



Report to Town Council 2022 – 2023

The summer of 2022 once again proved to be challenging. Watering began in early April and continued weekly until late September. Despite this regular maintenance programme, we lost two trees. Closer examination suggested poor soil conditions at these two sites were probably the primary contributory factor. Before the autumn/winter planting season commenced we checked all trees for broken ties and posts and damaged cages and carried out remedial work need.

The planting season began with a very successful collaborative project on the Templars estate involving the local Residents' Association. Essex County Council, Witham Town Council, Braintree District Council and our wonderful supporters from Aegon. A total of 32 trees, including Japanese cherry trees around the children's play area, were planted. The success of this project may lead to further large scale projects funded through ECC including the area alongside the new cycle path from the Rivenhall Park Development, at Spa Road and Rickstones recreation ground. Extending the planting at Spa Road has been an objective for some time and using Town Council and Tree Group funds an initial tranche of 12 trees has been planted.

Following a request from a resident we completed a nine tree scheme at Cornel and Bryony Close using Town Council tree planting funds. Approval was sought from and readily granted by Eastlight, the landowners. The usual consultation with residents overlooking the planting sites was carried out before plans were finalised.

We planted two further memorial trees at the site off Flora Road by the underpass.

Chatten Free School for children with severe autism contacted the Tree Group for help with trees for a planned sensory garden. The use of Council funding for such school projects being barred by legislation, a Group member stepped forward to support this very worthy project and four trees with sensory appeal were planted.

Whips and small trees are particularly vulnerable to our hot dry summers and during the winter we replaced several at the site off Cut Throat Lane by the Electricity Sub Station.

Tree Group members visited Howbridge Junior School where we met children and their teacher to provide advice on a whip planting scheme planned by the school.

Shortridge Court Residents' Association contacted the Group for advice on a proposed tree planting scheme. However, a routine search for underground services revealed extensive pipelines running through the area where planting was proposed that prevented the project proceeding.

In January 2023 BDC invited views on its Healthy Housing Policy. The Tree Group took the opportunity to reflect on the need for tighter planning control of developers to ensure that trees planted are properly maintained to ensure their survival. In May we followed this up with details of a survey carried out by the Group of the condition of trees planted on the Rivenhall Park development that illustrated our concern that too many trees planted by developers are failing as a result of inadequate maintenance.

We have been monitoring plans for the widening of the A12 with increasing concern for the potential loss of mature trees currently offering protection from noise, pollution and a visual barrier to traffic movements. Replacement trees will take many years to put back that protection. When the time comes, we will endeavour to ensure that re-instatement of vegetation lost is with suitable trees maintained to ensure their survival.

We are aware of a growing appreciation by residents of the work we have been doing and with exciting plans for further major projects, we are looking forward to continuing to enhance our town with trees for the enjoyment and wellbeing of the people of Witham.

Allan Waight
Deputy Chairman
Witham Tree Group

June 2023