

Independent Inquiry into the Sheffield Street Trees Dispute

Independent Chair: Sir Mark Lowcock KCB

Progress Report July 2022

The Chair and the Inquiry team have continued to hold private meetings with stakeholders this month. The Inquiry has also continued to receive new documentation and other evidence proactively submitted by a variety of stakeholders.

In April and May, we reported that while some new documentation requested from key stakeholders had been made available, much was still outstanding. While this situation improved somewhat during May, document transfer slowed during June and that slower pace has continued into July. The Inquiry continues to request important documentation from a range of stakeholders and hopes that the transfer of this information will regain pace in the coming weeks.

Anyone wishing to provide information can continue to send it to the Inquiry's main email address: streettreesinquiry@weightmans.com.

As set out in the terms of reference, the Inquiry will hold a series of public hearings. These sessions are due to commence in late September and the process for them is set out below.

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Sheffield Street Trees Inquiry – public hearings approach

The Inquiry is gathering information in three main ways: through reviewing extensive documentation, holding private meetings and through public hearings. The public hearings will provide an opportunity for those affected by the dispute to understand what happened, why actions were taken and to hear the answers to questions posed by the Inquiry. We want the hearings to be constructive and helpful to the recovery process. The Inquiry will end with the publication of a report by March 2023.

The public hearings will support the ongoing recovery in Sheffield from the street trees dispute, and support reconciliation by enabling stakeholders to hear the story of the dispute from each other's perspectives. Each hearing will be a conversation between the Independent Chair and a person relevant to the dispute who has been invited to attend. They will discuss key elements of the dispute, and the Chair, and on occasion his team, will pose questions.

The hearings will be streamed online so anyone can watch, then published so they are available to watch online shortly after each session. These recordings will be retained both as evidence for the Inquiry and as part of the public record of the dispute. Physically present at the hearings will be the Inquiry staff, technical operatives and someone brought by the person invited to each hearing (if they wish to be accompanied).

Hearings will be held in central Sheffield, with a first round in late September and early October. There are likely to be further hearings from later in 2022. There may be multiple hearings (one after another) on any day.

We will invite a range of people to attend hearings, with different viewpoints on the dispute. There will be a balance of experts, main decision makers in relevant organisations, significant parties drawn into the dispute and people campaigning or protesting against what was happening. We will publish the names of everyone we invite to a hearing in the final report.

We will provide more information to the public, including the dates and times of the hearings and how to view them online, in due course.

At the beginning of each hearing, we will ask the attendee if they would like to make an opening statement. We will then discuss a series of topics tailored to the attendee's experience and expertise. We will also give each attendee the opportunity to make any closing remarks.

Attendees may consult other people about the topics to be discussed and what they intend to say in advance of the hearing. However, speaking in the hearings will be confined to the Inquiry and the invited attendee, who will be expected to answer all questions themselves. (Anyone accompanying them may not speak for the person invited).

If, following the hearings, attendees wish to contact the Inquiry with further details or to correct anything they said in their hearing, they will be welcome to do so (as any member of the public is free to submit evidence or testimony to the Inquiry).