



Sheffield Trees Action Groups (STAG), Feb 2018

Street Tree Manifesto for Sheffield City Council Candidates

SCC policies and the Streets Ahead PFI contract have led to the removal of thousands of healthy street trees. We ask all councillors to adopt these policies:

Protect and Create Street Tree Canopy for Health

Large street trees make a unique and significant contribution to residents' health (Note 1 below).

Sheffield City Council will protect our established healthy Street Tree Canopy and have a comprehensive policy to plant new large crowned street trees across Sheffield, especially in areas of health inequality.

Include Trees in Air Quality Policy

There is a national and local crisis over dangerous air pollution with many early deaths from respiratory and other diseases. Street trees have been shown to mitigate such pollution, especially at 'hot spots' such as busy roads (Note 2 below). ***SCC will develop clear, evidence-backed strategies*** to conserve and create tree canopy where it will help deal with air pollution.

Put in place a Comprehensive Street Tree Management Strategy that prioritises Conservation and Public Health

Given the importance of Street Tree Canopy to health and wellbeing, both on the highway and on adjacent private land, ***Sheffield City Council will have a comprehensive strategy for management, conservation and further creation of street tree canopy***, informed by the best arboricultural practice, taking account of environmental impact and financial value of trees and not compromised by highway maintenance, property development or other secondary concerns.

Resist Private Monopolies over our Public Services.

The democratic crisis over Sheffield's Street Trees is the direct result of awarding long-term control of our streets to a multinational company, creating local monopolies that allow powerful big companies to control public services for decades (Note 4 below). ***Sheffield City Council will pursue every possible opportunity to withdraw from these long term contracts***. Sheffield City Council should ensure that existing and future contracts do not prevent the Council from responding to changing priorities, a problem that has been widely reported in the wake of the Carillion collapse..

Resist damaging PFI Contracts that create perverse incentives and excessive costs

It is widely understood that PFI contracts create excessive costs for taxpayers as well as tying all parties into a complex contractual relationship where fear of compensation charges overrules concern for the public good (Note 3 below). The current impasse over the programme to fell healthy trees is a particularly painful and expensive example of this problem. ***Sheffield City Council will pursue every possible opportunity to withdraw from PFI Contracts***

Notes.

1. **Street tree canopy has a measurable and substantial positive effect on residents' health.**

Clinical and epidemiological studies over several decades, particularly in the field of Architecture for Healthcare, have demonstrated the positive relationship between health and contact with nature. More recently evidence has emerged of direct connections between street trees and residents' health, for example when a large number of street trees died from an epidemic in parts of the USA.

To investigate this more fully, University of Chicago carried out an epidemiological study of street trees and health in Toronto, using satellite images to measure tree canopy and the Ontario Health Survey to map health indicators and factors that might affect health.

The conclusion was dramatic: where there was a significant tree canopy (typically 10 big trees per city block) the effect on residents' physical and mental health was similar to being 7 years younger. This peer-reviewed research is published in Nature, the world's most highly regarded scientific journal (Kardan 2015)

2. **Street trees reduce air pollution in the immediate locality**

This issue has been debated for many years and until recently there has been little reliable evidence.

The Centre for Environmental Magnetism & Palaeomagnetism at Lancaster University created an experiment in which a temporary row of trees was placed outside a row of houses and levels of air pollution measured before and after with swab samples from TV screens.

The study showed more than 50% reduction in pollution when trees were in place, indicating that previous estimates may have greatly understated the effect of street trees on the air that residents breathe (Maher 2013)

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has raised some concern about 'canyon effects' with trees possibly causing increased levels of pollution in some streets between high buildings, in a draft guidance document. Some SCC councillors have seized on this as an argument for removing large trees. However this supposed canyon effect does not apply to the condemned street trees in Sheffield where the road layout and architecture allows air to circulate freely.

3. **PFI is risky, expensive and inflexible**

PFI contracts have been shown to be very poor value for money and have damaged the finances of our hospitals and schools, some of which are in deep financial trouble as a result. The Treasury Select Committee (2011) estimates that the cost of borrowing for PFI projects is 71% higher than using traditional methods of financing big projects.

The only justification for this expensive scheme seems to be to conceal public debt (Mann 2012).

The PFI system is inherently inflexible and leaves public authorities unable to respond to changing priorities or new technologies (Treasury Select Committee, 2011)

4. **Large scale outsourcing creates dangerous monopolies**

Cumbria Council (Conservative-led) have withdrawn from outsourcing for its highways maintenance because these long contracts granted monopoly powers to the contractor. The Leader of the Council has described how their contractor (Amey) were able to charge very high prices for any variation to contract, reinforcing the point made above by the Treasury

Select Committee (2011).

If the Council had not moved back to in-house maintenance the recent floods would have been disastrous for their finances, with all additional flood work resulting in extra charges. With the in-house system the Council were able to re-allocate their workers and equipment in response to the new priorities of the flood with no new costs (Presser 2016)

References:

Kardan, Gozdyra et al (2015) *Neighborhood Greenspace and Health in a Large Urban Center*, Nature Scientific Reports 5, Article number: 11610 (July 2015). [Available online at <http://www.nature.com/articles/srep11610>]

Maher et al (2013) *Impact of Roadside Tree Lines on Indoor Concentrations of Traffic-Derived Particulate Matter*, Environmental Science and Technology, 2013, 47 (23), pp 13737–13744 [Available online at <http://pubs.acs.org/doi/ipdf/10.1021/es404363m> (paywall)]

Mann, N (2012) *PFI 'still being used to keep costs off balance sheet'*, Public Finance, 11 January 2012 [Available online at <https://tinyurl.com/kohtm3c>]

Presser, L. (2016) *Why have councils fallen out of love with outsourcing vital services?* The Guardian 2 March 2016 [available from The Guardian online via <http://tinyurl.com/z55kbtj>]

Treasury Select Committee (2011) *Private Finance Initiative - Value for Money*, House of Commons [Available online at <https://tinyurl.com/lkcg7>]

Produced by the STAG Steering Group, representing 14 local Tree Action Groups across the City
Any enquiries to Chris Rust, chris@chrisrust.net, 07986 222 423