

Assets AND values in long-term management? How the street trees upset the status quo in Sheffield.

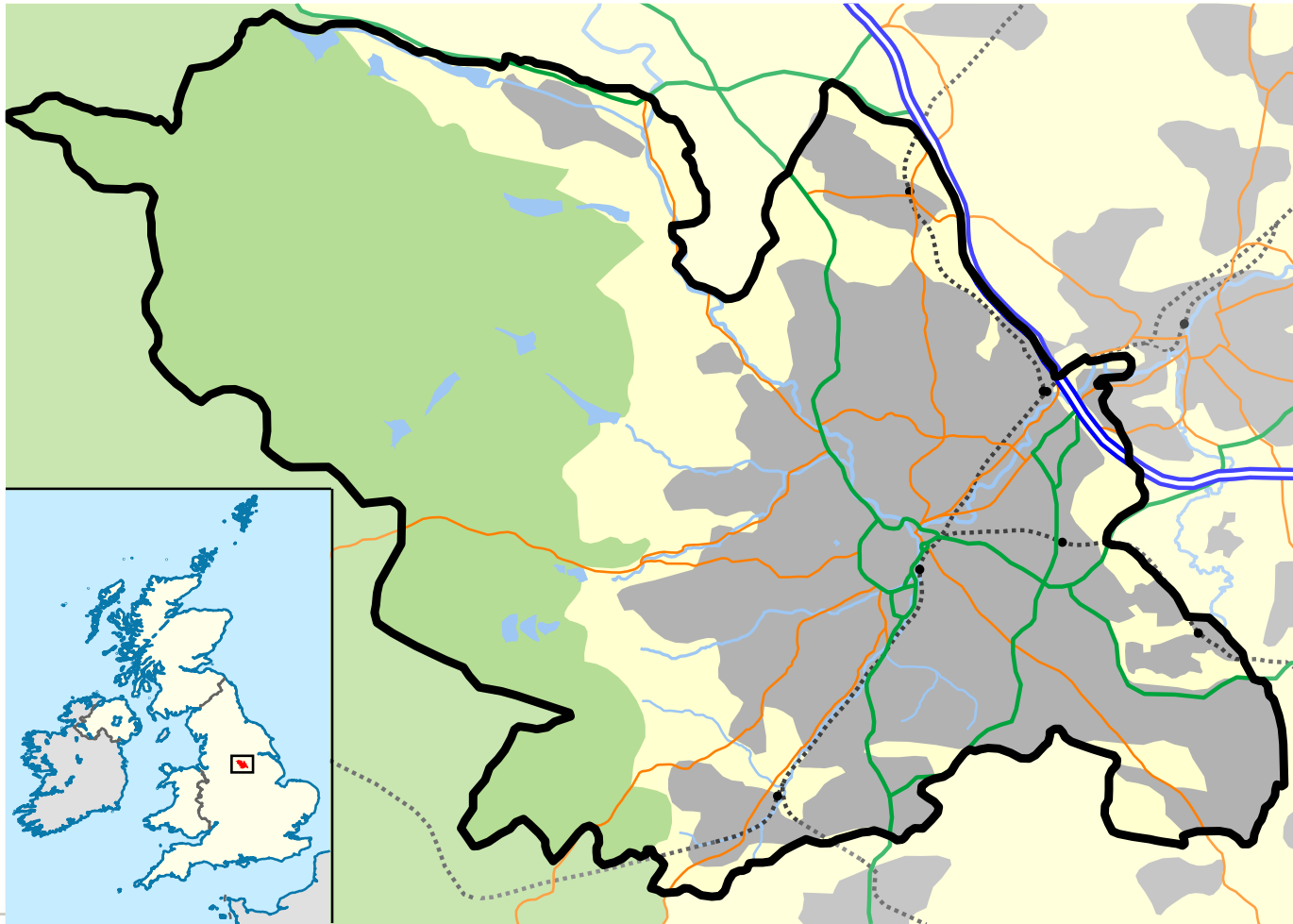
Dr Nicola Dempsey
Department of Landscape Architecture



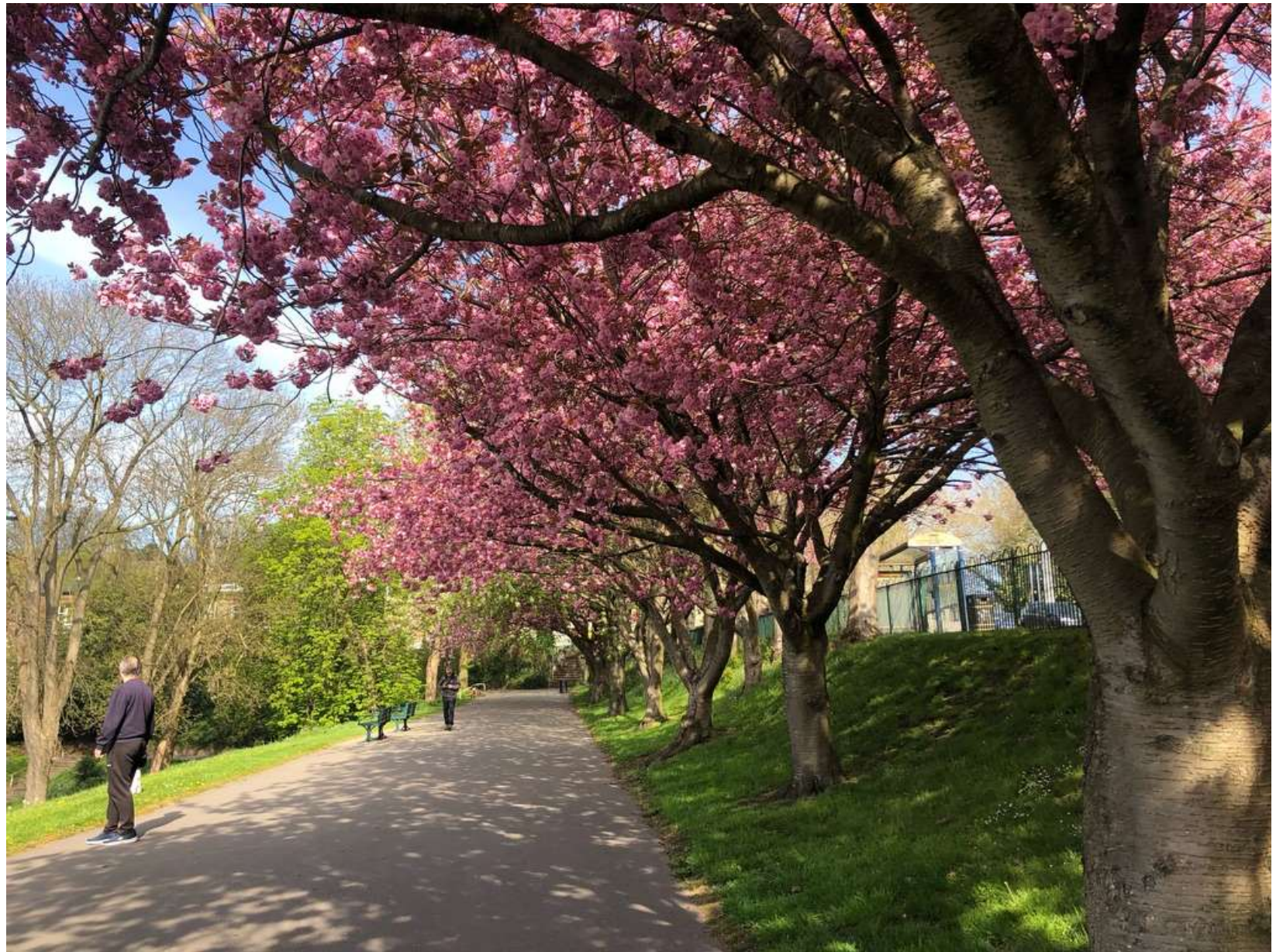
A story.



