

## Independent Street Trees Inquiry Public Meeting – Record of Questions & Answers

9<sup>th</sup> September – Reception Rooms, Sheffield Town Hall

Panel: Cllr Julie Grocutt (JG), Cllr Douglas Johnson (DJ), Kate Josephs (KJ), Ryan Keyworth (RK)

Questioner	Question
Paul Selby	I was a member of STAG and am now a member of the Street Trees Partnership Group. People will not be compelled to give evidence to the inquiry: we suspect some criminality has taken place which will have an impact on people’s willingness to give evidence, how can you encourage individuals to give evidence to the inquiry?
<b>Answer</b>	
<p>KJ: The Chair needs to work to encourage this. Some historic inquiries have offered the option to give evidence anonymously: we could consider something like this. A question for the Chair.</p> <p>RK: We will have to cross that bridge when we come to it. I acknowledge it is not an easy question to answer, and we know we need to get people to participate. We will need to work with the Chair on this. There was a question about legal representation or advice at the previous meeting, and we don’t have answer to this yet. We don’t want people to put themselves in a difficult legal position, for example either through defamatory statements, or by opening themselves up to legal questions. Neither do we want people turning up “lawyered up.” That won’t encourage the kind of approach we want. This is part of a set of tricky questions to answer before the inquiry can commence: we will be open about where we end up, and explain why that is, or the Independent Chair will.</p> <p>DJ: we know we can’t compel witnesses, and this would also be the case for a statutory inquiry. If someone refuses to help, it may look bad on them and their reputation. To take one example, in the Grenfell Inquiry some directors from the cladding company refused to give evidence. We have to recognise that an Inquiry is not a court of law. The most important thing will be to hear the evidence that people want to put forward.</p>	

Questioner	Question
Louise Wilcockson	How will the psychological damage caused by felling be assessed and recourse addressed? It cannot just be cathartic. What will the hardnosed outcomes be, even if that is just full acknowledgement of the damage caused to people? What can we do to avoid it happening again? Serious damage has been caused – PTSD, psychosis & not just hurt feelings. It is important not to dress this inquiry up as a cathartic experience about closure.
<b>Answer</b>	
<p>JG: We need a strong Chair can properly pick that up and ensure it is considered. It has been valuable to listen to what you and others have said, and we need to properly consider how that can come out of inquiry. It is down to the Chair to listen, understand &amp; make clear recommendations. This will be part of the skill of the chair in understanding and putting forward recommendations for Council.</p> <p>DJ: it is not for us to say what the outcomes should be, this will be for the Chair to pick up.</p> <p>KJ: we need to recognise that people have experienced trauma and the process will be traumatic for some people.</p>	

<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Question</b>
Justin Buxton	When you say members would have final approval on Terms of Reference in relation to time and cost: who would those members be? Is this Co-operative Executive? Full Council? There is potentially a fair amount of negotiation in developing the Terms of Reference: I can see that if it went to Full Council it could be a political football?
<b>Answer</b>	
<p>RK: If the decision comes before May 2022 it will be the Co-operative Executive; if after then we will need to understand decision making arrangements.</p> <p>KJ: It is really important that the Chair can be confident that in their appointment they are also receiving the endorsement of the Council to make measured objective recommendations. Members would have to clear about what reason they might have to reject the advice of the Independent Chair. We need to be open about the trade-offs involved with the Council's budget position.</p>	

<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Question</b>
Dave Dillner	Will the inquiry start with contract negotiations, and the presentation of business plan to DfT? There were omissions and oversights in the contract process, with no arborists or ecologists involved. Why were decisions being made by highways and finance people? Trees were treated as street furniture. You made a rod for your own backs. Why are council officers lying about what was done? These are the things that need uncovering. Can you give an assurance that the inquiry will start there?
<b>Answer</b>	
KJ: I don't see that's it's not possible to start at the beginning.	

<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Question</b>
Robert Cutts	A lot has been said about money: will there not be an inquiry? Will members vote for it?
<b>Answer</b>	
<p>RK: It is for the elected Members to decide how the Council spends its money.</p> <p>KJ: elected Members have committed to an Inquiry. I appreciate the scepticism, there is going to be an Inquiry.</p> <p>JG: If the decision comes to Co-operative Exec we are all signed up to it.</p> <p>DJ: Clearly, it's got to happen. The question is around how it is funded, but it has to fit in there somewhere.</p>	

<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Question</b>
Caroline Milner	In terms of the inquiry and the information available for it: will this not be restricted to the archive?
<b>Answer</b>	

RK: No it won't: the inquiry can go where it wants. We don't need the archive to be complete to start the Inquiry.

Questioner	Question
Jon Johnson	We all want to move on from this. Governance is a major issue behind this: how will those lessons be learned? There is and interaction here with the issues raised earlier around people being willing to contribute.
<b>Answer</b>	
KJ: I don't want to prejudge the terms of reference, but it is not a stretch to imagine that governance will be a part of the inquiry. One of the things that will be important in the appointment of the Chair will be an understanding of what good looks like in governance. This also comes back to understanding what happened and unpicking it: not just the rules and arrangements but the human behaviours around governance. Sheffield City Council are constantly trying to improve governance: we have an LGA Peer Review coming up, and fully expect and hope we get recommendations to build on from that. We won't wait for the Inquiry to report to improve. A key point is to ensure people to contribute: this will be really important for the city to be able to move forward.	

