

SHEFFIELD TREE ACTION GROUPS (STAG)

Press Release

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PRISON SENTENCES FOR TWO TREE CAMPAIGNERS UPROAR IN CITY COUNCIL MEETING

High Court Judge finds three guilty of injunction breach One more case to be decided

On 7th June, three Sheffield residents, **Fran Grace, Simon Crump and Benoit Compin**, were found guilty of breaking the Council's injunction not to enter safety zones around condemned trees. Dr Crump and Mr Compin were given suspended prison sentences. The judge said that for Ms Grace, the guilty verdict was punishment enough. **Mr Justice Males said that it was clear none of the protesters had held up tree fellings by their actions.**

During the case this week a regular meeting of Sheffield City Council was disrupted by angry shouting from opposition councillors and the Lord Mayor, Magid Magid, struggled to keep order when it was revealed that the court case had gone ahead on the personal approval of Council Leader Julie Dore. The Judge had said he was not willing to proceed without that approval. Previously the Council leadership had said that the decision to prosecute had been made by Council Officers without involving politicians. On the last day of the case local Labour Party members joined the tree campaign rally outside the court to protest at the actions of SCC's Labour Leadership.

Cost have yet to be decided and could be greater than the £27,000 charged to two previous defendants.

This week's court case is the latest twist in the long-running dispute in which nearly 6,000 street trees have been felled, more than half were healthy and causing minimal damage.

Defendant Paul Brooke, Co-Chair of STAG, whose case has yet to be decided, said,

"We are shocked that this attempt to give custodial sentences to constituents comes at a time when they are telling us they want to listen to us at last and to involve us in moving forward. This sort of punitive action doesn't help in any way towards a solution to Sheffield's crisis in the management of our street trees."

Tree Campaigner Ann Anderson of Save Dore Topley and Bradway Trees said,

"Will Sheffield City Council claim this as a victory? Our campaign to save healthy mature trees which contribute so much to air quality, health and beauty of the city has international support. This attempt to give custodial sentences to citizens is not a victory and will confirm Sheffield Council's poor standing in the eyes of the world."

It was great to see the Crookes and Crosspool Labour Party Branch with their banner and a speech of support at our rally yesterday. The National Labour party opposes damaging PFI contracts like the one which has led multinational company Amey to fell so many healthy trees. I know many local people are resigning from the Labour Party because of this case."

Co-Chair of STAG, Chris Rust said:

Recently we have heard some fine words from SCC who have talked about 'listening' and 'compromise'. But this case is a blatant attempt to intimidate and punish peaceful protestors with the council using huge amounts of public money to bring this civil action and then seeking to impose financial ruin on defendants by passing those costs on. There is no sense of compromise here, just lashing out by a Council who have lost the plot.

Justice Males said he had no opinion on the merits or otherwise of the Council's street tree policy. He praised the good character of all four campaigners and also the respectful way in which supporters in the public gallery had listened quietly to the proceedings.

Contact:

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