Sheffield in context







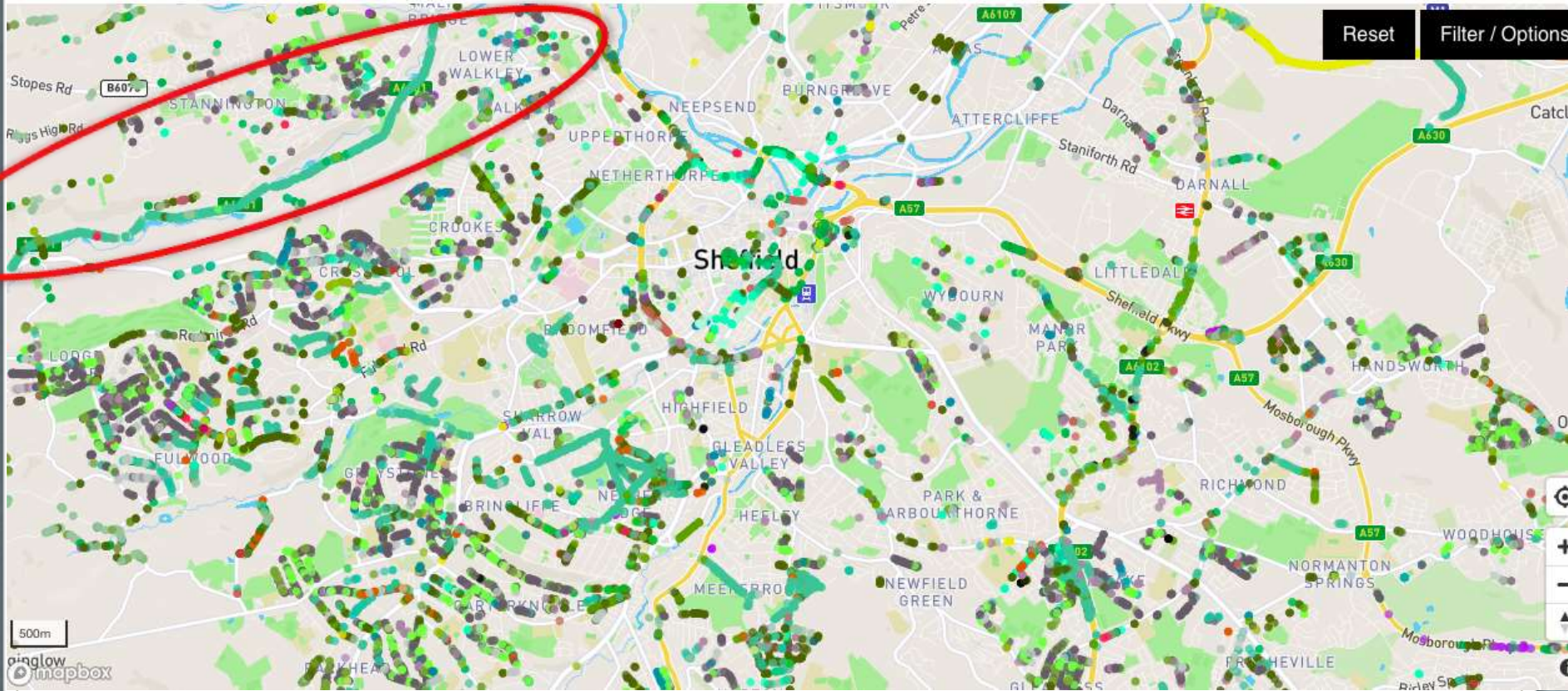








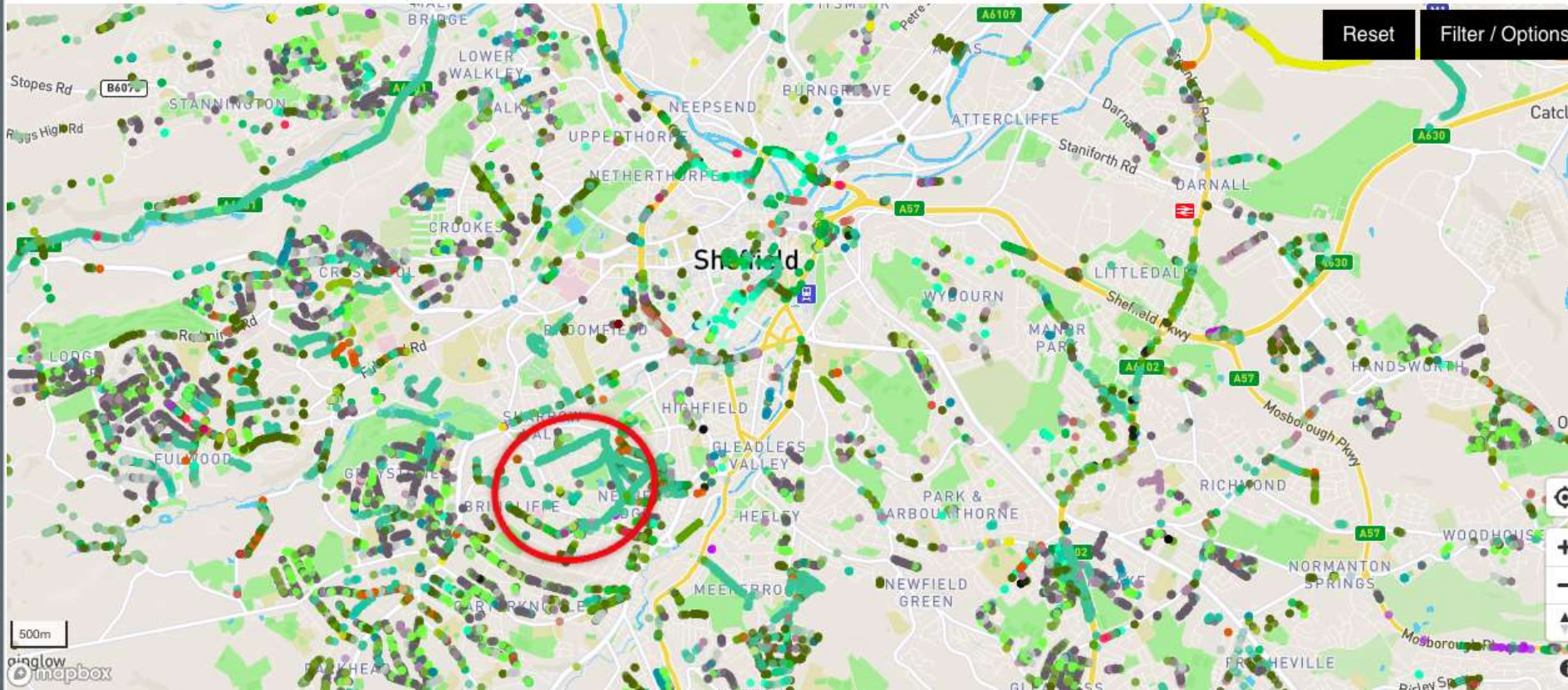
<https://www.awatrees.com/2015/11/20/the-lime-trees-of-rivelin/>





