

# Environment and Sustainability Policy Committee 25 July 2024 Public Forum



**Public Forum questions have been received as listed below (full details are set out on the subsequent pages):**

1. Annette Catherine: Net Zero/Clean Air
2. Danica Priest: Yew Tree Farm (*Attending*)
3. Suzanne Audrey: Tree removal (*Attending*)
4. Suzanne Audrey: Loss of established trees
5. Suzanne Audrey: Replacement' trees
6. Helen Hughes: Climate change
7. Helen Hughes: Reliance on superstores
8. Helen Hughes: Plastic grass and paving

**Public Forum Statements have been received as listed below (full details are set out on the subsequent pages):**

1. Jenny Harrison (*Attending*)
2. Catherine Withers



## **Public Forum Questions**

### **1. QUESTION FROM Annette Catherine**

Please read the above report on dark funding for the net zero/clean air agenda. **NOTE: the link was provided.**

Eg since 1999 the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation has given 2 billion to UK universities.

C40 cities, UK 100 are funded by billionaires Michael Bloomberg and Christopher Hohn.

Bearing in mind this billionaire interference in research and education, how can the council be certain of operating from unbiased data and opinion?

### **Officer reply:**

Bristol City Council has confidence in the peer reviewed research undertaken by universities and in the systems designed to avoid “interference” from funders, be these philanthropic organisations, businesses or governments.

We also use evidence from independent international institutions such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

We are members of UK100 and work closely with C40 and have found their research and policy development to be of a high standard.

Finally, we employ professional and well qualified officers to advise the Council and Committees on policy matters.

### **2. QUESTION FROM Danica Priest**

Massive amounts of scrub was recently cleared at Yew Tree Farm and despite there being an ecologist present a birds nest was found destroyed which I’m sure you are aware is a crime and the police have been notified. We are now being told the council plans to do vegetation clearance on Haldon close on the Northern Slopes to investigate potential House Building which goes against the Green Spaces motion and our ecological emergency plan.

Doing work during nesting season is bad practice and harmful to our wildlife, will you commit to stopping this behaviour from the previous administration?

### **Officer reply:**

Scrub cleared on land adjacent to Yew Tree Farm has been carried out in accordance with an agreed Precautionary Method of Working (PMW) with respect to Dormice and other fauna. The PMW was accepted by the Bristol City Council Nature Conservation Officer in our Planning Service as part of the ongoing process of meeting the requirements of a planning condition associated with the cemetery expansion project. The work was undertaken by hand and monitored by a licensed Ecologist and there were two areas identified where there was bird nesting activity and these have been left. The work carried out did not damage any birds’ nest.

Haldon Close

The land at the end of Haldon Close is a former council housing site that was allocated for redevelopment as part of the Local Plan (2014, BSA1124), with initial development proposals being put forward by a Registered Housing Provider.

Due to various site considerations and constraints the Provider decided to relinquish interest in the land.

Vegetation clearance works at Haldon Close took place in February 2024 and were scheduled ahead of bird nesting season to minimise any impact to local bird populations, in-line with ecological guidance and best practice. Neighbouring residents were notified of the works via a letter and the volunteer group the ‘Supernovers’ were updated prior to works starting on-site.

The Council’s recent site investigations and vegetation clearance have been conducted to understand the conditions of the site, including the likely impact any development would have on biodiversity, and inform any future proposals for the land. No decision has been taken as to the future of the site and the outcome of recent investigations will inform the most appropriate way forward.

**QUESTIONS 3, 4, 5. FROM Suzanne Audrey**

**Background.** Bristol City Council has declared both a Climate Emergency and an Ecological Emergency. Given the importance of established trees in an urban environment, it is important to protect them. Small replacement trees, planted as 'mitigation' for removing established trees, often fail to thrive - and those that do take many years to deliver the benefits of established trees. It appears that developments proposing the loss of established trees in Bristol are treated on an individual basis, rather than considering the cumulative effect e.g. current developments in the Bedminster area.

