

OPINION

A NIGHT TO BE VERY PROUD

As I write this leader column I am gearing up for the Sheffield Business Awards, to be held at Ponds Forge in the city.

The event is a partnership between Sheffield Chamber of Commerce and The Star and will be an irresistible collection of some of the most enterprising individuals operating in the Sheffield City Region.

No doubt there will be a few sore heads amongst those who were at this huge celebration of entrepreneurial brilliance, but there will also be a selection of very proud winners who will deserve every accolade coming their way.

The Star has chosen to specifically support the category: Digital Communication Award.

For anyone who doesn't know, www.star.co.uk is attracting 40-50,000 people a DAY - every day!

As a manager I am looking to support and nurture my staff into one of the most exciting growth spurts this media centre has ever been through.

We're growing our online audience at a rate we'd never dreamed of, and we've barely scratched the surface.

For that reason we admire the work being done by Rckt - the winners of the category.

Their now eight-strong team is but a baby in age terms when compared to The Star, but the power of the creative force coming from their Steel City HQ has been enough to get the likes of Channel 4, banging on their door, demanding Rckt give the TV station a lift.

But Rckt is just one firm among many in this city that deserve the limelight on a special night like last night, and as the new Editor of The Star I am determined to sniff out the Rckts of this world and help to put them under the noses of prospective clients via our newspapers, magazines, websites and apps.

This partnership with the Chamber of Commerce can only be a good thing.

Future partnerships with the likes of Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership can only be a good thing.

I am determined to help this city prosper, and look forward to an even bigger, better and more brilliant set of awards in 2014.

by **James Mitkinson**
Editor

BRANCHING OUT

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Sheffield's trees, the crowning glory of Britain's greenest city. Along with its seven hills, five rivers and unique industrial heritage, our estimated two million trees are part of what makes Sheffield special.

But, as high winds take down dozens of trees across the city, one of the world's leading environmental experts based in the city reckons Sheffield is in danger of destroying swathes of its natural beauty.

In fact, he says we're already doing it.

The city council says it is removing 250 trees through necessity and planting 750. They say they are re-planting and undertaking essential maintenance to ensure the future of the city's greenery as part of an agreed 25-year conservation programme.

But when The Star's letters page is bombarded with tree-related issues and people like Professor Ian Rotherham accuse the council of 'speaking Eco-twaddle', absolutely outrageous behaviour' and 'ignoring people's views' in an 'officious and bullying style', it's probably time to ask what's going on.

So we did.

The Star put to the city council the fears and concerns expressed by our readers and Sheffield Hallam University's Professor of Environmental Geography which include:

- The loss of ancient trees in the Gleadless Valley
- The removal of trees from the Meadowhead roundabout
- Threats to Bowden

Getting to the root of street trees problem

City questioned over commitment to green future

Housteads Wood and Smithy Wood from developers

- The perceived gradual erosion of long-standing conservation programmes
- A lack of consultation over street tree removals

Jack Scott, Sheffield City council member for the environment, sees things differently.

Professor Ian Rotherham

"We are doing more work on conserving and looking after street trees than we have ever done," he said.

"In regard to the older trees, they are the ones that by definition become diseased or start to die. We can't afford to have unstable or dead and dying trees alongside the highway.

"We have to manage trees with safety as our primary concern, especially with older trees, and unfortunately the conservation pledge that Ian Rotherham refers to is not close to what authorities do across the country now. Our first duty is to keep the roads and pavements safe for people.

