

Customer Services - Fulfilment Team

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Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for getting in touch with the Council regarding the trees on Rustlings Road. We have received a number of letters in relation to this issue, both in favour and against the replacement of the trees.

We are sorry for the time taken to respond to this enquiry, we wanted to listen to what concerned residents and others had raised and allow the democratic process to run its course before deciding any outcomes and writing back to those who have raised enquiries.

Now that the matter has been debated in Full Council and as a part of our commitment to keep residents and those interested informed, we have attempted to capture all of the most commonly asked questions, as well as a number of queries or pieces of information specifically requested during Full Council in order to provide a comprehensive response.

Overview

An independent tree survey carried out in 2006/7 indicated that approximately 75% of Sheffield's highway tree stock was reaching the end of its natural life, and only around 5% of trees fell into the "young" age grouping.

The survey also indicated that around 10,000 highway trees required intervention and that if a programme of sustainable replacement did not commence, then a catastrophic decline in tree numbers would occur.

To prevent this from happening we obtained funding in the form of the Streets Ahead project to ensure that we had the funds to better maintain our tree stock, whilst also replacing some of it to give us a better age profile of trees for future generations.

To date, almost 3 years into the Streets Ahead project, we have replaced just over 2,000 trees, which is only around 5% of the highway tree stock of 36,000 trees. We can confirm that over the remaining 22 years of the project there are no intentions to replace any more trees than absolutely required.

The Streets Ahead team will only remove trees as a last resort. We take our legal obligations to provide a safe and fit for purpose highway environment, as well as other relevant legislation such as the disability discrimination act extremely seriously. Therefore to ensure we do this we do have to remove some trees because they are causing damage. We would like to reassure you that each tree that is removed as part of this project will be replaced. There may be a short gap in doing this as we only replant trees in the planting season (November to March).

Rustlings Road Highway Trees

There are currently 30 trees on Rustlings Road and we plan to replace a maximum of 11 trees. The remaining 19 trees are being retained in situ by using a number of sensitive engineering solutions.

In addition we are planning to plant a further 9 trees that were previously removed but not replaced. After our works have been completed there will be 39 trees along the road.

There are 3 of the 11 trees that we may be able to retain subject to what we find when we excavate the footway. After excavation a Civil Engineer and an Arboriculturalist will re-assess the trees.

Inspections

In some instances trees which are suspected to require replacement due to damage to roads or pavements that cannot be repaired by reasonable engineering solutions, are noticed for removal in line with our procedures. However, if when we dig out the footway and find that we can work around the tree then the tree will be retained. We always adopt a policy of advising residents of the worst case scenario in order to be completely open about the potential extent of tree works in any one street.

Although questions have been raised about the competency of our teams and the training and qualifications they have received, we would like to confirm that all Streets Ahead staff hold the appropriate qualifications, training and experience to carry out their duties. A programme of continuing professional development ensures our staff are aware and trained in any new industry developments and refresher training when required.

As an additional control, a check of all tree safety surveys is made by the Council's technical experts to ensure that no errors have been made. A 100% check of all tree that are planned to be replaced during the zonal works are made and a regular, rolling 20% safety re-survey programme at different times of year also helps to capture underlying issues which may only present symptoms seasonally, such as fruiting bodies / fungi.

Engineering Solutions

Reasonable engineering solutions are always considered, including flexible paving, thinner kerb stones and sensitive footway reconstruction techniques to retain trees. We then also consider what we can do with the tree itself such as root pruning or removal.

Unfortunately these are not practicable in all instances. However, as outlined above if trees can be retained following footway excavation and further examination, this would always be our preferred option.

It has been suggested that we could consider raising the level of the pavement above the ridging of the tree roots. All practical solutions have been explored at the time of survey and in subsequent reviews. Covering the base of a tree above the buttress level can have catastrophic impacts upon trees, and the likelihood of failure in the event of this occurring is significant.

During our assessment process, we will always explore whether limited ramping or re-profiling of footway surfaces can be carried out with mounding of material above the roots, and constructed within the acceptable levels of tolerance for inclusive mobility.