**Question 3.** Please can you provide figures for the total number of established trees removed per year across the city in the last five years?

**Officer reply:**

As a local planning authority, the council considers the number of trees lost and replacement trees proposed when determining planning applications for specific proposals, and secure appropriate mitigation proposals on a case-by-case basis.

Where trees removed on private land, for example in private gardens, not for the purpose of development and we do not hold information on this.

On council land trees are removed for a variety of reasons and the number of trees that have been removed within the last 5 financial years, between 2019/20 and 2023/24, is set out in the table below.

Year	Total
2019-20	456
2020-21	420
2021-22	347
2022-23	478
2023-24	468
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,169</b>

**Question 4.** What measures are in place to ensure that planning applications which include the loss of established trees are collated to give a full picture of the loss of established trees across the city.

**Officer reply:**

As a local planning authority, the council considers the number of trees lost and replacement trees proposed when determining planning applications for specific proposals, and secure appropriate mitigation proposals on a case-by-case basis.

**Question 5.** Please can you provide figures for the total number of 'replacement' trees that have died in Bristol per year for the last five years?

**Officer reply:**

The council only has data on the number of trees planted by Bristol City Council to compensate for the loss of trees to development where a planting condition was discharged to the Council via a Section 106 agreement, ie, the council plants the tree with funds provided by the developer. The council does not hold data on the survival of trees directly replaced by developers, where such planning conditions apply.

The question has asked for the number of trees that have died, but to paint a fuller picture we have included those that have been replaced and some explanatory notes. These replacement trees are all living to the best of our knowledge.

<b>Replacement Trees planted via Section 106 agreement</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>Number trees planted</b>	<b>Number trees failed</b>	<b>Number trees re-planted</b>	<b>Notes</b>
2019-20	308	35	33	2 trees not replaced awaiting completion of works on Hengrove Way.
2020-21	338	17	17	
2021-22	269	28	28	
2022-23	86	23	19	4 trees not relaced due to land ownership. Some trees failed 21-22 but replanted 22/23. Losses from 22/23 planting are due to be replanted winter 24/25.
2023-24	175	9	0	9 trees scheduled for re-planting 2024-25

**QUESTIONS 6, 7, 8. FROM Helen Hughes**

**Question 6.** The fears around climate change that have led to policy on "Net Zero" and pollution are centred around the physical issue of reducing carbon emissions particularly through restricting the use of private motor vehicles. I would like to know if the committee is also taking the other aspects of changes in weather patterns into account, particularly the biological changes in the water cycle (caused by converting living land into concrete and tarmac, including housing), and soil degradation, and what they are doing or planning to do about these?

**Officer reply:**

The City Council has not specifically taken into account the specific impacts you refer to as causes of climate change.

The new local plan sets out standards for Urban Greening for major developments to encourage the incorporation of green space, trees etc to reduce the effects of climate change on the urban heat island effect, that is the increased temperatures in urban areas caused by hard surfaces like concrete absorbing more heat than vegetated surfaces.

We have also developed the Keep Bristol Cool Framework to help us take a strategic approach to tackling the effects of summer overheating on the health of Bristol residents. [Keep Bristol Cool Framework](#)

**Question 7.** What is the committee intending to do to encourage trade for small local farmers, growers and food shops, and reduce reliance on superstores and the vast amount of environmentally damaging deliveries via HGVs they necessitate?

**Officer reply:**

The city council has supported the development of the Bristol Good Food Plan and this can be found on the website <https://bristolgoodfood.org/> An update from April 2024 also published on the website highlighted a couple of actions taken by the city council which help in general terms to support local food businesses, from loan of trial electric vehicles to a variety of activities to promote the Bristol Eating Better Award standards which encourages the use of local suppliers. The council is also supporting local high streets through a range of initiatives and this will indirectly support some local food shops.