Questioner	Question
Louise Wilcockson	Some of us have seen the changing of the guard before and saw how the Independent Tree Panel was established but then its recommendations not followed, with the ITP report recommending that the majority of Rustlings Road trees remain in place being published at 4:30am and following by the trees being felled at 5am. This is not just about getting a set of recommendations: they need to be followed.
<b>Answer</b>	
KJ: We accept this, and know that some recommendations may be straightforward, while some may be challenging.	

Questioner	Question
Benoit Compin	On 6 <sup>th</sup> March 2018 I was arrested on false grounds of breaching an injunction for the second time. I am grateful people are involved with no previous connection and would like a conversation with the Council to sort outstanding issues.
<b>Answer</b>	
RK: I'm happy to have a direct conversation about that.	

Questioner	Question
Justin Buxton	I understand Weightmans are advising on the appointment of the Independent Chair: do SCC see Weightmans following through and providing support through the process?
<b>Answer</b>	
RK: Weightmans are advising me at the moment, but I can see that changing to advising the Chair. The appointment was for the whole process.	

Questioner	Question
Martin Pickles	Who is it who decides the scope of the inquiry, the content and depth? Is it this panel, or is it the Chair? There are many episodes, and a lot to unpack that explains about behaviour, and the chance of things being missed. Do we have set of fundamental questions that are driving this?
<b>Answer</b>	
RK: There are lot of things to establish here: breadth and depth; start and end dates; how many episodes to go into? We will need to set a framework but it will be up to the Chair to make recommendations on start date and end date, and what will be covered in that time. When it comes to timeframe and cost, Members will need to sign that off.	

Questioner	Question
Isabel O’leary	What do you think is the purpose of the inquiry?
<b>Answer</b>	
JG: For me it is about looking into a period of time in Sheffield that has caused angst, anxiety, and upset to people, and caused public criticism of the Council that we need to deal with so that everyone involved can feel an opportunity to be understood, where we look to move forward as a city, and get back to doing what we need to do in terms of running the city.	
DJ: This is a really important question. We know that some bad stuff happened, and we also know things have moved on, a lot of people have gone, and we are in different times, and a new way of working has to build in a certain amount of openness and transparency. It will cost money. But too many loose threads are hanging and people need to tell their stories. I don’t know where that will lead us, what the findings or recommendations will be, but the process is important.	
RK: This is about truth and reconciliation: getting to the truth, reconciliation comes from that truth being acknowledged, and if sorry needs to be said it needs to be said properly. The mission is to get a Chair who can deliver that.	
KJ – there will be people who challenge us on using public money on this but it is really important – until there is a process of listening and ensuring it does not happen again – we won’t be able to move forward as a city with a sense of trust and collective purpose in these times to be the best we can be. Outcome – we begin to build some trust back.	

Questioner	Question
Jon Johnson	With regard to LACs, are we moving down a road we’ve been down before or are we going to learn the lessons as we go? We can’t wait for the inquiry to finish to move forward.
<b>Answer</b>	
KJ: An iterative, constant approach to learning and being curious is the right way to go. LACs are part of the vanguard of our new way of working, in and of communities, but this will also be about behaviour change as well as structures. We need to move forward and build in lessons as we go.	

Questioner	Question
Dave Dillner	We’d all like to see closure, but when talk about moving on and putting this behind us, can you imagine how difficult this will be for campaigners

	to stomach when some of the main perpetrators, councillors and officers, are still in post?
<b>Answer</b>	
JG: Ultimately, we need to try to get everyone there so they can have their say.	
DJ: We have to recognise it has been a big part of people's lives and they have been badly affected by it. The Inquiry will do what it can, but can't be expected to fix everything that has gone wrong.	

Questioner	Question
Louise Wilcockson	It is important to be mindful that part of the reason to be willing to commit sufficient funds to this inquiry, is not just about a healing process at local level. It is about rectifying Sheffield's global image and ability to compete on the global platform. We cannot be in the position of continuing to market ourselves as the Outdoor City, with the legacy of the tree felling casting its shadow still. We must not forget that this was a £2.2bn contract of which the .2 is often missed off. The cost of an inquiry would be a drop the ocean in comparison and that should be seen within this context. Also, Birmingham decided to sue Amey whereas we spent money suing our citizens.
<b>Answer</b>	
KJ: I agree; but it's clear there will be a cost commitment to this. SCC will commit funding to this, but in the current budget circumstances there will be trade-offs and choices and we have to be open about that.	

Questioner	Question
Benoit Compin	What we spend on the inquiry will depend on the transparency of SCC – this is an opportunity for the members and officers involved to be open.
<b>Answer</b>	
KJ: I anticipate all discussions around finances will be in the open.	
RK: the Inquiry will be better if people feel able to be fully open and free. An advance process of reconciliation could help with this?	

Questioner	Question
Isabel O'leary	It is good to hear learning can be done as we go: can learning be done about how Birmingham got out of their highways contract?
<b>Answer</b>	
KJ: We could look at this: I am spending time with the new Birmingham CEX so can discuss with her. We are committed to being outward looking, more so than has been the case in the past.	

Questioner	Question
Justin Buxton	For me, there are three strands the inquiry needs to address: the reputational loss to Sheffield; the personal cost to people; and the financial cost. I think there was misuse of public funds on several fronts, and there is a responsibility for the Council to inspect whether funds were used properly, especially in relation to delegated authority rather than through democratic process. There is an argument for why money should

	be invested in that. To add to this, a total of £413k spent on courts, plus police time, all a waste of money.
<b>Answer</b>	
Justin's comments were noted.	