

SHEFFIELD TREE ACTION GROUPS (STAG)

Press Release

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SHEFFIELD COUNCIL SEEKS TO IMPRISON TREE CAMPAIGNERS DESPITE NEW CABINET MEMBER CALLING FOR COMPROMISE

New court proceedings against four tree campaigners They face imprisonment and punitive high court costs

On 5th-7th June, in Sheffield, Sheffield City Council will be bringing four people before a High Court Judge for alleged breaches of an injunction against tree protestors awarded to the Council in July 2017. The incidents took place in December and January. At present Street Tree Fellings are paused while the contractors draw up a new scheme which, it is hoped, will bring an end to public opposition to the felling programme.

Chris Rust, Co-Chair of STAG Steering Group, said

"We are astonished that the Council is taking this action now while SCC are saying there needs to be compromise in order to move on. This is no way to compromise and build trust.

We can't see what purpose this case will serve. It appears the Council are not interested in trying to move on and rebuild community relationships at all.

Since the Injunction against tree protests was granted in July 2017 four people have been prosecuted by Sheffield City Council. Only two were found to have breached the injunction. It is questionable whether either of those people caused any actual obstruction to the tree felling programme. This whole elaborate legal process has cost a huge amount of public money with very few tangible results.

Cllr Lewis Dagnall, the new cabinet member responsible for the environment and street scene portfolio at SCC, said in a press release on 17th May, *"Only once I have an informed view will I then consider how we can move forward and start to rebuild some trust with the people in our communities."*

On Radio Sheffield on 10th May, he said, *"Rather than rake over what's been said in the past, I want to come in with a fresh approach"* and *"I want to bring a fresh approach and move on"*

The four defendants due in the High Court are Paul Brooke, Dr Simon Crump, Benoit Benz Compin and Fran Grace.

Paul Brooke said:

"I have publicly welcomed the call from Lewis for a fresh approach and have been looking forward to start positive talks with him on how we move on. To be told that the Council seeks to imprison me in this way is a shock. So much for compromise

We are going to be back in court raking over the past again. I respect the court and the injunction, but taking me to court won't solve the problem and I won't be intimidated into giving up lawful campaigning to save healthy trees"

The trial of four tree campaigners is scheduled for 3 days in the High Court in Sheffield from 5th to the 7th June and will be heard by Justice Males.

Recent revelations about a target to fell 17,500 trees and questions raised by the Yorkshire Post into the validity of the Street Ahead 5 Year Tree Strategy have put a spotlight on whether information given by the Council in the High Court was reliable.

Dr Simon Crump, a tree protestor who has previously been arrested twice and had all charged dropped said:

“On the one hand, I’m surprised and disappointed that SCC are choosing to continue with their High Court case against me, particularly in the light of recent statements from Lewis Dagnall which seem to be advocating negotiation and compromise.

On the other, I welcome the opportunity to put my side of the argument on the public record and to challenge the allegations. I now strongly believe that the High Court injunction was granted under dubious circumstances given the recent revelations which clearly indicate that SCC officials misinformed Justice Males as to the contents of the PFI contract whilst under oath.”

Benoit Benz Compin, a French poet and street performer said:

“To quote Thomas Paine all I can say is ‘my country is the world and my religion is to do good’. I’ve nothing more to add”

Fran Grace, retired teacher and grandmother said:

“I am very disappointed that the Council is going ahead with this case against me. I have only ever wanted to lawfully and peacefully protect healthy street trees in Sheffield for the sake of future generations.”

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