Tree Report AGM 2023

Mike Slocombe reported:

1. That Covid had undoubtedly had its effect on the amount of tree work that had been carried out during the past year.
2. That in addition WBC had removed their Tree Department from the Council Offices and that the members of the “Tree Team” were currently working from home. As a result, Planning Applications that had been previously taking 6-8 weeks to process were now taking 12-14 weeks – especially when a TPO was involved.
3. That this may not at first be seen to be a major problem. However, when one also considers the fact that trees cannot be cut in “the nesting season”, they cannot be tackled when there are high winds and, on top of this, the Tree Surgeons keep all the school holidays free for working on trees in School grounds – (when, to be fair, it is safer for the children) - the result is that there are limited periods when tree surgery could be undertaken. That the removal of any “Dead or Dangerous” trees would usually be processed by WBC as urgent - in days rather than months.
4. That apart from tidying up trees around the estate and removing any fallen trees in the Conservation Area, the Board had, as instructed by WBC, removed 3 large trees from the cut to the rear of 19 BBW. The original recommendation, in the bi-annual Tree Report undertaken by Professional Tree Consultants, was to plant a Dawn Redwood behind 19 BBW. However, we had appealed this decision and WBC instructed us instead to plant 3 x Alders along the bank. A second appeal was made with a recommendation to plant 3 very much smaller “Prunus Kanzan” along the bank. After a further consultation, WBC agreed that we could plant 2 x Prunus – but we had, in order to meet the Planning Requirements, to still plant one Alder as close as possible to the spot where the 3 original trees had been felled. A list of 3 acceptable trees were specified by WBC. The tree agreed, following further consultations, was an Alnus Glutinosa “Imperialis” - which grows to approx. 6m in height and 4m in width after 20 years. Whilst this was certainly not ideal it was a great improvement over a standard Alder which grows to 28m and seriously better than the Dawn Redwood that could grow to 60m.
5. That where a tree had a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) attached to it WBC had total control as to the species of tree that could be used to replace it - should it need to be felled.
6. That funds were available to undertake, in the coming 12 months, the tidying up (or reduction in height) of several trees around the estate and, also to fell several dead or dying trees in the conservation area.
7. That a new Tree Survey would be undertaken, by our Specialist Tree Consultants “Challis”, towards the end of the year. That this would provide the Landings ‘plan of action’ for 2024-25 and that currently there are approximately 100 trees with TPOs, and a further 100+ trees without TPOs, on the Estate.
8. That Bamboo was getting totally out of hand at the rear of 1-5 BBW. As a result, GN Tree Surgeons had been engaged to cut back the depth of the bamboo along the walkway by approx. 2-3 metres. This would allow the tree surgeons to reach and then lower the bamboo along the riverside. Previously this had been done from the river, as a favour, by the Environment Agency – but the new EA person was not, at this time, qualified to use the boat. GN would for this year therefore tackle it from the land.
9. That finally, the Board continued to add new “none-TPO’d” trees where appropriate on The Landings - to provide additional colour to the estate e.g. the use of Prunus, Acers, Magnolias etc. plus various coloured Cornus - including the bright-red “Sibirica” and reddish/orange “Winter Fire”. That rings were also being dug around the trees to reduce weeds and that bark would be added as appropriate – with the intention of providing a more professional and interesting look to the estate.