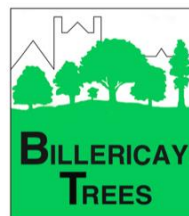


**The Billericay Tree Warden's Bi-monthly News-sheet for  
January 2023**

Our News-sheets are available to view on the Billericay Town Council's website including back issues and are listed under the header "The Town". There are also tree related Fact Sheets included to advise residents. The Factsheets can also be viewed on Facebook at <https://tinyurl.com/k8bzd772> <https://tinyurl.com/3hxdy5m9>



Conserving Our Tree Heritage  
In association with Billericay Town Council

Please note that our BTW AGM will be first to be discussed at our next Zoom Committee Meeting on Wednesday February 8<sup>th</sup> 2023 commencing at 6pm

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**1] Tree Planting at Lake Meadows and Pleasant Drive**



Photograph 1



Photograph 2

**Photograph 1:-** The Tree Warden volunteers and Council staff at the Pleasant Drive recreation area.

**Photograph 2:-** The tree planted landscape at Lake Meadows after the Friends of Lake Meadows volunteers and the Tree Warden volunteers had completed their task!

The Essex County Council (ECC) and the Basildon Borough Council (BBC) joined forces to undertake two major tree planting projects in Billericay to combat the Climate Crisis ably assisted by the dedicated volunteers from the Billericay Tree Wardens (BTW) and the Friends of Lake Meadows (FoLM). Approximately 400 native trees were planted at the recreational area at Pleasant Drive and another 400 native trees at Lake Meadows the following day.

The leading lights organizing were the ECC's Tom Moat, 3rd in from the left, the Senior Forestry & Woodland Officer and BBC's Joshua Childs, 4th in from the left, the Parks & Countryside Biodiversity Officer. Meanwhile, ecologist and BTW member Nathan Hume, 7th in from the left, liaised with both authorities on local issues.

Each tree is protected by a plastic free, biodegradable and compostible tree guard secured by a wooden stake and a cane. The base was then surrounded by a barrowed in mulch to resist moisture evaporation and also provides stability in high winds.

Native tree species opted for at each site were Beech / Cherry / English Oak / Field Maple / Hazel / Hornbeam and Rowan with Holly and Yew additionally planted at Lake Meadows. The trees have been randomly placed. The idea is to speed up the natural generation of a woodland. It is intended to take annual photographs from the same location on each site to illustrate the greening up.

In a town planning context, the town's centrally placed Lake Meadows combines a popular recreational area with a mix of habitats that hosts a variety of wildlife that unobtrusively thrives in the heart of an urban environment. The FoLM constantly keep on top of maintenance issues and ways to improve the Park.

Local residents at Pleasant Drive (off the Mountnessing Road) have recently formed a "community group" to take care of the recreation area in terms of recording its wildlife, litter picking and being the "ears & eyes" with respect security issues. To that end it has been arranged for a daily visit at two random times by the Police Support Community Officers and Park Rangers.

Thanks must go to the ECC staff and to the BBC staff for arranging two efficient and well organized events. Luckily, the weather favoured our endeavours! A big thank you to Tree Warden Bru Meadows for generously ordering in a quantity of hot food and drinks after the Lake Meadows event!

## 2] Tree Planting at Saint Mary's Buttsbury Church Ingatestone - 19<sup>th</sup> November.

There's more than anecdotal evidence that the abbot St Botolph preached from under a pear tree in the 7<sup>th</sup> century in the Buttsbury churchyard. So to commemorate this event together with our late monarch's "Queens Green Canopy" initiative it was thought apt to plant a pear tree. After the planting, Lay Minister Tim Lee gave a blessing to mark the occasion. The church itself was built in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and was probably built on the footprint of the original Anglo-Saxon church. Additional changes and enhancements were made during the Victorian period. Carbon dating has verified that the wooden North Aisle door (now weather protected by a white faced porch) was made from timber felled in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century and the iron hinges are probably of Viking origin! It is quite possible that the name "Buttsbury" derived from "Botoifvsparie" meaning Botolph's Pear Tree! The church is lovingly cared for by its local parishioners. The pear is a cultivar type 'Concorde' on a Quince rootstock type 'A' that when mature will be an ideal size for its situation. The Billericay Tree Wardens (BTW) were pleased to help out on the day.



