

The renovation program on Cours Colbert : What is the future for our trees?

Statement by Jacques Mamet, Mayor of Chalabre.

For the past few weeks, controversy has been brewing regarding the fate of the trees on Cours Colbert in light of the planned renovation work for our “Bastide”.

While a public meeting on this subject as well as the threatened closure of the post office has been announced for late August or early September (the date is yet to be finalized, though likely August 26 at 6:30 PM), it seems necessary now to explain how the work will be carried out.

We wish to be fully transparent and inform the public about the reasons leading us to make the painful decision to cut down all of the trees. Naturally, these trees will be replaced on a one-for-one basis with suitable species.

For your information, preliminary studies for the planned renovation work included a full assessment of all the trees along the avenue. This assessment is detailed in two reports: one concerning the 11 trees on the "odd-numbered" side (the butcher shop side), and the other concerning the 13 trees on the "even-numbered" side (the bakery/café side). These reports are attached to this statement and I invite you to consult them.

The conclusions regarding the 11 trees on the butcher shop side are quite drastic: *"...Retaining some of the plane trees on Cours Colbert—while laudable from a heritage perspective, now appears technically and ecologically risky. Redesigning the tree-lined area to incorporate new, sustainable plantings is a far better long-term option, regarding safety as well as the site's landscape and ecological quality..."*

As for the 13 trees on the other side, the conclusions are admittedly more nuanced but remain alarming enough to warrant basing our decision on the resulting recommendations: *"...The assessment of the plane trees on Cours Colbert reveals a generally concerning state of health for the majority of the trees..."* Many trees indeed exhibit major structural defects, notably large cavities accompanied by very little remaining sound wood.

These structural issues severely compromise their mechanical stability and make their behavior unpredictable or even inadequate when subjected to external stresses (such as wind, physical loads, or nearby construction work). Consequently, the risk to public safety becomes significant, particularly in a busy public area.

In addition to these reports, an engineer from the department responsible for the

"Tree Charter" visited the site to assess the situation. Following her visit, after hearing our arguments and observing firsthand the municipality's efforts regarding thoughtful greening, recommended the complete removal of the double row of trees, including the young plane trees.

She advises replacing the plane trees with species that are more resilient and better adapted to climate change. It is worth noting that the *Architecte des Bâtiments de France* (the official responsible for heritage sites), having been consulted due to the area's status as a "Remarkable Heritage Site," and has given the approval in principle for this change of species.

Finally, for the sake of completeness, we wish to inform you that the Prefect has granted approval (Order No. DDTM-SAFEB-UFCB-2025-160, received at the town hall on October 24, 2025)

and that the department aligning with its engineer's recommendation is awarding us a grant of just over €100,000.

We must therefore analyze the situation objectively, drawing on the reports and the engineer's advice as well as lessons learned from previous projects, all while maintaining an essential medium- and long-term perspective.

Lessons learned from previous projects:

Following the first phase of the work on Cours Joseph Raynaud, the department had one tree felled for safety reasons (located just in front of the café des Sports). As stump removal posed too high a risk, particularly regarding underground utility networks, the felled tree was replaced not with another tree alike, but with a pistachio tree. While the aesthetic result is pleasing, the expected necessary shade will not be achieved.

Following the recent engineering work, four trees on Cours Sully were identified by the departmental authorities as dangerous and requiring immediate felling. For the same reasons mentioned above, it is unlikely that these trees can be replaced by other trees.

Furthermore the young trees on Cours Colbert were poorly pruned during their early growth stages; this situation is irreversible. Since this issue was identified, the municipality's technical services manager has been applying a pruning method in close collaboration with the departmental authorities and the SMDA's arboricultural engineering office.

It is therefore appropriate to analyze the situation objectively, based on the reports and the opinion of the engineer, but also on the experience of previous work, all with

an essential medium and long term vision.

Considering all of the elements developed above, the complete reconfiguration of the tree-lined areas of Cours Colbert through qualitative redevelopment stands out as the most reasonable and sustainable solution.

The technical services, with advice from the department and the SMDA regarding the choice of species, carried out a simulation of what this requalification of the spaces could give (see attached photos). This result will not be immediate but should ultimately be satisfactory. Shades will be installed upon completion of the work and for the duration of the summer period, in order to alleviate the lack of natural shade.

Like most of the residents of our dear village and members of the municipal team, I grew up in the shade of these century-old trees, they are familiar to us as they have always been part of our landscape and our history. The decision is not easy to make and we must assume this responsibility. Issues related to the safety of our fellow citizens and environmental issues are not mutually exclusive. The choice made respects one as much as the other so that Chalabre lives in harmony.