

Street Tree Management by BCC

The following is the text of an email sent by Richard Ennion of Bristol Parks to the Vice-Chair of the BPF on 18th April 2008:

Hugh,

You wanted me to respond to the BEP article on Wednesday, so that you could brief the Parks Forum on Saturday.

Firstly, the subject of the article is not new. I was not asked by the BEP to comment on the article.

We (BCC) will make a statement early next week (when Russell and Josie are in the office - to give me some facts and figures about of tree planting programme - with existing resources).

The criticism in the article is:

- a) that the council is cutting down all the over-mature street trees
- b) that it is not replanting felled street trees
- c) they council is not taking this seriously enough and is not doing enough about it

On our web site is a 'frequently asked questions' about the management of trees by the council - which hopefully usefully gives some useful background for anyone interested in detail - the paper does set out the problem and what the council is doing about it.

See:

<http://www.bristol.gov.uk/ccm/content/Environment-Planning/Parks-and-open-spaces/tree-fsis/bristol-city-council-tree-management-faq.en>

In response:

Headlines

1. The Council increases its Street Tree Maintenance budget by £100,000 from April 2008
2. The Council is committed to planting more trees and has created a Trees for Bristol post (Josie Sadler started January 2008) - to generate income from private donations and from business, plus to co-ordinate BCC tree planting programme, including consultation with residents and high profile public tree planting events
3. The Council Supported the formation of a Tree Forum - which needs to debate the problems and work together to seek solutions
4. The council has an ongoing project to undertake a comprehensive survey of all council owned trees - creating costed management programmes by portfolio (eg trees in education sites, trees on housing land, trees in parks) - includes tree planting budgets

Some detail:

1. We are not cutting down all the over-mature trees. The fact is that many of our street trees are old and are coming towards the end of their useful life (decay, disease largely). Because the age-structure of street trees is uneven with many more old trees than young trees then the percentage loss in any one year is disproportionately high. There is only so much I can do about this inherited age-structure - I can't make the trees any younger. We can either keep trees longer (only so far you can go with this - as eventually they die or become dangerous), or plant more trees to replace the loss. We are also losing trees due to subsidence claims which we fight hard to avoid, but until case law changes or government steps in we are in a very weak position.

2. No, we are not planting enough new street trees. I have advised the council of this and sought additional resources to address the problem. As you know a budget amendment was put forward by the Liberals for £200,000 for tree planting, but this was not successful. However, an additional £100,000 per year (50% budget increase to £290,000 per year) was agreed from 1 April. The BEP article says that this is for tree planting - I would like it to be, but we need to improve the maintenance of our existing trees - largely moving from a 4-year cycle to a 3-year cycle of pruning - because residents are suffering from street trees touching their houses before we re-prune (and these much larger trees make properties more susceptible to subsidence in high risk areas). My main response to getting more trees planted is via Josie Sadler as the Trees for Bristol Officer. BCC having a tree planting officer puts us well ahead of many local authorities. Josie is working on a marketing plan to generate income from private donations and from business - we believe that there is good money out there to help the council make neighbourhoods better by planting trees on public land. Josie has three parts to her job: marketing, logistics and community. I can only afford her for 3-days a week, so her capacity is limited. Josie's marketing plan will come to the Tree Forum and I want a high profile launch by the council - with a really good web page - again Josie is working on this.

3. We are losing trees to development. Policies in the local plan are there to protect trees, but other competing priorities can mean that the development is allowed. Under these circumstances we seek compensatory planting within the development site or immediately off-site if there is no alternative. Where council owned trees are affected by development we claim the asset value of the tree and use this money to plant more trees: we have brought in around £80k over the past few years.

4. The Tree Forum will be an important means to identify the problems and seek solutions. I expect the Tree Forum will have a important role in influencing council policy.

Richard