It was also suggested that re-engineering of the road side could take place such as constructing build outs or additional line markings denoting where it is not safe to drive and this could be used as an alternative to removing and replacing the trees. National Regulations (TSRGD) prevents the Council from using non-standard markings to delineate where it would not be safe to drive on the road.

Building out the kerb line around trees into the carriageway on Rustlings Road would not alleviate the risk presented to pedestrians on the footway.

Questions were asked at Full Council as to how the Council captured the value of trees. The model utilised by our inspectors both from planning, conservation, parks and Streets Ahead is TEMPO which is utilised to establish whether a tree is eligible for a tree preservation order.

A physical valuation, using one of the various methodologies available (i.e. CAVAT or i-tree) is not routinely undertaken as we are looking at managing a historically under maintained and under resourced tree stock and bringing it up to legislative and nationally recognised highway maintenance standards. The financial results achieved from this kind of evaluation can also vary wildly based on the model used to carry out the evaluation, often relying on subjective decisions being used to reach an outcome.

Replanting Provision

Concerns have been raised about the quality of the replanting of trees. All new trees that are replanted are planted in newly formed tree pits and we have a dedicated team specifically for this task. All tree pits are constructed to an industry standard specification and this ensures we have the correct depth of pit and this is backfilled with tree planting soil that is designed to give the tree the best start in the highway environment. Although mulch is applied to the top surface this does not come from contaminated sources.

All planting locations are proposed by our professional tree inspectors and are chosen to give the tree the best possible chance of survival whilst taking into account highway users and 3rd parties.

In the case of Rustlings Road, we have also committed to plant an additional 9 trees which were previously felled and not replaced in order to infill a number of gaps in the street.

Due to developments in the nursery trade we have access to a wide range of cultivars which maintain the consistency of species whilst being more suited to the modern highway environment. On Rustlings Road it is proposed to plant the Rancho cultivar of Lime trees, which looks extremely similar to the existing trees but grows in a more columnar fashion without issues such as basal growth etc.

We are clearly not able to replace a mature tree with a mature tree but instead the Streets Ahead team plant extra heavy standard sized trees and as with all tree planting we suffer a few loses. We would urge the community to be guardians of these new trees and help us to ensure that they reach maturity and leave a lasting legacy for future generations. We would encourage residents to report any issues that they find with the new trees so we can rectify these as soon as possible.

We will replace all failed plantings as many times as necessary. During the Streets Ahead contract to date we have planted 2,019 new trees of which 60 have failed, which is a 97% success rate. Of those failures 46 have been due to vandalism – 77% (e.g. maliciously

sawn through) only 14 have failed to establish which amounts to less than 0.7% of the new trees planted.

We also work closely with the Council's conservation team who were instrumental in helping with the species selection of the trees that are replanted as part of the project.

Some criticism was made of the Council at Full Council for having "inappropriate" species such as Giant Redwood on the approved planting list. We can confirm that as there is an avenue of Giant Redwood planted within Sheffield, therefore it makes sense that we have clear provision within the approved replanting list to ensure that the eventuality of these trees failing, we can replant with a species match for continuity purposes.

Likewise the choice to plant Ginkgo trees was criticised by one elected member, however there is significant research showing demonstrable pollution sequestration and resistance qualities in this species making it an ideal tree for the highway environment.

Communication

Since the start of the Streets Ahead contract in 2012 we have had a dedicated page on our website which details our strategy in managing the city's trees, we also detail our approach to tree removals. We have also held a number of public meetings to discuss our approach to trees with residents and community groups. The first of these meetings was held in 2013 in Ecclesall Wood, where we demonstrated how we managed the city's trees as well as providing information about which trees we would need to remove and replace.

The second set of meetings were held in 2014 where we held detailed discussions with the public, including many of the campaigners, about our approach and listened to their feedback. We also have regular information about our approach to trees at each of the roadshows that are held before we carry out zonal works and we provide regular information to all community groups, Councillors and MP's and via our Social Media accounts.

Further details about our tree management approach can be found via www.sheffield.gov.uk/streetsahead. It has been stated that residents feel that we have not effectively communicated our plans with them. All residents who live in the Fulwood zone (which Rustlings Road falls into) were sent a leaflet during the week commencing 1 December 2014 to inform them of the works taking place in their area. Further leaflets were then sent the week commencing 8th December 2014.