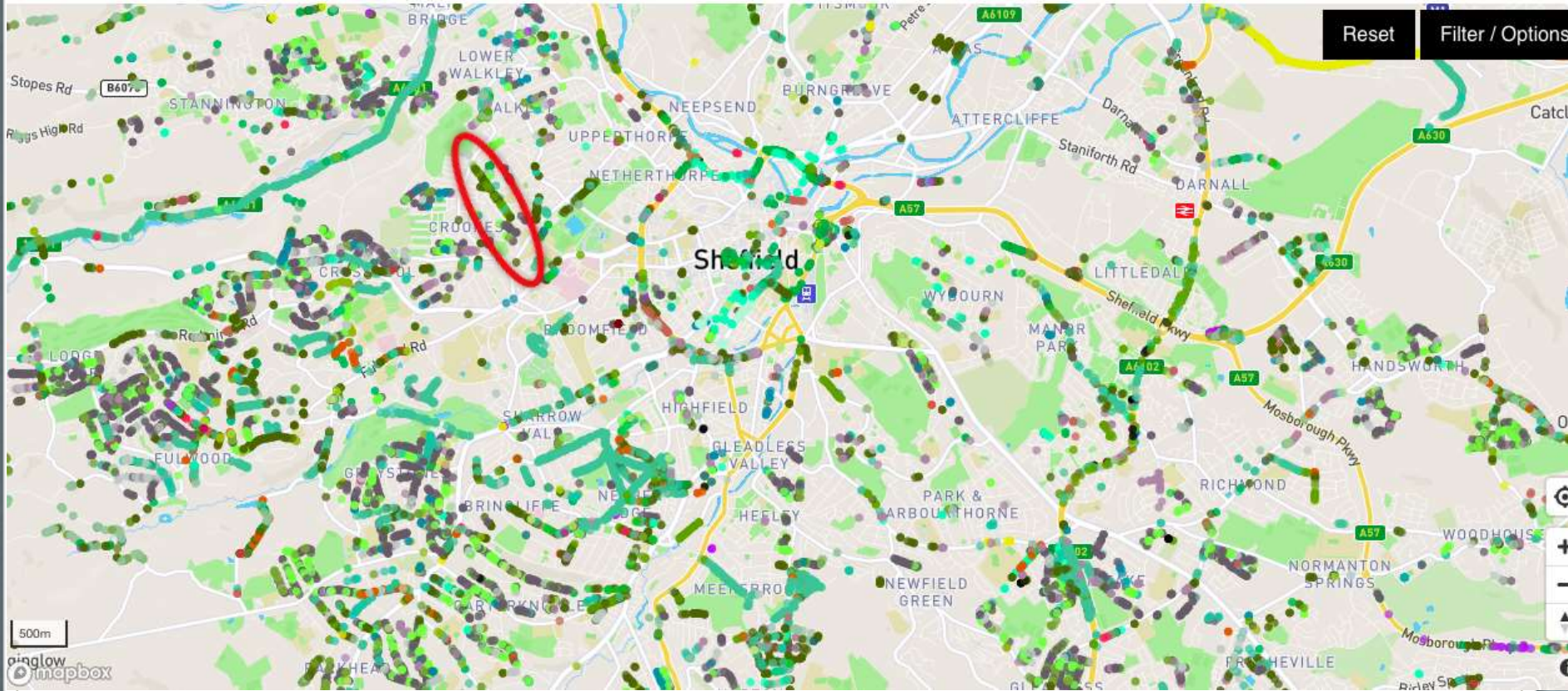
Nether Edge street trees

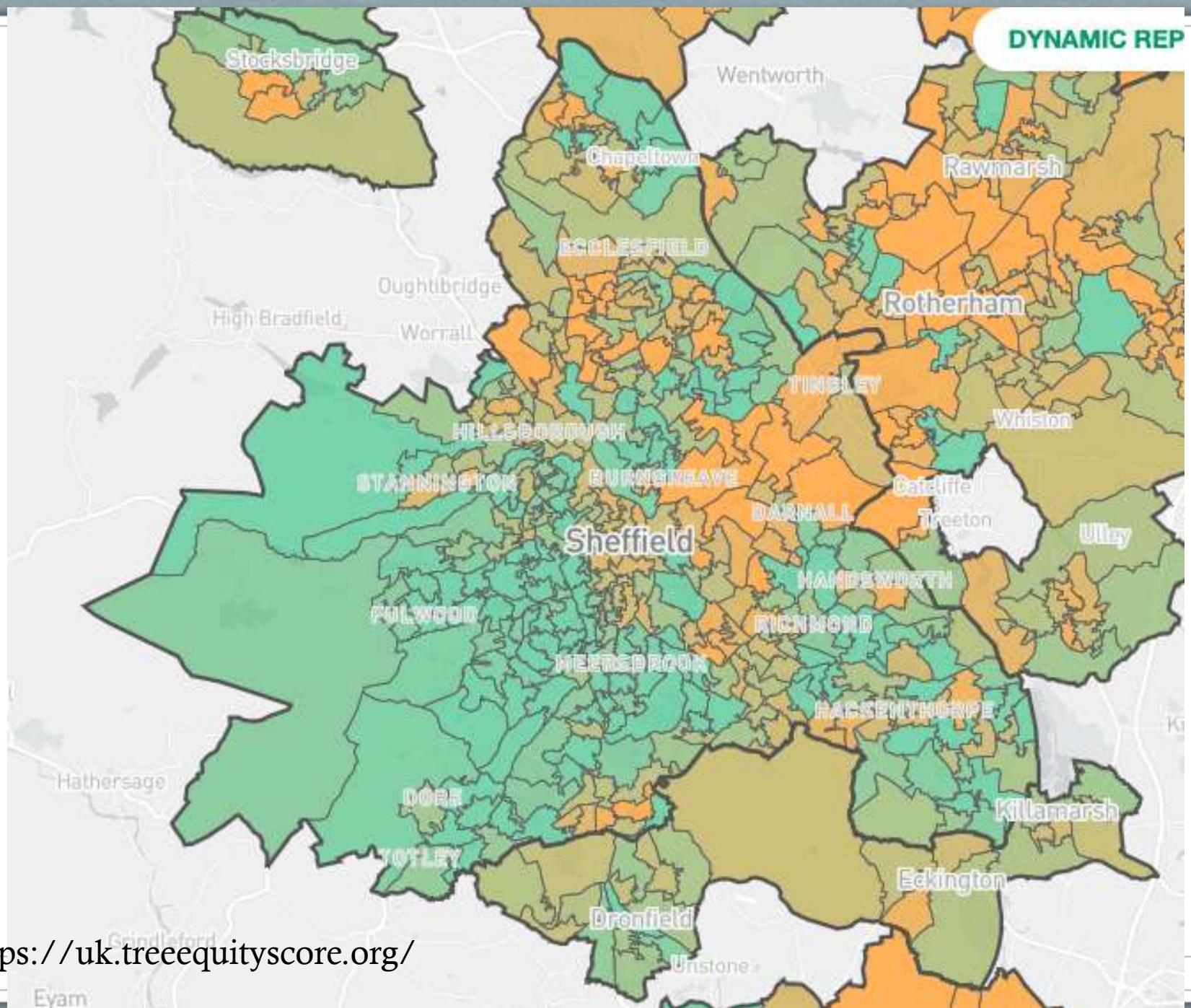
<https://thestreettree.com/tag/nether-edge/>

