EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Tree Forum Notes

Notes of the Tree Forum meeting held Thursday 24th October 2024 at 10am via Microsoft Teams

Present

Zoey Cooper	ZC	Exmouth Town Council (Chair)
Councillor Olly Davey	OD	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Tim Dumper	TD	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Mike Rosser	MR	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Maddy Chapman	MC	Exmouth Town Council
Lisa Bowman	LB	Exmouth Town Council
Ben Coles	BC	Treeconomics
Jan Gannaway	JG	Exmouth Wildlife Group
Reuben Hawkwood	RH	National Trust
Lucy Buckingham	LB	National Trust
Jodie Davis	JD	Forestry Commission
Simon Pardoe	SP	Tree Warden
Louise Baker	LB	East Devon District Council
Paul Fealey	PF	East Devon District Council
Alistair Jeans	AJ	East Devon District Council
Nathan Dunster	ND	East Devon District Council

Apologies

Councillor Louise Venables	LV	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Graham Deasy	GD	Exmouth Town Council
Therese Goodwin	TG	East Devon District Council

Notes

1. **Welcome**

ZC welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded the group of the purpose of the bi-annual Tree Forum. ZC invited everyone to briefly introduce themselves with their name and organisation.

2. **Update on EDDC's Tree Strategy**

Ben Coles from Treeconomics has been working with EDDC on a tree strategy for the district. He shared some slides (see accompanying document) with an update.

- **a. Tree, Hedge, and Woodland Strategy for East Devon**
  - i. **Project Overview**:
    East Devon District Council commissioned a strategy to enhance tree, hedge, and woodland cover across the district. The initiative involves developing a long-term strategy alongside a five-year action plan focused on increasing canopy cover, conservation, and public involvement.
  - ii. **Initial Consultation**: Meetings were held with internal council officers and various departments to ensure cross-departmental

input. Policy reviews were conducted from international to regional levels to align East Devon's goals with broader environmental strategies.

iii. **Canopy Mapping**: Mapping of tree canopy cover was conducted across urban and rural wards in East Devon, revealing varying levels of canopy cover. Notably, Exmouth Town had one of the lowest canopy cover levels, which poses specific challenges due to its coastal nature.

iv. **Public Consultation**: Public input highlighted that:
    - 94% of respondents see trees as very important.
    - 76% believe there are too few trees, though coverage disparities across districts are acknowledged.
    - 92% support active encouragement for planting new trees across public and private spaces.
    - Primary perceived benefits of trees include providing wildlife habitat, improving air quality, and enhancing natural beauty.

b. **Emerging Strategy Vision**: An early vision statement emphasizes making East Devon a place where trees, hedges, and woodlands enrich the landscape, economy, and well-being of residents and visitors.

c. **Action Plan and Goals**:
    i. **Tree Planting and Development**: Assess potential plantable spaces to aim for 30% tree cover in new developments. Collaborate with the Devon Tree Strategy Group to bolster policies on tree retention.
    ii. **Policy and Enforcement**: Develop policies and enforcement measures to protect existing trees, provide training for enforcement teams, and enforce retention in landscape schemes.
    iii. This strategy is expected to be completed by the end of November after final consultations and revisions.

Questions were raised regarding integrating future development with natural areas including trees and grass areas. To summarise the response from BC:

Integrating Natural Areas in Future Developments:
There is a strong focus on integrating green spaces and trees in new developments, acknowledging challenges like low survival rates for new trees, as seen in Cranbrook. East Devon is considering ways to improve long-term tree establishment by involving local groups, like tree wardens, to help sustain these plantings.
Tree Protection and Maintenance:
Currently, new trees in developments are protected for five years, which has led to gaps in survival beyond that period, especially in areas like Exmouth. There is interest in revisiting these protections to improve outcomes.
Strategy Timeline and Guidelines:
The strategy is expected to be completed by November, with an "Action Workshop" planned to involve community partners in its implementation. While specific town-level tree strategies aren't anticipated, there will be district-wide actions with potential roles for local stakeholders.

Suggestions were made to plant trees within hedgerows to naturally protect them. This approach may already be in use in some areas and could be expanded as part

of the strategy.

