

HOLT PARISH COUNCIL

Email via: clerk@holtparishcouncil.gov.uk

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<http://holtparishcouncil.gov.uk/>

Open Letter to Holt Residents,

There have been some comments about Holt Parish Council on social media recently, which I feel are unfair to the councillors who, like many people in Holt, give up their own time to make our village a better place to live. While Wiltshire Council and other authorities provide most of our principal services, we do have a direct responsibility over some village facilities and amenities, such as the recreation ground, pavilions and greens and work hard to make them a positive influence on village life, which brings me onto the Ham Green horse chestnut trees.

In June 2019, it was reported that the trees had become diseased and the recommendation from a number of experts was that they be removed. So we communicated with the village by leaflet drop and held a public meeting where we had engaged a tree expert to advise and answer questions. At the time, the majority of voices we heard were dismay and opposition given the general benefit felt visually and environmentally and that if this went ahead that we should replace with a semi-mature tree as the largest option available. In July 2019 we took a difficult and majority decision to remove with a commitment to replant and Autumn 2020 considered the optimum timing. From estimates received at the time the cost could vary from approx. £2700 to £6500; the size of the tree varying between 6–8 metres. A number of residents offered to contribute towards the purchase.

With the trees removed for a period of time, it was reported by a number of councillors that village opinion may have shifted and that the new open space was considered preferable to replanting, so in July 2020 we again communicated with the village and asked them to state whether they would prefer no tree, a young tree or a semi-mature tree. Of the approx. 750 leaflets dropped we had 193 returns, of which 55 voted in favour of a young tree, 57 voted in favour of a semi-mature tree and 81 voted for no tree. So what to do? At the meeting in September the majority of councillors were of the view that as 112 respondents wanted a tree and 81 wanted no tree, we ought to plant a tree. Given that the majority of those respondents that wanted a tree voted for a semi-mature tree, that is what we went for as the majority of councillors considered this as simply carrying out the wishes of the village as we try to do on all matters.

At the meeting last night we were joined by a number of Holt residents and we welcomed their views. These included: an assessment of the negative net environmental impact of planting semi-mature trees, including the risk of unsuccessful transplantation; a summary of the views from those who had commented on social media; different views on the interpretation of the tree survey results; a general positive view on replanting but not at the maximum cost for a semi-mature tree; and some alternative ideas for planting. In our subsequent discussion, the council majority concluded that our previous decision correctly articulated the wishes of the village from the perspective of the survey results alone, but taken together with this new information we should no longer pursue the planting of a semi-mature tree on Ham Green. Instead we would consider purchasing 1-3 young trees (3-4m height, approx. £350 each) for locations to be decided.

The council currently has 7 members, with 4 vacancies. We would be very interested to hear from anybody who would wish to join and provide additional representation; there are elections in May next year should, at that time, there be more candidates to places. As we recently communicated, we ask for ideas for a project or initiative that residents think would improve village life, with an aim to link up like-minded people, and provide advice and support where we can. We really are doing our best for the benefit of the village and look forward to positive and constructive engagement on any aspects of village life

Phil Game
Chairman