

Strategic Planning & Highways Group
Tree Preservation Taskforce
Notes from Meeting
21 August 2025

Attendees: David Solman (chairing), Kirby James, Stephen Mariner, Gert Vonhoff, Ed Dolphin as guest from Sidmouth Arboretum

Excused: Hilary Neville

Not attending / check whether they are still interested: Angela Goddard

Blue colour shows actions still to be taken. Green colour: action done.

The very productive meeting provided a whole list of avenues and projects the taskforce is going to pursue and set-up. Key will be to attract the public, engage with the local media and through this generate pressure on politicians to influence officers. This at the same time will help raising the profile of the society and should benefit membership numbers and structure.

Review of TPO Map

Kirby confirmed that this or a similar page in the past contained information which the current format no longer provides, such as the species of the trees; it would also be useful to see more about their condition and/or history, and the National Grid reference for each tree.

The trees marked by red dots represent not-confirmed TPOs, which supposedly were the reason the map was taken off a couple of years ago.

We were astonished by the incoherence of the TPOs shown on the map, but Ed Dolphin pointed out that this is part of the current inadequacy about TPOs in general. TPOs are only set up when it is perceived that a tree is under threat; they do not represent a coherent approach for tree conservation e.g. based on a comparative survey. In Conservation Areas it is common for TPOs to not be placed on trees until someone applies to do work on a tree and the Council then decides that a tree needs protection.

In order to reform the TPO system or make the local TPO listings more systematic, and to improve their care and maintenance, it is necessary to generate public interest in trees and flag improvement proposals up to the local Council, national bodies, and/or government; we all need to actively do more. This group aims to find/share ECC's policy commitment in its 'Tree and Woodland Strategy 2023-2033', generate public interest, and increase pressure to more to actively protect the city's trees

(<https://committees.exeter.gov.uk/documents/s94003/Tree%20and%20Woodland%20Strategy%202023%20-33%20Final.pdf>).

- DS to consult the document. DS to contact ECC to find out about state of Tree Officer (who is currently substituting, when will the position be filled again).
- GV to find out who are the portfolio holders for trees at ECC and DCC.
- After that information is retrieved, taskforce to write an official letter as part of a campaign and inform press about the situation: the letter should welcome the restoring of the website, but then highlight its inefficiencies.

Public Tree Project

Instead of just developing tree leaflets, Ed Dolphin confirmed from his Sidmouth work that it would be necessary to bring the public on ones side and engage them actively, to then approach the Council. In Sidmouth the result has been a council which is very much supporting the work of the Sidmouth Arboretum, opening doors and promoting its work.

We agreed to start with two tangible projects: 1) Bull Meadow Park as an area for TPOs (start in Sep) and 2) Prospect Park as an area for street trees (with only 1 TPO, work to start in October).

Bull Meadow Park

We dedicated the September tree walk to the start of the work in Bull Meadow Park: Ed Dolphin will provide us with a tree map for the park (using Google MyMaps and training David, Stephen and Kirby up). He will identify and photograph the trees for us. His work is voluntary and we will not have to reimburse him for anything. We will store the information on our website, create a QR code and ask ECC to display that in the park (Ed teamed up with the university and two such codes will be placed in their grounds, so our effort can be 'sold' to ECC as part of a bigger initiative from which the city will benefit.)

New date for Sep walk: 10 Sep, 2-4 (to be confirmed).

GV to advertise it on the website and inform Andy and Keith: done.

GV to contact Katherine in late August to see whether she will invite her local Whatsup group to the walk and whether we can use Old St Leonard's Hall after walk for a meeting planning next steps with local residents.

Prospect Park (Road in Pennsylvania)

For October [the taskforce will develop a leaflet to be used in door-to-door enquiries](#) about the residents' willingness to engage with protecting their street trees and mapping issues. Only one of the mature trees has a TPO, some have been felled in recent years endangering the street to lose its leafy character and identity.

Potential next steps after that. Approaching DCC to grant all trees in this street TPOs, plan a local event with residents (they have been known for their street parties bringing the community of permanent residents and HMOs/students together), finding out whether we can include the university outreach team as well in this.

Both projects can function as **blue-prints for similar projects all over the city**: a good follow-up might be **Priory Park**, where a local neighbourhood association looks after the park, plants trees, but after last winter storms a few of the mature trees had to be cut back substantially or vanished completely.

[David Solman to report about the work of the taskforce at the next AGM.](#)

Ed Dolphin signalled his willingness to provide a Saturday talk to the society next year. [Keith Lewis to invite him for a talk in 2026.](#)

Next meeting:

1. [Agree on follow-up meeting in September after the walk.](#)