



Report to Witham Town Council of the activities of The Witham Tree Group – 2018/19

The hot dry summer of 2018 presented the Group with a considerable challenge. Our bowser was in use on a weekly basis, sometimes refilling twice as we strove to keep our valuable trees alive. On the whole we succeeded losing just one.

Our choice of trees for the spring 2019 planting was heavily influenced by our experiences during last summer. We selected species with a proven track record of reliability under dry conditions, for example variants of the field maple, *Acer campestre*.

Whereas our planting during the spring of 2018 was in mainly 'open' grassland, our spring 2019 planting returned in the main to residential areas. These included several 'greens' in the areas of **Brain and Trent Road, Epping Way and Cuppers Close**. We also extended the planting along part of **Spa Road**. For the **area beside Asda** the District Council provided us with a replacement horse chestnut for the tree that was destroyed by contractors clearing the ditch. BDC also provided us with several trees to replace some of those planted in the spring of 2015 by Kings under the '£45k' project that had failed. These replacements included a number of field maples by the **Children's playground off Bramble Road** and a plane to replace an oak on the **Greenfields estate off Pasture Road**.

Our planting sessions this spring were assisted on a couple of occasions by our friends from Aegon (formerly Cofunds) and for the most part by fine weather, but not without mishap. Despite meticulous checking for the presence of underground services we hit a water main when planting in Cuppers Close. We were digging at the time some 7m from the nearest main according to maps provided by the water company. Essex and Suffolk Water were quickly on the scene to repair the damage and kindly helped us with their detection device to avoid further problems at the location.

Our activities are now regularly reported on our new website which is helping to spread the word of our existence. We were contacted by a resident in Wickford who wishes to establish a tree group in her town. We provided a potted history of how we came into existence and how we enjoy the invaluable support of our Town Council and a good working relationship with the Landscape Service department of Braintree District Council. Wickford is hoping to establish a Town Council this year and forming a tree and landscaping committee is one of their priorities.

Recent months has seen a number of articles in the national press highlighting the benefits of living in an environment surrounded by trees. These articles have also highlighted a growth in Community Tree Groups up and down the country. Many of these groups were formed when it was realised that austerity hit local authorities were unable to replace trees felled on account of age, disease or issues such as broken pavements or subsidence. One article in the *Sunday Times* noted that a standard 'street' tree cost a local council around £700 to buy, plant and nurture for those important first two years of its life and councils were struggling to find both resources and manpower to provide this important service.

The Witham Tree Group has planted over 30 substantial trees this spring, most of them purchased by our two local authorities. With each tree costing around £80 - £100 (some a little more) and using

the Sunday Times costings, that represents a massive saving for local tax payers of around £18,000 over a two year period. And we have been doing this now for 5 years.

The *Sunday Times* article also reported that a new scientific study from Denmark has revealed the importance of trees in the urban environment, concluding that children growing up in green leafy spaces are less likely to develop a mental illness in adulthood. The findings were based on an examination of more than 1m people.

It is now well established that trees improve air quality by removing pollutants, helping to reduce the severity of conditions such as asthma in children. The study from Denmark re-enforces our knowledge of the health and wellbeing benefits of living with trees.

The Tree Group looks forward to continuing its mutually beneficial relationship with The Town Council.

Allan Waight
Deputy Chairman
Witham Tree Group

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