

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

Street Trees Review Scrutiny Panel

Transcript of the meeting held on Wednesday 21 March 2007 at 5.00 p.m. in Committee Room 3, Hove Town Hall.

In attendance: Councillors Young (Chair), Elgood, Hazelgrove, and Paskins.

Council Officers: Rob Greenland, Arboriculturist; Stuart Wilson, Assistant Engineer – Sustainable Transport; Andrew Westwood, Transport Systems & Lighting Manager – Sustainable Transport; John Adams, Scrutiny Support Officer; Christian Brown, Democratic Support Officer.

The Panel noted that written submissions had been received from a Mr Sven Rufus, a Ms Karen Coley, a Mr S Derwent, a lady living in First Avenue and a lady in Westbourne Street (please see attached).

The Chair welcomed the speakers attending the meeting. The first speaker was Mr Derwent. He stated his particular interest was in elm trees but also in street trees as a whole. Elms formed an important part of our city's tree scene and thanks to the success of everyone working together in the early 1970's, we still have the majority of our elm trees, which form the national elm collection. With this accolade, the city has a responsibility to maintain the elm stock. His chief concern was that a third of the street trees in the city are elms and in parts of the city all street trees are elms and their preservation is central to the overall street tree scene.

Mr Derwent acknowledged the concerns over asphaltting up to the base of tree trunks but wished this issue to be balanced against the importance of work to preserve the elms. We cannot run the risk of Dutch elm disease coming back into the city. Mr Derwent referred to the point made by Gillian Marston at the meeting held on 13 March 2007, in which she stated that there comes a time with some trees where the only solution is to remove them. He supported this realistic view but believes that it must fit into a strategy whereby one has seen the removal coming and another tree is planted either in the vicinity or in its place.

Mr Derwent said that it was important to have a long term strategy. He deemed 50-100 years to be a good time span and stated that if we want to maintain the feeling of the city, this can only be done through a long term strategy that took into account tasks such as sympathetic pruning to maintain the image of the tree and the need for a balanced approach

that emphasized preservation of the existing stock.

The Chair agreed with the views of Mr Derwent and Gillian Marston regarding responsible decisions to remove trees as a last resort.

Councillor Elgood stated that he had worked with his ward residents in Lansdowne Place, Brunswick Place and Norfolk Square in order to mark the sites for new tree planting. Councillor Elgood said that the feeling amongst the residents was that they were making history because the trees will be there for a long-time into the future. Councillor Elgood then asked Mr Greenland some questions with regard to the timescale he envisaged for the tree strategy.

Mr Greenland said that he wanted to develop a sustainable method of planting and maintenance for all trees in the city. He envisaged a complete management strategy taken up to 300 years.

Councillor Hazelgrove stated that the resources are not there to redo all the asphaltting up to the trunks of trees in the city. The immediate priority is for current and future works to be carried out properly without resorting to asphaltting to the base of the trunk, for example by the use of clear guidance to contractors.

The Panel thanked Mr Derwent for his contribution.

The next speaker before the Panel was Ms. Eileen Odom, a resident of Westbourne Street who had lived in Hove all her life. She observed that another lady from Westbourne Street had written in to the Panel to express concerns similar to her own. Westbourne Street has a sheltered accommodation block, Carmel House, housing 33 elderly residents. She has now lived in the block nearly a year and travelling along the paths of Westbourne Street is extremely difficult due to the asphaltting which tree roots have broken through. It makes the pavement difficult for her and must make it impossible to navigate for the less mobile residents of the road. She also stated that she has spoken to Councillors about getting hedges trimmed and the pavements corrected/evened out. Ms Odom said that she is not against trees in any way as she has helped to protect trees in St Leonard's Churchyard, but would like to see resumption to this problem.

Councillor Young mentioned that the Panel will be undertaking site visits and that Mrs Odom would be welcome to show examples of the problems she encounters on the road.

The next witness to give evidence to the Panel was Ms Jane Addey who moved to Brighton from London 7 years ago. She is a parent and teacher

at the Brighton Steiner School which has become an eco-school. A project they would like to undertake is balancing the school's production of carbon each year by planting trees. However, it has been difficult to find a location to plant the trees. In the school grounds there is little space, therefore, the school would like to be able to plant trees at the roadside or on the pavements fanning out from the school. Once the trees had been planted the children would then take care of the watering etc. She also suggested the possibility for other schools to take up the opportunity to green areas in their proximity. Ms Addey was frustrated that this project had not been able to be moved forward.

Mr Greenland stated that he knows Steiner School and its surrounding area well. The area has lost a lot of big trees due to elm disease and the area could continue to lose more trees because of the difficulty of disease prevention as the trees share the same root-lines. Mr Greenland said that the Council had in the past contributed to planting in the area including Roedean Road and provided assistance for disease prevention. The council had looked to plant up the Broadway but, unfortunately, one side of the road was lined with electrical cables and the other side had a multitude of other underground services. The Council had planted nearly all of the few available sites that they could find in the area. At present, the Council are looking to plant further up from the Steiner School towards the shopping parade and at the bottom of Bristol Gardens. Later this year the Council planned to contact local traders there to determine whether they have any objections to a line of trees being planted.

