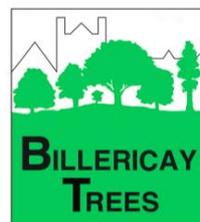


Billericay Tree Warden News-sheet for December 2020

Here's hoping that we, and our households, get through Christmas and into the New Year all Covid-19 free. What 2021 holds for us all, with respect the pandemic is an unknown. However, the vaccines that are soon to be on stream may hold the key to it.



Conserving Our Tree Heritage
In association with Billericay Town Council

Planting Projects – Adjacent Norsey Wood.

Planting projects have been altered and rescheduled several times by Covid-19 lockdown and other unforeseen reasons. However, they are going ahead. Pictured here are Nathan and Neil planting 10 “standard” trees, a mixture of Oak and Horse Chestnut, spread out alongside the Outwood Common Road adjacent to Norsey Wood. The Norsey Wood Society is to plant a hedge mix between the “standards” and then go on to plant up their Norsey Meadow project with an additional hedge mix. It has long been recognized that this edge of farmland location will greatly benefit from a planting project; for both wildlife and for the aesthetic value. One of Nathan's neighbours kindly donated several of the “standards”. Please note that social distancing was observed throughout!



Barleylands

Covid-19 lockdown rules strikes again but we are not defeated. Nathan is leading a team of six on Saturday the 5th December for another planting project at Barleylands. We hope to plant a hedge mix of c.420 “whips” kindly supplied by the Woodland Trust (WT). “**National Tree Week**” is from the 28th November to the 6th December!

South Green

We are to plant two “standard” Maple trees on the Village Green funded by their Village Council.

Mountnessing Roadside + The “Hill” at Mountnessing Hall Farm & Cowbridge Wood

The serious drought that we experienced this spring has taken its toll on the Mountnessing roadside planting that we carried out in February. Nathan is to replace the “whips” where necessary. And we are providing Mountnessing Hall Farm with enough “whips” to replace those that failed to thrive on the “Hill”. Nathan is also to replace the “whips” at the Cowbridge Wood project that had also suffered in the drought.

Lake Meadows – The Lions Club of Billericay

With reference to the Elm tree project at Lake Meadows that was generously funded by the Lions Club, one of the seven trees planted had died. So the Lions Club has provided extra funds for a replacement Elm. Needless to say, the Lions, along with other charities, have not been able to fundraise this year for obvious reasons but this has not deterred them. We thank the Lions Club for their support.

Future Planting

Despite the problems of the ongoing Covid-19 lockdown, we are hoping to continue with more substantial planting projects in March of 2021. Planting what we can, when we can, in the right place.

Investigations – The more relevant ones are listed below:-

The Minstead along the Deerbank saga continues - One of our members noticed that the Developer had moved his property boundary to his advantage. Only by a small amount but enough to include at least two mature trees. Now this is risky as trees in a private garden, unless with a TPO, can be felled without permission. However the Tree Protection plan in the Planning Portal (19/00154/FULL) does indicate that the mature trees are to be protected. So we are to inform the BBC that we expect ALL the mature trees within the Minstead

property to be given TPO status and point out that the boundary has been slightly extended. Border disputes can be notorious to resolve as it can involve Land Surveyors, lawyers if not a mediator – Presumably, a Local Authority would normally be reluctant to pursue such an issue unless it is of a blatant nature. Also, there is laurel hedge planting bordering Minstead along the entrance path to Norsey Wood. Planting of a native shrub species would have been more appropriate. So we are to inform the BBC with all of these issues.

Felled Oak – Mill Road – South Green

Two of our Tree Warden members came across this incident on 1st November 2020. The tree, to our eyes, had been on an Essex County Council (ECC) green verge. This incident has not been resolved as to why it was felled. The Basildon Borough Council (BBC) informed us that the tree had not been the subject of a TPO and advised us to contact the Essex County Council! But as ECC staff are working from home due to the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, they cannot access their Highway records that are based at their Head Office in Chelmsford. So we await the result of their researches.

We have experienced this problem before whereby trees on ECC land are owned by them but their maintenance is down to the BBC. And it is clear, that the ECC and the BBC, with regards tree issues, are reluctant to liaise with each other. It's probably a logic that is only fully understood by those in County Hall.