Next Steps: Slides and information from the meeting will be shared (ZC) with attendees and others unable to attend.

3. **Update on the Tiny Forest (OD)**

The tiny forest, inspired by the Japanese Miyawaki method, aims to create dense, biodiverse forest patches in small areas (about the size of a tennis court). The forest at Carter Avenue includes layered vegetation with 600 densely planted trees supported by nutrient-rich compost. This density promotes fast growth and natural selection within the forest.

Project Support and Collaboration: Key collaborators included East Devon District Council, local organizations and Devon County Council, who provided compost, trees, and financial support. Volunteers from the community, including residents, the local primary school, and the Deaf Academy, actively participated in planting and maintenance. Additionally, a rainwater collection system from the local football club was set up to support the forest during dry periods.

Maintenance and Community Engagement: The forest is maintained by “tree keepers,” local volunteers who regularly manage weeds, support tree growth and monitor wildlife. The area is fenced with a pathway around it and will eventually be open to the public.

Expansion Plans: Plans are underway to create another tiny forest in Brixington Park, using a semi-circular design and including informational signage to engage and educate the public.

Several questions were asked about Exmouth’s first Tiny Forest project. In summary:

Participants noted key lessons from the Carter Avenue Tiny Forest, particularly around irrigation, ground preparation, and the resilience of the planted trees. Initially, watering was improvised by connecting to a nearby resident’s water tap during dry spells, and there was general agreement that establishing a more consistent watering system from the start would be beneficial. Another lesson was about grass suppression - future projects may benefit from preparing the ground in advance, possibly covering it to prevent grass competing with young trees.

Community Engagement and Success: The project has received positive community support, with numerous local volunteers, including responses to Facebook appeals. The difference in growth rates between the tiny forest and nearby control trees was notable, with tiny forest trees growing faster due to the enriched soil and planting techniques.

Future Tiny Forest Plans and Considerations: Plans to create another tiny forest at Brixton Park raised concerns among residents about losing too much of their

limited open space, especially with the addition of other proposed tree plantings along rewilded areas. The community's concerns, voice by Councillor Maddy Chapman, sought reassurance that the tiny forest would be carefully planned to preserve park access and minimize disruption.

Environmental Monitoring and Long-term Management: Participants discussed potential research opportunities comparing growth rates in different environments, such as areas closer to the estuary with higher saline levels. Long-term management and potential challenges in maintaining the tiny forest were highlighted, with suggestions to allow natural development where possible and respond gradually to issues like invasive weeds.

4. **Update on plans for a second Exmouth Tiny Forest**

In this discussion about a potential Tiny Forest in Brixington, several points and concerns were raised:

- **Management and Maintenance**: The trees planted in the Tiny Forest are covered under a five-year maintenance plan funded through the Emergency Tree Fund, managed by the organization Parklife Southwest. This ensures that the trees are not simply planted and abandoned but are monitored and maintained regularly.
- **Public Consultation**: Currently, no formal decision has been made on the second Tiny Forest's location or design. Public consultation is ongoing, and the community's feedback will be carefully considered before finalizing plans.
- **Community Concerns**: Some residents worry that planting additional trees, particularly in Brixington's limited green space, will reduce park openness. MC highlighted the importance of maintaining the park's open character since it's one of the few available recreational areas. However, the plan includes only smaller canopy trees, intended to enhance biodiversity without compromising the park's open feel.
- **Location Selection Rationale**: Brixington was chosen due to its active community, proximity to a local school, and opportunities for providing shade near the play area. Access to the park allows for easy transport of necessary materials like compost, an improvement based on lessons from the first Tiny Forest site.
- **Further Clarification and Feedback**: Additional community spaces, like fields near Knappe's Cross Community Centre, were suggested as potential alternative locations to alleviate concerns about losing open parkland.
- Overall, the team emphasized that plans remain flexible and open to public input, aiming to balance ecological benefits with preserving recreational space.

5. **To consider the need for trees planted by volunteers to be looked after**

The agenda turned to the challenge of tree maintenance post-planting, with ZC noting the enthusiasm for planting, like the Rotary Club's goal to plant 100 trees, but adding that it's less easy to find people to maintain the trees. MR shared a similar concern, highlighting community projects that started strong but lacked follow-up care. Several participants emphasized the need for local community involvement, especially for basic tasks like watering and weeding. RH recommended using tree watering bags to ease the maintenance load on volunteers.

