

The Billericay Tree Warden's Bi-monthly

News-sheet for August 2024

For News-sheet back copies, the "Billericay Tree Wardens' Guide" and BTW Factsheets refer to the Town Council's website under the heading "The Town" and follow the dropdown. Factsheets also on:-

<https://tinyurl.com/k8bzd772>. <https://tinyurl.com/3hxdy5m9>



Conserving Our Tree Heritage
In association with Billericay Town Council

Due to a family that are BTW members who have recently lost one of their members in a tragic road accident this News-sheet has been delayed out of deference. We thank those who have asked the BTW to send their condolences. Meanwhile in response, the BTW has undergone a "quiet period" and has only been responding to urgent H&S tree issues.

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1] The URC Ancient Burial Ground – Chapel Street - "Garden of Peace":-

At the request of the United Reformed Church (URC) in Chapel Street, the BTC organized a "tidying-up" and a "litter pick" project of the Ancient Burial Ground between Chapel Street and Waitrose. To this end, our BTC Chairman Mark Thomas contacted the local charity and volunteer groups within the town and a date of Saturday 3rd August was proposed. The BTW was asked to comment on the environmental aspects of the project. We identified that several of the trees, for various reasons, would require the attention of a professional Tree Surgeon which should include some canopy thinning that would let more light down into the understorey below. Tree work would be arranged for a later date. It was highly likely that birds were nesting lower down in the shaded and tangled leafy corners so caution was required.

Back in early 2000, the Billericay Rotary Club (BRC), in partnership with the BTC, had organized a major remedial project of the 18th century burial ground; involving a considerable amount of volunteer work and fund raising.

Since then, the gardens now presented a very different habitat as the pollarded trees had regrown their leafy canopies casting much shade below and the understorey shrubs have grown unchecked. Sitting in the garden, in the heart of Billericay, one experiences the therapeutic feeling of peace and relaxation that visiting a cathedral inspires - A quiet and cloistered habitat for thoughtful contemplation. Some say that it is movingly Otherworldly and also a welcomed retreat from the daily hustle and bustle.



The event took the opportunity to observe a Minutes Silence led by Cllr Mark Thomas & BTW member Neil Sumner in respect for the recent lost loved one of the Meadows' family who are members of the BTW. A tragic event that is so final.

A thank you to those volunteers who engaged with the project and to the adjacent "Billericay Brewery" that brought along a sample of their beers to slake the thirst of those grafting!

Volunteers came and went throughout the "tidying-up" session and so there was no opportunity for the traditional group photograph!

There are very strict church rules that apply to working in Ancient Burial Grounds that were of course respected.

2] Unnecessary Tree Loss at Raven Lane:-



Over half a dozen residents living near to Raven Lane (west of Perry Street) contacted the BTC to say that they were appalled by the loss of a healthy and mature 150 year old (approx) oak by the pavement on the gap between two existing properties. The residents also wrote a letter to their MP Richard Holden, our new MP for the



Basildon & Billericay constituency, expressing similar. There was no advanced warning or consultation that we were aware of - A Tree Surgeon arrived one morning unannounced and felled the tree. The BTC asked the Billericay Tree Wardens (BTW) to research the incident and one of our member's attended site and met with residents.

The gap-site is private property and it is suspected that a Developer is to eventually erect a dwelling or two thereon. As can be seen in the photograph, the tree was in the extreme corner of the site and could have been easily landscaped-in without need for removal. The oak was not protected by a TPO so its removal on private land was not illegal. However, both the BTW and half a dozen local residents consider it to be, in an ethical societal context, an "*anti-community act and unjustifiable*". The tree would have existed long before the housing estate was built and deliberately landscaped-in for its "Street Scene" amenity value.

This felling represents typical behaviour shown by gap-site Developers whereby once the land / property is in their ownership they remove, without consultation, **ALL** trees and vegetation on the site and usually before they have submitted a Planning Application (PA). Past experience confirms that this is typical behaviour of gap-site Developers.

In this particular case, there is no justification as the tree was not in a location that would affect / restrict a new dwelling's footprint. We await a PA to be submitted and will submit a strongly worded "*comment*" to the affect as to what has been described above. We will recommend that at least two replacement "*heavy standard*" native trees be introduced on the site with stakes, ties, tree guards and mulch with a five year maintenance clause to guarantee their survival in the critical early growing years.

We would hope that Basildon Planning will endorse our approach when considering to pass judgement on the PA. The PA will be liable to apply the new law of "**Biodiversity Net Gain**" (BNG) either by submitting a landscape plan or by applying for a mitigation (offsetting) strategy. The BTW will be checking for "*compliance*". The negative actions of gap-site Developers should not be confused with the more professional approach that the mainstream Developers are expected to exhibit.

