I am officially a ‘person unknown’ bound by the injunction order of August 2017, as I fit the description of ‘a person who intended to enter or remain in a safety zone erected (around a tree) on the public highways in the City of Sheffield’.

I was driven to carry out Non-violent Direct Action (NVDA) in the personally held belief, that the wanton destruction of healthy, beautiful street trees in this city of ours, was a crime against nature and would have an impact on the ecosystems that these trees supported. The removal of our green heritage would also deny the residents of Sheffield the beauty and the physical and mental health benefits that the trees provided.

My actions were born out of fear and anxiety for the potential loss of our street trees, but also out of anger and frustration about the council’s cynical approach and lack of strategy to maintain and value the green assets that trees provided.

I joined a group of campaigners. Each of us felt compelled to break the injunction. We would respond to callouts posted on social media, via Facebook, Messenger and WhatsApp. We also developed a rota to patrol areas most under threat, each hour from eleven at night through to the following morning. There were only a small number of us, but we did the best we could.

I carried out a number of NVDA actions in 2017/2018, each had a physical and mental impact: the butterflies in the tummy once I had made a decision to ‘jump’ a barrier, rapid breathing, heart thumping, breaking out in a sweat (even on a cold day). These were all symptoms of stress, because at times it was scary, due to the reactions by some of the security and other workers who would use physical pain, by pushing, shoving and grabbing my arms, bending my fingers back and verbally abusing me in an attempt to threaten and stop me.

On the 11th of January 2018 I had been woken up by a call at four o’clock that morning to say that arbs (arborists) were butchering a tree on Meersbrook Park Road. I and another campaigner responded, and although we stopped the crew continuing, we discovered that they had already amputated the branches of two other trees on the road. I was devastated and emotionally distraught. It was a horrific sight and I could not return to bed. I was so angry, and it was this anger that fuelled my next action. At 10:45 that morning, I responded to a callout on a WhatsApp group, to say that a crew was setting up at Crescent Road to fell a beautiful London plane. There was no hesitation as to what I had to do, so donning a bunny outfit, choosing clothes that I would not wear at any other time, these being a bobble hat, a ‘Tree Hugga’ face cover, an old pair of walking shoes and a brown mac, I made my way to the area, parking up some distance away, and walked towards Crescent Road.

Turning onto the road and looking up, I was faced with a sea of hi-vis jackets, and an area fenced off with large metal Heras barriers. I was aware that my heart rate had increased significantly, but I think I was in a hyper state remembering what had occurred on Meersbrook Park Road previously that morning which overrode any tiredness I had been feeling through lack of sleep. That state propelled me forward. There were a significant number of campaigners cheering as I got closer, which was double edged, as although they were supporting me, I became anxious that I would fail and not get in. The onus on me became even greater to get over those fences.  In my mind’s eye, I remember walking up and down the fencing like a caged animal, but the ironic thing was I was trying to get into the cage! I was obstructed at every turn. I considered climbing onto the bonnet of a large truck that was parked up at the corner of the fencing, and just trying to alight from there over the fencing, but a large Security Industry Authority (SIA) operative stood blocking my way. I knew that it was futile. I was close to tears of frustration and helplessness, but a fellow campaigner took me to one side and informed me that I could go around the back of the adjacent house that had given permission to stand in their front garden.

So, I found myself standing on their garden wall, hands on the fence looking down at SIA operatives on the other side looking up at me. The height of the top of the fence reached my hips, so it was still a challenge and I was fighting a sense of panic that I would not get over it. As I tried to raise my leg over the fence several times, with fellow campaigners who were trying to assist, I became weary and needed to take a few seconds of time out to gather myself whilst looking for a weak link. I saw an opportunity and moved quickly to my left, throwing my left leg over the fence clinging to it with all my might, whilst the SIA operative attempted to push me back. I found myself lying on top of the fence struggling to bring over my right leg, but I was pushed back and found myself virtually hanging off in a horizontal position on the wrong side of the fence looking into the chests of the SIA guards.

I don’t know how, but I think it was a fight or flight instinct that took over, and I found the strength to pull my body up over the fence. At this point, I think, even they thought that it was a pointless exercise trying to hold me and my feet were allowed to touch the ground. Once over, my body reacted and I started to shake uncontrollably. I had developed a pounding headache and I found myself short of breath. I thought that I was going to have a panic attack and I could not move. I knew that people were talking to me, but everything was muffled. I could just hear and feel my heart pounding against my chest. I stayed facing the fence, focusing on my breathing and not responding to anyone until I composed myself. The tree still stands today.

On the 22nd of January there was a call out to say that the Arbs had turned up at Meersbrook Park Road, a street lined with beautiful Lime Trees. I changed into my bunny outfit and made my way to the site. I was able to breach the 6ft high metal Heras Barriers four times. On each occasion that I was physically dragged out of the barriers, I never fought or became physical; I just went limp like a rag doll. I remained mute, bar the cries of pain. On the last occasion when I clung to the park fence, I was excessively manhandled by the security guards, who with force, succeeded in pulling me off the fence. I just couldn’t cope with the pain and I was roughly manhandled and dragged onto the road.

It was a surreal situation, I tried to disconnect myself from what was happening, but focused on the why, not giving into the fear, anxiety and pain. Suddenly I heard the barriers come crashing down, as another campaigner felt that he could no longer witness what was happening to me. Then all the other supporters followed. I started crying out of relief, complete ecstasy to see these wonderful, wonderful, people that had been there on the day and all throughout the weeks and months of the campaign. It was just the most extraordinary moment. The tree still stands today.