

B&NES Street Tree Planting Public Consultation

BPT Response

26/09/2022

The proposals form part of B&NES Council’s commitment to plant 100,000 trees within the district by May 2023; the full package of tree-planting measures in both urban and rural areas is set out in the Tree and Woodland Delivery Plan.

The scope of proposals set out in the consultation covers a number of areas across the district, including Keynsham, Saltford, Peasedown St John, Paulton, and Camerton. At this stage, comments from Bath Preservation Trust will focus on tree planting works within the Bath city boundary, although our comments may also be broadly applicable to the whole scheme’s framework and methodology.

* BPT is supportive in principle of increased tree planting and associated greening of urban areas within Bath. In light of the Climate and Ecological Emergency, the provision of increased tree planting has been emphasised as key to addressing a number of core objectives, including:
	+ Provision of much-needed biodiversity and wildlife habitat within the city and areas of hard landscaping.
	+ Use of tree planting to offset/absorb carbon dioxide as part of movement towards net zero targets.
	+ Use of street-side trees to contribute towards reductions in air and noise pollution associated with well-used roads and thoroughfares.
	+ Regulation of water movement such as surface water and storm water run-off in light of increasingly extreme weather events.
	+ Opportunities to mitigate the heat island effect in built-up areas and reduce risk of overheating as summer temperatures continue to rise.
	+ Improved community access to local green spaces and associated benefits to mental health and wellbeing.
* However, we believe that the suitability of street tree placement requires determination on a case-by-case basis, particularly where proposals may affect the established, and in some cases intentional, character of historic streets and townscape/landscape views (eg. Milsom Street).
* In addition we emphasise the importance of ‘the right tree in the right place’, choosing the right species for each place. Thus, street planting needs to retain footpaths of minimum width for wheelchairs/prams and to avoid impacting kerbs, underground services and street furniture; species need to avoid dropping fruit & sticky deposits and large slippery leaves; some grass verges & wider open spaces can accept larger species or varieties.
* We note that the Tree and Woodland Delivery Plan refers to an Audit of Streets for potential tree planting works: *“Sets out the methodology used to audit streets for tree planting, with maps identifying possible locations for planting by ward. Also sets out the key considerations for any street tree planting scheme.”* It would have been helpful had this information been supplied in this consultation**,** highlighting the particular factors as to why the proposed street locations have been selected. Obviously, to ensure success, the residents of any street being considered for tree planting must welcome it (or at least acquiesce in it).
* Certain identified areas, such as Kipling Avenue and Shakespeare Avenue (Bear Flat) already feature street tree planting. It is unclear whether the proposed planting would supplement existing planting, or replace existing trees, re-using existing tree pits in the pavement. How would the proposed species of new trees be selected to reinforce existing tree planting? Some of the existing trees are now overly large for street trees, necessitating frequent pruning or pollarding. It would be sensible to avoid such labour-intensive future activity by judicious choice of species.
* We maintain that further information is required regarding the proposed tree species to be selected, to ensure that these are appropriately resilient to the particular qualities of their context (eg. pollution/disease resistant), and of appropriate size when mature. We strongly encourage the consideration of native species where this would help to support and enhance local biodiversity and wildlife; the provision of fruiting trees would also supply a valuable food source to at-risk species such as birds and insects. A mixed range of tree species is also recommended to improve tree resilience to pests and diseases within the localised area of planting.
* We emphasise the significance of embedding a long-term tree maintenance strategy at this stage, to secure the ongoing future success of proposals. The significance of district-wide tree planting is dependent on these trees ‘taking’ and thriving in these locations rather than just the planting works themselves. We therefore strongly recommend that works to care for the trees are implemented for a set time following planting to give these specimens the best possible chance of success (eg. regular watering of young sapling trees) and that a system of regularly monitoring of growth is established. These works could be undertaken in partnership with local community or residents’ groups to ensure that street enhancement works are guided by local residents throughout the whole process. The importance of aftercare for saplings cannot be overemphasised, with agreed watering provided following formal rota of residents/operatives, so that both too little and too much watering is avoided.
* There are areas in Bath where previous street tree planting has already begun to fail. For instance, the lime trees on London Road have been in decline following their initial planting, in some cases requiring removal and replacement with new specimens. Such examples indicate the need for the careful consideration of planting circumstances, particularly in highly-trafficked areas where factors such as concentrated air pollution, vibration, or soil compaction should inform choice of tree species and proposed planting location/depth.

In short, BPT welcomes this Street Tree Planting initiative in principle, but emphasises the imperative of ‘the right tree in the right place’ and the importance of adequate aftercare and community cooperation.