

Sheffield Tree Action Groups

PRESS RELEASE

Thursday 6th April 2017

Straight Talking Needed in Street Trees Debate

STAG are not asking Sheffield City Council to cancel the Streets Ahead contract with Amey, and it is misleading to suggest that we are. STAG believes that thousands of healthy trees could be saved by the adoption of less stringent highways curb and pavement specifications and the use of Flexi™-Pave or similar solutions. These options are already funded within the contract and could be used at no extra cost to the council.

It is in the gift of Amey and the Council to agree to vary the highway specifications to their mutual advantage and to the benefit of the City's valuable street tree assets.

During a debate yesterday on the fate of the trees on Ecclesall Road, Council Leader Julie Dore asserted that Sheffield Tree Action Groups (STAG) is seeking the cancellation of the Council's flagship 'Streets Ahead' PFI contract with Amey. This is a wilful and no doubt calculated misrepresentation of the STAG position. STAG is campaigning to save the very large proportion of healthy Sheffield street trees that the council has condemned for unjustifiable reasons.

During his presentation to the council, petitioner Paul Hemmings emphasised that although the Council tried to play up the issue of obstructions to the highway, the majority of obstructions on Ecclesall Road are due to road signs, businesses' advertising boards, and other street furniture.

Despite proven highways engineering solutions included and funded within the contract, Amey insists on unnecessarily felling thousands of healthy street trees and SCC continue to support them in this. The decision of international charity 'Trees for Cities' to withdraw from partnership with SCC reflects the widespread professional concern about the extent of the absolutely avoidable felling plans.

Rebecca Hammond, of STAG, said *"SCC and Amey's own evidence shows that around 50% of the approximately 6000 trees to be felled in the first five years are healthy and have been listed for surface damage. Cllr Dore downplayed these figures, instead quoting that only around 1200 trees have been listed for damage. She also tried to overplay the number of trees causing obstructions to the highway and pedestrians."*

Mrs Hammond continued *"We aren't asking SCC and Amey to do anything unusual: it's routine practice all around the UK and across the world. This approach is supported by various national and international experts who have visited Sheffield and have expressed their astonishment at what's happening. We certainly aren't asking SCC to rip up the contract - just to look again at the curb specifications"*

Sheffield City Council's ruling Labour group yesterday voted to expel Green Councillor Alison Teal from the full Council meeting during the debate. Councillor Teal's assertion was that Cabinet member Cllr Bryan Lodge had misled the Council and the people of Sheffield regarding the use of Flexi™-Pave around highway trees.

Despite regular assurances over many months from Cllr Lodge that he will contact KBI, who make and supply Flexi™Pave, this still has not happened. KBI have confirmed that they have had no contact from Sheffield City Council or Amey in Sheffield. They do, however, supply Flexi™Pave to Amey in Birmingham.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

Two petitions were presented at yesterday's council meeting: "[Save Ecclesall Road Trees](#)" (5925 signatures) and "[Save the Norfolk Park 6 trees](#)" (738 signatures).

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All local authorities in England and Wales are required to comply with the Department for Transport & [UK Roads Liaison Group](#) Code of Practice 'Well-managed highway infrastructure'. This includes accepting "*reduced levels of surface regularity*" in the vicinity of highway trees to allow the trees to be retained (sections A.9.9.3; B.4.4.4 & B.5.4.6).

A recent Freedom of Information request revealed that out of 4168 felled up to the end of 2016, 1858 (44.5%) were listed as "damaging" or "discriminatory". More recent data from household surveys revealed 953 (66%) out of 1450 trees for future felling were "damaging".

Experts who have criticised the tree felling programme in Sheffield include:

- Ian Dalton – a local authority Tree Officer with over 16 years arboricultural experience
- Professor Peter Duinker, of the School for Resource and Environmental Studies at Dalhousie University in Canada visited Sheffield on Tuesday 4th April, prior to speaking at the Institute of Chartered Foresters conference in Birmingham on 5th & 6th April.
- Jeremy Barrell, who has visited Sheffield in several occasions, including an appearance on The One Show on 4th January. He is an AA Registered Consultant, and a Chartered Forester, Biologist and Surveyor, with more than 30 years of tree-related experience has made several visits to Sheffield include a piece on the One Show on 4th January 2017.

Contact:

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