The local area is very good for wildlife as Blackbirds, Song Thrushes and Goldfinches nest in the churchyard's mature trees and surrounding hedges whilst a few pairs of Swifts and House Sparrows nest under the church eaves. A pair of Kestrels nest in one of the external niches of the church and hunt over the adjacent grassy fields for rodents. There are several species of bat in the immediate area that nightly hunt the summer insect fare and some roost within the church.

### The left to right line up:-

Paul Butterworth, local church historian who also donated the pear tree / Nathan Hume, ecologist and organizer of BTW tree planting operations / Liam, a keen church volunteer / Chris Hayward the Church Warden / In blue is Tim Lee the Lay Minister of

Buttsbury & Margaretting Churches / Bryan Shields the Treasurer / Alison Hayward of flower arrangements and John Smart BTW Chair. (Photo by Paul on time exposure after a quick dash!)

## 3] Norsey Wood Tree Loss - An Update:-

The Basildon Borough Council (BBC) has looked into the incident of the ancient woodland tree loss in a private garden and on Green Belt along the Norsey Road that extends down to the Wood's Main Ride. It is technically not illegal as trees can be felled in a private garden without Local Authority permission. However the matter was referred to the Forestry Commission that has considered a prosecution but a conclusion has so far failed to emerge. Norsey Wood as an overall entity, is a flagship recreational area for the Borough and has Local Nature Reserve (LNR) status and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

So to date, we are not aware that a law or a regulation has been broken. This highlights the difference between a legal matter and an ethical matter. The ancient tree loss amounted to approximately one third of an acre. But make no mistake, the Norsey Wood Society (NWS) has been slighted as there has been no consultation, no apology and as yet no reparation from the Norsey Road property owner. Other incidents have occurred in the recent past where the Wood is being slowly nibbled away around its edges.

The author of this article was with a work party within the Wood when we were approached by a neighbouring property owner who wanted to purchase a sliver of NW land!

So to date, we are *not aware that a law or a regulation has been broken*. Encouragingly, the BBC is in the process of applying a Woodland TPO Order on the existing mature woodland in the several other gardens that extend down to Norsey Wood's Main Ride. The photograph illustrates their presence. The BBC take the stance that it is unnecessary to designate Norsey Wood LNR itself with a Woodland TPO Order as it is on Council land and already has protection. The photograph was taken from Norsey Wood's Main Ride looking north just after the felling in March of 2022.



Additionally, Norsey Road has suffered from gap-site Developers over the years who demolish the existing structure and rebuild large gated mansions that involve the removal of mature oak trees that had provided a significant "Street Scene" amenity value. In our view, there needs to be a sensible balance between development and tree loss.

Also adding insult to injury is the fact that the BTW had attended the site prior to the felling of the garden's ancient woodland and was assured by the onsite landscape company's senior operative that the woodland in the garden would remain intact. Unfortunately, this assurance is not in writing. We did contact the company for an explanation but it may be of no surprise to learn that a reply was not received!

Before the owner of the Norsey Road property can legally move into his new home, he will be required by the BBC to submit a Planning Application (PA) for a "*soft landscaping*" scheme that will need to be Approved. It is at this juncture that the Council could exert leverage by requiring that replacement trees are required.

However, the saga continues - There's something called "*Permitted Development Rights*" (PDR) where one does not require Local Authority planning permission to build various structures in a private garden – A swimming pool; an outside kitchen; a games room etc. As we understand it, these facilities are planned to be implemented by the owner of the property.

The BTW has worked closely with the NWS on the politics involved with this contentious issue and have discussed how it should be best resolved.

#### **4] Illegal Tree Felling in England to be Addressed – Guardian Article**

[https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/dec/23/tree-felling-punishable-jail-term-uncapped-fines?CMP=Share\\_AndroidApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/dec/23/tree-felling-punishable-jail-term-uncapped-fines?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other)

Presumably motivated by the need to address the Climate Crisis in combination with how vulnerable large scale development is now threatening woodlands and trees generally. This legislative revision is thus well timed.

