

# Andover Secondary School students speak at national Tree Conference

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The Tree Conference at the Merlin Theatre in Frome on Sunday 21st October 2018 was an inspirational, sell-out event which showcased effective strategies for citizen-led reforestation and for halting deforestation worldwide.

Attended by a 240-strong audience, the event placed a core focus on supporting the younger generation to be resilient caretakers of the Earth.

As part of Mary Reynolds Thompson's talk, calling for 'deep imagination' to be brought back into our school systems, the Conference also gave the stage to four Andover secondary school students from Harrow Way and Rookwood to highlight what we need to do, from their perspective. Andover Trees United's Wendy Davis accompanied Hannah Bradbury and Erin Hacker (GCSE year, Rookwood) and Megan Nikolic and Nicola Marshall (Year 8 Harrow Way). Trained as 'Plant-for-the-Planet Climate Justice Ambassadors', the girls' responsibilities include training their peers, reaching out to community leaders and local politicians.

The girls called for children and adults to work together, combining the strong imaginal capacity of children to re-envision the future with the aptitude of adults to turn ideas into action. *"If we don't do something then my kids might not get to know some of the animals in the wild and in the rainforests,"* said Erin. *"I learn about crude oil in*

*school but not about its effect on the environment - changing the education system would be a wonderful place to start,"* said Hannah. *"Listen to us, we have lots to say, stop talking, start planting!"* urged Megan.

Andover Trees United shared the stage with headline speakers at the event which included:

- Millennial trailblazer [Ayana Young](#), founder of the 1 Million Redwoods Project in California, who spoke of the devastating effects of global warming she'd recently witnessed first-hand in Alaska, pointing out that practically nothing is being done to stop the destruction of our planet
- [Isabella Tree](#), author of *Wilding*, who gave a [talk](#) highlighting that the UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, and sharing her exemplary work for generating ecosystems for the future
- Scientist [Dr Martin Bidartondo](#) who wowed the audience presenting his pioneering research into how soil fungi health has been significantly affected across the UK by excess nitrogens (from fertilisers and air pollution), with a considerable knock-on effect for tree health.
- *Flatpack Democracy* author [Peter Macfadyen](#) who gave an overview of leading-edge tree projects around the world
- Local Somerset author [Julian Hight](#) who shared his work reviving Selwood Forest
- [Andy Egan and Teresa Gitonga](#) of International Tree Foundation who shared guidelines for communities to support landscape regeneration projects, modelled on their work in Kenya

In the Conference's final panel discussion, Tree Conference founder Suzi Martineau suggested that a quiet and powerful 'revolution of care' was underway: "It's happening all over the country, especially among the millennial generation. People see what's going on and their radical response is to change their lives to focus on planting and working with the land in towns, cities and across the countryside."

Photo credits to Joe Hulbert and Wendy Davis.