



Frances Martin
Executive Director for
Economic Growth and
Neighbourhood Services

Civic Centre, Reading, RG1 2LU
☎ 0118 937 3787

Mr. Jonathan Smith
Big Heart Tree Care
1 Thorney House
Drake Way
Reading
Berkshire
RG2 0GZ

Our Ref: 220163/TPO
Your Ref:

Direct: ☎01189 372440
Email: sarah.hanson@reading.gov.uk

14th April 2022

Your contact is: Sarah Hanson, Planning & Building Control

Dear Mr. Smith,

**RE: PROPOSED WORKS TO A SYCAMORE TREE AT 38 FAIRFAX CLOSE CAVERSHAM
READING RG4 6DA- T2 OF TREE PRESERVATION ORDER NUMBER 85/09**

Thank you for your application of 7th February 2022 regarding the above. May I firstly apologise for the time it has taken for you to receive a response to your application.

You have applied to reduce the Sycamore within the garden of 38 Fairfax Close by 2-3 metres and to remove the epicormic shoots from the lower canopy of the tree. The reason given for the works are that the client considers the tree to be '*overpowering*' and that the tree has shed some branches onto neighbours shed. The works are proposed to '*reduce wind loading and allow some lower light to the garden*'. The extent of the reduction has been determined by the fact there is no room to get a cherry picker into the garden and it would not be possible to carry out a lesser reduction by climbing the tree.

The Council's Tree Officer visited the property to view the tree on 8th April 2022. At the meeting the client indicated that previous consent had been granted for a reduction of the tree. I have now had the opportunity to review the previous works history and not found any previous applications to carry out works to the tree under the TPO. The only previous works were permitted in 2002 and this was to lightly raise the lower canopy of the tree around the time that the Fairfax Road development was built.

With that in mind there is no precedent in place for managing the tree in a reduced form. This is a mature Sycamore with a large trunk and full canopy. The tree has some historic wounding around the base, but this damage appears to be well-compartmentalised and there is no audible decay or visual evidence of decay at the time of the Council's visit.

The proposed reduction of 2-3 metres of the entire canopy and removal of the epicormic shoots is significant in terms of tree health and is likely to weaken the tree due to the removal of most of the leaf-bearing area. Crown reductions disrupt the flow of plant hormones created in the branch tips, thus reducing the overall health and vigour of trees by removing the energy stored in the severed branches. Following the work, the tree would need to expend more energy sealing the pruning cuts to prevent the spread of decay pathogens and to replace the lost foliage and photosynthetic area.

The Sycamore has a high canopy beneath which it has grown some mature adventitious (epicormic) shoots from the trunk. These shoots are a tree's response to various stress triggers such as age and environment (drought, pruning, root damage etc) and they serve to increase the tree's resilience by creating additional photosynthetic area and increasing the draw of nutrients up the tree. The epicormic shoots are frequently described by arborists as the tree's 'retirement fund' and removing them on this occasion would cause significant additional stress to the tree.

The British Standard BS3998: 2010, Tree work - Recommendations, specifically Sections 7.7.1, Paragraphs 2 and 3, with regard to crown reduction, states that: *'Following a reduction, there should still be a strong framework of healthy small-diameter branches and twigs (leaf-bearing structure), capable of producing dense leaf cover during the following growing season'*.

Aside from the epicormic growth, the tree has few new shoots in the inner or lower canopy therefore the proposed reduction would therefore remove most growth tips from the tree's canopy. As all visible health indicators currently show that the tree has low vitality, the tree is not expected to respond favourably to the proposed reduction works. The tree will struggle to replace the lost photosynthetic area and may go into decline, ultimately resulting in the early loss of this significant protected tree.

The proposed reduction T1 Sycamore is, for the reasons given, considered to be potentially harmful to an otherwise healthy and significant protected tree contrary to good arboricultural practices therefore your application is refused.

