

SHEFFIELD TREE ACTION GROUPS (STAG)

Press Release

30 November 2017

Sheffield City Council deliberately stirring up division between neighbours

**Would rather score points in the media than accept offer of help,
Resident's complaint treated as a PR opportunity.**

Sheffield City Council have mounted a massive PR campaign to stir up hatred of tree campaigners but they are ignoring genuine offers to work together to fix things.

On Tuesday 28 November SCC encouraged the BBC to interview a resident in Meersbrook about suggested structural damage to their house from a tree due to be felled. The story was that 'tree-huggers' were making the resident unhappy by preventing felling of a street tree near his house.

But STAG has always been willing to help if trees are genuinely causing damage to buildings and that offer was repeated on 8th November by the STAG Co-Chairs in a meeting with the two top people at SCC, Julie Dore and John Mothersole.

Chris Rust, Co-Chair of STAG said:

SCC have never approached us about damage to buildings. We did have one case where an Amey employee mentioned that a tree was causing damage, but he asked that we didn't name him as he might get into trouble. So we talked to the occupier of the house (in Nether Edge) and they showed us the damage and explained that SCC had been monitoring it for several months before concluding that the tree might be part of the problem.

Of course we told our supporters about this and without any persuasion they all agreed that it would be best not to protest at this particular felling. Amey can fell it anytime they choose and we hope the householder gets a good result.

Every time a healthy tree is felled, the city loses a valuable asset. So it's important that the decisions are made carefully. If Amey fell all the trees that they want to, the city will have lost £66 million of assets.

But it's not good that individual residents should have to negotiate with us. We would be very happy if SCC or Amey were to approach us and we can have a proper discussion about the evidence. We would never want to oppose a felling that is genuinely a priority although of course we would like to be confident that the evidence is sound. Quite often people believe that a tree is causing damage but there really isn't evidence that the tree is at fault and sometimes removing it can make the situation worse.

It's a pretty bad situation because Amey managers have always been interested in talking to us and local residents about possible agreements that will help them get on with their work, but they seem to be terrified of getting into trouble with SCC. Sometimes a local agreement has been called off because it became public knowledge and Amey didn't want to risk trouble with SCC.

This is a desperate situation. Our elected council would rather use the media to stir up hatred and cause conflict between neighbours than actually fix the problem with help freely offered by us. We told them we are always open to discuss situations like this but they don't want to know.

Contact:

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Background information

STAG opposes the unnecessary felling of healthy street trees since they have huge value to residents and the environment, including improving health, removing pollution, and enriching the urban landscape. 83% of the big canopy trees condemned by Amey and SCC in the past two years have been healthy with the possibility of more than 100 years of useful life ahead.

The BBC Look North broadcast on 28 November showed the resident in his cellar explaining where tree roots had appeared through gaps in the wall but since there was no such intrusion, or damage, visible at the time it was impossible to say what had happened. Only a technical report by somebody with a good understanding of trees can be trusted as there are many misconceptions.

Amey's street tree surveys have not taken account of damage to buildings: the great majority of 'damaging' trees condemned by Amey have been for displacement of kerbs or disturbance of the footway surface. It is not unusual for residents to believe that a tree is causing damage but STAG rarely encounters verified cases where the City Council has confirmed the problem.

Good street tree management, which has been absent in Sheffield for many years, can bring root growth under control and eliminate risk to buildings. STAG is always willing to seek expert advice and share that advice with residents if it will help.

STAG has produced a leaflet written by an experienced Local Authority Tree Officer, Ian Dalton, explaining some of the main problems that residents may encounter. We have shared that with some residents who believe that a street tree is causing a problem for them.

<https://savesheffieldtreesorguk.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/ian-dalton-tree-nuisance-leaflet.pdf>

STAG have always campaigned against the unnecessary felling of healthy street trees which could be retained using simple low-cost engineering solutions widely used elsewhere.

As of August 2017, the healthy trees that were listed for felling were estimated to be worth £11million (hyperlink to Ian's report), and the overall value of healthy trees due to be lost as a result of the contract estimated at £66million.