They were informed that trees would be removed and replaced and they were invited to one of four roadshows that were taking place in the area on different dates and times so residents could get specific details about the variety of works taking place.

The Roadshows were held at:

- 15th December – 2-4pm Hallamshire Golf Club, Redmires Road and 5-7pm The Florentine, Tupton Park Road,
- 16th December, 2-4pm at St Thomas Church Hall, Crookes, and 5-7pm Broomhill Methodist.

All ward Councillors (and councillors from neighbouring wards) were also informed of the works and invited to attend one of the four roadshows in order to gain further information and gain feedback from residents. Only Councillors Dunn, Cllr Sangar and Cllr Alston took

up the invitation to attend one of the roadshows and no residents asked any questions about the tree removal on Rustlings Road or any roads in the zone or raised any concerns with the Streets Ahead team.

In total 3705 leaflets were sent to residents directly affected by the Streets Ahead works in this area.

Each zone also has a Community Steward who is dedicated to dealing with enquires from Community groups and elected members as well as working with the community.

Some comments have been made by interested parties about the use of plain language wording on the tree notices as opposed to industry specific technical language. These comments have been fed back to our communications team for further consideration. We will always endeavour to provide more detailed feedback to anyone wanting to query the reasons for tree felling when requests are made via our customer contact centre.

We were also asked what happens to the timber arising from our arboricultural operations. Some timber goes into biomass other pieces have gone to local community groups, artists, schools, as well as into furniture making. Timber has also been recycled into milled timber bollards and other products for use on the highway network. Should any residents have any suggestions or wish to request the timber for the community, please let us know by contacting Customer Services on 0114 273 4567 and we will endeavour to facilitate these requests. Please note that not all requests can be fulfilled.

Safety Considerations

It has been suggested that dangerous or diseased trees could be retained on the highway network for their habitat potential. Although this might be suitable for a park or woodland location, the highway presents very different challenges.

This is clearly demonstrated by recent incidents such as the pedestrian hit by a falling decayed tree (from Private Land) on Ecclesall Road. This highlights the risk of retaining diseased and decaying trees on the highway network.

Other core cities such as Birmingham have had notable fatalities in instances where diseased and decaying trees have been retained and have then subsequently fallen onto the highway. This is a level of risk we are not willing to accept for Sheffield's highway maintenance and management.

Questions have also been raised about how we identify pathogens or fruiting bodies in trees. Arboricultural experts would first of all identify any disease by the use of their experience and technical references, they would also check the extent of decay where appropriate by the use of decay detection equipment this would typically include resistance drilling or tomography.

If a mature tree can benefit from a better maintenance regime and pruning and would thrive in its current location, then this would be retained, even if it has a short lifespan of 5 years.

At Full Council there was a suggestion that 26,000 trees would be removed under the Streets Ahead programme but that is simply not true nor do we expect to replace anywhere near that number.

A number of enquiries have also been received regarding the potential for clay soil movement or heave. We can confirm that any instances of heave resulting from the removal of highway trees are highly unlikely given that extensive stump grinding that will take place in addition with a full footway reconstruction. Should any instances occur, for clarity the standard practice would be for householders to advise our contractor Amey of this issue through our standard customer services contacts, and typically commission a specialist report via their own home insurers. Any claim for such damage would be made against Amey and would not be paid by the Council.

Allegations have been made that Amey may have “made up” the three broken bone claims received in order to bolster the case for tree removal on Rustlings Road but we can confirm that Council staff have validated their existence. It is key to note that although pertinent in demonstrating the risk of the trip hazard presented by uneven footway surfaces and ridging due to root tracks, these claims have not had any impact upon the decision and inspection process to remove the trees.

Flood risk was also cited as part of the argument for retention of the mature trees. Sheffield is currently embarking upon a significant flood management plan and employs a number of industry leading flood and sustainable urban drainage specialists as part of the delivery of this project.

