

Plymouth Tree People

Annual Report 2023 -24



Our new name, Plymouth Tree People, was agreed at the 2023 AGM and, whilst there is much new to report this year (1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024), our core mission to help others plant, care for and learn about trees remains unchanged.

Tree planting

Neighbour-Wood tree projects

With a healthy financial situation at the end of PTP's year 2022-23, coming from several generous donations, Trustees decided to press ahead with replacing missing street trees on Beacon Park Road where residents had already asked for assistance. James Brown, a chartered landscape architect with relevant experience, was contracted to lead the project which required detailed planning and close co-ordination with residents.

Soon afterwards, Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest (PSDCF) launched their 'Neighbour-Wood' programme, which is designed to assist communities with accessing government funding for tree planting schemes. With this added incentive, we extended the scheme on Beacon Park Road to 16 trees and took on another complex project in Wilton Street, which also followed a resident's request.

During consultation we found that most support came from Wilton Street's western portion and opinions were mixed elsewhere. We took this into account and limited the project to 8 replacement trees although only 5 could be planted in practice when an unmapped electricity cable was uncovered. Fortuitously, we had heard about plans to pollard Wilton Street's existing trees around the same time and were able to co-ordinate site works to keep traffic disruption to a minimum.

We used Glendale Countryside to re-establish the tree pits and plant the new trees in both places, and their experienced team completed the work over two weeks in February and March 2024.



Glendale Countryside on Beacon Park Road, 27th February 2024



New tree on Wilton Street planted 28th March 2024

PTP has the responsibility for establishing the new trees and we are encouraging residents to help with watering in summer in addition to regular visits by contractors and Tree Wardens. Labelled watering bags will be fitted to make the task easier and to raise awareness.

Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest also invited PTP to assist with the design and consultation stages for three further projects, these being at the junction of Outland Road and Weston Park Road, Kingston Drive and Bideford Walk. Alison White was contracted to lead on each whilst volunteers assisted by delivering leaflets to houses. Plymouth City Council's grounds team did the planting and they are also providing the aftercare.

All the PSDCF Neighbour-Wood projects continue to be closely monitored with costs and experience being gathered to inform future projects.

Tree replacements

Neighbour-Wood funding does not cover every situation, including trees on their own or in pairs. Other resources are needed and PTP can sometimes assist. As an example, we were able to replace the historic sycamore by Plymouth Guildhall after it had blown down in Storm Noa in April 2023. In view of its prominent position and history as a Blitz survivor, the project included a ceremonial planting by the Lord Mayor on 22nd March, exactly 83 years after the Guildhall was set alight in the Second World War. The new tree is a sycamore like its predecessor.



The Lord Mayor, Cllr Mark Shayer, planting the new tree by the Guildhall with PTP's Chair, Penny Tarrant.

In one of the Central Park tree avenues, a young horse chestnut had died following malicious damage, and this was replaced by Tree Wardens during one of their regular group sessions. Tree Wardens also tended the trees planted in 2020 in Herbert Street playground and took the opportunity to replace the young oak there which had died. It was the second one on that spot and had failed because of the difficult ground conditions and lack of water. A lot of hope is resting on the third tree.

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Tree Care

Tree Wardens

The pre-season Tree Warden meeting took place in the Hyde Park Social Club on one of the hottest evenings of the year but, even with just a few attending, it helped to plan activities over the autumn and winter.

There were 43 Tree Wardens on the roll at the end of 2023-24 and they have contributed in a variety of ways including tree monitoring, practical work, talks, educational activities and supporting young people with their Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. More than 1,200 volunteer hours have been recorded.

Hands-on tree care is being delivered by nominated Tree Wardens in 25 places whilst the mobile group has lent a hand with work sessions in a further 12 places. Ways to increase volunteering capacity are constantly being sought and, with a funding grant from Natural England, PTP was able to purchase a road trailer for transporting materials to and from work sites, as well as new tools and high-visibility surcoats for Tree Wardens.



Tree Wardens tending trees on Segrave Road, 15th March 2024

Family Tree Field

The young trees in this 4-acre field in Central Park, all planted since 2004, continue to provide practical opportunities to try different tree-care techniques and see what works best. Grass competition and quickly drying ground are the main challenges, and generous mulching with woodchip has proved to be enormously beneficial when getting young trees established.

Tree conservation

Armada Way

The night-time felling on 14th March 2023 left only 19 trees standing after STRAW – ‘Save the Trees of Armada Way’ – had obtained a necessarily urgent injunction. With felled trees and cut branches having to be left over the bird-nesting season, PTP Trustees issued a further statement in June. It reiterated our previous criticism of a design characterised by hard surfaces and fastigate trees that would make a less-welcoming and less-resilient environment.