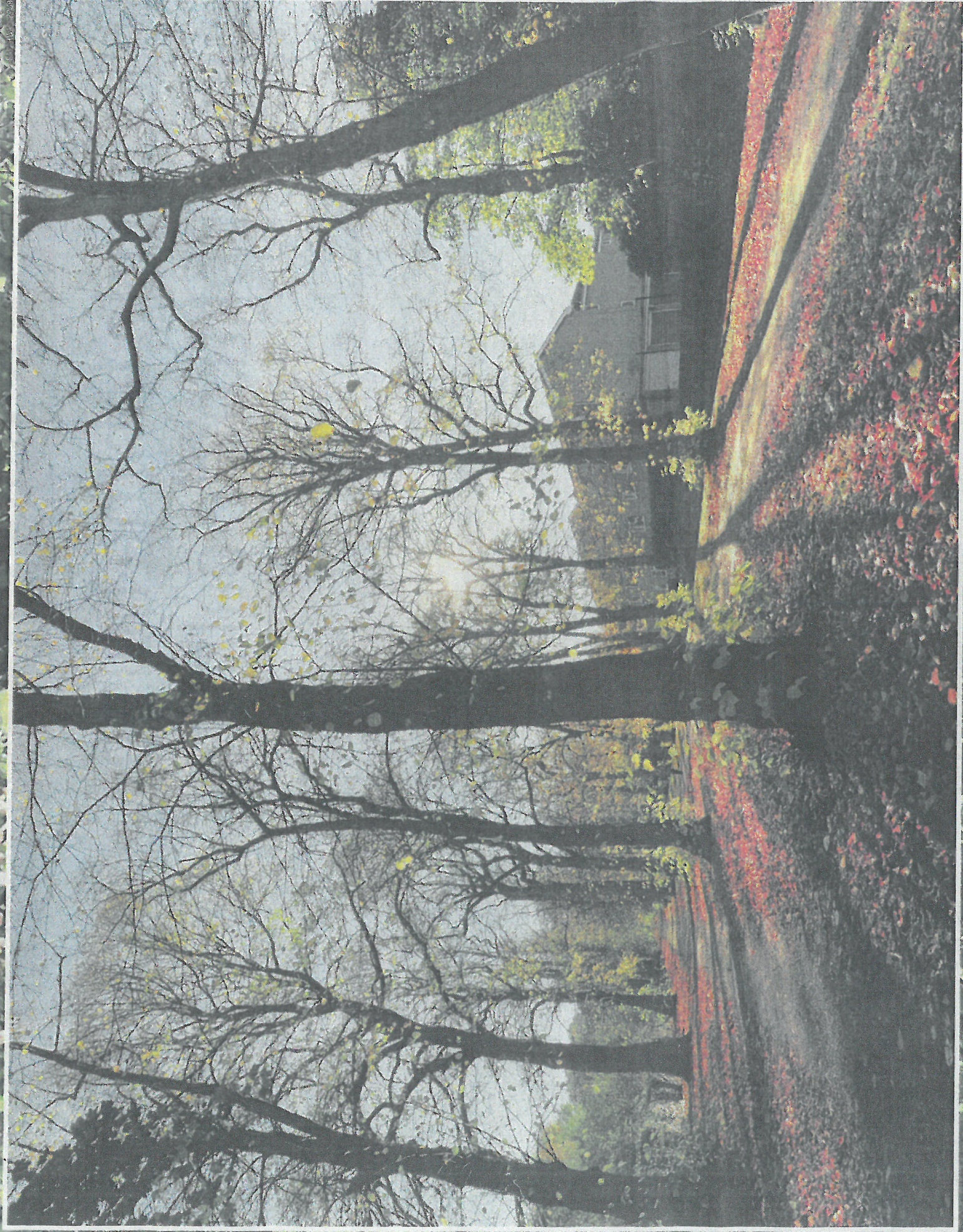
"We do consult with people but if trees need attention quickly we have to take

action. We get more people complaining because we don't cut trees down than those who complain that we do.

"We have arboriculturalists working for the council who are passionate about trees and they give their expert opinion as we try and work out what to do with a certain tree."

"Regarding Bowden Housteads Wood there has not been a planning application submitted as far as I am aware but if there is it will have to comply with preservation requirements of the area which are still in place. Regarding the Meadowhead roundabout the trees had to come out anyway because the island will be smaller. We will plant 10 to 15-year-old

LETTERS PAGE IS BOMBARDED WITH TREE-RELATED ISSUES



Trees are the crowning glory of Britain's greenest city

the unique and irreplaceable nature of ancient trees but said: "The Smithy Wood development is in two parts. One application that has been made is for a coal wash-plant on an area that is not designated ancient woodland. The other part is for an area that is ancient woodland and which will again have to comply with conservation conditions. That may mean a developer having to make commensurate improvement compensation to restore another green area or make a brown-field site green. However there is an application from local people to turn the wood into a village green - and to keep it as woodland."

None of which impresses Professor Rotherham who

was City Ecologist for Sheffield Council from 1984, to 1994 and helped write the Sheffield Nature Conservation Strategy in 1991.

"I have never had so many people coming to me with complaints who feel like they are being ignored," he said. "Sheffield is famous for its green suburbs and trees but the council don't seem to understand the difference between consultation with people and simply telling them what they are about to do. That's not consultation. They come out with their 'eco-twaddle' that sounds all right and that they know what they are talking about but it's just 'greenwash'. They are not conserving things, they are destroying them."

"I think the problem is

that they just don't have the expertise any more to know the value of the resource we have.

"Years of cutbacks have taken out the people who do know and who remember the agreements the council made in the past through people like David Blunkett, Peter Price and Clive Betts, who knew and cared about these issues.

"I think those agreements are being overlooked when it comes to practical decision-making. A 250-year-old tree cannot be replaced by a new one. It is an irreplaceable part of the city's archaeology.

"I don't think they see the difference between a tree planted by the Victorians in 1870 and a tree that is a 300-year-old marker of the city's history and is irreplaceable. It seems to me the council has lost track of the promises it made 20 to 30 years ago.

"Trees can cause nuisance with their roots and leaf fall but that's what happens with trees.

"People will make individual complaints and of course they have to be looked at but decisions were made as part of a democratic process and they should not be over-

turned because people have forgotten about them.

"There was no reason why the trees on Meadow-head roundabout had to be removed. I think they were cut down for convenience so the spoil from the work could be stored on there. To say the trees were diseased is complete hogwash."

■ Bowden Housteads Wood - alongside the Parkway near the Handsworth turn-off - is an ancient wood listed as a conservation site. It is thought that an application is being prepared to site a new fire station there.

■ Smithy Wood, just off junction 35 of the M1, is recognised as an ancient wood by the Woodlands Trust but is the proposed site for a motorway service station.



Jack Scott