

Draft Proposal and Plan for replacing the avenue of trees in Fore Street, Bradninch



Bradninch Town Council April 2013

N.B. This document is for consultation purposes. It is a proposal, and no decisions have been taken at this stage (April 2013)
Please submit comments to Bradninch Town Council

Summary

- ✦ This proposal is to carry out enhancement works to Fore Street, involving the replacement of the avenue of trees, alterations to the grass verges and remedial work to the road edge.
- ✦ Expert advice states that the chestnut trees in Fore Street will not survive for more than another 20 years.
- ✦ If replacement is to happen, it should be undertaken in good time.
- ✦ A sub-group of Bradninch Town Council has identified several possible alternative trees.
- ✦ These could be interplanted with the existing trees, which can be removed when necessary at a later date, to minimise disruption.
- ✦ Estimated costs for the works will be in the order of £7500, plus costs of work to road.
- ✦ Options for the future maintenance of the grass verges and the trees should be considered
- ✦ This proposal is for consultation purposes. A final proposal will be written in the light of discussions.



Fore Street in 1962. Note the trees on both sides.

Why is there a need?

The trees which form the avenue in Fore Street, one of the most striking features of the town, are mostly Horse Chestnuts. These have been heavily pollarded over their long lifespan (110 years), and are now vulnerable to bleeding canker, a disease which has become prevalent due to climate change and is currently ravaging this species in the South West. Experts advise that they will all be dead within twenty years. One has already succumbed.

If the avenue is to be replaced, it would be better to take action before the old trees have to be removed, and while there is time to plan. New trees will take several years to get established.

The trees in Fore Street are one of the principal features of the town, and many will feel affection for them. Replacing them is something that will be gifted to future generations, and the significance of this act should not be underestimated.

The current situation

The 16 trees on the South side of Fore Street are growing in land belonging to Devon County Council, which is mostly grass verge, with some poorly maintained uneven tarmac 'steps' two-thirds of the way down the street. Many of the trees date from the original planting in 1901. The original planting was all of Horse Chestnuts, but some have died over the years and have either not been replaced or other species (Lime, Hawthorn, Cherry) planted.

Grass cutting and pollarding are undertaken by Mid Devon District Council. It was noted that there has been quite poor management of the grass areas, i.e. not clearing path edges and not cutting regularly enough to prevent the grass becoming coarse. Management of the trees is also poor, as there are many suckers growing from the base of trees.

One Horse Chestnut is growing in the car park in front of the Castle pub (land belonging to DCC Highways), and a Lime is in the pavement area in front of the Guildhall.

Trees on the North side (5) are growing in land belonging to the individual householders. These are 1 Lime, 2 pollarded Horse Chestnuts, a Cherry and a Sycamore/Norway Maple. Gaps between the trees are uneven. There is no kerb between the private land and the road surface, leading to problems with run-off and damage to gravel and tarmac areas during periods of heavy rain.

There is a public right of access across all the frontages in this area of Fore Street.

Fore Street is located within a Conservation Area. As a result any proposed changes will require consultation with MDDC planning and conservation officers.

The issues

- ⤴ The trees are at or near the end of their natural lifespan
- ⤴ Pollarding encourages disease
- ⤴ The Chestnuts will die from canker within the next few years
- ⤴ The current arrangement is untidy with gaps in the avenue and several inappropriate species
- ⤴ Trees on the North side are in private ownership
- ⤴ Maintenance is currently barely adequate

The Options

Several options are available:

- 1) Do nothing.
- 2) Remove all trees and replant
- 3) Interplant and remove old trees when new ones are established
- 4) (Additional) Take the opportunity to tidy up the green verges and address road edge problems on the north side

Option 1)

It is tempting not to act until it is necessary, but this would mean the avenue becoming increasingly gappy and unsightly. At some point a decision will have to be made to remove the remaining trees and either plant anew or lose the trees altogether. The final decision time is likely to occur in the next 10 to 20 years.

Option 2)

The cheapest option would be to have all the trees removed in one go, before replanting with new. The replacement trees will be small and unimpressive for some years, so there will be a period of transition before they become established.

Option 3)

It is inadvisable to replant trees in the same spot where one has been removed, so it is possible to interplant new trees in the existing avenue, allowing them some time before removing the old ones. This is likely to be more costly, especially if the old trees are removed some at a time at a later date. They will also have to be cut down carefully so as not to damage the new trees. Visually, this option will provide the most continuity for the look of Fore Street, because it will not leave it bare of trees at any time.

Option 4)

This is an additional option to carry out further enhancement works to Fore Street. Interplanting on the South side will require removal of some of the old tarmac steps and a disused path. Grassing this area will provide visual continuity down the street, and make for easier maintenance. Some areas of tarmac could be left so as to provide access from the road to the houses, similar to the paths further up the street. Additional planting of bulbs in the grass areas could also be included in this option, and offers an opportunity for hands-on community involvement.

There is a need for works to the edge of the road on the North side. Kerbstones or a proper gully would form a boundary to the private land and prevent the erosion of tarmac and shifting of gravel that currently occurs.

Tree requirements

- ⤴ The trees should form an attractive avenue or line
- ⤴ They should be low-maintenance
- ⤴ They should be disease-resistant
- ⤴ They should not be pollarded
- ⤴ They should not grow too large
- ⤴ They should not create too much shade

Suitable trees

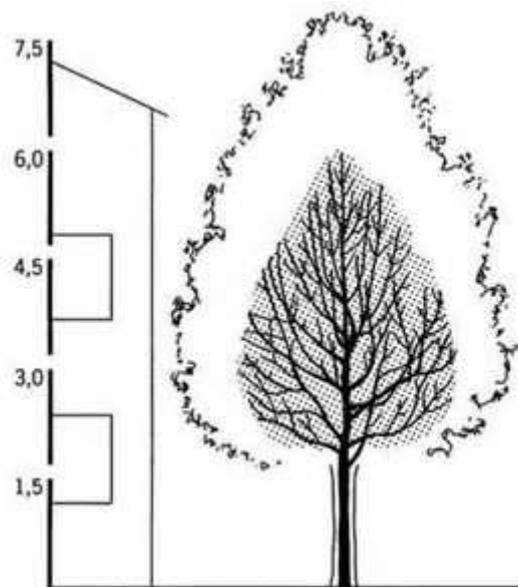
Assuming that some action is agreed, a choice of tree species must be made.

The Town Council group agreed that it would be best for the avenue to be composed of a single type rather than several different species. The feature is highly visible from the road approaching Bradninch from Cullompton, as well as from within the town, and this gives a striking and homogeneous effect.

Three trees were identified by the experts as candidates:

1) *Pyrus* 'Chanticleer'

This is a type of pear tree. It is a common street tree, early flowering, with a pyramid shape and good autumn colour. It reaches a maximum height of 30ft and can survive for up to 100 years. But it is not very resistant to honey fungus – which is likely to form on the roots of the dead trees. It is also not a particularly unusual or striking tree and can look scrappy in winter when it is bare.



2) Sorbus 'Hillings Spire'

This is a mountain ash, which has a goblet shape, good colour and berries in autumn and an open branch structure. It is also rather small (10 - 15ft), has poor resistance to honey fungus and a short life expectancy – approx 30 years.



3) Acer Campestre 'William Caldwell'

This is an unusual variant of a native tree, with a lifespan of up to 200 years. It has a spectacular conical shape and striking foliage in autumn. It has a strong resistance to honey fungus and a maximum height of around 30ft. Although it is narrow it has a dense but not heavy foliage structure and will require some pruning at the base to maintain its shape.



Other Trees

Limes were considered as an alternative, but rejected on several grounds: they would need pollarding, and produce a sticky residue which would fall onto parked vehicles. They also have large leaves which will create considerable leaf litter in autumn.

The Town Council group considered that the Acer Campestre was a clear winner, not just because of its hardiness, shape and colour, but because it has a strong local connection. The only nursery in the country that cultivates this variety is Thornhayes at Dulford, and there is no other avenue of these trees in Devon.

Kevin Croucher gave his opinion that the avenue would be so spectacular in autumn that people would come to Bradninch just to see it!

How many trees?

At a site meeting on 16th February 2013, 16 locations were identified on the South side, including an additional tree at the bottom of the existing row, between King William and No 43. The top of the row would finish at the edge of the grass area. It is expected that the Chestnut in the pub car park would not be replaced, and the Lime in front of the Guildhall could be left to grow naturally with no further pollarding.

On the North side, 6 or 7 trees could be planted. It was noted that one landowner, currently without a tree, is informally supportive of the scheme and would be prepared to have a tree.

The Town Council will publish a map with proposed locations for the new trees.

Consultation

It is anticipated that everyone living in Bradninch will have an interest in how Fore Street looks, and consultation will accordingly seek to include as many views as possible. It will also be appropriate to consult more fully with those who are directly affected, as below:

South side (Guildhall side)

Before any action is taken it is necessary to consult with people living in Fore Street, both as to the type of tree and the exact positioning. The replacement trees could be placed so as to cause the minimum loss of light to properties, i.e. between windows or on property boundaries.

Additionally, discussions need to be had with MDDC planning and conservation, to gain the necessary approval for alterations.

North side (Spar side)

The group considered that it would be desirable to give the landowners on this side the opportunity and encouragement to join the scheme to replace the avenue. Clearly they would need to make individual decisions. In any event, those with Horse Chestnuts will need to decide when to have these removed.

Positioning of the trees would be an important consideration, as cars are parked between them at present, and it is unlikely anyone would be in favour of losing a parking space. However, there would seem to be scope for trees to be planted on the boundary between properties, maximising space while preserving the avenue.

It does not seem reasonable to expect the landowners on this side of the street to fund the replacement of their trees when the scheme is for the whole of Fore Street. It is therefore proposed that trees and planting should be offered on a no-cost basis.

For any works to take place on the North side, it will be essential for the householders to reach some agreement. If only one or two agree, it would be difficult to have a proper avenue.

