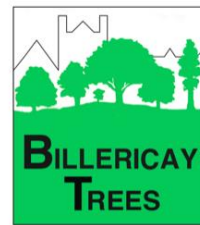


We hope that everyone is safe and well in these continuing dangerous times. Our Committee Meetings are cancelled until further notice and our fixtures remain postponed.



Conserving Our Tree Heritage
In association with Billericay Town Council

Tree & Hedge Planting Projects – Saturday 21st November - Latest Information:-

Nathan has been in conversation with Barleylands. We have 840 tree & hedge plants arriving in November, courtesy of the Woodland Trust (WT). About two thirds of these are destined for planting projects at Barleylands. As the current Covid-19 rules dictate, we will only be allowed six volunteers on the Barleylands site at any one time. We had hoped to involve two teams of six on the same day but we understand that only one team of six will be allowed. So unless the rules change, this will be the formula. We already have volunteers for the group of six. As there's so much planting to do by so few, it may also require a Sunday 22nd visit. Updates to these arrangements will be issued should there be a revision to them. A further 420 WT "whips" will be arriving in early spring of 2021 that are destined for the Outwood Common Road project.

Tree Planting Project at the South Green Village Green:-

Scheduled for the 5th December. As there are only two "standards" to be planted, **Nathan** has said that he can cope with the planting with perhaps help from a volunteer or two from the South Green Village Council (SGVC). The dead trees that they are to replace have been removed by others. The SGVC is funding the project. It's thank you to **Nathan** for mainly arranging the logistics of these planting projects.

A 'Mast Year':-

In an article by Joe Shute from the Daily Telegraph on the 17th October is a piece entitled 'The mystery and magic of autumn's 'mast year'. This autumn oak trees have surpassed themselves by producing a bumper crop of acorns. Oak trees do this between every five or ten years as do other woodland trees, the beech in particular. The theory is that by producing this glut on an irregular basis, the animal and birdlife that take advantage of the extra food only increase their populations on a temporary basis. And the years when there is a glut, Jays and squirrels will widely disperse and bury far more nuts than they can remember the location of; thus good for tree propagation! So the tree enlists such help to distribute the next generation of trees. But how do trees over a wide area synchronise their mast producing years? One theory is that it is weather related event when the right combination of rainfall and temperature occur in spring. A cold snap during this period could trigger a glut event. It is widely accepted that woodland trees communicate with each other via the specialist fungi in their roots but woodlands separated many miles apart would be unable to take advantage of this connectivity.

The Woodland Trust Virtual Event – 15th October:-

A very lively meeting attended from the comfort of one's home via the Zoom facility. It is an efficient and "green" way to arrange a meeting between so many participants from across the UK. The main discussion focused on the Government's recent white paper "Planning for the Future" that aims to rationalize and speed up the Planning system for house building (corresponding to our Prime Ministers outcry "Build, build, build"! The WT has identified that existing protection for woodlands and trees would be compromised where Local Plan developments are planned. In my opinion the one hour allotted time was far too short for all the relevant aspects to be discussed and to allow time for the many questions that had been tabled to be answered. One crucial omission from the "Planning for the Future" white paper was that Ancient Woodlands do not get a mention! An interesting snippet by the WT was that there are 52,000 ancient woodlands in England! And by definition is that they have remained in a continuous state since 1600; many by a coppicing regime.

The **Billericay Action Group (BAG)** has recently also analysed the Government's white paper "Planning for the Future" whose views can be studied on their website:- <https://www.billericayactiongroup.org.uk/planning-for-the-future.html> "Planning for the Future" aims at speeding up the decision process by "Cutting the Planning Red Tape". The BAG article not only analyses the faults and shortcomings but also cites the plus points. The main objection is the move away from the democratic process whereby residents and Local Planning Authorities will have less say in the decision making as to where development will take place and the numbers of houses opted for. And the controversial issues of house numbers, Green Belt and infrastructure are never far away. And for reasons as yet unknown, the Government Inspectorate's examination of our present Local Plan is likely to be further delayed until 2022. That would make the delivery of a workable Local Plan late by 8 years! And with trees in mind, there is a recommendation in the white paper that new developments should have tree-lined streets; one of the plus points!

Development Companies – Business not as usual?