3] The Proposed National Grid Overland Transmission Line Route from Norfolk to Tilbury that passes by the Billericay's Western Border:-

The Billericay Tree Wardens' (BTW) have looked into the proposal in some depth from an environmental point of view, assessing the "*pros & cons*" and passed their findings onto the Billericay Town Council (BTC). If the scheme were realized, it would take at least five years to complete o/a. There is an irony for if the project went ahead as the National Grid proposes, it would help combat the Climate Crisis by providing green energy to keep our lights on but change our landscape to its detriment forever. It would result in a line of twenty five 50 metre high pylons running from Buttsbury down to a line west of Little Burstead. These are untypically high pylons (as the ones we already have locally are 36 metres in height), and will be viewable from various locations from within the town. A local archaeological expert has pointed out that the countryside landscape to the west of Billericay has remained virtually unchanged for many centuries and could be a candidate to be designated as "*An Area of Natural Outstanding Beauty*" (ANOB) by *Natural England*; land protected by the *Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000*. Additionally, that there is much

archaeology to be unearthed and recorded in and around the Buttsbury area with reference to medieval dwellings, cottages and their artefacts.

The project, if it went ahead, would decimate the wildlife area of Billericay Marsh (BM) that is in the Borough of Brentwood, but is a facility that can only be accessed by Billericay residents for recreational purposes. The river Wid runs partially around BM and is uncontaminated as evidenced by its variety of fish species and abundant aquatic insect life. Kingfishers ply the Wid. This in an era when river pollution has dominated the national press. Only one pylon is destined for BM but the construction process of installing overhead transmission line cables will be extensive as access will need to be made to bring in



tower cranes, HGVs delivering and storing heavy materials, fuel depots and the widening of existing approach roads by grubbing out their tree and hedge lines accordingly. Standard practice is for the NG to maintain a 100 metre wide “*maintenance corridor*” under the overhead cables and kept clear of obstructions. Looking at other similar NG projects elsewhere in the country, the extensive scar left behind in some areas after removing the existing vegetation to accommodate the construction process could be viewable by satellite from space! We wonder if the practicality of the two alternative solutions, underground trenching or via seabed cables, have been researched independently, scientifically, politically and with cost effectiveness in mind. In the cold light of day, without being overdramatic - Billericay is effectively under attack from an unpublished revised land-hungry Local Plan and the NG proposed overhead transmission line route with its invasion of pylons. We recommend that the pylon that is founded on BM should be moved further to the west. Photos – The River Wid and the local landscape by NH. **With thanks to Julian Whybra for historical landscape notes and archaeological references and to Lisa Olson for additional background research.**

4] The Local Plan and Biodiversity Net Gain Law (BNG):-

This article is focused on how the expected revised Local Plan (LP) will affect the trees on the various development sites, in whatever form it takes, in and around Billericay. It does not take into account or address the two main concerns of how the LP could controversially swallow up Green Belt and the tangle of uncoordinated infrastructure problems that have been predicted to occur. For informed opinion on those two crucial matters and other LP related issues, please refer to the Billericay Action Group (BAG) website.



What is Biodiversity Net Gain?

To deliver a biodiversity gain, nature must be left in a measurably better state than it was before development took place. Ideally, wildlife habitat creation and enhancement will occur onsite, but offsite arrangements are permissible where this is not possible. Individual trees, hedgerows and treed habitats will all be captured in the Biodiversity Metric. BNG has been deliberately introduced into English law to counteract the loss of nature and enhance it.

Since 2013 when our then LP (that had proposed nine extensive new build residential development sites to be built in and around Billericay) was introduced there had been the real risk that once Developers had acquired the land the site could be denuded of its trees and hedges to maximize their residential new build footprint. Later, our Local Authority (LA) introduced a regulation that a Developer would need to submit at his own expense a detailed Tree Survey of the site with his Planning Application. From that, the LA would agree with the Developer as to what tree coverage should remain.

Since then, a further element of protection for trees has been introduced in the form of the recently introduced BNG law and its “*metric rules*” that have made Developers acutely aware that any existing trees removed will need to be replaced in kind. Replaced onsite, or on a dedicated wildlife site elsewhere as a mitigation exercise (offsetting), plus introducing a 10% net gain over and above the biodiversity that the development site originally had. Existing ancient and veteran trees should now remain intact. In law, BNG enhancements will be maintained for thirty years. BNG will also apply to smaller development projects.

It is hoped that the Tree Surveys together with BNG will resist our local landscapes from being denuded of its trees and be beneficial to wildlife. How this will pan out in practice remains to be seen.

An outstanding issue with BNG that has yet to be addressed is one of checking for “*compliance*” as to what has been agreed at Planning level has been implemented on site. The new law of BNG, in terms of wildlife enhancement, has yet to be tried and tested and will take time to do so. **The new government has announced that BNG will have an even bigger role to play in the revised Planning system.**

We would like to say thank you to the various BBC and BTC Councillors who support our goals and those “Friends of the BTW” (FoBTW), who’s anonymity we respect, who offer their technical advice and practical support when called upon via their empathy for trees, wildlife and in the interests of the town.

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 & Personal Accident insurance for BTW members and their volunteers, whilst out in the field with no geographic restriction

We take this opportunity to thank the company of S H Goss & Co Ltd that has generously provided the use of equipment, materials, transport & Nathan’s time for BTW’s planting projects

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’ meeting is scheduled for
Wednesday 4th September 2024 at 7pm**

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