The discussion moved to the Knappe Cross playing field, previously used by Brixington Blues, which has limited parking and no changing facilities. The County Council invested over £70,000 in drainage, which (MC thought) may affect the viability of planting on the pitch. While trees can be planted around the field's perimeter, the pitch area might not be suitable due to drainage needs. It was noted that existing trees at Knappe Cross have survived well after being watered during a dry summer, but they could benefit from weeding and mulching.

The Forestry Commission is developing guidance to assist those who receive grants for creating new woodlands, covering planting and maintenance practices. This guidance may soon be available to help streamline the process for future projects

6. A sharing of information regarding funding available for tree planting (e.g. Tree Council's Branching Out Fund)

ZC suggested that anyone with information about available tree-planting funds or schemes should email zoey.cooper@exmouth.gov.uk. She will share this information more broadly, and also consider sharing additional resources alongside the funding details.

7. To hear concerns regarding the felling of trees with TPOs for insurance purposes

The discussion addressed the pressing issue of protecting mature trees, particularly following recent tree removals due to insurance concerns. MR highlighted his experience on the planning committee, mentioning a difficult decision to allow the felling of a mature oak tree to avoid a potential £45,000 insurance liability, despite the tree being valued at £82,000. He emphasized the need for a budget to protect trees.

ND clarified that East Devon District Council holds the decision-making authority regarding tree protection orders, while the town council acts as a consultee. He explained the legal constraints that often lead to tree removal, particularly in cases involving subsidence, where insurance companies prefer felling over costly alternatives like underpinning. ND noted that multiple trees have been lost to subsidence in recent years and that legislative changes are needed to address the issue. He also mentioned drafting a letter to the government to raise awareness of the challenges faced in protecting trees.

LB expressed concern over the town council's understanding of its role in tree applications, corroborating what TD said that the instructions ETC has always been given are that ETC is the deciding authority for trees. LB promised to clarify the situation with Ed Freeman at the District Council. The conversation underscored the complexities of tree protection, insurance pressures, and the need for coordinated efforts at both local, district and national levels to advocate for better protections.

8. **An opportunity for members to raise concerns / ask questions / present specific issues or topics**

Participants were invited to raise concerns or questions. One key topic discussed was the Rotary Club's desire to plant 100 trees but uncertainty about where and how to maintain them. The group noted that tree planting involves more than just planting; it requires ongoing care, which may strain the already busy Street Scene teams. Suggestions for next steps included sending an email to the relevant parties for further discussion, as land ownership would influence potential planting sites. The Rotary Club is eager to move forward with this project.

RH talked about ongoing concerns about the management of Lower Halsdon Farm, which will have new tenants in 2026. The current plan is to involve the community and explore tree planting opportunities there, including widening hedgerows and potentially establishing an orchard. Additionally, there are discussions about possibly planting trees near Orchard Point, where the National Trust has land.

RH also mentioned current complaints regarding a protected oak tree causing issues for a nearby resident who recently moved in. The National Trust is committed to a strict tree safety management plan and aims to handle resident concerns diplomatically while supporting tree preservation efforts. The conversation highlights the balance between community engagement, land management, and the protection of local trees.

In the meeting, participants expressed support for the National Trust's efforts to preserve local trees and manage the situation with new residents at Three Oaks Cottage, who are requesting the removal of nearby oak trees. The group emphasized the importance of educating the community on the value of trees and the need for tree conservation.

The National Trust mentioned its commitment to a national strategy of planting 20 million trees and proposed collaboration on tree-planting initiatives in Exmouth, including potential woodland areas.

Concerns were raised about protecting hedgerows, especially considering ongoing developments that threaten local biodiversity.

A discussion highlighted that well-maintained hedges can support tree growth and biodiversity.

9. A summary of key actions and next steps

The meeting concluded with a call for future collaboration and updates, along with plans to schedule another session in six months. Participants were encouraged to join a chat group for ongoing communication.

The meeting ended at 11.35am