Plymouth City Council released a revised design for consultation in October which incorporated all but six (subsequently four) of the remaining trees and, again, we were forced to deprecate the wide extent of unshaded paved surfaces. Although the design contained a greater number of trees, they were not generally with large canopies, so the overall aesthetic remained similar. We continue to encourage the use of trees that will capitalise on their well-known benefits, not only in Armada Way but in all urban spaces.

Development objections

Groups on the Hoe and at Crownhill contacted Plymouth Tree People for advice on preserving locally important trees in the face of injurious development proposals. In the conservation area of Lambhay Hill, street trees along the perimeter fence of a Ministry of Defence compound were to be removed to allow a new fence to be erected. On the green at Wilmot Gardens, a row of mature ash and oak trees lining the western boundary were to be removed for a housing development. We advised both local groups from PTP’s collective experience of similar situations and continue to follow progress with the planning applications.

Tree recording

Plymouth City Council’s asset management system, *Alloy*, includes trees and there would be mutual benefit if Tree Wardens could be involved with the ongoing task of keeping records up to date. The first training session has been arranged with a view to volunteers re-surveying the Hoe’s trees during 2024.

Educational talks and walks

Introduction to Trees course

Thirty people followed this course of monthly lectures which was aimed at providing a basic understanding across a range of topics such as tree biology, identification, cultivation, and threats to tree health. The content has been designed to give new Tree Wardens the necessary knowledge and confidence to be effective in the role while wanting to learn more. We have been extremely fortunate that Dom Scanlon, an experienced tree consultant and engaging presenter, has once again been available to lead the course.

Evening talks

Café Momus was the relaxed setting for two very well-attended evening talks. Harry Barton, former Chief Executive of Devon Wildlife Trust, spoke about the “Crucial Role of Trees in a

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Wilder Devon of the Future” on 4th March. Matt Underwood, a professional arboriculturist and PTP Trustee, spoke about “Plymouth’s Street Trees as Extreme Survivors” on 25th March.



Talk at Café Momus on 4th March 2024.

Promotional activities

Urban Tree Festival

The Urban Tree Festival has been a national event since 2018 and Plymouth participated for the first time in 2023, thanks to intensive planning by PTP’s Chair and event organisers. A total of 27 events were staged over nine days from 13th to 21st May, and they included talks and walks, ‘forest-bathing’ pursuits, workshops, and children’s activities. All were well subscribed, a few were booked out, and more than 500 people participated in total.

The festival coincided with the twentieth anniversary of Plymouth’s Tree Warden network and to celebrate, we held a reception for members when our Chair presented Tree Wardens with more than 10 years’ service with a signed print by tree-artist and PTP member, Kevin Tole.



Reception to celebrate 20 years of Tree Wardening in Plymouth, 17th May 2023

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Planning for a further festival in May 2024 is underway, and we are delighted that the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest has agreed to sponsor it.

Electronic communications

The old Plymouth Tree Partnership website was starting to look dated and, with the name change to “People”, we took the opportunity to give it a makeover and freshen the logo. The new website was launched in November and it will include a video made by Fotonow that shows how Tree Wardens are making a difference in Plymouth.

There have been regular posts on Plymouth Tree People’s Meta (Facebook) and on X (Twitter) pages, covering a broad range of tree topics. Photos of trees with special features have proved to be especially popular.

A monthly round-up of tree news has continued to be emailed to members and the previous issue about some going into ‘junk’ folders has been resolved.

LUSH charity pot weekend

The cosmetics firm, LUSH, hosts local charities in their stores from time to time and Plymouth Tree People were invited to tell customers about our work during the first weekend in March. Our presence was very well received, and with a new banner, leaflets and slideshow display to help, the event raised a total of £165.18.



All set in the LUSH shop, 2nd March 2024

‘For the Love of Trees’ book

Published by PTP in November 2022, this book remains on sale in bookshops, and orders have been received from other parts of the UK. Total receipts amount to £1,918 so there is some way to go before the publication costs of £2,438 are recovered. More generally, however, the venture has provided a useful way to celebrate the special qualities that trees bring and to engage others.

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Organisation and administration

Co-ordinator contract

With a growing list of places where resident or community groups have been asking for assistance, more organisational capacity was clearly needed and Trustees decided to engage Alison White in a co-ordinator role. She was selected because of her evident passion for trees and excellent communication skills. The contract has been for two days a week starting from 1st November 2023.

