

Dear Tom Rock,
CC: Dave Power, Niall Power, Phil Lukes, Alan Leicester.

We are writing to you from the Bentley House estate Tenants and Residents Association (TARA) regarding the proposed removal of trees from our estate. This follows an openly advertised and well-attended meeting of residents about the issue.

We are in no way opposed to sensible and proportionate management of trees on the estate. We agree with the removal of dangerous or diseased trees and necessary pruning works. However, we are very concerned by:

- The number of trees that we have been informed are to be removed
- The lack of any meaningful consultation with the community
- The lack of publicly available information about the trees to be removed
- The fact that the plan does not take into account two previous green spaces management plans commissioned by yourselves and made for the estate, namely:
 - The Mulberry Tree Survey, November 2009
 - The Hulme Community Garden Centre plan for Letsby Avenue, February 2012

We would like for an immediate halt to be put on any further felling until there has been an open an informed dialogue between City South Manchester (CSM) and local residents.

We would like to know how the proposed removal fits within the Manchester Biodiversity Strategy, Manchester City Council's Tree Strategy, the Manchester Planning Policy Guidance 17 Strategy, Manchester Core Strategy and the City Council's greening strategy for Hulme, as referenced in the Hulme Ward Plan 2013-14.

Context

Bentley House residents have worked alongside CSM over a number of years to manage our green spaces collectively and co-operatively. This included the Green Zone and the Greening the Redbricks projects. CSM also contracted Hulme Community Garden Centre (HCGC) to work with residents to improve Letsby Avenue. A plan was drawn up by the garden centre, which states:

“Letsby Avenue is home to over 40 trees and forms an urban forest with its own ecosystem. The social, psychological and recreational benefits are many, including beautification and reduction of the urban heat island effect, reduction of air pollution, enhancement of property values and improved wildlife habitat. Residents living by Letsby Avenue appreciate the environment they live in which helps them maintain their connection with nature.”

The plan to fell at least 16 trees from this area alone seriously undermines not only the long term management of this green space, but also the trust and working relationship between CSM and Bentley House residents.

Lack of consultation

Residents have been informed that a consultation regarding the tree removal occurred in

September 2013. We understand that this is supposed to have taken place during the Hulme Street Open Day event, which was jointly organised by residents and CSM. However, residents were not informed in advance of any tree consultation, as evidenced by the attached flyer for the event, which was posted to all residents by CSM and was the only formal notification of the event. Furthermore, the resident organisers of the event were unaware of this "consultation" taking place, and attendees on the day did not realise it was happening. A consultation which is not publicised is not a consultation.

The first that many residents heard about the tree removals was a letter posted to them the day that the work began. Some residents have still not been informed of any works taking place, though some got a letter in advance. Volunteers across the estate collectively manage and maintain our green spaces, in partnership with CSM. To only inform those in adjacent blocks goes against the ethos of partnership working, and the premise of the Green Zone and the Greening the Redbricks projects.

Trees on the estate

The mature trees are a collective asset of our estate and part of the heritage of the area. The estate is directly next to a motorway and the trees provide a vital screen from noise and are an absorber of pollution. They also serve as a key habitat for birds and other fauna. One recent survey found there to be 13 types of hedgerow birds on Letsby Avenue, including goldfinches, dunnocks and long tailed tits. The removal of nearly half of the trees could be a devastating blow to the biodiversity of the area, which has built up over decades, through community action and management agreements with the City Council and subsequently CSM.

We are also concerned by how the removal of so many trees may affect the water drainage in the area. We draw attention to the HCGC plan for Letsby Avenue.

"The area is a woodland and all plants are slow growing and require minimal pruning if at all. Leaves are an important part of the woodland garden. Leaf mould... increases the water retention of soils."

The HCGC strategy and shade-specific planting for Letsby Avenue was developed on the understanding that the area would continue to be a woodland. We do not yet know whether the proposed tree removal will undermine this status because the plans have not been publicly available.

The Mulberry Tree Survey (attached), conducted in November 2009, recommends felling only 11 trees in total across the estate. All the other recommendations are for pruning, crown lifts etc.

We recognise that such ongoing maintenance of local trees may be a less attractive option economically for CSM. We need more information about the proposed removals to be able to assess whether economic decisions have been taken to the detriment of the well-being of local residents and the environment.

We fully support well planned tree management on the estate, in fact we insist on it. But we do not support a cavalier approach, apparently advocated by one consultant (in a report we don't have access to), which is contradictory to previous professional reports on trees on the estate and counter to Manchester City Council's broader environmental

strategies.

We request that you halt the felling work, make the tree removal plan available online, engage the community in meaningful consultation on this issue, and work in partnership with us to proceed with the necessary pruning and removal of dangerous and diseased trees.

Yours sincerely,

Bentley House Tenants and Residents Association