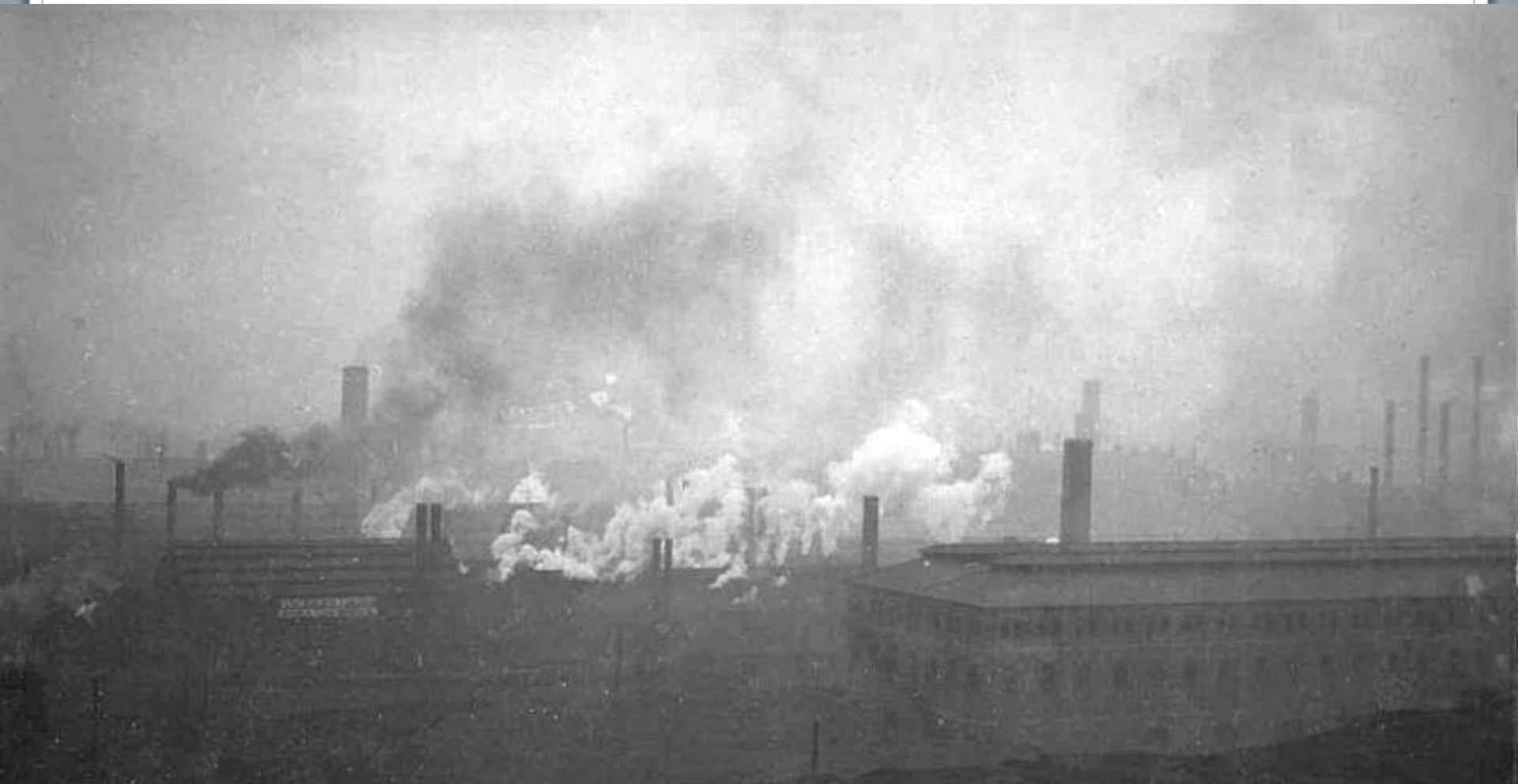




<https://www.awatrees.com/2016/11/30/sheffield-tree-survey-felling/>







THE BRIGHTNESS OF BRIGHTSIDE, 21.68.

VICKERS MAXIM WORKS, SHEFFIELD.

sheffieldhistory.co.uk

The Sheffield context

- Sheffield's response to the gross air pollution of the 1960s was to become the 'Clean Air City'
- Since the late 1970s, Sheffield City Council had a very good reputation
 - environmental issues
 - engaging positively with local people on woods, trees and countryside management issues







Sheffield's street trees

- As trees aged and street tree works were required, SCC's *Ecological Services Department* (ESD) engaged with local communities.
- However, this department was lost in the 1980s when ESD was abolished and tree maintenance was transferred to the *Highways Maintenance Department*.

(Dempsey, 2023)

Budget cuts...

- Despite budget cuts in 1980s-1990s, the Council created a Nature Conservation Strategy
 - street trees are highlighted as the key to forging, strengthening and creating 'green corridors'...
- 1990s: 'continued acute shortage of resources allocated to trees' in the city. This shortage continued into the 2000s.

National background

- 1980s: the Conservative government **required** local authorities to contract out certain public services to the private sector
- Local authorities could not do their own highways maintenance. A private company had to be used.
- 1980s: the same government reduced funding for public services...NPM

Dempsey, N., Burton, M. and Selin, J. (2016) Contracting Out Parks and Roads Maintenance in England. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 29(5).

<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1108/IJPSM-02-2016-0029>.

National background

- 2008-2010 onwards // austerity-driven national government cuts to local authority budgets
- = continued loss of core services and skills relating to open space management and planning

Dempsey, N., Burton, M. and Selin, J. (2016) Contracting Out Parks and Roads Maintenance in England. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 29(5).

<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1108/IJPSM-02-2016-0029>.

Urban tree management 1980s-2010s

- There was no street tree planting per se.
- There was no time or resources to consider the urban forest.
- Focus was on maintenance as trees became a risk/liability.
- Management/ long-term thinking was not valued.



<https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/plans-dim-street-lights-sheffield-1750994>

2008-2012

- To help save money over the long term, Sheffield City Council put in place a *Public Private Partnership* (**PPP or PFI – private finance initiative**) to deliver core environmental and green-space services in many urban areas.

