

Stop The Spin, Background

Dodgy Statistics

“75% of Street Trees approaching end of life” (Cllr Julie Dore)

Not True! Council’s own expert consultant denies it.

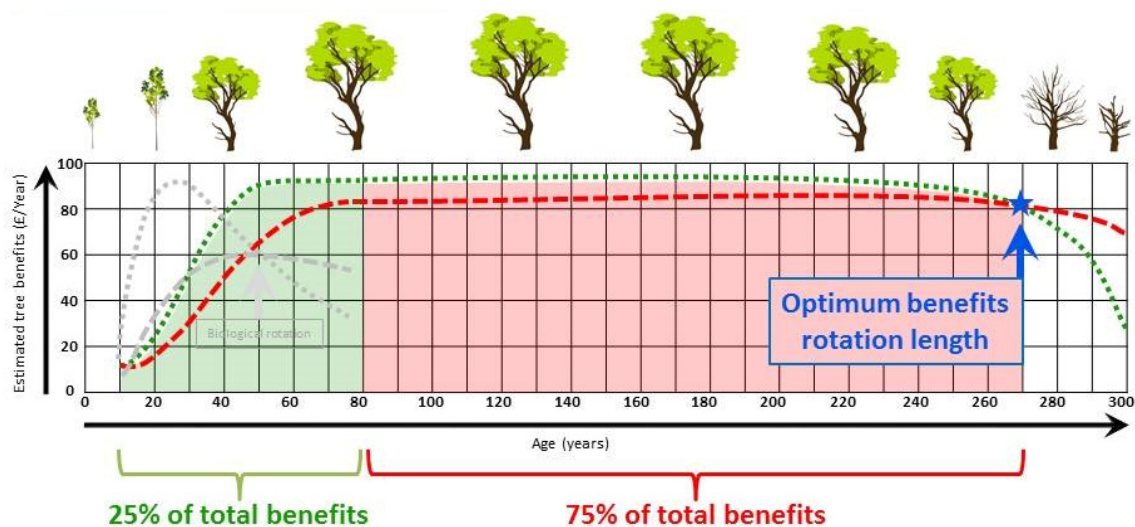
This claim has been made many times by Sheffield City Council (SCC), quoting a survey from 2007. Most recently Councillor Julie Dore, Leader of SCC, wrote in a local community newsletter:

An independent roadside tree survey for 200617 reported that around 75% of our trees were approaching the end of their natural life.

But the person who did the survey (Mr Elliott of Elliot Tree Consultancy) has strongly denied the claim in an email to a local arborist:

Did I tell them they needed to remove half of their tree stock? NO. Did I tell them that 70% of the trees were nearing the end of their life? NO... it was clearly explained that 25,000 trees needed no work, and of that 10,000 almost half were routine crown-lifting operations, another quarter being deadwooding operations, and others including the whole gamut of routine works etc. (I did suggest to them that there were a couple of hundred trees that could be retained but their condition was such that they may merit replacement - this was the only pre-emptive felling issue that I recall mentioning).’

A distinguished tree expert, Jeremy Barrell says that the useful life of our hundred year old street trees is around 260 years. He produced this chart to show the life cycle of these big trees.



Why are they being chopped?

“Trees are felled because they are Dangerous, Dead, Diseased, Dying...”

But 84% of big trees condemned are healthy and only causing slight damage to kerbs etc.

The Council and the press tend to emphasise the first four of the ‘6D’ reasons for replacing trees, but the biggest category of condemned trees are healthy ones that are causing minor damage to kerbs and pavements, problems that most towns and cities sort out with no fuss and no need to remove a healthy big tree. Tree campaigners are not trying to save unhealthy or genuinely dangerous trees.

Fake Consultation?

“Only one resident on Chippinghouse Rd opposed fellings!” (Cllr Bryan Lodge)

Doorstep survey showed at least 40 opposed fellings.

The Council repeatedly use the Independent Tree Panel street surveys as evidence that most residents do not oppose the fellings. But the survey was extremely badly run, had very few responses and many residents say they never saw it or found it too difficult to complete. Our own door to door surveys show a different picture. Three out of four households in Chippinghouse Rd opposed the fellings with 40 people signing petition forms to say that.

Prof Greg Brooks, an expert on survey techniques who has reviewed the Council’s ITP survey process has concluded that it was deeply flawed and the results completely unreliable, for example:

The response rate of 5.8% in one recent street survey is farcical, and basing any policy decision on such tiny response rates is a denial of democracy

Tree Panel ignored

“We want to put people’s views at the heart of our decision making” (SCC)

Wrong! Independent Tree Panel repeatedly ignored.

“We have always said we want to put people’s views at the heart of our decision making and the establishment of this independent panel we hope will ease any concerns people may have.

Cllr Terry Fox, Sheffield City Council press release, 4 Nov 2015

The Independent Tree Panel (ITP) was set up to give us all a voice in decision making. The ITP experts, employed at a huge cost, have recommended saving more than half of the healthy condemned trees they have considered but their advice has been repeatedly ignored and no tree has been reprieved on the basis of ITP recommendations. The only voice that counts in the decisions is Amey.

Crazy costings

“£10,000-£50,000 to save a tree” (Amey)

Independent expert says £1500-£3000

When the Chelsea Elm was condemned, Amey said it would cost around £50,000 for the special work needed to save it, the surface damage was greater than most of our street trees. Tree campaigners asked an experience highway engineer for a second opinion and he said that tree could be worked round for £1500-£3000. Similar ratios of cost have been seen in other cases. From the opinions we have had, it looks like most trees can be saved for less than it costs to chop them down and replant. The people who do the actual highway work seem confused by Amey’s costs and in any other town or city it’s not seen as an expensive problem.

No Legal Endorsement

“High Court has strongly endorsed our policies and procedures” (Cllr Bryan Lodge)

Wrong! The Court only ruled on a tiny part of the work.

The High Court case was only focused on whether the Council needed an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and whether the ITP household survey was legal. The judge ruled that an EIA was not needed and the survey was allowed by law. He said nothing about any procedures or about any policies other than the survey and the EIA, both relatively minor issues in the tree felling programme as a whole. In 2016 Amey told the Police that the fellings were approved by the High Court, which was grossly misleading.