

Plymouth Tree Partnership

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With government funding, Plymouth City Council has planted more than 2,000 standard trees since March 2020 and taken on their aftercare, all of which is very welcome.

Most recently, in February 2022, the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest was launched with a 'Call to Action' weekend. Plymouth Tree Partnership ran two 'all-comer' tree care events as part of it. The Community Forest will have a strong emphasis on young people and eventually plant 1,900 hectares of land from the 'heart of the city to the edge of Dartmoor' and 'form a mosaic of different habitats'.

We look forward to continuing our dialogue with Plymouth City Council to establish a role in the Community Forest that builds on our core activities and key strengths; i.e. the Tree Warden network, community engagement, education and awareness, and fundraising for projects. Highlights from these activities are included in this report.

Tree Wardens



Coming out of the pandemic, Tree Wardens met in the new Community Sports Hub in Central Park on 20th September 2021 to re-establish contact and take stock. Encouragingly, most Tree Wardens had stayed active in their chosen roles during the pandemic.

At the year-end (31st March 2022), there were 34 active Tree Wardens (shown at Annex A). Six had enrolled or re-enrolled during the year with most bringing a great deal of relevant experience and all keen to make a positive contribution.

Five Tree Wardens retired or lost contact during the year. Each made a big difference where they worked and maybe 100 of the city's amenity trees exist today because of their efforts. Especial thanks go to Zita Moyse for her work in Victoria and Patna Parks and to Tina Wilson for hers in Burleigh Park Road.

The mobile group re-started in October to lend support where required and they met on a three-weekly cycle. Blessed by fine weather, they helped with tending young trees in these places:

20 th October	Freedom Park
12 th November	Tothill Park
3 rd December	Victoria Park
14 th January	Central Park
4 th February	Pemros Road
25 th February	Lower Street
18 th March	The Ride

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Plymouth Tree Partnership had been involved with plantings at each of the above locations except for The Ride. Here, about 100 plastic tree shelters were starting to interfere with the growth of trees and shrubs that had been planted in about 2014 without any maintenance provision in place.



Individual and group efforts together have amounted to 1024 hours of volunteer time spent on practical tree care tasks and many more hours have been spent in other volunteering roles. It is a very creditable achievement when there are so many other calls on time.

Members

Membership renewals declined significantly over the pandemic and new membership applications were also down. This is attributed to the lower levels of group activity during the period, especially the impossibility of holding the 2020 AGM and the usual programme of walks and talks.

With much uncertainty remaining in March 2022, not only from the pandemic but also because of the Community Forest, it was decided that subscriptions would not be sought for the coming year. The situation was explained to members by email and many chose to leave their annual mandate in place as a donation to support the partnership's work. Such loyal support was a tremendous boost and greatly appreciated.

These developments mean that the partnership started the 2022-23 year with 70 individual members and 8 corporate members.

Communications

Every month, news items have been collated into an email for members and volunteers. Statistics from Mailchimp which supports the service show that 'open' and 'clicked link' rates are slightly better than for comparable organisations although the number of emails reportedly going into recipient spam folders continues to be a concern.

Plymouth Tree Partnership relaunched its Facebook page as a 'group' during the year and it has been a useful channel for posting news items and forthcoming events. The Facebook page 'Plymouth Favourite Trees' continues to attract posts from a slightly broader following and there is usually an item of recent general interest there.

Trustees have maintained contact with the Tree Warden networks in Cornwall and South Hams, especially with a view to making the Tree Warden scheme more effective at the local level. In July, the Tree Council's national co-ordinator visited Plymouth and met representatives of all the groups together at Saltram.

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Trustees

David Curry and Diane Barrall retired as trustees at the 2021 Annual General Meeting. Having been the Chair since 2017, David was instrumental in consolidating Plymouth Tree Partnership as a registered charity on which others could depend. He worked hard to make the voice of community groups heard and it was during his tenure that Plymouth City Council made amenity tree planting a corporate objective, something that had not been seen previously. Diane's experience of practical tree care has been most valuable, and we are grateful to her and to David for their efforts to promote volunteering for trees, especially the Tree Warden scheme.

Penny Tarrant took over as Chair at the 2021 AGM and, with Dave Curno, is developing a dialogue with Plymouth City Council about the role of volunteers in the Community Forest. Much is still to be agreed but the partnership's capabilities, both existing and potential, are well recognised.

In other matters, trustees continue to give their time and experience freely and the following have served during the year from 1st April 2021:

Roger Atkin	Treasurer
Sandy Borthwick	
Dave Curno	
John Stone	
Penny Tarrant	Chair
Andrew Young	Secretary

Events

Although in-person events have been suspended with just a few exceptions, there have been several webinars and similar online meetings. Hayley Rogers, PCC's co-ordinator for tree planting gave a talk over Zoom on 14th April and Howard Gray, Green Blue Urban's urban trees advocate, gave two presentations on 1st and 11th November. We have also enjoyed listening to the presentations of others, notably the Trees and Design Action Group of which Plymouth Tree Partnership is a member.