Public Finance Initiatives

- Not all local authorities do it, but there are many examples of PFIs around the country (and world)
 - e.g. in Leeds, rubbish/ trash collection and recycling is done by Veolia for Leeds City Council
 - Hounslow (London) and Isle of Wight also have highways PFIs

Sheffield's PFI

- AMEY and Sheffield City Council have an agreement that AMEY will maintain Sheffield's highways for 25 years
- Streets Ahead 2012-2037
- Value of £2.1bn



Streets Ahead

The contract aims included:

- Smooth roads and footways
- Well-lit streets
- Litter-free environment
- Free-draining highways
- Good tree cover
 - All trees removed to be replaced by 'increased variety of highway tree species' to 'encourage biodiversity'

Lowcock report, 2023.

12 Road Maintenance Transportation Professional December 2012



Streets Ahead project director Mike Notman and Sheffield City Council head of Highway maintenance Steve Robinson check in depth the condition of the roads

Sheffield streets team starts city's core refurbishment

Sheffield residents are about to see their street lights replaced with 68,000 LEDs. But the new Streets Ahead PFI aims to shine in many other ways. Jackie Whitelaw reports.

By the time you read this three areas of Sheffield will be undergoing a top to toe make over of their streets as the city's maintenance PFI starts in earnest. Over the first five years of the 25-year Streets Ahead deal concessionaire Arney will be spending £350M to tackle these and a further 105 zones of the city in order to reverse decades of underinvestment.

There are 1888km of road to be replaced and built along with 8720m² of footpath; around 50 of the total 610 bridges will be refurbished and new traffic signals set up at 400 sites. Also included in a very long list are items like replacing half of the city's 36,000 highway trees, replacing 28,000 new street signs and cutting of 2.8M m² of grass verge.

It is not just the street scene on the ground that will alter. Above the heads of the population another change will be taking place as 68,000 conventional street lights are replaced with more efficient but brighter LEDs that nevertheless emit far less light pollution.

"In five years you won't be able to see Sheffield from the Peak District at night anymore," says Sheffield City Council head of highway maintenance Steve Robinson.

As the city disappears from the view of one of the country's most beautiful regions the plan is that it will itself be transformed into a far more desirable place to live, work and crucially invest. The intention behind the PFI is to create a more

Transportation Professional December 2012



<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-64040665>

<https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/politics/all-planned-road-resurfacing-works-in-sheffield-are-now-suspended-2523961>



<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-64040665>

Why did the PFI lead to...?



<https://www.thenatureofcities.com/2018/03/29/sheffield-street-tree-massacre-notes-public-private-partnership-gone-wrong/>



<https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/sheffield-tree-massacre-parks-green-city-spaces-felling-street-council-yorkshire-a8286581.html>



<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/mar/30/sheffield-union-leaders-withdraw-support-for-tree-felling-project>

Jennifer Saul, Contributor
Professor of Philosophy, University of Sheffield

How Democracy Commits Suicide: The Sheffield Trees, And The Corporate Takeover Of Local Government

09/14/2017 10:13 am ET | Updated Sep 15, 2017



Waiting for www.huffpost.com...

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-democracy-commits-suicide-the-sheffield-trees_b_59ba7b4ee4b06b71800c3707

clean air act sheffield - Google x Toxic Tea and Other Tales From x The Sheffield Street Tree Mas x +

nytimes.com/2018/03/13/world/europe/uk-sheffield-trees.html

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SHEFFIELD JOURNAL

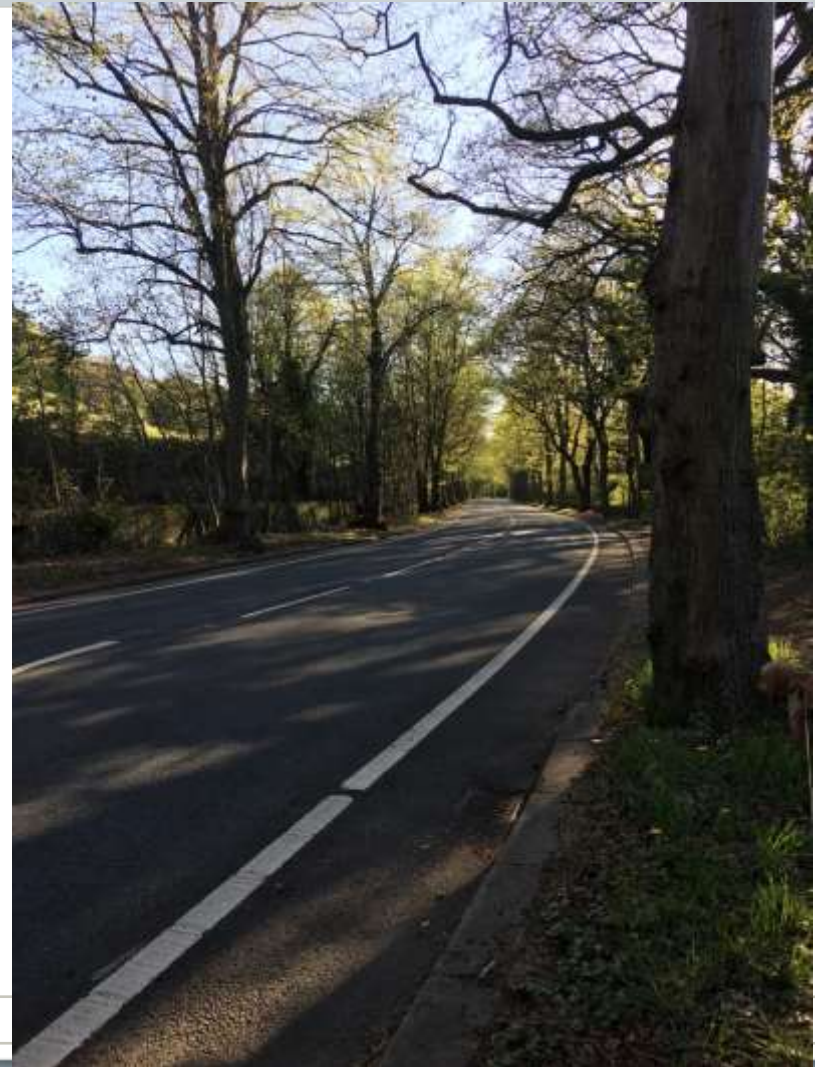
Toxic Tea and Other Tales From an English Tree War

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- The situation went global...

Three tales within the big story

- Creating the contract
- Implementing the contract in the real world
- Reacting to public opinion



Creating the contract...

- 2007: Sheffield City Council commissioned a private consultant – Elliott Consultancy – to report on its highway trees.
- (remember, SCC didn't have the in-house capacity to do this)

Creating the contract...

The 2007 Elliott report stated:

- 74% of the city's 35,000 street trees were mature or overmature.
- around 3% of the city's street trees (**approximately 1,000 trees**) might need to be removed.
- 2008: SCC produced an outline business case for the Streets Ahead programme, stating
- “a large proportion” of the mature and overmature street trees were “**now ready for replacement**”.
- That is not what the Elliott report said.

