



One of the saplings destroyed by vandals at Merton fields

## Vandals destroy pupils' saplings

MINDLESS vandals destroyed hours of work by volunteers when they snapped more than 40 young trees in half in Stratton. On Sunday night, as the St Jude storm started to gather pace, an avenue of around 40 trees which were planted in Merton Fields last year as part of the Big Tree Plant initiative through Swindon, were snapped in half, leaving hundreds of pounds worth of damage.

Paul Russell, clerk to Stratton St Margaret Parish Council, discovered the trees had been destroyed. "It appears that a group of people have gone through Merton Fields area, which is managed by the Parish Council, and have snapped off a number of standards that we planted last year," he said. "We have lost 30 or 40 standards, which cost about £50 each. Volunteers planted these trees last year as part of the Big Tree Plant. It's not the first time I've seen it done but it's the first time I've seen so many trees vandalised and it's completely thoughtless. It happened a few years ago but not on this scale. It costs a lot of money and they are put there for the benefit of the community and to enhance the area for this generation and for future generations."

It is thought that the destruction was caused by a group of youths who were seen passing through the area. Paul said: "I think they just got carried away or they thought it was a great laugh and showing off. It's totally mindless. It's such a shame."

It is not yet known what will be done to replace the trees, but there are some ideas to siphon funds that would see new trees planted in other areas of Stratton to replace those damaged by the vandals. In the meantime, the Parish Council is urging residents to report instances of vandalism to the police. Paul said: "I just hope that when people see acts of vandalism taking place that they call the police on 101 and report it. The loss of these trees is such a shame. It is one of the areas which we most wanted trees to be planted in."

The trees were planted by children from Ruskin Junior School and St Catherine's Catholic Primary School as well as volunteers from the National Trust after the Great Western Community Forest initiative won a grant from the Forestry Commission to plant 10,000 trees across the town. The GWCF is a partnership between Swindon council and local and regional organisations working together to create a better environment.

**Evening Advertiser, 3rd November 2013**

©Wiltshire OPC Project/2014/Nigel Chalk