Actions to date

A sub-group from the Town Council met with Adam Montague (voluntary Bradninch Tree Warden) on 15th January 2013 to discuss possible courses of action. Members of the sub-group are: Jane Webber, Simon Tytherleigh, Andy Butler and Mary Ryan.

A subsequent meeting was held on 26th January 2013 at Thornhayes Nursery, Dulford with Kevin Croucher (owner) and Adam Montague, to look at possible tree varieties. A report and presentation was made to the full Council at its February meeting.

A further site meeting was held on 16th February 2013 to identify and map locations of trees and to investigate the possibility of trees on the North side.

It was agreed to produce a draft proposal and plan (this document) to be available for the Annual Parish meeting in April 2013, to start the process of consultation.

Next Steps

The immediate next step is to spread the word about the proposal and to invite local residents to have their say. This will be achieved through publications such as the Bradninch Magazine, questionnaires and public meetings.

The Town Council will engage with the householders on the North Side to find out whether they are willing to take part, and to discuss details, planting locations etc. for inclusion in the final proposal.

In the light of the consultation, a final proposal will be discussed, agreed and published by the Town Council. It is important to ensure that there is wide community agreement with the final plan, as it will affect the townscape of Bradninch for many generations.

At the same time the Town Council will negotiate with the various authorities that have responsibility over Fore Street, namely Mid Devon District Council planning and conservation departments, Devon County Council Highways, and any other relevant authorities, such as South West Water, electricity suppliers etc..

Once the plan has been modified in the light of consultation and negotiation, it will be fully costed and fundraising can be done in earnest. Initial enquiries about funding should be made as early as possible to establish the likely mix of funders and the amount needing to be raised from the precept.

Planting of the trees should be done during the winter months, so the earliest it is envisaged would be early Spring 2014, with a more likely time of autumn 2014. The trees will need to be ordered and reserved with plenty of notice.

Removal of old trees will take place either as they die off or when the new trees have become sufficiently established not to leave the street bare for too long.

Proposed timetable

Spring – Summer 2013	Consultation and investigation of fundraising
End Summer 2013	Final draft of plan in light of consultation
Autumn 2013	Agreement with MDDC/ Highways etc.
Winter 2013/Spring 2014	Funds in place
Early Spring or late Autumn 2014	Planting of new trees
2016 onwards	Removal of old trees

Estimate of Costs

South Side

Trees 16 @ £30 approx	£480
Protective surrounds	£520
Planting	£400
Removal of old trees	£2500
Removal of tarmac, grass areas	£3000
SUB TOTAL	£3900

North Side

Trees 7 @ £30	£210
Protective surrounds	£250
Preparation of ground	£1500
Removal of old trees and make good	£800
SUB TOTAL	£2760

Contingency 10% £660

GRAND TOTAL £7320

Please note these are initial estimates of costs, and are subject to change.
When the final plan is agreed, quotes will be sought in order to fix the costs accurately.

The specific street works on the North side will need to be carried out by DCC Highways, and costed and funded separately.

Funding sources

- ⤴ There are some grants available towards village enhancement schemes, which should be investigated.
- ⤴ Local funding via the precept and Town Council
- ⤴ Grant from MDDC
- ⤴ Locality fund from DCC
- ⤴ Funding via Community Council of Devon
- ⤴ Local fundraising from individuals. It should be noted that one donation has already been offered.
- ⤴ Big lottery fund
- ⤴ Independent trusts
- ⤴ Donations in kind. It is anticipated that some local volunteers will help with the planting. Others may wish to plant bulbs in the grass verges.

Future maintenance

The current maintenance is just about adequate. There is neglect of the trees, with no clearing of sucker growth. Grass areas are not cut frequently enough to prevent the grass becoming coarse, and edges around paths are not cut back.

Two possible courses of action are available: to continue with the present arrangement for maintenance (with no more pollarding once the Chestnuts have been removed), or for there to be more local control over the maintenance, in order for the new trees and improved verges to be maintained to a higher standard.

The current maintenance arrangement is funded by the district authority. The cost of the second course of action would need to be met from the annual parish precept.

Additionally, it is estimated that £200 per year will need to be set aside to cover inspection of the new trees and any pruning, extra supports etc. necessary.

Initial questions to be addressed

- ⤴ When action should be taken, if at all
- ⤴ Remove all trees and replant or do it gradually?
- ⤴ Which type of tree. One species or mixed? How many?
- ⤴ Both sides or South side only?
- ⤴ How to fund the costs
- ⤴ Future maintenance

Recommendations of the Council sub-group

- ⤴ Plant one species only for effect. Acer Campestre 'William Caldwell', because it is really special and distinctive, long-lived and disease-resistant.
- ⤴ Interplant all new trees Spring/Autumn 2014. They can be reserved at the nursery and kept there until ready.
- ⤴ Remove old trees as they die. It is difficult to justify removal of still-healthy trees. Costs are also spread with this approach
- ⤴ Try to create an avenue on both sides of the street. It would be highly distinctive and very attractive to have trees on both sides
- ⤴ Action should be taken as soon as possible, because trees take a long time to grow.