Whether the following is a recognizable sea change by Development companies remains to be seen. Recently I have joined two Developer / Local Planning Masterplan "Zoom" Webinar meetings in Chelmsford for reasons other than trees. But what transpired was that both Redrow Homes & Hopkins Homes have put much emphasis on introducing green aspects into their design criteria. This response has been brought about by prospective buyers of a new property warming to the idea of a sustainable infrastructure and bringing nature into the urban environment. This could be one of the very few benefits, but an important one, along with the

popular facility of “Zoom” Webinar meetings, that Covid-19 has brought us. Presumably the Developers are working on the assumption that this requirement will become the “new normal”. “Nature is good for business”; perhaps a new strapline for a sales pitch?

The BTW Planning Application Check Team:-

Our Planning Application checks continue and occasionally we identify where trees appear to be vulnerable for what we consider to be for unnecessary reasons. We then submit a “Comment” to that effect. The classic case is where a property is to have its bungalow demolished and replaced by a large structure. Such gap-sites can be completely clear-felled of trees regardless of those not in the way of the new dwelling. Also, some of the site plans contained within a Planning Application do not show all the mature non-protected trees on the site – How then does one know that they could be vulnerable to felling? Using the facility of Google Maps indicates the true tree coverage of a property. We are keen for the Planning system to address these anomalies.

Newspaper Articles:-

Thank you to our BTW members who send in tree-related articles from their newspapers. It helps to keep in touch with the wider issues.

Tree Planting – Land Available:-

News from Friends of the Earth (FOE) – The water industry are owners of vast tracks of corporate land throughout England and Wales. So FOE are recommending that these large areas of land can be given over to a combination of tree planting, rewilding and silvopasture. The last named is where pastureland for livestock is planted thinly with trees that works in ecological harmony with farming and nature. And additionally, where the land is suitable, to allow natural regeneration occur whereby trees and scrub (a much maligned habitat because it looks so scruffy!) procreate themselves with little intervention by Man. The overall area of land involved is mindboggling = 423,952 acres (171,567 hectares). This represents 1% of the land surface area of the two nations. *But more about the many local and national tree planting schemes in our next issue!*

Investigations:-

Norsey Road – Building Site – Tree Protection

I recently visited a building site along Norsey Road for a large gated structure involving a basement construction. An oak with a TPO is in the front garden. One of our BTW members noticed that the tree was still vulnerable to damage even though partially protected by a wooden barrier. So we requested that the tree protection barrier should be completed to avoid the risk of potential damage by site traffic. The Site Agent was amenable and said that he would complete the task but has been waiting for more fencing material to arrive. He then went on to explain that to resist root compaction, they had laid down multi-layers of thick polystyrene on the nearby ramp before covering with a temporary road material. This has the effect of spreading the wheel load of the heavy site machinery and mitigating the unnecessary risk of tree root compaction. We can now report that the protection barrier to the TPO oak has been completed.

Little Burstead:- We queried and researched some tree loss on a property in the Little Burstead Conservation Area that had been reported to us by passers-by. We alerted the Little Burstead Parish Council who were unaware of the incident. A Planning Application (subsequently refused) did not indicate the felling of trees and the Architect’s drawing stated in the notes column that no trees were to be felled. So we contacted BBC Planning and were informed that the new owners had requested to remove trees and had given the required six week notice with respect a Conservation Area. A BBC Tree Officer attended the site and in his opinion none of the trees qualified for TPO status. Thus there was not an infringement of the rules.

Chestnut Avenue:- We brokered what could have been a dispute between neighbours in Chestnut Avenue over an Ash tree on the verge. One of the households wanted the tree removed. The new owners of a property had not realized how fond their neighbours were of the tree. Also we pointed out that the tree was on ECC land and would need BBC permission to fell. So when the facts were explained the situation became amicably resolved and the tree is to remain.

Perry Street

One of our BTW members noted that a Corkscrew Willow tree branch was overhanging the Perry Street carriageway and looked vulnerable to being hit by a tall vehicle. And it could be a risk to life and limb if it fell on its own accord. So we have made BBC Planning aware of what we consider to be a danger to the public. Felling the branch will involve a Health & Safety issue (H&S) and permission from highways to divert / interrupt traffic will need to be sort. And it’s relevant to note that this is a regular school run route.