The council and Amey

- The contract actually stated that Amey will fell and replace around 17,500 street trees
 - i.e. 50% of Sheffield's 36,000 street trees
- The vast majority of these trees are completely healthy (the Elliott report said **only 1,000** might need replacing)
- Note: **mature** or **overmature** does not mean dead/dying

**The initial arrangement
in Sheffield, 2012**

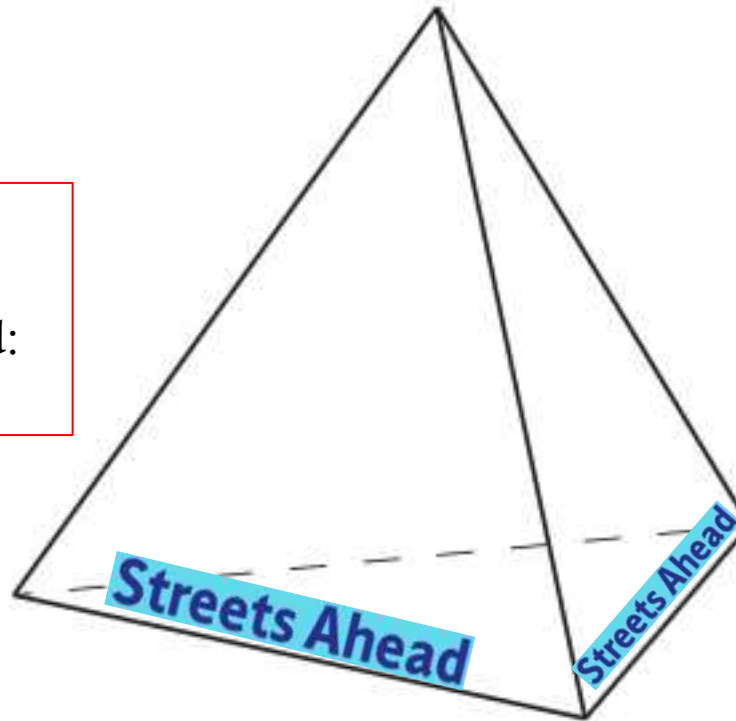
£2.1bn public money spent
on streetscene improvements
SCC is the decisionmaker

Power/
resources

Confidential contract.
SCC is the client.
Core investment period:
the first 5 years

SCC (with
national govt
funding) and
Amey

Rules of
the game



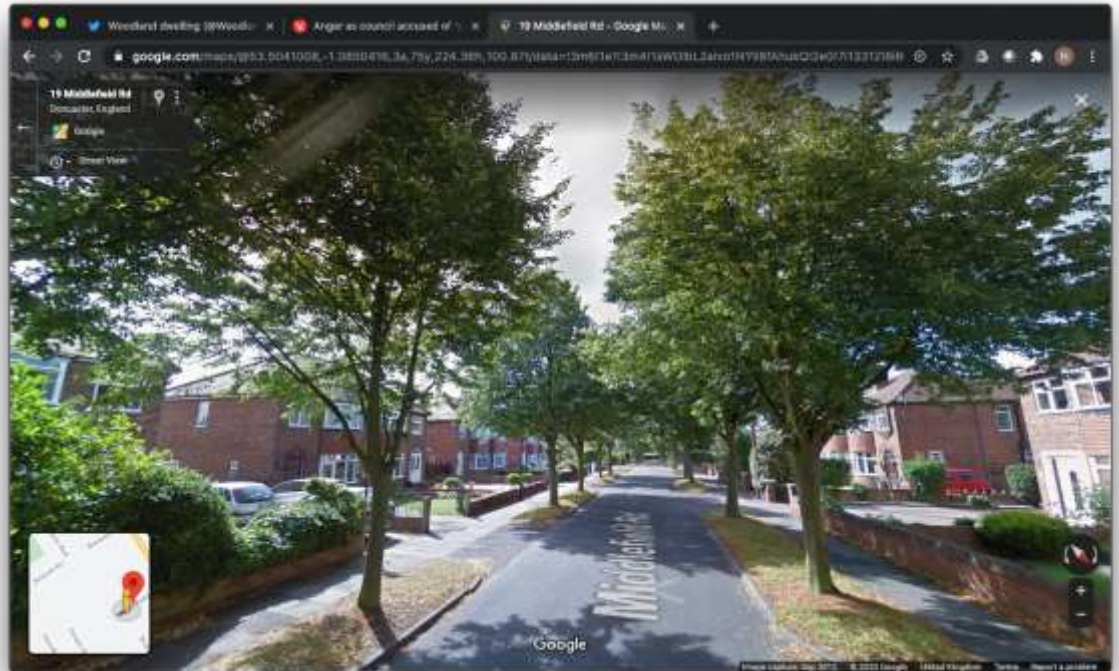
Actors/
coalitions

Discourse

Fill in the potholes, light
the city up, make the
streets safer, make
Sheffield modern.

Not in the contract...

- A Benefit Cost Analysis was done but did not include street trees
- There were available tools to do this, but weren't used
- Specialist knowledge was ignored about the value of trees



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Implementing the contract in the real world



Using democratic means...