If a reduction is required to alleviate biomechanical stress by reducing the leverage and sail area of the tree, more specific information is required as to which branches require reduction and the reasons for works. If there is concern over the health and safety of this tree, I recommend a tree survey by a certified arborist is undertaken to provide clear evidence as to the tree's health, and any health and safety issues associated with regards to a justification for further tree works, if required.

Lesser works have been consented to in the second half of this letter, which will allow for the reduction of an over-extended lateral branch on the east side of the canopy and remove the dead and dangerous branches from the tree. These works are intended to remove identified hazards from the tree whilst retaining the health and amenity value the tree currently provides.

I can confirm that the following works to the Sycamore, are approved subject to the conditions below:

Approved Tree Works

Sycamore (T1 of application; T2 of TPO)

- Reduce over-extended lateral branch on eastern side of canopy by approximately 1-2m to reduce leverage and wind loading (please refer to annotated Photo 1 below).
- Crown clean removing any dead, dangerous, split, damaged, diseased or dysfunctional branches from within the tree's canopy.

Please note: In all cases, cuts should be made to the nearest suitable reduction points and graded where necessary to leave a natural-looking canopy shape

Conditions relating to the approved works

1. All tree surgery shall be in accordance with BS 3998: (2010) Tree Work - Recommendations.

Reason: To ensure that all works are carried out in an acceptable arboricultural manner

2. The approved canopy reduction shall be undertaken in mid-late Summer (July - September) when the tree's energy reserves are at their height or during the Winter months of December - January during the period of dormancy.

Reason: Taking into account the tree's phenological cycle and in order to avoid any unnecessary detriment to the tree as a result of the pruning work.

3. Climbing spikes shall not be used whilst undertaking any form of works on living trees, except on trees to be felled.

Reason: Spikes can cause extensive long-term damage

4. Crown cleaning should not include the removal of fused natural braces (branches or stems), or the removal of entwining branches or rubbing branches (where they may be forming a natural brace) from the crown of a semi-mature to fully mature tree without carrying out an assessment of any junctions formed below such natural braces.

Reason: Removal of natural braces may lead to failure of weak unions.

Informatives

1. You are advised that, in accordance with Part 4, 17 (4) of The Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation)(England) Regulations 2012, this decision is valid for one pruning operation (as per the approved specifications) to be undertaken within two years from the date of this notice, after which the consent lapses and a new application will be required.

2. Removal of dead or dangerous wood: This does not require the formal consent of the Council. However written notice must be given 5 working days in advance of removing dead wood. Where a branch is deemed to be 'dangerous', i.e. where works are 'urgently necessary to remove an immediate risk of serious harm', you are required to give notice to the Council 'as soon as practicable after the works become necessary'.

3. Disturbance of wildlife: It is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as

amended) to disturb roosting bats or nesting birds. It is advisable to consult your tree surgeon/consultant to agree an acceptable time for carrying out any work. Wildlife and habitat controls are administered by Natural England who can be contacted on 0300 030 6000

If you are aggrieved by the refusal of consent to reduce the full canopy of the Sycamore tree as per your application, or against any of the conditions attached to your consent, you may appeal to The Planning Inspectorate (PINS). Because of coronavirus (COVID-19), you currently can only make a planning appeal online. You cannot currently apply by post. For more information go to:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tree-preservation-order-appeal-form>

Telephone: 0303 444 5570 or e-mail it to:
treeandhedgeappeals@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Your appeal should be received within one month of receipt of this decision or any such longer period as the Planning Inspectorate may allow.

If you suffer any loss or damage as a result of this refusal of consent, you may be entitled to recover compensation from the Council. If you wish to make a claim you must do so within 12 months from the date of this decision (or, if you appeal to the Secretary of State, within 12 months from the date of his decision). Claims should be made in writing to the Insurance Section, Reading Borough Council, Civic Centre, Bridge Street, Reading, RG1 2LU.

If you require any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me on the above number.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Hanson

Sarah Hanson
Natural Environment Officer

cc. Ms. Jane Hall, 38 Fairfax Close, Caversham, Reading RG4 6DA



Photo 1. Indicative line of approved reduction on east side of canopy to reduce the leverage and sail area of these branches