# Bristol father faces £85,000 debt after losing legal battle with city council over fallen tree



A father from Bristol has been burdened with an £85,000 debt after losing a legal battle against Bristol City Council over a tree he claimed caused significant damage to his garden. James Williams, 45, a father of four and a school caretaker, had repeatedly warned the council about a 30-foot ash tree bordering his property, which he believed to be dying and dangerous.

According to Williams, over an eighteen-month period, he alerted the council about the hazardous condition of the ash tree, which he feared posed a serious risk to his family and property. His wife, Leanne, 43, initially reported in May 2019 that large branches were falling from the tree into their garden. A council representative inspected the site and promised to fell the tree. Despite this assurance, the tree remained standing for the following months.

Further concerns arose when Leanne lodged a complaint in June 2019, suspecting the tree was suffering from ash dieback disease and could be dead. The council's arborist visited and noted dieback present in the upper and middle canopy of the tree. However, their assessment concluded there were no signs of significant disease or imminent risk of the tree falling. The arborist recommended that by September the tree should be "monolithed"—cutting it down to a stump no taller than four metres by removing all branches. Despite this, the planned work was never carried out.

On 3 October 2020, the feared incident occurred. The tree toppled onto the Williams’ garden, destroying a newly completed swimming pool, trampoline, and summer house. James Williams described the event as terrifying, reflecting, "We could have been killed by it if we were outside - I still have nightmares about it." He noted that the family had planned to fill the swimming pool that very morning for their children to use.

Leanne Williams likened the damage to "a scene from The Wizard of Oz," describing how broken glass and wood were scattered across the garden. The couple's home insurance only covered £3,400 of the £28,000 worth of damages, leaving a significant financial gap.

Bristol City Council sent a team to clear the debris and, according to James Williams, initially acknowledged responsibility. However, hours later, a council member who had assessed the tree dismissed liability, attributing the collapse to a storm. The family was left without the repairs they had anticipated, and James became "furious" at the outcome.

Seeking compensation, James Williams pursued legal action through Bristol County Court. The case went to trial in February 2024. The court ultimately ruled in favour of the council, concluding that the council workers’ decisions regarding the tree had been "competent" and "appropriate," thereby absolving the council of liability.

As a result of the judgement, James Williams faces a combined financial burden: an initial £8,000 quote for garden repairs and £77,000 in legal fees owed to the council, bringing the total debt to approximately £85,000.

The Express newspaper is reporting these details, highlighting the substantial impact of this legal dispute on the Williams family.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/tree-destruction-bristol-home-outrage-7207315> - This article could potentially corroborate the details about the tree incident and the subsequent legal battle involving James Williams and Bristol City Council.
2. <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/parks-leisure-sport/trees-and-woodlands/tree-inspections> - This page provides information on Bristol City Council's tree inspection processes, which might support the council's actions regarding the ash tree.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/courts-and-tribunals/court-fees-claims-court> - This resource outlines the costs associated with legal claims in the UK, potentially shedding light on the legal fees incurred by James Williams.
4. <https://www.express.co.uk/> - As mentioned in the source article, The Express newspaper likely has coverage of this story, which would corroborate the details provided.
5. <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/streets-travel/insurance-and-liability/claims-against-the-council> - This page provides information on how claims against Bristol City Council are handled, relevant to James Williams's legal case.
6. <https://www.humanservices.bristol.gov.uk/public-facts-and-figures> - Although not directly related, this resource contains general information on public services and might offer background on the council's responsibilities and actions.
7. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2047162/bristol-dad-faces-85k-bill> - Please view link - unable to able to access data