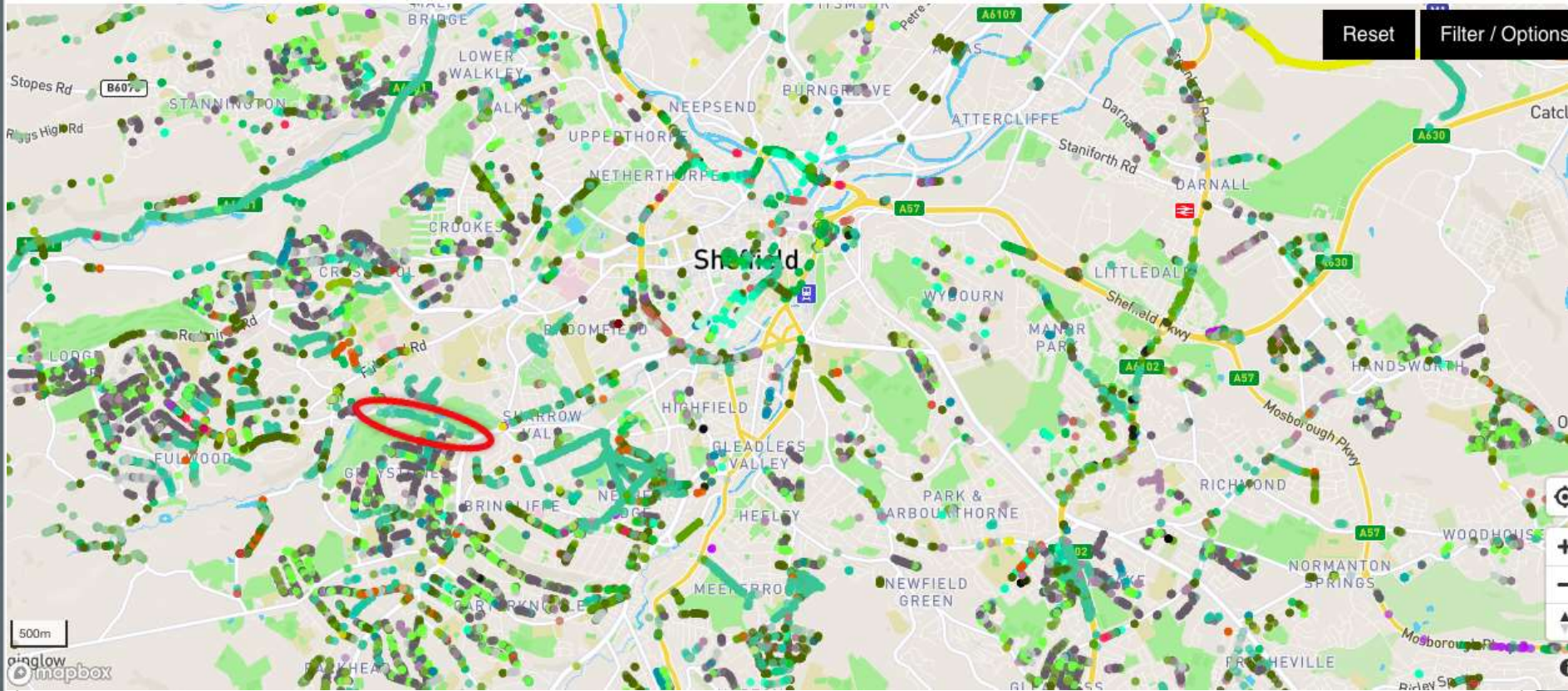
SCC under pressure

- March 2015, a petition against a bus lane project felling 180 trees in Heeley = 1,500+ signatures. The Council agreed not to proceed with it.
- June 2015, a petition asking SCC to reconsider felling trees on Rustlings Road had 10,000+ signatures. SCC would not reconsider.
- June 2015 onwards: Non-violent direct action began to prevent tree removal/ replacement. It became increasingly well organized.

Rustlings Road



Aug 2008



Rustlings Road (1)

- Residents were informed about 11 trees being replaced on this road in **Dec 2014**
- Campaigners/ protestors postponed the tree works. Sept 2015, protestors camped in the park directly next to Rustlings Road
- Attempts by SCC/ Amey to talk with campaigners failed
 - Campaigners: 'They[SCC] say they have to do this because of the contract. It's not negotiable'
 - SCC/ Amey felt unable to be heard.



Rustlings Road (2)

- Jan 2016, SCC commissioned an **Independent Tree Panel** to “put people’s views at the heart of our decision making”
- ITP recommended that **only 2 of the 11** Rustlings Road trees for removal. Other trees to be retained using engineered options.
- This recommendation was not made public.



Rustlings Road (3)

17 November 2016

- **04:30am** ITP advice about the trees on Rustlings Road published on the Council website
- **04:30am** SCC publishes its decision to reject ITP advice (without explanation) and proceed with replacing the trees.
- **04:35am** contractors and the police went to Rustlings Road, closed the road at both ends, creating safety zones around the trees



Lowcock report, 2023, 99.

Implementation decisions that led to political disaster

- **04:45am:** police knocked on people's doors to get cars moved
- **05:00am:** arborists started work on felling the trees.
- 3 people arrested for standing in the safety zones around the trees
- Much more support for the protestors
- Strong criticism of SCC in the local/national media and by politicians



<https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/politics/flawed-from-the-moment-the-contract-was-signed-inquiry-exposes-truth-about-sheffield-tree-felling-4055356>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/sheffield-tree-massacre-parks-green-city-spaces-felling-street-council-yorkshire-a8286581.html>

Reacting to public opinion...



<https://www.thenatureofcities.com/2018/03/29/sheffield-street-tree-massacre-notes-public-private-partnership-gone-wrong/>

Retrofitting a “framework”

- Autumn 2015: SCC created an operational framework for street trees in response to calls from the public.
- Jan 2016: SCC published Five year Tree Management Strategy. A public facing document.
- This was not created or used by contractor AMEY.
- AMEY had their own (confidential) strategy



Retrofitting a framework: the Six Ds

The **Six Ds**:

- Dangerous
- Dead
- Diseased
- Dying
- Damaging
- or Discriminatory.



The six Ds never formed part of the strategy previously and was not part of its contract with Amey.

Retrofitting a framework: the Six Ds

- 2016-18: SCC said that ‘Engineering Solutions’ would be considered for **damaging** and **discriminatory** trees.
- These solutions came from the public, **not from AMEY**.
- Some of these ‘solutions’ were never feasible within the contract.
- Dec 2018: ‘The Council’s position is that all engineering solutions are considered but in practice, only some of the solutions have actually been used to date.’
 - This was untrue. The Council was lying.



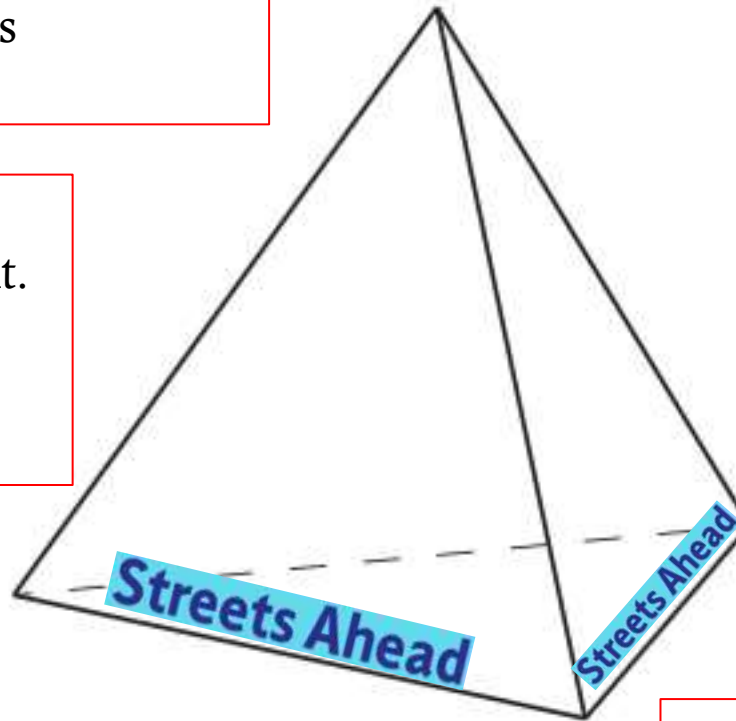
- public money spent on streetscene improvements, consultation exercises, legal action and private security.
- SCC is challenged as decisionmaker.

Confidential contract.
The council is the client.
The cost of core investment period is becoming a problem

The arrangement in Sheffield during the core investment period

- SCC
- Amey
- Protestors/ STAG
- Police
- ITP
- Private security
- Residents

Rules of the game



Actors/
coalitions

Discourse

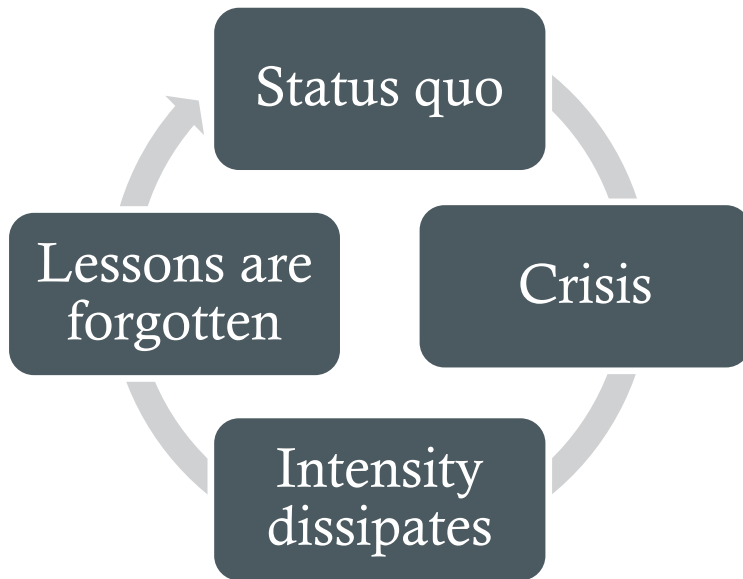
- We need to improve the city and stop the disruptive, middle-class protestors
- The council can't be trusted

