

## Removal and replacement of Sheffield street trees

### The Issue

As part of the Streets Ahead contract, Amey's Streets Ahead team are tasked by Sheffield City Council to manage street trees on the road network across the city.

Streets Ahead is a significant programme of works taking place across Sheffield which has resulted in the felling and replacement of a large number of street trees. Many of our members are concerned about this tree felling and its impact on wildlife, health and other environmental benefits that street trees provide.

Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust's position statement on the street tree replacement programme is as follows:

We want to help find positive solutions to move forward. We understand why local people are upset as they feel they have not been listened to, especially in cases where the Council has overruled the Independent Tree Panel's recommendations that trees should be retained. We have established a working relationship with Sheffield City Council and Amey to try and positively influence their work, but remain their 'critical friend'. See here for more details. [insert link re: Streets Ahead]

We accept that there is a need for tree management across the city's road network for the following reasons:

- Previous lack of ongoing 'little and often' maintenance or lack of ongoing removal and replacement, resulting in the need for a much greater, large scale tree management project today.
- Some trees are dead, dying, diseased or dangerous. In these cases, replacement may be the best course of action, although tree surgery should be explored for mature trees with localised disease.
- The roots of some trees (particularly those that have grown very large in a narrow verge due to an inappropriate species selection many years ago) are causing damage to neighbour's property (although it should be checked whether this is acceptable to the neighbour or not).
- As above, the roots of some trees cause severe uplift of pavements which can cause issues for resurfacing or trip hazards (and associated liabilities).

However, we also wish to highlight the following to Amey/Sheffield City Council:

- Mature trees, especially those with large canopies offer many important benefits to people: clean air, noise reduction, flood alleviation, carbon storage.
- To understand the value of Sheffield's tree stock, a proper assessment should be made of the value of trees and the cost of losing healthy mature trees using i-Tree Eco or a similar tool as part of the new Trees and Woodlands Strategy. Such an assessment has recently been undertaken in London.
- Has the overall impact of the loss of this amount of mature wood canopy/volume from across the city during the next few years been recognised by the Council and mitigated against where possible i.e. has the impact been considered as a whole as it would be, say, in a planning application or environmental impact assessment? A proper value assessment as suggested above would allow this impact assessment to be made.
- Mature trees are fantastic wildlife habitats for bats and other protected species. Protected species surveys must be undertaken well in advance of any tree removal

and appropriate measures be taken to protect any species found. Works must also be undertaken outside of bird nesting time (March – July) to avoid the illegal damage or destruction of bird nests in use/being built, bird eggs and their young. Every effort should be made to retain trees that are identified as being of significant wildlife value as best practice in line with the Streets Ahead Biodiversity Action Plan and the NERC Biodiversity Duty. For example the Huntingdon Elm tree in Nether Edge which supports a rare White-letter Hairstreak butterfly.

- Limiting the percentage of tree removal in any one area will help to retain sufficient canopy for existing wildlife, protected or otherwise. Listening to local knowledge about wildlife could help reduce the impact. So far we do not feel this has been the case.
- Therefore, engineering solutions should be further explored to try harder to retain healthy, mature trees that are only causing minor pavement or road uplift. Solutions to retain healthy mature trees should be concentrated on the parts of the city that are characterised by their mature street trees such as Nether Edge and Dore, Rivelin Valley Rd and Rustlings Rd.
- Communications must be improved. For example, we have called for the decision-making process to be more transparent as it is unclear why one tree in an area which is causing minor uplift is ear-marked to be felled, and another that looks the same is not?
- The Streets Ahead programme needs to be more transparent about why engineering solutions have been rejected for individual trees, and how many solutions they have applied and where.
- Are there opportunities for biodiversity gains across the road network – where can the loss of some of these important mature tree habitats be offset by habitat gain elsewhere? Looking at alternative management of scrub and road verges may provide some offset.
- In the longer term, the ongoing rotational management of street trees will limit the need for any future repeat of such a massive programme of tree works causing such an impact on wildlife and people in one go. Is the Council planning for this?
- Removal of a tree should always be the last resort and not seen as an opportunity to save on future maintenance costs.
- Neighbours should be consulted on the location and species of replacement trees. We support the selection of native trees that are suitable for an urban environment and that fit with the retained trees in the street/neighbourhood.
- Implement a moratorium, as suggested by the SORT group (Rustlings Road), on the felling and replacing of street trees until the new Trees and Woodland Strategy is in place and until resident's concerns are properly addressed.
- Consider giving people a longer notice period of tree removal. Two weeks is a very short time for people to understand what is being proposed and find out more information. For zonal works Amey/the Council provide roadshows well in advance where people can ask questions directly to staff involved.

### **What the Trust have done and will continue to do**

We have directly questioned Amey and SCC about particular tree issues and will continue to do so.

We particularly focus on issues of wildlife concern. For example we raised awareness of a rare butterfly (the White-letter Hairstreak) on a rare surviving Huntingdon Elm tree in Nether

Edge. We have submitted our concerns about this tree to SCC and Amey (a copy of our letter can be downloaded at the foot of this webpage.) [add letter as download]

Dr Nicola Rivers, our Living Landscapes Development Manager spoke at the 'Trees of Steel' procession and rally in Sheffield on 21st October 2017, and also attended the Vernon Oak vigil event on 15th October 2017.

