added where supply not available.

Apparently trees have a significant public health benefit by reducing fine particulate pollution. Therefore the value of trees 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/1m0KyIS04ZqwcsWP5Q8MQQq/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 rapidly accelerating, 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 times. This was about 75% of the work, and it took a long time – most liaison was in this set up stage, but liaison continued throughout the project as a steady stream of questions continued 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.

It is important to set such issues in context. 90% of those 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.

Pits

Pit cutting and edging is done by a contractor, and managed by the Council. Trees go into pits 70x60cm cut in the pavement 60cm back from the curb, and 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 or more so that pedestrians and buggies can pass easily.

Pit depth is 40cm, but in practice deeper would be better since if there is still much road building rubble at that depth. So it's important to clean the hole out further if needed.

Additional soil is usually required to make up for the rubble removed and to make a good soil pit 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. Cages are about 6' tall which helps to protect against car damage and vandalism. It's important to ensure top growth doesn't chafe or grow out through the grill. 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 present.
- b) Tree root access downwards is surprisingly restricted due to the concrete foundations for both the road curb itself, and for the new pit edging. So the 'window for downward rooting' is surprisingly limited.
- c) Utilities/services – the position of services on location maps seems to usually be 'indicative', ie street maps are often not very accurate and contractors have to take care.

Planting

Planting is done by a Council team, managed by the Council. Trees come in at 10 - 12cm circumference, and usually 3 - 4m high.

Maintenance

In the first year water two buckets every two weeks in summer, and in a hot dry spell two buckets every week. This is essential to encourage roots grow down. 'Little and often' watering is not helpful.

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

We hope to achieve establishment of all the 44 trees just planted, but in a more organized way – probably by allocating a "champion" 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 “champions” 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.

Trees will be labelled up with Common and Latin names, and with a second label for carers, eg ‘*Cared for by ...*’. Families keen to help maintain them can have their names on the label, and hopefully labelling in this is a way will encourage such involvement.

Residents can be encouraged to plant up around tree bases. In our case a ‘guerilla gardener’ has 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.

Press coverage

The three local radio stations and maybe five local press outlets covered the project’s completion – an opportunity which we used to encourage listeners/readers to consider planting in their own situations.

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 for use in the press.

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 much more practical proposition, and not just in Bath, but across the whole of BathNES and everywhere else for that matter!
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

Contacts

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Post event comments

Coming into this project, we had little experience to go on. Hopefully others can improve on this base level! Some ideas for further consideration follow.

1. Use 'every house leafleting', followed by 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.
2. Form a small committed team to share the work, 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 due course, 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 it 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 and the Council will focus resources on these priorities, ie it will reshape planting opportunities – and maybe increase the opportunity – in due course.

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