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## Agenda item

### TREE FELLING ALONG THE RAILWAY LINE IN WINCHMORE HILL

- [Meeting of Bush Hill Park, Palmers Green and Winchmore Hill Area Forum - Reconfigured as Bush Hill Park, Grange and Winchmore Hill Area Forum - May 2011, Thursday, 9th October, 2008 7.30 pm \(Item 7.\)](#)

To receive a brief presentation from Denise Thompson, Community Relations – Network Rail London North East Region.

#### Minutes:

RECEIVED a verbal presentation from Denise Thompson, Community Relations Manager, and Andy Ellis, Maintenance Depot Manager, Network Rail, London North East Region:

- Many local residents had raised concerns with Denise Thompson's office in relation to felling of trees on the railway embankment at Winchmore Hill.
- The work was done for safety reasons, linked to the risk of dead trees falling across the tracks, of growth obscuring the drivers' eye view of signals, level crossings or those working on the track, and of leaf fall during the autumn which could cause the train wheels to slip and compromise braking which could lead to a train passing a signal at danger or failing to stop at a station.
- Network Rail looked after 21,000 miles of track throughout the country and had been carrying out a programme over a number of years to manage railway embankments.
- Network Rail had an obligation to maintain and provide railway infrastructure and safe railways for the travelling public.

Councillors and attendees were invited to ask questions, and the following issues were discussed:

#### Clearance of trees

Concerns were expressed about the 100% clearance of trees of all species down to ground level, fears that people had been travelling for years past 'unsafe' trees, and that excessive action had been taken including poisoning of tree stumps. Residents also drew attention to notices put up by First Capital Connect train company advising commuters that leaf fall was not dangerous, but it could affect train speeds and delay journeys by a few minutes.

Andy Ellis advised that the site had been assessed by Network Rail's contractor in early spring, and been highlighted as having trees in a dangerous condition at risk of falling onto the line, and as a site with leaf fall problems. Leaves on the rails were a serious safety issue and caused delays, and so all vegetation had been cut back to the boundary fence. The experts' assessment was that all the trees had to come down and the contractor was approved to remove the trees. As the trees were removed for valid safety reasons it was necessary to prevent their re-growth so that the same problems did not re-occur in future years. After the tree removal, grasses and low level vegetation would be able to grow and would 'green up' the embankment, but regrowth and saplings would be managed. Such maintenance had not been done previously, but that did not mean it should not be carried out now. Denise Thompson denied that clearance rather than other forms of maintenance had been decided on for cost reasons.

#### Future Work

A representative of Winchmore Hill Residents' Association asked that Network Rail take a more gentle approach on other land. Denise Thompson advised that work on any particular area would depend on the survey and recommendations received. She also reported receiving many letters from the public asking for trees on Network Rail land, which were causing them a nuisance, to be cut back. However, she was not aware of further works planned in Winchmore Hill.

In response to residents' queries about other embankments around the station, Andy Ellis advised that work was done on the embankment immediately opposite several years ago and this site was being maintained again at the moment.

#### Ecological survey

Denise Thompson stated that trees would not have been removed unless it was necessary, and that ecological surveys were carried out before such work was done. Network Rail had used a properly qualified company to carry out a survey.

The Chairman felt that the Council should have been given the opportunity to carry out a parallel survey, and asked that copies of the survey should be made public. Denise Thompson stated there was 'nothing to hide', but that it was company policy that the survey was an internal document produced solely for Network Rail and not to be released in the public domain.

Other attendees were concerned that only bats seemed to have been considered. Denise Thompson confirmed that all species had been considered, but the ecological survey had identified four trees as a potential bat habitat.

Residents pointed out that, at their instigation, a full ecological survey was also carried out by a representative from London Wildlife Trust, Dr Matelzon, which was critical of the work done by Network Rail and claimed they had recklessly endangered a bat habitat, which was against the law. The assessment was that 12 trees were almost certainly bat roosts, but they would have been difficult to get close to because of surrounding shrubs and ivy. Denise Thompson stated that Network Rail used qualified environmental specialists to produce the ecological survey, and the report identified four trees considered potential bat roosts. There had been a bat survey at dawn and dusk on 25/26 September using a bat detector, and an analysis of species and activity. She confirmed that more than one company was used to provide ecological surveys to Network Rail. The ecological survey was just to investigate the wildlife, birds and protected species in the area, and was separate from the contractor used to manage the vegetation.

#### Fly-tipping

Councillors and local residents were unhappy about recent fly-tipping which had occurred at the site.

Denise Thompson agreed that the vegetation clearance was not an excuse for dumping of refuse on third party land. Network Rail would clear the rubbish and involve British Transport Police to try to deal with offenders. Andy Ellis advised that the rubbish would be cleared at the beginning of the following week, on 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> October. In response to concerns about preventing it happening again, he advised that he was currently awaiting a fencing proposal.

#### Site Security

Local residents were concerned that children could access the embankment quite easily. Andy Ellis confirmed that there was a proposal to re-fence the site at the moment. Concrete posts and wire was the standard form of fencing. It was advised that the fence was there to mark the boundary of Network Rail property. Network Rail invested heavily in education programmes for children and employed dedicated railway education officers to publicise the dangers of going onto railway land, while "No Messin'" events aimed at teenagers offered activities during the summer holidays.

#### Local property prices

A local resident believed that the Network Rail tree work had made his home worth less, and that it would be much harder to attract a buyer. It was advised that Network Rail were not responsible for the valuation of properties, and that the railway had been there for a long time. They could not compensate for a perceived fall in house valuation simply because they had managed their land.

#### Contacting Network Rail

An attendee voiced concerns that as tree roots disintegrated, the trackside may become unstable. He also felt that trees close to the railway bridge in Palmers Green were dead and dangerous and should be dealt with as a priority by Network Rail. He had found it difficult to communicate with Network Rail and to report these issues.

Denise Thompson advised that Network Rail had a website and a 24-hour, year round national helpline. All details would be taken, the call logged and a reference number allocated to it.

[www.networkrail.co.uk](http://www.networkrail.co.uk)

Network Rail  
Kings Place  
90 York Way  
London  
N1 9AG  
National Helpline: **08457 11 41 41**












HQ switchboard: 020 3356 9595  
HQ fax: 020 3356 9245

An [e-mail form](#) is available should you be unable to find the answer to your question.

#### Lessons Learned

Denise Thompson apologised for the lack of pre-notification of the work to local residents. Letters would normally have been sent in advance by Network Rail in the interests of being a good neighbour, in case people may be disturbed by works and to notify local residents if work was being carried out which would have a visual impact. However, the clearance work would still have been carried out.

The Chairman thanked Denise Thompson and Andy Ellis for coming to the Area Forum and they were given a round of applause by attendees.

Communication tools			
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