The council's ability to encourage further trade as you suggest is very limited.

**Question 8.** What is the committee's policy on the ever-increasing amount of plastic grass and paving over of gardens seen in the city?

**Officer response:**

Where these changes are made as part of development which needs planning permission, we have developed a new Local Plan policy which is scheduled for adoption in 2025. This says: *“Developments should not include artificial grass within their landscape schemes or as part of the provision of private or communal open space.”* The plan also includes policies to encourage retention and improvement of trees, vegetation etc.

Where planning permission is not required we have no powers and therefore no policy on these matters.

**Public Forum Statements**

**Statement 1. Jenny Harrison**

"Nothing is more important than the future of our planet, and ensuring that we have a liveable future. Bristol City Council has declared a climate emergency, claims to be world-leading in terms of responding

to climate change, and is committed to its citizens consuming totally carbon-neutral food and drink by 2030. Moving towards a plant-based food system would be the most logical and science-backed way to do so. The 'Bristol Good Food 2030' document states that 'Reducing meat and dairy consumption is key to mitigating severe climate change impact'. Indeed, animal agriculture is one of the largest culprits of greenhouse gas emissions, and the single biggest cause of land use change, which makes the impacts of a warming world all the worse. A 2019 Harvard University study found that if we transition to a plant-based food system, half of UK land would be available to rewild, therefore allowing us to restore biodiversity and draw down huge quantities of carbon.

Many other UK councils have recently voted for fully plant-based internal catering, to increase plant-based food options at all their external sites, and to promote plant-based eating to residents. As the Environment Committee, we are sure that you will encourage and create positive changes such as these, wherever you have influence, leading by example towards a more sustainable and healthy future for all."

## **Statement 2. Catherine Withers**

Yew Tree Farm and I have been treated very badly by council officers and some elected members historically. Failures within the planning system has led to dor mice habitat destruction and an ongoing police investigation. Those currently being investigated for the habitat destruction are also the council's preferred graziers of the council owned section of the SNCI.

During the previous administration an elected member wrote to my professional colleagues, such as the soil association and the sustainable food trust in an attempt to discredit my farming methods. It appears at this time senior officers knew the farm was home to the only dor mice habitat in Bristol but did not share this information to elected members for the proposed South Bristol Crematorium expansion planning meetings.

You can imagine my relief as I welcomed a new system that has promised more accountability and openness in processes.

I am horrified to find that the recent scrub removal at Yew Tree Farm was not compliant with the relevant planning condition and appeared to have broken wildlife law. At least two bird's nests were destroyed or damaged by the works.

Shockingly, the work was undertaken during an active dor mice survey. It appears a number elected members were made aware of the proposed scrub removal.

My tenancy on this land was ended on 1<sup>st</sup> May by the council officers. I have lived and worked on this land my whole life. My local councillors (one new, one old) were informed of these works but neither decided to inform me.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> July a member of the public asked crematorium staff what was going on when he saw men with strimmer's working on the bramble. The staff member responded – 'I'm not supposed to tell you but they are looking for dor mice because the council want to develop it'.

Throughout the day I was contacted by numerous members of the public who were outraged.

A documentary film maker who was recording wildlife on the farm asked the workmen if an ecologist was present. She was told the name of the ecologist.

I informed the concerned locals that there was nothing I could do, I felt hopeless as I assumed this work was sanctioned by elected members and that officers were working strictly within their permissions and method statements.

I have now discovered this was not the case. Yet again it took the Bristol Tree Forum to look at the officer's actions and members of the public to inspect the damage to discover illegal destruction to our dwindling wildlife.

Can I seek reassurance from the new committee system that any further actions will be stopped pending a full internal investigation, and that any future ecological actions by officers will be forensically scrutinised by your committee.

I will not accept that Yew Tree farm's biodiversity be sacrificed by the intention of officers to flout the rules and laws they are paid to uphold. I am outraged.