On 27th September 2017 we met with Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to discuss the street trees issue and visited a number of threatened trees with him. Following the meeting, our CEO Liz Ballard wrote to Mr Gove on 24th October 2017 to find out more about his views.

We sat on the panel of the Tree Forum (not to be confused with the Tree Panel! See below) and raised pertinent questions to Cllr Fox from Sheffield City Council during the two Forum meetings to date (July 2015, September 2015). We have written to Cllr Lodge on 9th December - full details on our latest news section.

We followed up the second Tree Forum in September by providing suggested engineering solutions and further sources of information to Sheffield City Council, but have received no response.

We spoke at the peaceful public protest at the Town Hall in November 2015 and again at Endcliffe Park in November 2016 organised by STAG.

We support the proposal of a new Sheffield Trees and Woodlands Strategy to be led by Sheffield City Council and are participating in its development through the consultation routes.

## **What you can do**

If you are concerned about your street trees, we would encourage you to make contact with the City Council and the Street Ahead Programme. Currently there is a view that most people contact the Council to complain about trees and ask for more rather than fewer trees to be removed. If you do value your local trees then contacting the Council or making your local Councillor aware is a good way to demonstrate this.

If a tree has a removal notice on it then it should state the reason for removal (see the list below). Check to see if you understand the reason and whether this is appropriate in your view.

Contact Streets Ahead on tel: 0114 2734567 (option 1), or email [streetsahead@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:streetsahead@sheffield.gov.uk) or visit First Point to ask for more information about a planned tree removal on your street. Make sure you can clearly describe the exact location of the tree. You will be referred to someone in the Amey Tree Team who may have inspected the tree originally.

The Council will not give out contact details for Amey staff, as ultimately the responsibility for customer relations lies with the Council. However, they can pass you on to Amey so do try to speak to a member of the Amey Tree Team as they are very knowledgeable about the City's trees.

There may be a consultation event in your area – try to attend to ask your questions.

Things to ask when you contact the Council or speak to an Amey Tree Team member of staff:

- \* What is the exact reason for the removal of the tree?
- \* Have all other options been considered prior to recommending removal?
- \* How many other trees will be removed in the surrounding area (what percentage) – can you see a map?
- \* Will the tree be replaced in the same location, if so with what & by when, if not, why not? There is an approved list of replacement street trees here: Sheffield Streets Ahead Tree Species (PDF, 142 KB)

Has there been a protected species survey? (if you are aware of any protected species or important wildlife that regularly roosts in the tree then please make sure you advise Amey of this and if needs be contact us).

You should now receive a survey asking your opinion on the proposed tree felling on your street. This will come through the door in a plain brown envelope. If there are notices on your trees and you have not received a survey – contact Streets Ahead to ask for one (see further information below about the surveys). If more than 50% of respondents want to keep certain trees, they will be referred to a new Independent Tree Panel (ITP) for further consideration. We therefore encourage you to complete the survey and talk to your neighbours, but please respect that not everyone will hold the same view.

Once the ITP results has been published, then we hope now (following the Council's apology over the Rustlings Road approach - see latest news) that there will be a period of time for residents to discuss the findings with the Council - do take this opportunity.

Consider joining or forming a local campaign group if you want to take this course of action. Several have formed over the city and the umbrella group Sheffield Trees Action Group (STAG) can offer a list and advice <http://www.savesheffieldtrees.org.uk/>

Support the Trust in helping highlight and raise concerns of wildlife importance in relation to street trees by joining us.

If you have concerns about the reasons given for the tree removal, and these aren't satisfied by talking to Amey's Tree Team we suggest you contact your local Councillor. Ultimately it is the Council's decision to remove street trees. Every tree removal will have been approved by the Council and so your local Councillor should be able to help. However, we are aware of very few removal decision being over-turned, although some are still pending (e.g. Rustlings Rd). . One of the reasons is because of potential future safety and liabilities.

### **References / further Information**

Most local campaign groups and STAG have Facebook pages and petitions

STAG have provided some information about the tree surveys here:

<https://savesheffieldtrees.org.uk/2017/07/31/independent-tree-panel-result-summary-final/>

London i-tree eco project

<http://www.treeconomics.co.uk/projects/londoni-tree>

## **Streets Ahead Tree Removal Process**

Trees are inspected by an Amey Tree inspector. They make recommendations to the City Council as to whether a tree should be removed or managed in some way. This is done on the basis that the next tree inspection may be in 5 years' time (this is the agreed maximum period between inspections). Any tree will be assessed as to whether it is 'reasonably' safe until the next inspection.

Removal is recommended for the following reasons:

- Dead or dying tree
- Decaying or diseased tree to such an extent that they are deemed unsafe
- Structurally compromised e.g. previously poorly managed
- Vandalised
- Damaging to the highway or pavement
- High likelihood of unavoidable significant damage to the tree as a result of highway maintenance work
- Proven to be implicated in subsidence and insurance claims

Sheffield City Council will then visit the site of any tree proposed for removal and either approve or reject.

Amey will then put a notice on the trees subject to removal and leaflet drop the area immediately affected at least two weeks prior to works starting.

Further details can be found here:

[https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/in-your-area/report\\_request/trees.html](https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/in-your-area/report_request/trees.html)