Sheffield's street trees become political and stay political

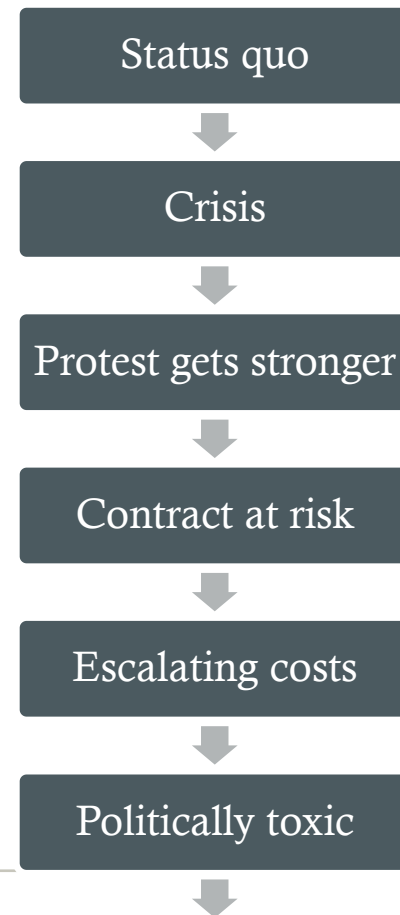
- The tree felling paused in March 2018.
- Since September 2018, fewer than 1% of street trees have been removed
- The protestors have made a political difference
- It is no longer AMEY and SCC who make the decisions

How to manage...?

UK 'business as usual'



Sheffield tree dispute



after Davies (2021)

How to manage...?



Sheffield City Council has agreed major changes to how it will take democratic decisions.

Mediation



Council staff move on



Political damage to Labour



Change to the city's political system



Public Inquiry



Forced apology



Partnership with independent Chair



Transparency



A fragile status quo



after Davies (2021)

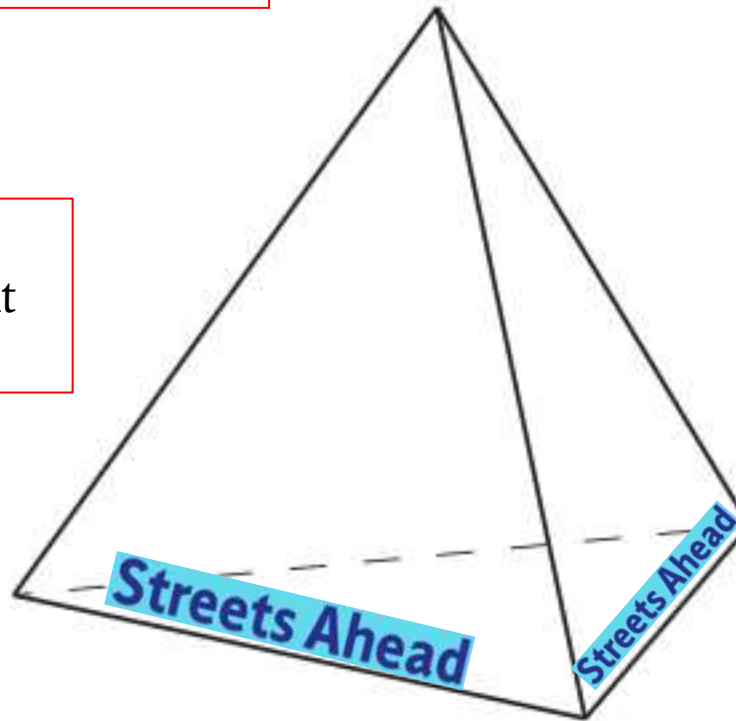
<https://sheffnews.com/news/you-said-we-did-council-changes-how-it-makes-decisions>

- public money spent on streetscene improvements, SSTP, community engagement
- SCC is in partnership

The contract is public.
The council is the client working with SSTP

Rules of the game

Power/
resources



Discourse

The arrangement in Sheffield today

- Sheffield Street Tree Partnership (SSTP)
- SCC
 - Amey
 - STAG
 - Universities
 - Wildlife and Woodland Trusts
 - Independent Chair

Actors/
coalitions

- Trust needs to be rebuilt
- Decision-making processes are now transparent

How to manage...learning from Sheffield

- Assets must be considered differently from one another
- Values need to be taken into account
- Listening to relevant stakeholders
- Interpreting within the local (historical) context

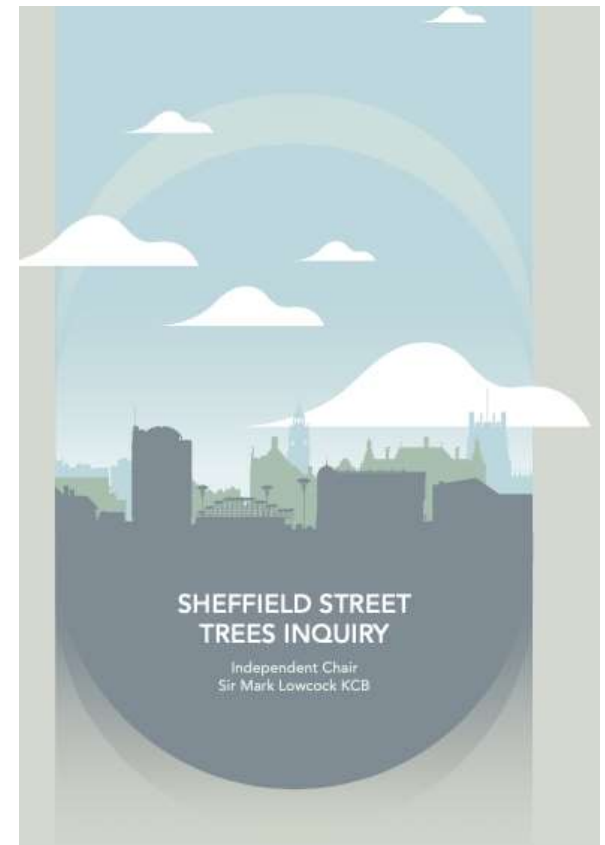


Best practice...and worst

- We learn more from poor practice than we can from best practice
- How can mistakes/ flexibility be built in?
 - Acknowledging that mistakes happen
 - Gather as much relevant knowledge as possible

Management for sustainability

- What are the long-term implications?
 - Legal
 - Ecological
 - Social
 - Cultural
 - Economic
 - Political
 - Reputational
 - For streetscape management
 - ...





<https://uosjournalism.shorthandstories.com/sheffields-street-tree-strategy--why-is-it-important---/index.html>

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