

March 2005 Newsletter

What Price The Local Environment?

Welcome to March.

This month, I want to focus on what is going on around us in the environment. The subject has been brought into stark relief by the news this week that, without consultation, Ealing Borough Council plan to get rid of 4,500 Lime trees from the Borough area. Given the location of these, they would be a different group to the 1,000 that Transport For London expects to have to cut down to make way for the West London Tram. All this, in the "Queen of the Suburbs".

Councillor Nigel Sumner, Tory Environment Spokesman, has been told by a senior Officer of the Council, that the destruction of these trees is a done deal. This Officer has suggested that the decision was taken at a regular, private "Leader's Panel" in January. But no report has been submitted to the Labour Cabinet and no Scrutiny by the other parties undertaken. Their motive appears to be the short-term one of saving the annual pruning costs and the pavement repair costs - but at what long-term price? And if it is Lime trees this year, will it be Plane trees next?

The majority of these mature forest trees have invested over seventy years in providing visual amenity, bio-diversity, and habitat for wildlife, pollution control and oxygen to the population of the Borough and actually represent nearly 40% of the street trees in the Ealing Centre. Some of these Limes are very much older than that.

Trees are a valuable part of the environment and our heritage. The law recognises their 'amenity value' - in other words, the contribution which they make to the attractiveness or quality of a place or landscape. Central to amenity value is visible benefit. Trees contribute to the identity of a place and can continue to do so over many generations. They provide interest by their changing appearance, season by season and year by year. Many trees have a life at least as long as that of the average building and mature trees are often large enough to act as an effective foil to buildings where smaller plants fail. In these respects trees can provide an ideal complement to buildings.

The law places a duty on Local Planning Authorities to protect trees, not only when development takes place but wherever it is considered expedient in the interests of amenity. Where mature trees have to be cut down, it can take up to twenty saplings to replace the biological effects of the lost tree.

And don't believe the Labour Party story that more suitable trees will be planted in these trees' places - if that were true, where would the funding come from?

Cllr Sumner has spent all week contacting local and national media, and environmental groups - to seek their support against these proposals. Now we need your support.

On our website www.ealingconservatives.com we have just posted our March 2005 Survey. It asks if you oppose the proposed destruction of these trees. If you do, please visit the website and submit your opposition. Your numbers will join those who will be filling out petitions this weekend that we will be delivering to 1,500 addresses near Ealing Broadway. If we can present enough opposition to the Council, then we may be able to prevent this - quite possibly illegal - proposal. I urge you to register your opposition today at www.ealingconservatives.com

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I propose to publish two more of these newsletters before a likely May 5th General Election. Please feel free to contact me directly before then, if you have questions about Conservative Party policy or if you would like to know more about what we believe in. I would be delighted to meet before the Election, if you or friends and colleagues felt that that might be of interest.

Finally, an administrative point - there have been a couple of technical changes to the e-mail distribution list this month. This may mean that you receive more than one e-mail from me - if you do, tell me who you are and I can remove one of the entries. Fortunately or unfortunately, I have so many addresses now that I am not able to check for duplications that easily. Also, there will be some of you who have received this for the first time - welcome and please let me know if you would prefer not to receive this monthly communication.

Best wishes,
Jonathan