



SHEFFIELD TREE ACTION GROUPS (STAG)

Press Release
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Tree Killer Disease in Sheffield Campaigners call on Council to protect city's trees and preserve healthy canopy

The Sheffield tree campaign's determination to stop the felling of healthy street trees has been vindicated this week when it was discovered that a number of trees that were not condemned by Sheffield City Council are diseased and must be removed. When we may lose more trees to disease, it makes no sense to remove healthy ones as well, risking a dramatic loss of urban tree canopy, the very thing that SCC claim to be preventing.

STAG calls for urgent measures to manage the risks from tree diseases alongside the efforts now being made to retain healthy trees previously condemned by the SCC Streets Ahead programme.

Chainsaws will be back on Sheffield streets next week to remove six diseased lime trees on Whitley Wood Road. The Forestry Commission's Tree Health Advisory and Diagnostic Service confirm that these trees are infected with *Phytophthora plurivora*.

Phytophthora is a family of fungi-like microscopic organisms including some of the most destructive pathogens of crops and trees in the world. There are over 100 different species of *Phytophthora*.

P. plurivora is not the most virulent species, but it will usually cause the decline and death of the host tree. The six lime trees on Whitley Wood Road are all showing signs of distress and the infection is advanced. Tree campaigners from Sheffield Tree Action Groups (STAG) have been out with Amey, the Council's contractor, to view the problem and consider the options.

Paul Brooke, co-chair of STAG steering group, said:

*"The Forestry Commission confirm that these trees in Whitley Wood Rd are infected with *Phytophthora*. We agree with the recommendation to remove them promptly.*

We have always said that diseased trees which pose a risk, as in this case, should be removed. We have campaigned for the sustainable management of

street trees and against the needless felling of mature, healthy trees. When it's clearly uncertain which trees might succumb to a disease like this, it makes no sense to fell healthy trees, We need the best possible street tree canopy for citizens' health and wellbeing."

Prof. Ian Rotherham, an author, broadcaster and academic researcher at Sheffield Hallam University, said:

"Climate change challenges trees and biodiversity, especially in urban areas. Urban street trees are vital in reducing the impact of global warming. One of the major threats to biodiversity is the spread of pests and diseases, made worse by the stress of climate change.

We need the best practice in the care and maintenance of street-trees and continuing vigilance. It is also vital to work closely with local communities so that they, as stakeholders, are fully informed and actively engaged."

The Council's website refers to the need to fell trees that have Phytophthora. However, Phytophthora remains in the soil and there is little evidence that tree removal will tackle the problem on its own.

Paul Brooke said:

"We call on the Council and Amey to engage with experts and to develop a strategic plan of action. Phytophthora is not the only threat to trees in the city and we need an informed, planned and sustainable strategy.

Removing the trees on Whitley Wood Road may help prevent the spread to the woodland nearby but this is by no means certain. Phytophthora will remain in the soil and will not be removed solely by felling the trees."

Following talks between the Council, Amey and STAG at the end of 2018, after years of bitter dispute, a new approach to resolving simple road and pavement problems is resulting in trees that were condemned being saved on a daily basis. **Christine King** from STAG has been observing tree inspections:

"Each day we have volunteers doing joint inspections of trees condemned by SCC as a 'last resort' for minor pavement and kerb problems. Each day we see the Amey crews finding simple ways to fix them instead of the wholesale felling of healthy trees we had witnessed before.

We've lost thousands of healthy trees and now we see the folly of that approach. We stand to lose many more trees to diseases and pests and the impact will be felt by generations to come. Our Council has failed in its duty as a steward of the city's natural assets and this must change".

Further results from suspected affected street trees on Thornsett Road, Park Avenue and Endcliffe Grove Avenue are still being looked at by the Forestry Commission. It is possible that a number of these trees will also need to be removed.



Signs of Phytophthora on a lime tree on Whitley Wood Road