

Tree-felling landowner may face £20,000 fine

by Peter Swinton

A LANDOWNER could be fined up to £20,000 and forced to replant trees after woodland in Dunblane's conservation area was destroyed.

Ian Stirling told more than 100 people at a hot-tempered public meeting that he is the "tree contractor" responsible for felling at Holmehill.

Chainsaws and woodchippers were used to destroy forestation at the protected site last weekend, prompting an angry mob to confront Mr Stirling.

He was again harangued by residents at a stormy meeting in the Braemar Centre on Thursday night, which occasionally descended into a shouting match.

Mr Stirling told people: "I was the tree contractor. I, as a landowner, consider that I have a right to manage this woodland."

"What I failed to understand — and I have apologised for this — is within a conservation area I was bound to discuss this with the local authority, I put my hands up to this. I was wrong and I admit that."

"I did not know there was a requirement in a conservation area to discuss the management of the woodland first of all with the council. That's a perfectly valid position."

The landowner, who told the meeting that he wants to develop part of the site, could now face prosecution.

Addressing the meeting, Stirling Council's chief planning officer, Peter Morgan, said: "In relation to work that's been done, when there is no notification, the legislation is black and white."

"Just quoting from it... any person who cuts down, uproots, wilfully destroys or damages a tree without giving six weeks' prior notification, that person is guilty



Mr Stirling, inset, told people at the meeting above, "I was wrong and I admit that."

of an offence. Persons found guilty on summary conviction will be subject to a fine not exceeding £20,000.

"This requires a report to go to the procurator fiscal because it is an offence. It's quite clear from the legislation when the steps are. I should say as well that the legislation places a burden on anyone who fells a tree to replant a tree as soon as possible after it has been felled."

It is likely that residents will push the council to take action against Mr Stirling, whose company, Wardlaw Gardens Ltd, owns the site.

"Dunblane Community Council will be

asking Stirling Council to pursue Wardlaw Gardens Ltd for the maximum fine under the legislation that protects trees in conservation areas," said chairman Terence O'Byrne.

"The claim by Mr Stirling at Thursday night's meeting that he was unaware of this legislation is not credible and is no excuse."

Local councillor Graham Houston has also taken a dim view of the tree felling at Holmehill. "What is immediately important is that the council take action over what has already occurred without permission and submit a report to the fiscal, the developer makes a proper application to

the council with regard to agreeing a tree management plan for the area and steps are taken to secure the site and make it safe," he said.

The public meeting was organised by Holmehill Community Bayout Group, which aims to take control of the land. David Prescott, who chaired proceedings, said: "We will continue to work with the council, other stakeholders and the landowner, Ian Stirling, to secure the protection of Holmehill from further damage and seek restoration of the damage that has recently been inflicted."

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Couple use water scam to steal cash from man

A YOUNG man has been robbed in his own home in what police are describing as a "distraction theft".

When the 23-year-old opened the door to a man and woman, one of them said they were unwell and asked for water.

The woman then "distracted" the householder while her accomplice took cash and personal belongings, according to police.

The robbery happened on Wednesday July 3 at a house in St Johns Avenue in Falkirk.

A police spokesperson said: "About 8.30pm, the man was in his home when a man and a woman came to his door on the pretence that one of them was ill and required a drink of water.

"On letting them into his house, the female distracted him while the male stole a quantity of cash and personal belongings."

Police have issued an appeal for information in the hope of finding the thieves.

The man is described by police as being around 20 to 25 years old, 6ft tall, slim, with short brown hair. He was wearing a light blue top and grey trousers at the time of the incident.

The woman is said to be in her mid-20s, about 5ft 5in tall, of medium build and black hair. She was wearing a pink top. Officers can be contacted by calling 101 or details can be given, anonymously, to Crimestoppers on 08000 555 111.