

## The Street Tree Letters - January 2026

### Letter to:

DfI Roads Eastern Division  
Divisional Manager: Des McFarlane  
Divisional Headquarters  
Annexe 7, Castle Buildings  
Stormont Estate,

Please ensure this reaches the attention of Des McFarlane. DfI

Dear Des,

I am writing to you on behalf of Groomsport Village Association. We are concerned that the street trees within the pavement boundary in our village are at risk of being felled. I am seeking your assurance that this will not be the case and that your team will reengineer the pavement around them and allow the trees a long and healthy life. I am sure you are aware of the best practice principles below

The surrounds around these trees has been recently marked by spray paint. These trees are raising the surrounding pavement as would be expected as they grow larger. We understand that there have been a few unfortunate accidents to the public caused by this. The situation needs to be addressed. Our concerns are that as an expedient but unnecessary action the trees maybe felled.

We have corresponded with Jonny Bettes, Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager from Ards and North Down Borough Council. My minute of our recent meeting said

*"We discussed the intended pavement repairs around the village street trees. I shared our concerns that the trees should be treated with respect and pavement repairs safeguard the trees. I explained that I had read DfI web site and how they had stopped using their guide 'trees and development, a guide to best practice 2003' because decision making had been passed to local authorities when they had policy cover which for Ards and North Downs seems to be Stand for Trees. Within the document there are several references to BAS 5837, 2012 which makes many references to trees in hard development both prior to and post development. These and UK Government best practice make the assumption that trees should be safe guarded and protected wherever possible. As an expert in tree matters I know that these trees can be protected by engineering of the pavement."*

Jonny replied to my minute to clarify some points:

*"The previously used 'Trees and Development, a guide to best practice 2003' was a guidance document for planning decisions, when this responsibility sat with DfI. DfI would have stopped using this when planning authority moved to Local Government in 2015. Councils Tree and Woodland Strategy is designed to ensure the Council's limited budget is focused on positive planting programmes and managing tree care and risks within Council owned tree stock. Any guidance brought forward to replace the former 'guide to best practice 2003', would need to be discussed with Planning and I have added the contact details for this*

department below. Parks and Cemeteries would not be in a position to provide advice on planning guidance.

[planning@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:planning@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)

[Planning - Ards and North Down Borough Council](#)

*It would be for DfI to provide comment on the engineering approach being taken through their proposed pavement scheme.*

*To clarify, in relation to the felling of the trees. I stated that if DfI felt there was a health and safety risk posed by any tree, they could remove the tree. Council would take the same approach to a tree that posed a significant health and safety risk. I did not mention an emergency situation. I would not be in a position to comment on any claims, this would be for DfI to advise on."*

I will be also writing to the Borough planning department to understand their role in what seems an unnecessarily complicated tree issue. I will also be keeping our locally elected individuals with the loop. For your interest I am a retired forester and former member of the Institute of Chartered Foresters, so have some expert knowledge in the matters

John Weir

## **DfI Reply**

: DfI Roads Ards & North Down <ArdsandNorthDown@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk>

**Subject:** RE: 196942-26 - John Weir - Groomsport (Complaint) - Trees

Dear Mr Weir,

Thank you for your enquiry regarding the mature trees on Main Street in Groomsport. Firstly, let me apologise for the delay in replying, we were and still are considering the best way to proceed taking into account the delicate balance between public safety, the need to protect the natural environment and ever tightening budgets.

The Department has inspected nine trees located on the footway along Main Street, Groomsport. These trees have caused significant structural damage to the footway surface, resulting in uneven conditions that present a risk to pedestrians. We are aware of one incident in which a member of the public fell.

A number of remedial options are currently being considered. At this stage, the preferred approach is the removal of eight of the nine trees, followed by the planting of replacement species that are more appropriate for the location and less likely to cause future damage.

Before any works are taken forward, my Department will engage with Ards and North Down Borough Council.

No decisions have been made.

Regards  
Stephen Gardiner  
Section Engineer – Ards and North Down

**Letter to** Dear Elected Representatives

Thank you for having the patience and understanding of Groomsport Village Association's concerns about our street trees. We really do need your help!

I have asked questions of Ards Council which I have copied you in on. I now have the reply from DFI. (see below)

*'At this stage, **the preferred approach is the removal of eight of the nine trees**, followed by the planting of replacement species that are more appropriate for the location and less likely to cause future damage.'*

This is the answer we did not want to hear but was expected. The sad fact is that the trees were well selected for an exposed site and are very healthy. They also provide a strong visual connection to the other sycamore trees which enhance the seafront. There are in truth few tree species that will thrive in this location and also provide shade and structure.

Yes engineering the pavement is not the cheapest resolution, but if looked after keeps our award winning village with its valuable assets. How long will it take a replacement tree to mature?

It is clear from this letter from the DFI that decisions have not been made and that Ards and North Down Borough Council have significant input. You are our influence with the council.

John Weir