We acknowledge that tree canopies do capture a proportion of rainfall, however in a significant flood event, a tree that is planted in a grass verge could make a very small contribution in soaking up water, but it is likely that the verge soil would make a much larger contribution than the tree. However a tree planted directly into a footpath (as is the case on Rustlings Road) would contribute very little that would help in flash flooding as the water would merely flow across the sealed surface. It is often the case that highway trees contribute to flooding through leaves blocking gullies and their roots blocking and collapsing drains and pipes

Contract Specification

A number of requests have been received for copies of the Amey contract. We can confirm that this is already published online, and although there are some sections of the contract which are redacted, there is no redaction within the tree section, as such, all of this information is in the public realm and available for viewing.

Queries have been raised as to why the contract specification cannot be changed for the pavements to be left in their current condition. The contract merely states that we will apply nationally recognised highway maintenance approach by identifying footway defects and rectifying them. Put simply Amey are being asked to leave the footway in an acceptable, fit for purpose and safe condition.

Over the past few years residents and users of Rustlings Road have reported trips and falls to us which are directly attributable to the footway condition and namely the tree root ridging.

A number of residents who live on Rustlings Road have come forward to the Council depicting their own struggles or those which they have witnessed of disabled persons and those with prams and buggies or mobility issue struggling to pass along the footways at this location.

Concerns have been raised about the construction process with regards to the retained trees. We can confirm that all works will be supervised by a qualified arboriculturalist to ensure no tree root damage occurs as part of our works. The Streets Ahead team work to National Joint Utilities Group (NJUG) regulations and relevant British standards for construction works in the vicinity of trees and will continue to do so, our inspectors regularly monitor this by carrying out site inspections.

Project Financing and Payments

Residents and interested parties have questioned how the project is financed and we can confirm that Sheffield City Council has a Private Finance Initiative contract with Amey Hallam Highways Ltd for the delivery of a complete highway maintenance service which includes all highway maintenance activities such as, street lighting, street cleaning, carriageway and footway resurfacing, grounds maintenance and arboriculture. Payments made by the Council under the contract do not relate to the provision of specific items of work such as removal or replacement of trees. Instead, a single payment is made for each month of the 25 year term of the contract.

Payment is based on a number of different factors relating to Amey's performance, progress against investment programmes and completed non-core services. Amey submit a Payment Report on a monthly basis which is discussed and the monthly payment agreed at Management Board.

This payment mechanism means that Amey are not paid per tree they remove, as has been suggested.

Ecology and Wildlife Considerations

Detailed ecological assessments are undertaken in every zone where Streets Ahead works are taking place in order to ensure that the works do not adversely affect wildlife. All our works are subject to repeated ecological and environmental assessments from both Amey and ourselves throughout the design, evaluation and build process.

Any tree planned for removal that is found to contain wildlife eg nesting birds or bats will be retained until that is not the case.

The halfway point in the Streets Ahead Core Investment Period has been mentioned as a suitable point to carry out a review of our approach. We can confirm that we review tree survey results from the rolling survey programme on an annual basis, which also includes analysis of age profile, species mix and condition of the entire asset.

The condition of the tree stock as a whole had not improved in the period between the independent tree survey of 2006/7 to the commencement of the Streets Ahead project in August 2012, and as such, unless a phased removal and replacement programme continues, catastrophic decline in tree numbers on the highway network will occur.

Some campaigners at the Full Council meeting felt that the Council should be taking guidance from Professor Ian Rotherham, as opposed to a private sector organisation. Although Professor Rotherham is a well-known local personality, Streets Ahead, employ conservation, planning, tree preservation, landscape design, ecological, plant and tree disease and arboricultural specialists who contribute to many national publications, including the well cited TDAG document as well as routinely being invited to speak at national conferences. These officers have nothing to gain from tree removal, are not

incentivised in any way to remove trees and will always provide impartial advice about what meets the current legislative and national standards requirements and the legal responsibilities of the Council.

As has been widely publicised the decision from Full Council on the 1st July 2015 was to continue with the felling of the trees on Rustlings Road. We are aware that this might not have been the decision that most of you had wanted but we hope the debate in Full Council and the details of this letter has led to a greater understanding of the reasons for our decision.

Kind Regards

Streets Ahead Team