

# STRAW.....and the trees

Throughout the campaign to save the trees in Armada Way Environment Plymouth has supported Ali and the STRAW team and Penny and the Plymouth Tree Partnership in their efforts to prevent the felling. We were as appalled as everyone else when the Council sent in the fellers after making what still appears to be a very dodgy executive decision by the former Leader Cllr Bingley. Having worked for the Council I can assure you that you can't call in all the security, fellers and clearance equipment at a couple of hours notice. The PCC procurement process doesn't allow that (unless other rules were broken) so the action must have been planned in advance. The resulting injunction and the ongoing, court led, instructions about clearing the area with STRAW's approval of an ecologist's audit is therefore welcome and we will give STRAW every bit of help we can. We were asked to issue a statement from Environment Plymouth which was important given that we do not, in the majority of cases, take a political stance. However, given the action taken by both Councillors and Officers in this case we had to do something. The following was agreed by the Steering Group and issued on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2023. It was sent to the local Press but we didn't see the point of sending to the Council as they were clearly taking no notice of the community anyway.

Issued : Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2023

STATEMENT FROM ENVIRONMENT PLYMOUTH

ON THE FATE OF ARMADA WAY'S TREES AND THE DECISION MAKING  
PROCESS LEADING UP TO THEIR FELLING.



“ We are sure that, like us, many of you have been deeply upset by the recent action in Armada way. Quite apart from the unforgivable felling of the trees and the impact on wildlife, we have witnessed a complete disregard for community engagement and a perceived misuse of power in a public office by Councillors and Officers alike.

This saddens us as many of our members, both groups and individuals, work closely

with different teams at the Council to deliver improvements to the environment. However, it is not surprising that the story has hit headlines all over the world (including the US) and the questions being asked have already and, possibly, irrevocably, brought the City into disrepute.

Environment Plymouth's strategic role includes the promotion of awareness and the achievement of sustainable solutions. As such we are not against urban regeneration but, in

this case, we are at a loss to understand why the decisions taken were applied in the way they were by both officers and elected members. Changes could have been made and community voices listened to.

Action on the felling must have been taken long before Cllr Bingley's 'executive decision'. Securing the equipment and manpower to fell and remove the trees and to secure the site would have needed to go through the Council's procurement process and that takes time.....not two hours from signature to chainsaw.

The timing of the felling must have been deliberate too. Did the Council seriously think that no-one would notice ?

And, in terms of consultation, it was clear from the start that 'meaningful' would mean 'meaningless'. The survey was clearly written to favour the Council's stance but the implications that those opposing the scheme did not understand the process was, at best, disrespectful and at worst, downright insulting. It was nowhere near the 'best practice' in community consultation we'd expect.

When Environment Plymouth was established in 2017 we were told by Council officers that a new community network for the environment would not work, was not needed and would be ignored. This seemed very odd for teams that were so closely involved with the city's sustainable development over the years. We can only assume that very little was learned as the Council insisted we create Terms of Reference and a Code of Conduct that they

would 'approve'. At the time we kicked back and made it clear they would have no authority over us, that we were independent and that we could call on independent expert advice if we needed it. We have pursued this approach ever since, working successfully in partnership, and we strongly support STRAW, the Plymouth Tree Partnership and others involved as partners and fellow campaigners.

We created our code in consultation with our members and we would like to remind the Council, and Messrs Barnard, Bingley and Drea in particular, of the strongly supported principles of communication, consultation, respect and integrity they represent. We would suggest the Council urgently reviews its own policies in this respect as they are now clearly lacking.

We cannot ask anyone to suddenly back away from any work they may be undertaking with the Council's teams. That would be unfair and we are sure that many of the officers share our outrage although it would probably not be safe or diplomatic for them to say so in public.

Environment Plymouth will be carefully considering any future work with the Council until such time that it is clear something like this will never happen again. We would urge everyone to support STRAW in its ongoing legal battle and to push, wherever possible, for a complete change in the Council's attitude to the community's views so that some semblance of democracy can be restored. It is certainly lacking at the moment

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