Waitrose Car Park

We were alerted to a call that there was Tree Surgeon company operating in the Waitrose car park. The store had called them in for some H&S work. Several trees had their deadwood removed but their canopy profiles remained much the same. However two Sweet Chestnuts had been very tightly pruned. This is a species of tree that can be pruned harshly and will quickly recover by producing vibrant leaf coverage the following spring. They are very good for attracting wildlife. Superstores are mindful of litigation brought on by slippery leaves on the tarmac and damage to car paintwork by falling branches. The Tree Surgeons had the right paperwork that had been generated by an independent arboricultural company. The trees were not of TPO status.

Lesley Mitchelmore

Lesley Mitchelmore has recently stepped down from her BTC duties as a Councillor due to her full-time work commitments and other time pressures. We take this opportunity to thank Lesley, in her role as representing the BTC, for her invaluable help at Council level in the early days of the BTW. Lesley then arranged a meeting between Neil and myself to discuss and flesh out the basics as to how our group should best function. It was advice that we still adhere to today. And along with fellow representatives of the BTW, Lesley was present when there was a gathering of concerned residents outside of Frith Wood, an Ancient Woodland, to protest about the then planned Relief Road that was to encroach across its northwest corner.

Norsey Wood Local Nature Reserve:-

Some of you may already know that Wildlife Ranger Chris Huggins has recently retired. Norsey Wood was not the only reserve that he was responsible for in the Borough and due to severe cutbacks in the past, was mostly denied staff to share the workload. The Mill Meadows Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and the Queen's Park Country Park (QPCP) managed as an area for wildlife and Vange Hill were also his responsibility. Achieving the long-term delicate ecological balance of managing the Redpoll cattle that go to enhance a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) that is Mill Meadows was one achievement of many. Chris also chaired the "Basildon Wildlife & Countryside Forum" (BW&CF) from its inception many years ago to the present day.

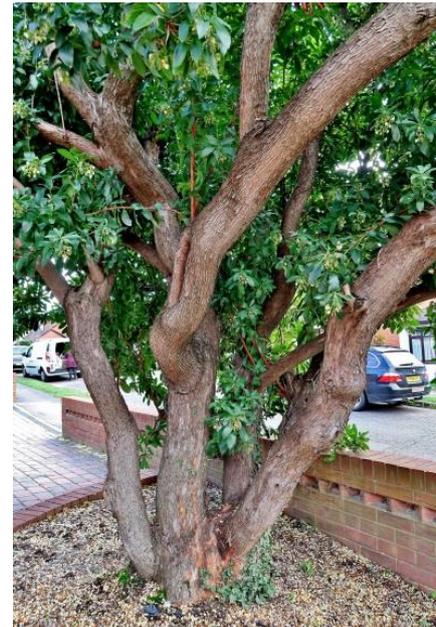
And it was at one of these meetings, in the early days of discussing the Local Plan from 2012 onwards, that the idea of forming a Billericay Tree Warden Group was suggested and eventually realized. It may be a cliché but it aptly describes the sentiment that Chris will be a hard act to follow. The Norsey Wood Society has expressed its gratitude to Chris for his professional advice down his sixteen years of tenure. And the dedicated Norsey Wood

volunteer team will miss his guidance. But Chris will be staying in the area for the foreseeable future so I'm sure he will still be available to advise on wildlife technical issues!

“National Tree Week” – 28th November to 6th December – An annual calendar event organized by the “Tree Council”. We are not affiliated with the Tree Council but incorporate much of their ethos and have had occasion to seek their advice.

Strawberry Tree

A member of the Mill Meadows Society pointed out the location of another Strawberry tree in our area. It's a mature example in the front garden of a house down Prince Edward Road off Greens Farm Lane. This particular example has to be kept in check as it has a habit of growing into the overhead telephone wires! The bark is engaging as it is made up of fine vertical strips. It was encouraging to realize that the property owners regard themselves as the tree's “guardian”! Are there more local examples of Strawberry trees out there?



An Overview / Statistics - England's Tree Coverage:-

According to the Woodland Trust the UK only has 13% tree cover compared with continental Europe's 37%. Currently, England has 10% of its land area tree covered. That's a collective area of 71 miles x 71 miles = 5030 sq miles.

