

The response to Philip Glanville's statement about the Happy Man Tree, 22nd
May 2020

Written by the 'Friends of the Happy Man Tree' 24th May 2020

Thank you to the Mayor of Hackney, Mr Glanville for your statement explaining why you have made the decision to destroy the tree known as The Happy Man Tree on Woodberry Grove, London N4. The statement can be read here. <https://news.hackney.gov.uk/losing-a-much-loved-tree-is-never-easy-but-heres-why-its-necessary/>

Our first and perhaps most important response to you is the following: -

Hackney are not noticing trees properly at the beginning of a redevelopment. We take as a starting point a simple principle. Development plans must work with and around the trees that already exist on the site. If we are genuinely going to have a world that respects nature and in particular trees it would help to start from that position. Unfortunately this was not the case in the plans that were drawn up by Hackney and Berkeley Homes over the past decade. Mr Glanville says in his defence that 'no concerns were raised at the time' to the tree going. It would help if we did not have to. It should be a core part of Hackney's approach to the climate emergency that mature trees remain. It should not be up to the public to find out what trees Hackney plan to cut down for whatever reason. Going forward it would be vital to know that Berkeley Homes and Hackney will take much more notice of all mature trees by incorporating them into their plans from the very start rather than taking a 'clean slate' approach to the development.

Social housing provision: By the time the issue of the Happy Man Tree appeared last year, it was already too late to be easily incorporated into the plans. At this point the argument that it would affect the number of social housing units appeared.

The obvious response is to change some of the many privately built units into social housing. However this would ultimately affect the amount of profit being made. It might be helpful to know that Hackney participate in the profits Berkeley Homes make on the development. It could be argued that the decisions Hackney make and the public statements made are compromised by the fact that the more money made out of the sale of private units, the more money Hackney ultimately might make. To frame the issue as the tree versus social housing units might be useful spin, but it ignores so much of the backstory of how it can even get to that point. It also ignores the controversy as to what really constitutes Social Housing. In this case, under one scenario to keep the tree, only 2 *social rented* homes might be lost. (The remainder are shared ownership)

Delay to the project: The next problem highlighted is the 'huge delays' to the project if there is to be a redesign. There are three issues here. First: a lot of time has already been wasted by not starting a redesign at the time this was raised in the autumn Second: There are costs associated with a redesign, however it is not in Hackney's interests for these costs to be incurred so it is

likely that they were not in favour of a redesign and might actively have been against it. Third: How long a delay? It is in Hackney and Berkeley homes interests to say that this delay would be 'huge'. However there is evidence to the contrary. For example the document that sealed the tree's fate prepared by Rolph Judd for Hackney Council /Berkeley Homes says a redesign would "lead to a programme delay of a minimum of 4 months" While the word minimum is noted, 4 months or thereabouts seems quite a way a way from 'huge delays'. In any event there are plenty of planning consultants who would query the amount of delay times being suggested by parties with a vested interest in removing the tree.

Consultation. Always a tricky one. Many a contentious decision hides behind 'consultation' All we can say is that our conversations with many many people do not support in any way Mr Glanville's assertions that there was meaningful and widespread consultation about the fate of the trees in the development plan.

Compensation for the loss of the tree.

We don't feel we should ever be in the numbers game that the council and the developers keep playing. Accepting money for the destruction of a tree is not mitigation. Planting young trees as mitigation or highlighting things like net gain biodiversity can never compensate properly for the loss of a loved venerable tree that has genuine meaning for so many people. In any event this should happen 'as well as' and not instead of the Happy Man Tree being kept. Perhaps the last word on this can come from an organisation called the Tree Musketeers, who were reported back to us as saying the following - "*the fact that the tree was planted in a much less hostile environment, 150 or so years ago means that the tree has been given the time and conditions to grow to be the magnificent specimen it is today. We cannot today guarantee the same circumstances that would allow a new London Plane to flourish in the same way. No one knows how long new trees planted will last. No one knows if a similar London plane would ever reach a magnificent age of 150 like this one. It is estimated that to replace such a tree in terms of capacity and environmental impact, you would need to plant hundreds of small trees*"

We thank Mr Glanville for his post. We may not like some of the spin that is going in to these discussions but we appreciate the attention. We have also asked to meet him personally as this kind of conversation in public is not helpful to achieve dialogue. This offer is still open and we would welcome that chance.

(Friends of The Happy Man Tree describes a group of local people including some from the WDCO Executive who came together a month ago. We have

been protesting at the tree and began a petition which has over 15,000 signatures. www.change.org/savethehappymantree.org

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