

Mr J Smith
Big Heart Tree Care
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29 April 2022

Your contact is:

Sarah Hanson, Planning

Dear Mr Smith,

RE: PROPOSED WORKS TO A BEECH TREE AT 1 QUEENSBOROUGH DRIVE, CAVERSHAM, READING - SUBJECT TO TREE PRESERVATION ORDER NUMBER 67/004.

Thank you for your application dated 18 March 2022, regarding the above.

You have applied for consent to carry out an overall crown reduction by 1 metre, crown thin by 20% and crown lift to 5.5m above ground level through 360° to improve light, reduced wind loading and make the street light more effective.

I have noted that a previous application (191823) to reduce the canopy of the same tree by 2m was refused. The reasons given in the decision letter for this application were that the proposed reduction would remove a significant volume of the tree's canopy and therefore would have a detrimental impact on the tree's health, with multiple pruning points being created, each an entry point for pathogens. The council identified that following this initial reduction, the work would need to be repeated on a regular cycle, each time creating new wounds and resulting in a permanent reduction of the tree's stature and wider amenity value.

An officer visited the property to view the tree on Wednesday 16th February 2022 (to assess a previous, withdrawn application) and found the tree to be in a good condition and of high amenity value. The proposed pruning works in this current application equate to a very small reduction of the tree's outer canopy which would reduce a number of overextended lateral branch tips.

The pruning cuts created by the reduction would be small and would not set a precedent for permitting further reductions of the tree's canopy in the future. If undertaken correctly, it is reasonable to conclude that the proposed works would not cause significant harm to the health or wider amenity value of the tree.

Given the very small extent of the proposed reduction it is difficult to see how the proposed canopy reduction would have any marked improvement in the light issues you are seeking to alleviate. However, as the 1m reduction would not cause harm to the health or wider amenity of the tree, I have concluded that it would be unreasonable to refuse your application on these grounds.

Please be aware that a strict 1m reduction of a mature tree of this stature is impossible to achieve by traditional climbing with ropes and harness. The arborist cannot reach these very outer branch tips and therefore can be tempted to make cuts further into the canopy than that which you have applied for. It is essential therefore, that should you wish to proceed with the approved minor reduction works, that it is only carried out by a tree surgeon working from a mobile elevated work platform (MEWP) (please note the requirements of Condition 1).

You are advised that this consent does not imply that further or repeat reductions to the tree's canopy will be permitted. Any future applications to carry out works to the tree will be considered on its merits taking into account the health and condition of the tree at the time of application.

The proposed crown lift is deemed reasonable to allow more light under the canopy and to ensure clearance from the street light.

In relation to your reference to wind loading and the proposed crown thinning, this is not deemed to be acceptable. BS:3998 states (7.5) that *'If the objective is to lessen the overall loading on a defective branch or stem, crown reduction and reshaping should be chosen in preference to crown thinning'* - further cautionary advice is given in Note 1. Advice in 7.7.1 states: *'Due to its potentially negative effects, crown reduction should not usually be carried out in addition to other crown pruning operations, which would add to the amount of wounding and leaf loss'* with Note 1 stating: *'although crown reduction should not be combined with systematic crown thinning, it often entails some degree of thinning due to the selective removal of branches at their point or origin'*. **The proposed thinning therefore goes against good arboricultural practice and is thus refused.**

I can confirm that the following proposed works, as detailed in your application, are approved subject to the conditions below:

Approved Tree Works:

T1 - Beech

- 360° Canopy reduction of 1m (to nearest suitable reduction point)
 - Raise crown to create 5.5m canopy clearance above ground level.
- (Please note the requirement of Condition 1)

Conditions

1. Pruning works shall only be carried out by operatives working from a MEWP (mobile elevated works platform) in accordance with HSE Leaflet AFAG403 leaflet safe working practices.

Reason: To ensure that the canopy reduction is undertaken to a high professional standard and does not exceed the permitted pruning works.

2. Five days' notice in writing shall be given to the Council prior to undertaking the approved works.

Reason: To ensure that the Local Planning Authority is given sufficient notice of the works to enable the effective monitoring of tree work within the Borough.

3. All tree surgery shall be in accordance with BS 3998: (2010) Tree Work - Recommendations. Pruning cuts will not exceed 100mm diameter.
Reason: To ensure that all works are carried out in an acceptable arboricultural manner
4. The approved canopy reduction shall be undertaken in mid-late Summer (June - September) when the tree's energy reserves are at their height or during the Winter months of December - February 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.
5. 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 to trees.

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 Council's refusal to allow the proposed crown thinning or by any of the conditions attached to the consented works, 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 your client suffers any loss or damage as a result of this refusal of consent, they may be entitled to recover compensation from the Council. If they wish to make a claim they must do so within 12 months from the date of this decision (or, if they 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.

Please ensure you provide a copy of this decision to your client without undue delay.

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