

SHEFFIELD TREE ACTION GROUPS (STAG)

Press Release

26 February 2018

South Yorkshire Police Taking Sides?

**More police on the streets to support unreasonable fellings.
Police blame local people while Council hides behind secret contract.**

Attempts to fell healthy street trees in Sheffield have been halted for five weeks. On Meersbrook Park Rd in January, Sheffield City Council contractor Amey were unable to create a safe, secure work zone and large numbers of local residents hugged healthy, much-loved street trees to protect them.

Campaigners believe that South Yorkshire Police were unhappy with Amey's inability to deal with the level of protests by local people determined to defend their trees. There were reports of injuries to both Amey staff and protestors and of complaints made to the police by individuals on both sides.

Now police have a new plan with more officers on the street to supervise the security guards as Amey are restarting their efforts to fell healthy trees condemned for very minor damage to footways and kerbs. Despite local people preventing fellings over many months and growing public and political opposition, Sheffield City Council have refused to engage in mediated talks with the tree campaign groups and say they see no alternative but to carry on with the divisive and expensive scheme.

Until recently local police have been unwilling to be drawn further into this political problem but police announcements in the media indicate that they are now seeking to blame local residents for the current problems. A press release implied that campaigners were actively seeking to undertake criminal activity and a radio interview by Assistant Chief Constable David Hartley took the same line, incorrectly claiming that the only criminal investigations ongoing are into the behaviour of protestors.

This is contradicted by at least ten Tree Campaign supporters who have reported Amey employees to the police for criminal offences during January, including assaults. Nineteen tree campaigners have been arrested over the past fifteen months on a variety of charges but so far no cases have ever come to court: seventeen cases were dropped for lack of evidence and two others have not yet resulted in charges.

Chris Rust, Co-Chair of STAG, said:

South Yorkshire Police are famous for ill-judged actions, including the well-known problems of Orgreave, Hillsborough and the arrest of Cliff Richard. Tree campaigners have had good experiences with individual officers on the street but it is disturbing to see a senior commander effectively blaming the victims of misguided public policy for a situation caused by stupid decisions in a huge PFI outsourcing contract.

A year ago SYP officers were saying the city council had "thrown us under a bus" over a disastrous attempt to fell trees in a pre-dawn raid. The police commanders' memories seem very short if they are now prepared to follow SCC's lead once again in another confrontation with the public.

Contact:

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On following pages

Images from recent tree protests
Background information

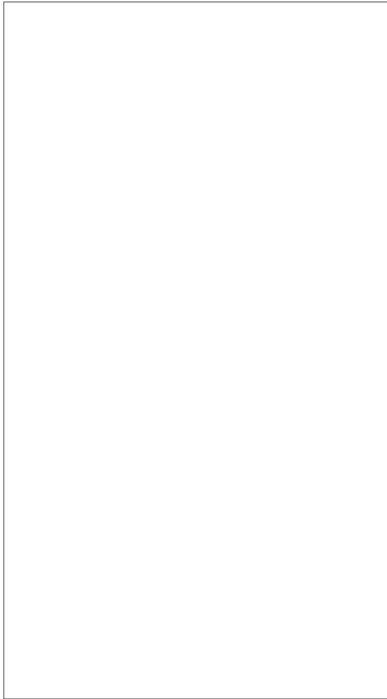
Images (photographers have given permission for use in news media only, please attribute)



Treehuggers on Meersbrook Park Rd, Monday 22 January 2018

Some faces covered because SCC are seeking huge court costs and damages from protestors

Photo: Pixelwitch, download from <https://sheffieldtreemap.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/jaq-01.jpg>



Gordon's Placard

Photo Paul Brooke, download from

<https://sheffieldtreemap.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/gordon-placard.jpg>



Maureen (Gordon's wife) on Meersbrook Park Rd

Fellers unable to work if she remains there

Photo Luis Arroyo Photography <https://sheffieldtreemap.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/18-01-19-maureen-meersbrook-park-rd.jpg>



Treehuggers, Meersbrook Park Rd

Photo Luis Arroyo Photography

Download from <https://sheffielddreemap.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/10-01-19-treehuggers-meersbrook-park-rd.jpg>

Background information

Amey LG is the arm of Amey plc responsible for contracts with Local Government in the UK. Their most recent accounts show that the company made losses of £74.3m in 2015 and £43.9m in 2016, with the losses attributed to problems in local highways contracts. Amey plc is a subsidiary of the Spanish multinational Ferrovial that builds and operates roads, railways and airports around the world. Public sector contracting in the UK, including PFI, is a very big part of Ferrovial's business. See Amey LG accounts: <https://sheffielddreemap.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/amey-lg-accounts-2016.pdf>

Currently Amey's work to resurface Sheffield's streets is months behind schedule. Having failed to complete the first **five-5**-year stage of the contract on time Amey face very big financial penalties and there are rumours that they lost the support of their main road surfacing sub-contractor last year due to extreme late payment problems. Certainly the surfacing work came to a complete halt for a long period and a new sub-contractor **was** appointed.

The street tree felling programme is a relatively small part of the Streets Ahead PFI project but it has become significant because of widespread public hostility. There is no evidence that the campaign to protect street trees is affecting resurfacing work, **as** most streets delayed do not have trees.

It is very difficult to understand how the tree crisis came about, given the levels of secrecy in the contract. It appears that SCC made serious errors in **mis**interpreting the results of a street tree survey commissioned in 2007, leading them to assume that more than half of Sheffield's street trees were in need of replacement very soon. In fact the survey did not say that and experts say that many of the big healthy trees condemned have at least 100 years of life ahead **of them**. If they are felled it will take many decades for new trees to grow to create a new canopy.

Recent scientific research indicates with a substantial street tree canopy has a profound effect on physical and mental health of residents.

You can find a great deal of detailed information, including links to most of the critical documents and data, in the **Citywide Tree Preservation Order Request** (TPO request) made by STAG to the

Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in October 2017.

<https://sheffielddreemap.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/17-10-13-city-wide-tpo-letter-v9-1.pdf>

(The Minister gave serious consideration to this request and was supportive of its aims but concluded it was not a practical way to solve this problem.)

In July 2017 Sheffield City Council obtained an injunction to prevent citizens from protecting trees from the work of the PFI contractor. However opposition has continued and Amey have struggled to fell trees in the face of determined resistance, falling far behind their targets. One person has been found guilty of contempt of court for breaching the injunction but cases against others were dismissed when it became clear that the contractor and City Council had failed to understand the terms of the injunction in bringing their cases.

Sheffield City Council has pursued a vigorous PR campaign in support of the PFI contract, seeking to accuse campaigners of being a minority who behave badly, but the evidence they offer is highly questionable and the majority of citizens who responded to SCC's survey of residents' views support retention of healthy trees. The tree campaigners are almost all local residents who have not been active in this way before but are outraged by the attack on our streets.

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 great majority of these trees could be retained using simple low-cost engineering solutions widely used elsewhere.

Value of trees lost: As of August 2017, the healthy trees that were listed for felling were estimated to be worth £11 million, and the overall value of healthy trees due to be lost as a result of the contract is estimated at £66 million. See the report by Ian Dalton who carried out tree valuation:

<https://savesheffielddreestreesorguk.files.wordpress.com/2017/09/cavat-valuation-report-on-street-trees-in-sheffield.pdf>