

SHEFFIELD TREE ACTION GROUPS (STAG)

PRESS RELEASE

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Council Chooses Confrontation with Communities

Lawyers for Sheffield tree campaigners are closely examining the latest twist in the long-running battle to save hundreds of healthy Sheffield street trees from destruction. As notices go up of imminent tree felling works, some to commence as early 20th April, peaceful protestors are once again gearing up to intervene .

Tree campaign groups have made repeated calls for constructive dialogue, including several in recent months. Supported by an array of internationally renowned experts, they have sought to put the case for different approaches to the fate of so-called ‘damaging’ but perfectly healthy street trees. Principle amongst these are calls for relaxation of the over-stringent kerb engineering specifications in the council’s PFI contract with Amey Plc. These specifications do not comply with British Standards and have condemned hundreds of fine trees.

Sadly, the City Council seems bent on a course towards confrontation. Despite the collapse of all legal actions against fourteen protestors that now sees South Yorkshire Police facing a High Court class-action for their wrongful arrest and false imprisonment the Council seems intent on manufacturing a stand-off over the next fortnight. It seems that Sheffield City Council is seeking to apply Section 14(1) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act (1984) as a means of curbing protest action by prohibiting pedestrian access.

Non-compliance with any proposed Traffic Regulation Order would probably be a matter for civil law. Campaigners anticipate that the Council will seek to injunct peaceful protestors who do not comply, thus creating a back-door to criminalising protest actions. This raises the spectre of yet more unnecessary confrontation and the undoubtedly reluctant involvement of South Yorkshire Police.

Sheffield City Council’s plans would restrict pedestrian movement in a number of streets. Not content with the protracted fiasco of fourteen arrests, using anti-trade union laws, ironically the hamfisted Council has chosen a period that overlaps the 85th anniversary (24th April) of the first Kinder Scout mass trespass. The access implications for homeowners and their guests are unclear.

Nether Edge resident Richard Ward said “Perhaps the Council has forgotten that within its own Town Hall building a plaque commemorates the Kinder Scout mass trespass, just as Labour councillors seem to have conveniently forgotten their abhorrence of anti-Trades Union legislation.”

Ends

Notes to Editors

On 24th April, 1932 more than 500 people participated in a mass trespass on the Kinder Scout plateau, Derbyshire. The subsequent confrontation set in train major changes to public access rights and led to the creation of the Peak District National Park. the mass trespass is an iconic event in establishing the right to roam.

Sheffield tree protestors in all fourteen cases of arrest were initially advised that they had committed an offence under Section 241 Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

The three protestors arrested in the infamous Rustling Rd pre-dawn raid (17th November 2016) were though eventually charged under Section 5 Public order Act 1986. In the latter case the charges were dropped on the day of the court hearing due to lack of evidence.

The remaining 11 protestors subsequently had all charges against them dropped. The Crown Prosecution Service deemed proceedings 'not in the public interest'. The South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner, Revd Dr Alan Billings subsequently made clear that the tree protests were a matter for civil law.

Sheffield City Council is seeking to apply Section 14(1) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act (1984) as a means of curbing protest action by prohibiting pedestrian access.

Sheffield Roads affected by the proposed Traffic Regulation Order, as from 20th April, are:

- King Egberts Road, Dore
- St Ronan's Road, Nether Edge
- Raven Road, Nether Edge
- Dobcroft Road, Millhouses
- Steade Road, Nether Edge

It is anticipated that these roads will be used as a 'test case' by Sheffield City Council.

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