

## **SHEFFIELD TREE ACTION GROUPS (STAG)**

Press Release

**17<sup>th</sup> April 2018**

### **Sheffield City Council holding back from constructive talks on tree dispute**

Following STAG's invitation this week, SCC say they will meet at sometime in the future but only to tell us about their new plans. SCC have refused to engage in proper constructive talks for nearly a year while the dispute has become increasingly more bitter and expensive.

SCC have issued a press statement following our invitation to talks this week. The full statement is appended but the key part was:

*"We want meaningful and constructive dialogue with anyone who is willing to engage...Tree replacement works are currently paused to allow time for Amey to work on options to help us to move forward and we are happy to share any new proposals with residents and meet with STAG once this work is completed."*

Chris Rust, Co-Chair of STAG responded:

*"Once again our Council are making vague encouraging noises but they are missing the point of our request for talks. After avoiding opportunities to resolve the dispute for nearly a year, it's very urgent that the Council meets with the tree campaigners now and we work together to set up a programme of constructive talks. It's just not good enough to have a single meeting where Sheffield Council lectures us on their position and nothing changes.*

*Under their contract, Amey aren't allowed to talk to the public about all this but it looks like they are trying to work out a new scheme that might end the dispute. Unless Sheffield Council take the initiative and start talking with us about what might work and how to deal with our concerns, Amey will be working in the dark.*

*I am very afraid that, despite Amey's best efforts, we'll end up in a few weeks time with the Council calling a meeting to explain a plan that turns out to be unacceptable to the great number and variety of people across the city who want to save healthy street trees and we will be back where we started.*

We still have a conference room booked (for the possible meeting) at Kenwood Hall Hotel at 10:30am this Friday, 20th April, so we invite journalists to come and hear about STAG's proposals for mediated talks and what we would hope to achieve.

We will also be explaining some new initiatives, including legal actions, that we are taking to try to resolve the mess that has been created by Sheffield City Council through years of bad decisions and avoiding responsibility.

### **Contacts:**

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**Press release from Sheffield City Council, 16 April 2018**

***A Council spokesperson said:***

*"We have always said that we are more than happy to meet and talk with STAG and they acknowledged that we had never refused to meet them at our last meeting.*

*"However, we are unable to partake in politically sensitive discussions which may involve publicity or changes to our approach, during the pre-election period and as set out by central government guidelines.*

*"We want meaningful and constructive dialogue with anyone who is willing to engage and in fact we are in regular communication with interested parties on specific issues.*

*"Tree replacement works are currently paused to allow time for Amey to work on options to help us to move forward and we are happy to share any new proposals with residents and meet with STAG once this work is completed."*

**Background - SCC avoided opportunities for constructive talks for nearly a year.**

On 8 November 2017, STAG proposed to SCC a programme of mediated talks to gaining a better shared understanding of the reasons for the disputed tree fellings. We hoped that seeking such an understanding might enable both parties to identify ways to resolve the problem.

However the leader of SCC, Julie Dore, rejected our proposal and has not subsequently made any counter-proposal for a negotiated settlement or even discussions. SCC have been well aware of the moves to involve the police and we know that the Police and Crime Commissioner has urged SCC to seek a political solution. Nevertheless SCC have allowed the police to be dragged in at huge public cost without trying the cheap option of mediation.

Since making our complaint we have discovered that SCC have rejected mediated negotiations on two previous occasions. Recently, the Labour Party's Shadow Minister for the Environment, Sue Hayman, said that she had offered herself as a mediator, "several months ago", but had been rejected by the leader of Sheffield City Council. She has now renewed her offer.

Also, at the time of the Injunction hearing at the High Court in Leeds, the Solicitors for the defendants proposed to SCC that there should be an attempt at Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) which usually means mediation. Again SCC rejected this proposal despite the relatively low cost and difficulty of such a process compared to a High Court case.

So SCC have preferred to see our police dragged into a hugely expensive operation, using up their limited resources, rather than taking the opportunity to talk with tree campaigners, despite several proposals.





Amey Security Guards and tree fellers on Meersbrook Park Rd (please credit Luis Arroyo photography)



Tree campaigners on Meersbrook Park Road this week (16 April) ready to protect their trees again. Local people have been out on this street defending their trees continuously for more than six months. (photo Paul Brooke)