

Landowner decides to fell trees sparking community anger

A War of Woods in Dunblane



Open meeting

IN BRIEF

An open meeting to discuss tree felling on Holmehill will take place this Thursday July 4 at 7pm in the Burgess Centre.

Holmehill Community Hub will also organise the meeting, following the events of last weekend. Among those invited to attend are local councillors, area MP Aine McNair and Bruce Crawford MSP, as well as a representative of the Planning Department.

The group say they hope to be finished by 8pm. Cashew are also welcome.

OUTRAGE was the feeling for several Dunblane residents at the weekend as dozens of trees situated in a conservation area were cut down.

Drains unroofed on Saturday morning as a group of around 30 local protesters descended on Holmehill as a bid to prevent further tree felling which is thought to have started on Friday.

Owner of the land, and former Managing Director of AllanWaterferns, Ian Sterling, was thought to be the one commissioning the tree-felling - as well as personally clearing trees. His son and current Managing Director of AllanWater Homes, David Sterling, was also present.

Witnesses say when asked whether he had consent permission to fell trees, it became apparent that he did not.

The trees in question are situated in a conservation area and are not covered by a Tree Preservation Order. This therefore means any work has to go through Stirling Council.

AllanWater Homes is known to have an interest in housing on Holmehill. They were recently refused planning permission to build an office block on the land, following backlash of local opposition.

On Saturday, a local councillor, police and staff from Stirling Council's land services team were in attendance. However it was said to be the intervention of Tree Officer, Ingrid Willingham, who eventually persuaded the land owner to stop the felling.

One on-looker said: "David Sterling made clear that his father intended to continue this activity across the site."

Dunblane Community Councillor Alan Booth said one of the first people in the scene, he said:



"You can understand why they have done this. There was about half a hectare of trees felled, with about 30-40 years of growth on them."

"At one point someone from Stirling Council came out and advised the people working on site to stop, however this was ignored."

"Fortunately one of the protesters knows the tree officer at Stirling Council who came down personally and was able to negotiate an agreement for them to stop felling, at least for the time being."

"The police also got involved as there is an act which makes it illegal to disturb nesting birds, and within the hour because it is strictly likely that there were nesting birds in the area."

Another quote so near was Kenneth Councillor



for Dunblane Mack Buskell, he said: "The landowner has also opted an outer disregard for the environment, the law and the local community to clear felling this much loved area of woodland."

"The candidate that the landowner has shown in our community needs to now be replaced by a candidate well to prevent further destruction. It is important that if any activity on Holmehill returns, including removal of already felled trees, that as many people as possible go to the site to hear witness and record evidence of potential breaches in the law and planning regulations."

A spokesperson from Police Scotland said: "On the morning of Saturday 29th June 2013, concerns were raised by several residents regarding tree felling in the area of House Hill, Dunblane."

"Officers from Police Scotland attended and found no evidence of any wildlife or other offences. Advice was given to the community and Stirling Council have made more aware of the concerns of local residents."

A representative from Stirling Council and the Planning Service would be writing to the landowner in order to advise them that the works undertaken were "unauthorised".

And that an assessment of the extent of the felling done in the area will be carried out before deciding what further action is to be taken.

Ian Sterling was reported as saying he was "extremely" his legal right as landowner so his planned woodland management at the time.