The Charismatic Strawberry Tree

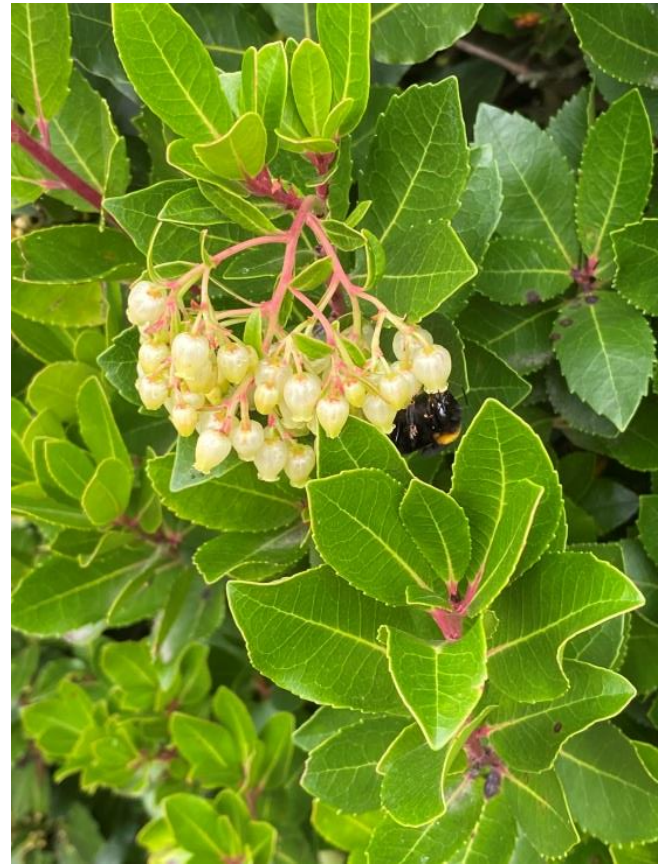
Although the Strawberry tree is a native of the British Isles, it hails from southwest Ireland where abundant rain and the warmth of the Gulf Stream are to its liking. But it is planted as an ornamental tree elsewhere in Britain. It gets its name from its clusters of strawberry-resembling red fruit. However, there the similarity ends as a translation of its Latin name *Arbutus unedo* means “I eat one” as a reference to its insipid taste! At present, we only know of three examples of this tree in the local area. Two are in

gardens of Little Burstead and another is in a front garden in Prince Edward Road. I have asked the Billericay Horticultural Society if they have knowledge of others in the town but no information was forthcoming. One of our BTW members, many years ago, used to sit with his mother under a mature and characterful example in what is now the Grey Lady Place. But it was later felled and now a brick hut marks the spot!

Many years ago, when I walked home down Western Road from the railway station there was a fine flowering and fruiting Strawberry Tree on the corner of Beaufort Road. But to my chagrin it was felled to make way for an extensive car parking paved area even though it was tucked in a corner out of harm's way!

There may be other examples of this intriguing tree species in the Billericay area that are waiting to be discovered!

Strawberry Tree photographs by Sue Goss.



Let-
ter
to

the Leader of the Basildon Borough Council (BBC) – 12th October 2020:-

Since our Group's formation we have become aware of several important issues involving the protection of trees that in our opinion need addressing. These were recently collated and presented as a letter to the Leader of the Basildon Borough Council. **A summary of the letter is as follows:-**

1] At a national and at a local level, both protecting our existing mature trees and engaging in tree planting projects are equally important initiatives. As it will be many years before the latter perform the former's "ecosystem service" with respect emitting oxygen in exchange for absorbing air pollution. **2]** At present, mature and substantially sized trees in private gardens can be felled if not TPO protected – We advocate that they should be subject to some form of protection. (It's been suggested that treating all garden trees as if they were in a Conservation Area with the 6 week notification rule would fulfil this requirement).

3] That woodlands in the Borough should receive legal protection to prevent irrevocable damage from those with business interests operating within the wood. The despoliation of Barrenleys Wood is a classic case to cite. **4]** And an addendum to the Local Plan should include that new developments should have tree-lined streets – A recommendation that appears in the Government's "**English Tree Strategy**". **5]** We await the strategy from the Basildon Borough Council as to how they are to achieve the planting of one million trees – As announced by the present administration when they came into office that they were to be the "greenest" administration ever. **6]** That the nine substantial New Build Local Plan developments proposed in and around Billericay should retain as many of their mature trees as is practical. The Queen's Park estate had set a precedent for such an approach. **7]** And that the BTW would wish to see other Tree Warden Groups created across the Borough.

We received a reply on the 23rd October sent via the BBC's Development Team Manager to one of our BBC Billericay Councillors. The contents of which came as no surprise as much of the information contained in the reply we are already aware of. It was notable that there was no mention of the "plant a million trees in the borough project". However, there was the offer (an olive branch!) for the BTW to send in the paperwork for TPOs that had been submitted previously but not acknowledged. There are 8 in all – And these are now with BBC Planning. So the BTW flexed its muscles and stated its case! Faint heart never won a just cause!

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

Prepared by the Billericay Tree Wardens [Editor JHS - 02/11/2020]

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