

Extraordinary Council Meeting – 10 May 2023

Questions Received from Members of the Public, answered by the Lord Mayor

Name of Questioner	Question	Responder
Sheffield Tree Action Group (STAG)	<p>Sheffield Tree Action Group (STAG) welcomes Sir Mark Lowcock’s findings. We do not need to revisit his very serious conclusions in this statement. Sir Mark showed us a devastating failure in leadership and a culture that, demonstrates a deep crisis, beyond the tree dispute, of leadership, accountability, openness, deep-seated hostility to challenge and a failure to regulate standards in public life. Leading politicians’ aggressive responses to ANY criticism, reveals a deeply inappropriate culture.</p> <p>Councillors now have a historic opportunity to champion enduring cultural change. The recommendations in the Lowcock Report provide a framework for such change, as well as a focus for efforts towards reconciliation.</p> <p>Green spaces where people live are vital assets in our growing crises of health and biodiversity. We said that frequently throughout the dispute. As we move forward, the Local Plan and other policies must recognise the importance of street trees and green spaces right where people live and work. They will play an increasing role in the city’s response to the health and nature crises and there must be a clear recognition of the ways in which street trees enhance well-being and amenity across the city. STAG will continue to promote these issues through the Street Tree Partnership and through our support for environmental education about the contribution of street trees in the public domain.</p> <p>The reach of the Lowcock Report goes way beyond the street trees dispute. That bitter dispute was symptomatic of a deeper cultural and governance crisis. Let’s recognise that crisis and make it a driver for change and new confidence at all levels in the city, in the conduct of politics and administration of the our affairs. Sheffield cannot afford to remain deaf to the legitimate concerns of its citizens. Public consultations must be meaningful. Decisions must be timely, transparent and well evidenced.</p> <p>Our city’s reputation was damaged by the street trees dispute. Let’s promote respectful debate and consensus</p>	Lord Mayor

	<p>and never again use othering and conflict as political tools. We ask the full Council to accept the findings of the Lowcock Report and acknowledge their failings. Councillors must accept collective responsibility for ensuring that there is a comprehensive plan to implement all the Lowcock recommendations. That process must engage with stakeholders. STAG remains a committed contributor, ready to provide positive and well-informed perspectives to the change process.</p> <p>Answer:</p> <p>The comments from the STAG Elected Committee are noted and we hope that their remarks will help to inform the positive and forward-looking discussion we wish to have as part of our meeting this afternoon.</p>	
Calvin Payne	<p>I would also like to ask a question relating to the committal hearings against tree protesters; did the leader of the council support the attempts to imprison eight Sheffield tree protesters in 2017/18, and does he now think it was right for Sheffield City Council to do so?</p> <p>Answer:</p> <p>The Council has apologised publicly for the decision to pursue committal proceedings against tree protestors in 2017/18 and we will build on this further in the forthcoming report to Strategy and Resources Policy Committee. As set out in Sir Mark's report, we have dropped outstanding financial claims against the protestors and have gone further than Sir Mark's recommendation by repaying those who had already settled their claims.</p>	Lord Mayor
Benoit Compin	<p>Now that the elections are out of the way, I'd like to know when this council will want to schedule any movement towards the reversion of my case at court.</p> <p>It would certainly be easier for me to claim a compensation out of public funds (council or police) for 2 counts of wrongful arrest and lies under oath at court from council officials I was subjected to.</p> <p>But I believe this council can help bringing justice to this matter in brief delays.</p> <p>I would suggest that a meeting between myself and the legal department should be arranged at the earliest possible date.</p> <p>Answer:</p>	Lord Mayor

	<p>As this question relates to an individual case, we will, as he suggests, meet with Mr Compin outside of this meeting to determine how best to resolve the issues he raises.</p>	
<p>Russell Johnson</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the current leadership regret that SCC sought to illegitimately imprison citizens during the Street Tree Scandal? Will it make appropriate reparations to those harmed? 2. Why has SCC failed, after many months, to respond to a formal complaint by the 'undertakers'? This was concerning intimidatory behaviour by SCC as evidenced by Lowcock. What is SCC's intention? 3. Would the Council encourage or welcome a Police investigation into possible Misuse of Public Monies, malfeasance or misfeasance or other criminality based on Lowcock and other evidence? 4. Does it remain the Council's view that the most effective way to address challenge is to ignore and obfuscate? 5. Does the current leadership regret that SCC sought to illegitimately imprison citizens during the Street Tree Scandal? Will it make appropriate reparations to those harmed? Would whoever is acting as Leader please say whether there can be real change in this Council whilst [<i>name of Councillor redacted</i>] and [<i>name of Councillor redacted</i>] remain as Members? <p>Answer:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council has publicly apologised for the decision to pursue committal proceedings against tree protestors in 2017/18 and we will build on this further in the forthcoming report to Strategy and Resources Policy Committee. As set out in Sir Mark's report, we have dropped outstanding financial claims against protestors and have gone further than Sir Mark's recommendation by repaying those who had already settled their claims. 2. We are still in the process of considering the complaint and how we respond will be part of the report to Strategy and Resources Policy Committee. Those who have made the complaint will be kept informed. 3. Sir Mark's report was clear that there were no matters that needed to be considered by the Police. Whilst the Council accepts that it got things wrong, Sir Mark has not identified criminality or misuse of public money in his report. 4. No. The Council has committed publicly to being open and honest at all times, to engage positively 	<p>Lord Mayor</p>

	<p>and proactively with the public and to hear all perspectives and views before coming to a decision. This afternoon's meeting is one attempt to do this.</p> <p>5. This question would need to be addressed to the Councillors directly.</p>	
<p>Justin Buxton <i>(not present at the meeting, questions were read out by the Lord Mayor)</i></p>	<p>1. Will all citizens intimidated with accusations and threats of legal action receive a personal and detailed apology?</p> <p>2. Will the Council also publish a public apology recognising and unconditionally acknowledging the wrongful use of power resulting in misconduct by Sheffield City Council when purposefully intimidating individuals with demonstrably illegitimate legal threats of 'damages'?</p> <p>Answer:</p> <p>1. Yes, we will set out as part of the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee report how members of the public who were harmed during the street trees dispute will be able to come forward. Those individuals who are known to the Council will be contacted directly to apologise.</p> <p>2. As part of the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee report we will make a full apology for the things that the Council got wrong during the dispute in line with the recommendations that Sir Mark makes in his report.</p>	<p>Lord Mayor</p>
<p>Isabel O'Leary</p>	<p>In addition to the comprehensive and fulsome apology recommended by Sir Mark Lowcock, the Public need to see true accountability from Sheffield City Council. Has the Council already commissioned, or is the Council going to commission a Public Interest Report to identify all the legal, financial and accountability implications of the Lowcock Report? This is needed so that the council can begin to systematically ensure that accountability is delivered. Will the Council install a plaque in the Town Hall to commemorate those who were affected by the Street Trees dispute?</p> <p>Answer:</p> <p>The report to the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee would set out all the actions to be taken both in the short and long term with associated timeframes.</p>	<p>Lord Mayor</p>