

SHEFFIELD TREE ACTION GROUPS (STAG)

Press Release
02 February 2018

Sheffield Tree felling on hold indefinitely?

Press statement by contractor indicates that they are unable to restart in the foreseeable future following mass protests

The Sheffield Streets Ahead PFI Contractor, Amey, have told the Sheffield Star that they are focusing on other parts of their contract at present while they review their tree felling work.

<https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/no-date-set-for-when-tree-felling-works-across-sheffield-will-continue-1-8996836>

Over the past two years Amey have escalated their efforts to fell street trees in the face of increasing protests from local tree action groups.

At each stage the increased efforts by Amey, including pre-dawn raids, police involvement and arrests, an injunction and the use of a large number of private security guards, has led to an equal increase in opposition from tree campaigners, making it extremely difficult for Amey to fell the remaining big healthy trees on their condemned list.

The most recent escalation has involved Amey's security guards being authorised to use 'reasonable force' to remove protestors from workzones under observation by police officers, However this led quickly to a surge in the number of protestors, often pensioners and others wanting to save the trees on their own street, willing to get directly involved with more than a dozen people hugging a tree when it is due for felling and many more making their feelings known. The sudden halt to felling and recent announcements by Amey indicate that they are unable to form a safe reliable plan to fell trees.

Chris Rust, co-chair of STAG said:

As local MP, Louise Haigh said when she visited the felling site in Meersbrook, the situation is unsustainable. Very large numbers of local people were out on the street defying the security guards.

As ever we are open for discussion and we've reminded SCC of that. We would welcome mediation or a truly independent review of the situation.

We welcome the recent votes by several Sheffield Labour Party branches in support of our campaign and against outsourcing and the damaging PFI contract.

We have great sympathy for South Yorkshire police who are struggling to serve the community with very limited resources. It's not reasonable to burden them with this mess which is the result of very bad political decisions over the past 5 years or more.

Force was used by Amey staff throughout the period from 15th to 22nd January with Amey clearly determined to intimidate the street tree protectors. On Friday 19 January a large number of local residents refused to leave the felling safety zone and hugged the threatened tree, security guards were unable to deal with this. On Monday 22 January, after several protestors were forcibly removed from the area, despite protests that the use of force was illegal and may be assault, another large group of residents surrounded the tree and the felling was called off.

Local MP, Louise Haigh, made a statement to the local press that the situation was 'unsustainable' and called on the City Council to halt the fellings for a review.

<https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/completely-unsustainable-sheffield-mp-calls-on-council-contractor-to-halt-tree-felling-pending-further-investigation-1-8973830>

Meanwhile support for the campaign has grown every time Amey try something new. Amey's panic was made clear last November when, in their haste, they felled a complete tree straight into a front garden without warning the house occupants, lawbreaking that earned a very severe reprimand and special measures from the Health and Safety Executive.

Among the local residents protesting in Meersbrook Park Rd, **Maureen and Gordon**, both in their 80s made a determined stand for the tree opposite their home. Maureen stood under the threatened tree and defied the security men to remove her and Gordon beside her produced a placard with a heartfelt statement:

Firstly I am not a criminal. I also object to being treated like one.

I have lived on this road for 63 years. I have always loved the environment I am living in.

This includes the fantastic tree-lined road. That is why I bought this house 63 years ago.

I am now approaching my 90th year, I would like to keep enjoying the view before I leave the earth.

This is why I have faithfully paid my council tax all these years, now approaching £2000 a year.

I struggle with this out of my meagre pension.

All I ask is do not fell these healthy trees that are not harming anyone.

For that reason I ask the Sheffield Council to listen to the protestors.

10,000 supporters can't be wrong.

Contact:

STAG press team: sheffieldtreeactiongroupsmedia@gmail.com

On following pages

Images, including Gordon's placard, and Maureen
Background information

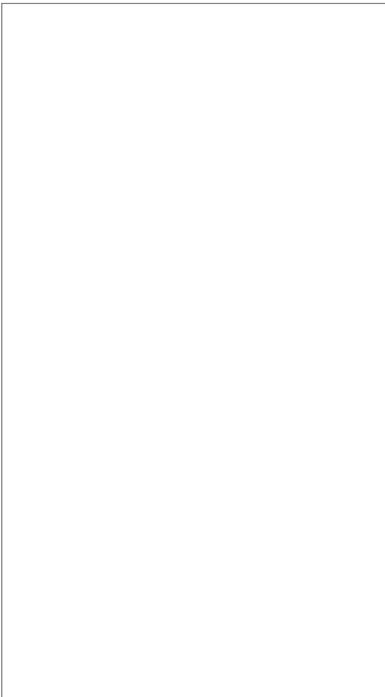
Images (photographers have given permission for use in news media only, please attribute)



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

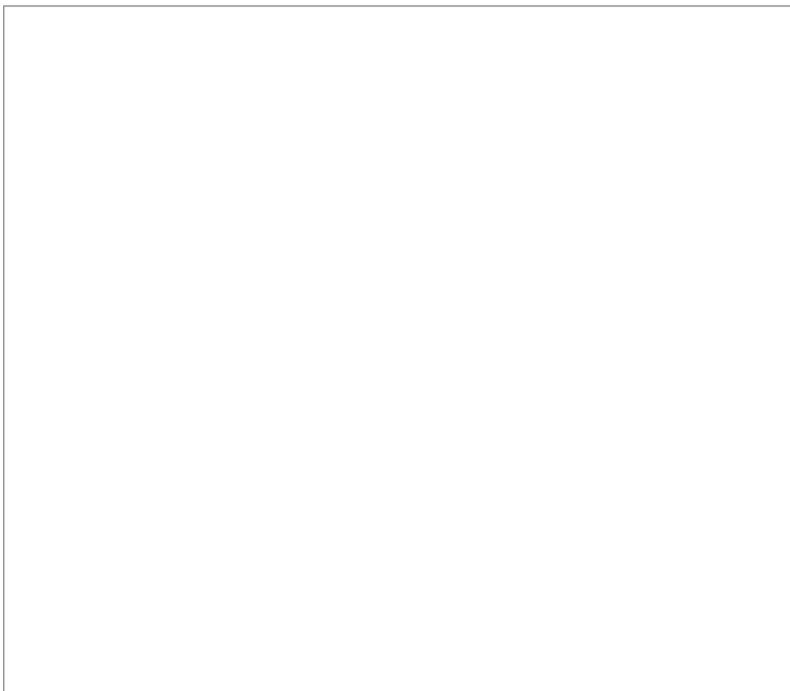
Photo Paul Brooke, download from

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



Maureen (Gordon's wife)

Photo Luis Arroyo Photography <https://sheffielddreemap.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 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 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, 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 misinterpreting 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. If they are felled it will take decades

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 estimated at £66 million. See report by Ian Dalton who carried out tree valuation: <https://savesheffielddreestrees.org.uk.files.wordpress.com/2017/09/cavat-valuation-report-on-street-trees-in-sheffield.pdf>