Organisational policies

All the organisation's policies were reviewed and updated as necessary, resulting in a revised Health & Safety policy and a new Biosecurity policy.

Changed bank account

We have looked for a bank with ethics that resonate with PTP's environmental values and after much deliberation moved PTP's current account to the Co-op Bank.

Plan for Trees steering group

The Plan for Trees steering group, attended by Plymouth Tree People's chair and secretary, has continued to shape collaboration around tree management, conservation and canopy restoration practices.

Trustees

John Stone and Joe Berryman left as Trustees, and Matt Underwood joined during the year. We are very grateful to John for his considerable contribution over many years, with his ability to apply logic to any issue and his superior practical skills always shining through. Joe brought much experience during his brief tenure and only left because of other demands on his time.

Matt Underwood is a senior arboriculturist in an ecological consultancy and he brings with him experience across a wide range of tree issues. Other Trustees at the end of the financial year were:

Roger Atkin	Treasurer
Dave Curno	
Chris Hunt	
Penny Tarrant	Chair
Andrew Young	Secretary

Funding

PTP's funding has come from a variety of sources. First and foremost, we are extremely grateful to several individuals who have made donations over the year, either as a one-off payment or as a regular amount. It is a very encouraging level of support which has confirmed the decision not to re-introduce membership fees after they were suspended during the Covid pandemic.

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Natural England awarded £8,490 for a project to increase the range of activities undertaken with a view to reaching more people and the outputs have included:

- Tools, training and materials for Tree Wardens
- A road trailer to support volunteering activities
- Promotional materials including a website refresh and short film
- Guided walks for members of the public
- Participation in the 2023 Urban Tree Festival.



Guided walk in Freedom Park – an event in Plymouth’s Urban Tree Festival 2023.

A pleasant surprise came in August when Plymouth Tree People won £5,000 in a special charity draw organised by the Benefact Group’s ‘Movement for Good’ initiative. The prize has been instrumental in building Plymouth Tree People’s capacity as a volunteering organisation and providing the confidence to take on more tree projects.

STRAW’s campaign to save the trees on Armada Way included a book of poetry, photography and art by the public and members of STRAW. We are most grateful that they decided to donate the book’s end-of-year sales profit (£658) to Plymouth Tree People.

As already appreciated, the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest has funded some projects managed by PTP through its ‘Neighbour-Wood’ scheme and it is sponsoring Plymouth’s Urban Tree Festival in 2024. Street tree replacements are necessarily expensive and this is reflected in PSDCF’s funding award of £47,304.

All of the above has meant that PTP’s expenditure has increased substantially from £5,978 in 2022-23 to £36,022 in 2023-24. An increase in year-end cash funds from £27,015 at March 2023 to £57,937 at March 2024 is also to be welcomed, and it should enable future activities to be planned on a much firmer basis while retaining sufficient unrestricted funds for a 12-month minimum operating period.

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Acknowledgements

In addition to the funding contributions gratefully received and acknowledged above, Plymouth Tree People has depended on the professional IT services generously given pro bono by Richard Cosgrave of Beside the Box and Mark Thomas of Nettio. Richard administers the Office 365 suite provided by Microsoft with free licences for qualifying charities whilst Mark administers the website and social media accounts. These are very significant contributions in financial terms and invaluable to PTP's day-to-day running.

We are also most grateful to Paul Marker, a chartered accountant, who has carried out the independent examination of PTP's annual accounts for the sixth consecutive year, each time generously providing this professional service free of charge.

PTP members have contributed in many different ways and it would be impossible to mention them all. However, Kevin Tole has undoubtedly brought an artistic element to the appreciation of trees with his exhibitions of drawings in the Theatre Royal and the Art Mill gallery. His 'Fagus sylvatica' signed prints made a wonderful presentation item for long-serving Tree Wardens and it deserves our special thanks.

It is a privilege to use facilities in the University of Plymouth's sustainability hub for educational activities and even more so when the University chooses to waive the usual hire charges. It has been a great moral support and very much appreciated.

Finally, we admire the work that the teams in Plymouth City Council's Street Services and Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest do for trees, and hope they benefit from having us around as much as we do them.

In numbers

Plymouth Tree People has:

295 Members including 43 who are Tree Wardens

Contributing:

1,200+ volunteer hours

Achieving:

500+ establishing trees tended

30 trees planted, with PTP as the lead partner

24 resident and community groups engaged

6 guided walks

11 educational talks