

David Aspinall

Westgate Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE4 6NQ.

9th November 2021

Dear Sir,

I must formally complain that Westgate Cemetery was vandalised by the city's groundworkers - probably from the Condercum Road depot - in mid-September this year and that Tree Protection Orders on several trees were breached. These works are along the northern edge of the cemetery and must have been intended to open up the view of the cemetery to the main road. The bordering trees on the northern edge of the cemetery made a screen which distinguished the contemplative urban woodland from the busy main road. To remove this border was crass and inappropriate. Two of the Weeping ash (*Fraxinus excelsior* 'Pendula') trees have been given a short back, front and sides in an attempt to mould them into a lollipop profile. This is entirely inappropriate and incompetent and it seems that a Felling Licence was also needed to fell the coppiced Wych elm by the gateway. The damaged trees are listed below.

00155 100 yr old ash moderate dieback untouched (control)

00170 Weeping ash lopped and cut off moderate dieback

00173 ash tree considerably lopped to 10' moderate dieback

00174 lime extensively lopped to 12'

tag missing old ash tree light dieback lopped to 12' large bough removed

00179 large lime badly lopped to 10'

no tag coppiced Wych elm sawn down to near ground level probably fatal

00202 Weeping ash lopped and cut off moderate dieback possibly fatal

00205 lime badly lopped and pruned 2 large boughs taken

00228 young ash large bough broken off subsequent to loss of coppiced elm (wind damage)

Except in desperate situations hardwood trees are only cut when they are dormant, during the winter. About half of the trees vandalised by the city groundworkers were infected by Ash Dieback disease and also in full leaf. The tree limbs removed by the vandalism were pulverised by a Timberwolf shredder and removed from the site. The infected timber was not safely disposed of.

Tree cuts beyond about a couple of inches in diameter should be painted with tar to deter infection and to reduce scarring.

There is also a TPO registered Swedish hornbeam tree, near to these vandalised trees, which has been dead for more than a year. This has been left untouched and provides a reminder of the city groundworker's incompetence. The Wych elm is traditional to cemeteries and church yards and it is desperately sad to destroy existing specimens, particularly as they shelter so much native wildlife. The cemetery is a last refuge for the tiny local hedgehog population and a young one was displaced by the removal of the leaf litter from the ground, particularly around the coppiced elm. This hedgehog was predated and all that remains of the creature now are some pieces of skin.

Newcastle City Council have a policy of randomly taking out healthy mature trees and I describe this as 'illegal deforestation' as most cases would need a Felling Licence from the Forestry Commission to comply with the law. Many examples may be found and often it is the best tree in a stand that has been removed. The cemetery on Westgate Road has an annex across the road, which is locally known as the plague cemetery. It's on the boundary of the Summerhill Conservation Area and is grassed with a copse of trees protected by TPOs. On November 4th and 5th this year two trees were clear felled here, by N.C.C., and these were pulverised and removed from the site. The trees were a mature Swedish hornbeam and an ash. The ash tree was in perfect condition and, perhaps, seventy or more years old. Most of the ash trees in this neighbourhood show some signs of Ash Dieback but this specimen was remarkable as it was entirely free of infection. The TPO tags from these trees are lost but another tag, on the corner Willow reads '0954'. I took several photographs of this destruction on Friday morning and hope to circulate these.

Thank you

David Aspinall BSc