Ms Addey asked Mr Greenland about the possibility of further planting along Roedean Road. Mr Greenland stated that it was possible, however, any trees planted there would be exposed to the elements, primarily strong winds, which damage and stunt the growth of the trees.

Mr Greenland said the cost of a tree is around £240. Of this cost, there are few ongoing care requirements except £70 for watering in the first year following planting. The Council provides resources for further maintenance. Mr Greenland said £240 was just a unit price and could be adjusted if there are several trees.

Mr Greenland stated that the Council welcomed projects like that outlined by Ms Addey. However, there are few arboriculture resources and several projects are already being pursued. Mr Greenland was happy to discuss the matter further with Ms Addey.

Ms Addey then asked about the pruning and Mr Greenland replied that the standards of pruning in Brighton and Hove were very high.

Councillor Hazelgrove asked for clarification on donating trees. Mr

Greenland responded that the current price was £100 but the price will increase to £120 due to increasing costs. The council periodically surveys all of the parks and open spaces in the city and identifies planting opportunities to be offered to donors. Street tree planting opportunities are also offered to donors, but this is not well taken up because most people prefer a tree in a park that is more attractive. Mr Greenland stated that the Council surveys the parks and then decides which trees are needed and where for the next 150-300 years. The Council then offers that tree species and that location to the donors.

Councillor Hazelgrove suggested that this scheme could be expanded if there was sufficient interest and cited the re-launching of the Brighton Dome and the Founder's Room. This was a scheme established to allow anyone to donate £500 towards the refurbishment of the Dome. He believed a similar scheme could be established for trees.

Mr Greenland stated that most of the donations were made *in memoriam*, although the Council promoted donations for anniversaries, birthdays and births, and while this does happen occasionally, probably for every 50 trees the Council plants, around 45 are *in memoriam*. In 1999 the Council stopped putting plaques on the trees because as the scheme became more popular there was a funereal effect. Planting certificates are now given to donors instead.

Councillor Elgood asked whether there was an opportunity to meet budget costs by the establishment of a carbon offsetting scheme for residents. Mr Greenland responded that the Council could try and promote this kind of scheme and it would be a new way of promoting tree donation. He stated that the Council has been undertaking large scale schemes, for example in East Brighton, to balance the Council's carbon output. Brighton & Hove has very little woodland and most of the areas that will take wide scale planting are already planted up.

Andrew Westwood, Transport Systems and Lightings Manager, gave an overview of the conflict between lights and trees on the highway. The team endeavours to ensure there is no conflict between street trees and lighting. Guidance is followed and the works inspectors consider impacts of trees and street lighting. Mr Westwood commented that it is more usual for residents' trees to cause a problem for street lighting, although as a tree grows and matures it may begin to encroach on street lighting. Mr Westwood conceded that there is very little room underground for all the competing demands of utilities, street lighting and tree roots, and inevitably this means that some trees and lights are close together, although every attempt is made to ensure this is kept to a minimum.

Councillor Young asked about the provision of maps of underground

utilities and whether the studying of them will help find better locations for trees. Mr Greenland responded that the Council uses maps and detection equipment to locate utilities' infrastructure, but the process is still difficult.

The Panel discussed planting opportunities in general. The Panel noted that there were fewer resources for tree planting now than there had been in the past. There was usually some scope for limited planting in most areas, for example the 22 new trees in Lewis Road, which although do not sound like a lot, are better than what was there before.

The Panel briefly discussed tree-related waste and cleansing.

Mr Greenland informed that Panel that officers are already looking at resolving the roots issue and hope to make inroads into this before the completion of the strategy, although the strategy will uphold this. In the meantime, providing there is a gap between asphalt and the tree, it receives water as it runs down the branch. Under tarmac and concrete there is a condensation effect: as the tarmac heats up and then cools it puts moisture into the soil below which is what the tree roots seek this out and then push the tarmac out above it.

The Panel heard that officers are experimenting with Amsterdam Sand – which holds more moisture than other minerals and so encourages the roots to remain contained within it. If the Council can use Amsterdam sand in tree pits then there will be less roots pushing upwards and buckling the tarmac and paving slabs. Mr Greenland added a caution that the mineral was expensive.

Councillor Hazelgrove asked about experimentation with Amsterdam sand and whether it has been used elsewhere. Mr Greenland replied that its use and success is well documented. The ideal situation would be to lift an entire road and start from scratch; however, he is aware that this is not possible and the Council must experiment with how they can introduce the material to existing situations.

The meeting concluded at 6.05pm