Following a brief postponement to avoid clashing with football's Euro semi-final, the Annual General Meeting was held in the Devonport Park pavilion on 21st July. Afterwards, we enjoyed walking around the fruiting arboretum planted in February 2020 with two of the project's champions, James Brown and Fairfax Luxmoore. They described the arboretum's background in a lively and informative way.

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Family Tree Scheme

The Family Tree Scheme has been running since 2004 and attracted more than 130 donations to plant the field formerly known as ‘Lane End’ in Central Park. The young trees have been tended by Plymouth Tree Partnership volunteers who frequently hear appreciative comments like ‘this is my favourite place in the whole park’. With space at a premium, recent plantings have been small trees or large shrubs and there is still scope for more in well-chosen areas. However, the Council believe it is time to bring the Family Tree Scheme to a close and the Natural Infrastructure Team has taken over the field’s management, although volunteers will continue to care for the trees already planted. Chris Hunt has been leading this work very ably and, over winter, most of the trees were mulched with woodchip laid over a sheet of corrugated cardboard.

One of the last additions to the field has been a new bench funded by the Co-op Community Fund. It is a large plank taken from the Atlas cedar that used to stand in front of the main entrance at Derriford Hospital until removed for road widening and the bus interchange in 2016.



The closure of the Family Tree Scheme makes it more important to find a suitable permanent home for the dedications book although presently it remains in Plymouth Tree Partnership’s office at Poole Farm.

Trees and planning applications

Individuals and community groups concerned about losing trees in their neighbourhoods have approached Plymouth Tree Partnership for advice on several occasions. Each situation is different and involves a great deal of research and effort to prepare a meaningful response. We are very grateful to Kevin Warley for leading this activity in addition to his Tree Wardening role in Radford Park arboretum.

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Mutley Plain project

The loss of trees on Mutley Plain has long been lamented. Shrubs in planters were tried about twenty years ago but they could not make enough of a difference and were soon removed.

Re-introducing proper trees has always seemed a pipe dream but this changed in March 2021 when Drew and Co Ltd, a locally based engineering firm, donated £5,000 for tree planting schemes in the city as a demonstration of their commitment to reducing environmental impacts and leading the way towards sustainability.



Earmarking Drew and Co's donation for Mutley Plain provided a catalyst for engaging other stakeholders, not least The Tree Council which followed by allocating £20,000 from its Community Tree Planting Programme funded by Network Rail. With local pledges, it meant that about half the estimated cost of five new trees was already secured. The high cost is due to the need to work around underground services and to install soil cells that can bear the weight of the pavement while keeping the tree roots zone free of compaction.

Raising the outstanding funding required will depend on a Crowdfunder campaign. We applied to Plymouth University's Virtual Internship scheme in January for a student who could develop the materials and manage the social media aspects. The bid was successful and the Crowdfunder campaign looks set to launch imminently.

Acknowledgements

We continue to be grateful to Richard Cosgrave of Beside the Box (an IT Support business) for generously lending his firm's professional services. The shared drive he set up in 2018 makes it possible for trustees to access files remotely and is a valuable store of information.

Katherine Tubb has kindly lent her experience as a charity consultant to present Plymouth Tree Partnership's work to local businesses and discuss where mutually beneficial relationships could be established. It is a long-term prospect and the advent of the Community Forest will also influence developments here.

Lastly, very many thanks to everyone who has supported our work to help others plant and care for trees. People have volunteered or contributed in many different ways and each one has been extremely valuable. It would be impossible to acknowledge them all as they deserve so this brief paragraph must suffice. Thank you most sincerely.

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Charity management

Policies have been kept under review and the reserves policy to retain sufficient unrestricted funds to continue operating for a minimum period of twelve months was achieved. There were no incidents of a serious nature during the year.

Annex A – Tree care and surveys

Plymouth Tree Partnership's volunteer Tree Wardens have been delivering care to young trees or undertaking tree surveys in the following places during 2021-22.

Location	Tree Warden
Adelaide Park	Barbara Hampson
Astor Park	Emily Triplett
Central Park	Martin Blacher Chris Hunt (Family Tree Field) Nicola Westlake (Alma Road) Alice Thompson (Swarthmore Orchard) Matt Underwood (Swarthmore Orchard)
Cremyll Street	Mick Nightingale
Devonport Park	Fairfax Luxmoore
Down Horn Park orchard	Nigel Jackson
Freedom Park	Jacques Marchal
Haddington Road	Fairfax Luxmoore
Ham Woods	Dave Curno
Pemros Road	Ken Hamblin
Plympton	David Frost
Prynne Close	Diane Barrall
Radford Park	Kevin Warley Jenny Floyd
Radford Woods	Andy Anderson Hilary Fursdon
Staddiscombe Playing Fields	Alan and Menza Ramage
Thorn Park	Gloria Dixon
Torr Lane	Roy and Liz Harris
Tothill Park	Nick Reid
Mobile Group	20 Tree Wardens who lend a hand anywhere.