



SHEFFIELD TREE ACTION GROUPS (STAG)

Press Release

1 May 2019

RUSTLINGS ROAD KERB REPAIRED AROUND TREE THAT WAS TO BE FELLED AS "LAST RESORT" IN NIGHT RAID

Two and a half years after the night raid on Rustlings Road to fell trees as a "last resort", the kerb has been fixed around the last tree due for felling. Residents say they are pleased, but remain angry at the previous waste.

On 17 November 2016, police and tree surgeons arrived in the night to fell eight trees on Rustlings Road. Residents had long argued that felling the trees was not necessary, and that the pavement could be repaired with simple engineering solutions.

Residents were able to save one tree that day - nicknamed "Ellen" after Star journalist Ellen Beardmore. The official reason for removal was "Kerbs pushed out alignment by buttress root directly behind".

Today, a small team of highway workers removed the kerbstones, trimmed two very small roots (each about 1 centimetre diameter), cut down the kerbstones and replaced them in a straight line. They also dug out some tarmac to create a proper tree-pit which has been covered in mulch. It took two workers less than a day to complete.

Once again campaigners feel vindicated in their consistent insistence that trees all across Sheffield have been needlessly removed.

Zoe Borrowdale, of Rustlings Road, said *"Of course I'm pleased that Ellen the tree has been saved. This was a very straightforward job for the pavement crew. But I'm angry that we have lost nearly 6000 mostly healthy trees in Sheffield, because the council refused to do this before."*

"They woke us from our beds at 4am in November 2016, and tried to make criminals of people who tried to stop this totally unnecessary and harmful work."

"I've been one of the people from STAG observing the Joint Investigations, and I've seen just how many of these so-called last resort fellings were totally unnecessary."

Paul Brooke, Chair of STAG Steering Group, said *"Once again we've seen that very ordinary engineering solutions can be used to repair the pavement and keep the tree."*

"It's time for an independent inquiry into what happened. The public and South Yorkshire Police were told felling was essential as there was no other solution. SCC and SYP need to be held accountable for their actions and learn from what went wrong"

Notes:

1. The campaign against felling the trees on Rustlings Road was spearheaded by Save Our Rustlings Trees (SORT). Their petition gathered over 8000 signatures in one month before being presented to SCC in July 2015. It now stands at over 18,500 signatures
2. 12 trees on Rustlings Road were originally listed for felling. Four were reprieved following SCC's 'Independent Tree Panel' consultation exercise. The ITP household survey was criticised by Prof Greg Brooks as "a denial of democracy"
<https://savesheffieldtrees.org.uk/the-household-survey/>
3. On 17 November 2016 tree surgeons and police arrived on Rustlings Road before 4am. Residents were woken from their sleep with instructions to remove their vehicles. Three people were arrested for public order offences. Charges under the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act (TULRA) were subsequently dropped.
4. Over 5,000 trees have been felled since 2012 under Sheffield's controversial 25-year Streets Ahead Highway renewal PFI contract. According to SCC's own figures at least 2,000 of these were healthy trees. STAG's own analysis indicates that the great majority of big older trees that were felled were healthy and might have continued to benefit the community for 100 years or more.
5. Council records indicate that before the start of the contract SCC intended to 'replace' half of the city's 36,000 street trees. After citizens became aware of this and campaigns started to protect the trees, SCC have switched policy several times and it has been increasingly difficult to understand the plans and how they have changed. SCC now claim they will 'replace' 10,000 trees by the end of the 25-year contract.
6. Following extensive discussions between STAG, SCC and Amey, during October and November 2018, SCC and Amey are now following a new scheme which will lead to fewer trees being felled and some fellings being deferred for up to nine years. However tree campaigners have not agreed that this is an acceptable solution since nearly all the condemned trees are healthy. In most towns and cities solutions have been found to deal with the minor disturbance to kerbs and footways that are given as the reason for these 'last resort' fellings.

7. In the talks STAG asked that SCC commission an inquiry or review into what has gone wrong over street tree management and policy, in the spirit of learning from past mistakes. SCC said they were 'not minded' to do this and campaigners continue to call for an independent inquiry in view of the large number of issues not resolved, the very high public cost of legal actions to the Council, and evidence of misuse of the law.
8. In February 2019, South Yorkshire Police paid £24,300 compensation to campaigners following wrongful arrests under controversial Trades Union Law.

PICS



Rustlings road - excavation work
Photo: Sheffield Tree Action Groups



The size of the roots that needed trimming
Photo: Sheffield Tree Action Groups



“Ellen” the tree that survived the night raid
Photo: Sheffield Tree Action Groups



The finished job

Photo: Sheffield Tree Action Groups