The Government's “**England Tree Strategy**” (ETS) is aiming for 26% cover by 2020 for the benefit of people, nature, commerce and climate. There are a variety of ways to achieve this increase with at least ten supporting governmental agencies that will involve manual planting. These will involve creating and extending native woodlands and planting non-native woodlands for commercial purposes. The Forestry Commission's mantra is “Right tree, right place, right reason”! Seen as an omission, the ETS does not cover the restoration of our hedgerows that were much grubbed out in the mid-1970's and into the early 1980's in order to enlarge arable fields for larger farm machinery. That has led to the devastating result of decimating our farmland birdlife.

However, there is also a strong case put forward for a joint approach via rewilding that would allow for natural forest regeneration coupled with its biodiversity enhancement. Trees spread by the natural agency of windblown seeds, Jays and squirrels. And these would have the provenance of the local tree stock. Given that land is available, the economics of rewilding is an attractive proposition.

We are told that there is more than enough available and suitable land in England to double our tree cover. And by allowing the sheep-wrecked hills of Cumbria to regenerate its tree cover would further add to the initiative.

But how Boris Johnson's recent announcement of “£1 Billion Green Revolution with 30 Million More Trees” will interface with what has already been announced remains to be seen. And although the big national non-

governmental organizations (NGOs), such as “Greenpeace” and “Friends of the Earth”, along with the wisdom of the “Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), have welcomed the announcement in principle, it is under-funded to achieve its aims before it starts.

But it will be many years before new tree planting will perform nature’s “ecosystem service” as per existing forests currently do by absorbing air pollution and emitting oxygen; and thus combating the Climate Crisis. This presents a good case for valuing and protecting our existing mature tree stock.

The Forestry Commission’s report for 2019/2020 “**Government supported new planting of trees in England**” informs us that since 2017 to 2020 March inclusive, there was a collective area of 4 miles x 4 miles = 16 sq miles of tree planting carried out in England. A good proportion of that planting was extending the Northern Forest centred about Leeds. But all told, it’s a small increase of tree coverage to show for those several years.

Incidentally, there are c.52,000 Ancient Woodlands recorded throughout the United Kingdom covering some 2.5% of the land area of Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland. All told, that represents a collective area of 48.5 miles x 48.5 miles = 2355 sq miles. Ancient woodland is defined as a wood that has been in continuous existence since 1600. And many owe their survival to the art of coppicing – “*A wood that stays is a wood that pays*”.

[This data has been taken from Government sources. But it does not necessarily include the not insignificant tree planting projects by County Councils, Local Authorities, the Woodland Trust community tree planting schemes, wildlife societies, interest groups and schools. These signify additional areas of tree planting that have not have been collectively quantified or estimated at national level.

“**Countryfile**” recently launched a “**Plant Britian**” two year initiative to plant 750,000 trees. The aim is to plant one tree for every child that is starting primary school in the UK this year.

We note that the “**Campaign to Protect Rural England**” (CPRE) response to the DEFRA’s “**England Tree Strategy**” Consultation has been very thorough and insightful – Offering advice as well as support for what is a very complex issue that attempts to address the problem of the Climate Crisis mitigation. A complex weave of various approaches to tree planting, economics, earmarking land for development, inspiring the voluntary sector, endorsing the natural regeneration of trees via rewilding, and strongly recommending restoring hedges for wild-life and other environmental aspirations. After assessing the feedback from the Consultation process, the Government’s “**England Tree Strategy**” is to be published later this year.

But despite the various encouraging Government, County Council, Local Authority and the voluntary sector tree planting schemes that have been announced, there is a long long journey between intention and implementation. *Perhaps the follow up to the PM’s mantra “build, build, build” should be “plant, plant, plant”!*

 **Thank you to the Billericay Town Council for providing the BTW
with help and moral support.** 

**we would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Ground Maintenance
company S H Goss & Co Limited for generously providing Nathan with the necessary
facilities to carry out his nature conservation and tree planting projects.**

**Prepared by the Billericay Tree Wardens [Editor JHS - 02/12/2020]
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