



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

### **Press Release**

## **COUNCIL REPORT VINDICATES TREE CAMPAIGNERS**

**Twenty months after protests on Abbeydale Park Rise resulted in a huge police presence to fell trees as a “last resort”, a new report by Sheffield City Council shows how easy it was to make repairs.**

In talks to end the tree dispute last January, Joint Investigations across Sheffield were agreed by STAG, Amey and SCC. The investigation results are set out in a report just published by the Council.

**Paul Brooke, Co-Chair of STAG, said:**

*“Sheffield City Council repeatedly said that “felling is a last resort” and only considered after 14 engineering solutions, already paid for in the contract, had been considered. SCC officers repeated this claim in the High Court when they took out an injunction to try and prevent protests. Now SCC’s own report shows that those “last resort” claims were patently false.”*

The report shows that simple repairs could have saved most of the healthy condemned trees felled by SCC. Assumptions had been made by SCC about the cause of pavement and kerb damage without proper investigation first, such as removing some existing tarmac to see what was actually underneath. (see notes below for more detail)

**Paul Brooke said:**

*“Local campaigners protested against the felling of so many mature trees because experts had told them that repairs to the kerb and pavements would not be complicated. The Council’s stated reason for felling and ignoring advice from their own Independent Tree Panel never rang true.”*

Three of the trees jointly investigated were on Abbeydale Park Rise, a road that had seen significant police action and several arrests during the campaign to prevent healthy trees being felled.

**Ann Anderson, of local campaign group Save Dore, Totley and Bradway Trees, said:**

*I was really pleased to observe works on behalf of STAG as part of the Joint Investigations team on Abbeydale Park Rise. It was not surprising to us that they were able to repair the pavements so easily, as it is what we said all along. It took about 30 minutes to sort out one tree and they successfully created a straight and even kerb line. This is some much-needed and very welcome news for locals who have campaigned for years to save these, and many other, healthy mature trees.”*

**Paul Brooke said:**

*One campaigner, Mr Benoit Compin, was given a suspended prison sentence for breaching the injunction and still has £13,000 to pay to SCC in costs. The pavement around the tree that he protected - outside 22 Abbeydale Park Rise - has now been repaired, justifying his actions. We urge the Council to waive these costs immediately and work with us on setting up an Independent Inquiry.*

*"We feel vindicated by this report. It provides clear evidence that many hundreds if not thousands of the 5,700 trees felled could have been kept if the Council had made Amey carry out proper inspections and do simple repair work. We are very pleased with the way the report identifies the lessons learned from an approach aimed at keeping mature trees rather than substituting them with saplings. We fully support the actions agreed in the report and we will continue to work with the Council and Amey to complete the Street Tree Strategy that is due in the New Year.*

*"Everyone who stood up for the trees of our city should feel justly proud. We are clear that there is much more to be learned about how the Council got into this mess. It is essential to have an independent inquiry into the 'Sheffield Tree Massacre' so that we can all move forward."*

**Attachments:**

- 1. Joint report** by SCC, Amey and STAG
- 2. Illustrated examples** of practical solutions used to save condemned trees

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**Explanatory notes** with further detail on following pages

## Notes:

### 1. Key facts from the joint Inspections

Of the remaining 309 trees identified for felling during the first five years of the Streets Ahead programme, 165 were jointly inspected and a sample of 14 trees was considered in a review on 30th August 2019. The review explains how simple repairs could have been made to trees that had been condemned for removal. Uneven pavements that were assumed to be tree roots turned out to be multiple layers of tarmac, and uneven kerbs could be straightened out by using thinner kerbstones or slightly altering the kerblines. The review found that assumptions had been made about the cause of pavement and kerb damage without proper investigation first, such as removing the existing tarmac to see what was actually underneath.

The review considered how the Council had made decisions and noted that in some cases the Council rejected the advice of its own Independent Tree Panel. The report states that with the benefit of hindsight the Council considers “that in some instances the advice offered by the ITP and not accepted would have been appropriate to follow”

### 2. Arrest and prosecution of Benoit Compin

On 5th March 2018 campaigners faced a large police force, private security guards and Amey workers in a day-long stand-off over the tree outside 22 Abbeydale Park Rise, which the Council said had to be felled “as a last resort” due to a “kerb pushed out of alignment”. Mr Benoit Compin prevented a tree being felled outside 22 Abbeydale Park Rise and was found to be in breach of a High Court injunction for doing so.

In the report, Amey explain that “when assessing trees for removal, factors such as tree age, condition, species and future maintenance” were considered and not just the condition of the highway. The report states that “in some cases the original reason for replacing a tree was obscured” and that Abbeydale Park Rise was an example of where this had happened.

3. Independent Tree Panel (ITP) report 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016 -

<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/dam/sheffield/docs/roads-and-pavements/managingtrees/Managing%20Trees%20Doc31%20ITP%203%20Abbeydale%20Park%20Rise%20010616.pdf>

The ITP recommended the following engineering solutions with respect to the tree outside 22 Abbeydale Park Rise::

*We believe that it may be feasible to retain the remaining trees (those outside numbers 2, 6-8, 22-24, 30-32, 36, 39, 42-44, 49, 55, 56-58, 64 and 75) and renew the pavement by a combination of root pruning and excavation beneath the roots (solutions 8 and 10) . This would require excavation, the removal of soil and other material, the selective pruning of roots, depressing the remaining roots and replacing the soil and other material, all to industry standards. We believe it may be necessary to utilise other solutions (for example solutions 1, 3 and 4), the need for which would have to be determined whilst work is being undertaken. We recognise, however, that in some instances, an effective engineering solution may not be feasible.*

*We therefore advise that the Council should reconsider the plan for these trees. We consider that in some instances it may not be possible to reach a final decision until the excavation of a tree is undertaken (solution 2), which would therefore need to be scheduled with the works to the road and pavement. We therefore advise that the Council may wish to put in place control measures to ensure that the contractor does not proceed with removal and replacement when an alternative engineering option would be feasible and reasonable.*

#### **4. STAG Background report on Abbeydale Park Rise trees**

<https://savesheffieldtreesorguk.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/abbeydale-park-rise-report.pdf>

#### **5. Press coverage**

Outcome of Benoit's court case - Claim D92LS739 – High Court Sheffield – SCC v Benoit Compin. 5th March 2018

<https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/latest-news/two-sheffield-tree-campaigners-given-suspended-prison-sentences-for-breaching-protest-injunctions-1-9197693>



<https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/latest-news/sheffield-tree-felling-saga-man-arrested-and-woman-injured-as-dozens-of-police-and-security-staff-descend-on-suburb-1-9048770>

Police escalation relating to Abbeydale Park Rise

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-43316346>



**Photographs** (attribute to A Simpson)



Benoit's Tree - Abbeydale Park Rise



Kerb at tree by No. 22-24 Abbeydale Park Rise - before works





Kerb at tree by No. 22-24 Abbeydale Park Rise - Amey fixing kerb



Kerb at tree by No. 22-24 Abbeydale Park Rise - after works