The Forestry Act of 1967 is to be revised to increase fines for illegal tree felling. The incentive to fell trees in modern times is to do with the cost of land for development rather than the sale value of felled timber as it was in the past. Unscrupulous Developers want land cleared so they can maximize the number of houses they can build. So as a deterrent, unlimited fines could be issued when flagrant clear-felling has occurred. This may not just be relevant to trees that are TPO designated but to non-TPO trees as few trees away from towns in the wider landscape are legally protected. If a landowner or Developer wants to fell trees, he will need to seek permission from the Forestry Commission as a minimum.

Now we have the Local Plan whereby there are many sites across the country where new build development is proposed, there is a need to safeguard against unwarranted tree felling and the profiteering from land sale. There is an anomaly at present, flagged up by the BTW, whereby there is the risk that landowners and Developers sometimes fell trees before a Planning Application has been submitted. Apart from a hefty fine, it would further

deter such actions if the Planning Application were then automatically refused. We await the detail of the changes to the Forestry Act of 1967 and how Local Authorities will be guided by it. Present law does not protect mature trees in private gardens.

From experience, some of the proposed new build developments we have seen on paper are well balanced in terms of existing trees worked into their architectural plans, the housing layout and the recreational areas with their soft landscaping that often includes much tree planting. Most Developers prefer to leave surrounding existing tree and hedge lines retained and the gaps infilled as it provides a screen (both visual and softens the adjacent traffic noise) to their development. The problem of the lack of infrastructure to support the development and building on Green Belt land is outside of the BTW's remit to comment on. With respect Planning Applications, the BTW "Comments" on residential new build development on a "case by case" basis with respect its trees. Needless to say, the effect of a Local Plan is very contentious.

### **5] Grimshill Wood – 9.5 acres - To be designated a Woodland TPO Order**

We had a tip-off from the Billericay Action Group (BAG) that the 9.5 acre privately owned Grimshill Wood was to be on the market at auction for £90,000. It borders the south side of the Outwood Common Road and is sandwiched between a housing estate and farmland. The wood is relatively young as the site's topsoil was removed for development some fifty years ago but construction never went ahead. The existing wood is a good example as to how a vacant plot of land left to its own devices goes through a process of ecological succession until woodland dominates. From grasses, herbaceous plants, shrubs to scrub and then trees. The BTW contacted BBC Planning and requested that the Wood be served a Woodland TPO Order in order to safeguard its future. The good news is that the BBC is in the process of applying this legal protection process. However, if the Wood is sold, will it be managed for its ecological value or will it be turned into a business venture (paintball etc.) that could be to its detriment? There are examples in the area where the latter has occurred. An ideal solution is where a wood is bought to practice woodland crafts and to improve the wood for wildlife and its biodiversity with the intention to leave it in a better condition than when first acquired.

### **6] Addenda**

In our November issue of the BTW News-sheet we stated that it was the Head Librarian that organized the tree display for the Queen's Green Canopy at the library. In fact it was Dawn Hoyle the Customer Service Assistant who took on the project with help from the other library staff. Thank you to Dawn and her team for helping to "raise awareness" of our town's trees.

**We would like to say thank you to various the BBC and BTC Councillors who support our goals along with those local experts with specialist knowledge that have advised the BTW on various technical matters**

**A thank you must go to the Billericay Town Council for providing the BTW with advice, a meeting room at the BTC's Chantry Centre, moral support and Personal Liability and Personal Accident insurance, for BTW members and their volunteers, whilst out in the field with no geographic restriction**

**The Billericay Tree Wardens are a voluntary group and all information contained therein is not legally binding and is provided as a source of advice and information only**

**The BTW's next members' Zoom Committee Meeting and AGM is scheduled for Wednesday February 8<sup>th</sup> 2023 commencing at 6pm**

**Prepared by the Billericay Tree Wardens [Editor JHS – January 2023]**

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