

Fao Cllr Bryan Lodge



**Sheffield &
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Dear Bryan

Re: Streets Ahead and the Independent Tree Panel

I would like to ask you to consider a number of proposals in relation to the ongoing issue of the felling of street trees in Sheffield.

I appreciate that ours will be another voice amongst many, but I would like to highlight to you that:

- we also have the difficult task of managing land, including trees and woodland
- we are a community-based, local organisation working for Sheffield & Rotherham
- when we speak, we try to do so as objectively as possible, with the aim of finding solutions that benefit people, wildlife and the natural environment.

We fully recognise the need to manage trees across the city and implement an ongoing plan of renewal and replacement – over a period of years - and that Amey and the Council are dealing with a major backlog of poor street tree maintenance. We have worked with Amey (as a ‘critical friend’) from the start of the Streets Ahead contract, for example, improving their practice on surveying for protected species. We were asked by Cllr Fox to be part of the panel for the now-abandoned Tree Forum. We have been involved in issues our members have highlighted to us e.g. the English Elm in Nether Edge and attended and spoken at various meetings and events, so I believe we have some understanding of the issues involved.

Following the recent events at Rustlings Road, and your apology, I would like to suggest a number of ways to improve the current process:

1. That the Independent Tree Panel’s comments are published as soon as they are available, irrespective of whether the Council has seen them and commented on them.
2. There is then a period of 12 weeks for the Council to discuss the results of the ITP with the community who referred their street to the panel.

3. That the Council commits to working with that community to consider all engineering options for those trees that are neither dangerous, dead or dying (NB I have left out damaging, diseased and discriminatory as I believe this is more for discussion once the ITP results are public.)
4. That the Council allows the community time to put forward realistic and practical alternatives, with advice from Amey as appropriate.
5. If there is an additional cost involved to saving a tree, that the Council agrees to a reasonable period of time whereby the community has the opportunity to raise the funds to support that cost.
6. That Amey establishes a community tree fund, from the sales of the timbers and logs resulting from the felling of so many mature trees across the city. That this fund can be applied to by affected communities, for a fixed level of support to contribute to paying for any additional costs to saving the trees.
7. That the ITP have oversight of the fund, if appropriate.
8. That the Council and Amey more clearly demonstrate examples of how removal of a tree has been the 'last resort' with all other options fully explored and discounted. This needs to go beyond the Council's comment in the ITP table as follows:

After a review of the costs of building engineering solutions to retain trees that involve changes to the highway on a number of sample tree situations the cost of applying similar bespoke engineering solutions which are outside the Streets Ahead contract, across the rest of the highway network is estimated to be of the order of £14-26 million. The Council does not have such additional funding available and many solutions would also be of a short term nature.

If the work of the Independent Tree Panel is not carefully reviewed and considered by the Council, with the community who referred the original case to the Panel, then there seems very little point in the ITP continuing. Continued funding of the Panel could be seen as a waste of public funds.

If, however, the Panel continues to provide objective comments and suggestions that are used, developed and listened to then this is clearly a worthwhile investment.

As we are unable to know the details of the Streets Ahead contract, it is hard to understand when or where there are opportunities for changes to be made in the scheme. One of the main issues seems to be how the contract has been structured, with a significant upfront capital spend expected in the first 5 years of the contract. This requires the contractor to undertake an unnecessarily intensive approach to street tree management that to my knowledge is unprecedented. Other cities, e.g. Birmingham, have not required such a short period of intensive felling. Adjustments to contracts can and are being made. I appreciate this may involve a cost but this could be offset by a reduction in time spent managing the complaints being received.

9. Can the Council review the time period required for the tree management programme to take place, allowing more normal methods of removing/replacing a few trees each year (instead of entire streets in one go) to be applied?

Some of the other issues and suggestions we have made previously, at the start of the Streets Ahead scheme in 2012/13 are on our website at www.wildsheffield.com.

A point that has repeatedly been made to me is that it is only certain postcodes in the city that are protesting about the loss of street trees. Mature street trees – over 200 years old – have been felled elsewhere with no comment from residents. I would ask the Council to recognise that the lack of protest in some areas does not make a good case for a significant and rapid loss of mature tree cover across the city. Sheffield's reputation has been damaged.

Our organisation has worked hard with the Council and other partners to promote the City in a positive light, to promote our 'green credentials', Sheffield's Green Commitment and the Outdoor Economy work of the Joint Venture Group for example. I am aware, from contact with national press and attendance at national events that Sheffield is now viewed very negatively for the approach it has taken to the tree felling programme.

10. Can the Council share with partners how we can collectively work together to re-establish and communicate nationally some of the city's unique attributes ie. an attractive place for people to live and work because of its green spaces, tree lined streets and natural environment?

I look forward to your response,

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Liz Ballard', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Liz Ballard
Chief Executive
Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust