



Frances Martin  
Executive Director for  
Economic Growth and  
Neighbourhood Services

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

Mr S Greener  
Environmental Services  
Unit 4 Linnet Court  
Hawfinch Drive  
Cawledge Business Park  
Alnwick  
NE66 2GD

Our Ref: 201079/TPO  
Your Ref:

Direct: ☎01189 372440  
Email: [sarah.hanson@reading.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.hanson@reading.gov.uk)

11 January 2021

Your contact is: Sarah Hanson, Planning & Building Control

Dear Mr Greener

**RE: PROPOSED WORKS FELLING OF ONE BEECH TREE AT READING NATIONAL SPIRITUALIST CHURCH, 81 BAKER STREET, READING - SUBJECT TO TREE PRESERVATION ORDER NUMBER 13/20 (PREVIOUSLY 4/20).**

Thank you for your application of 27 July 2020 regarding the above. Your application was supported by the following documents:

Arboricultural Report dated 14/1/20

Root Identification Report dated 3/2/20

Soil Analysis Report dated 13/2/20

Engineers Addendum report dated 3/7/20

Crack Monitoring report dated 23/6/20 (July, Oct & Dec 2020 results subsequently provided)

Level Monitoring report dated 23/6/20 (July, Oct & Dec 2020 results subsequently provided)

Drain investigation Report dated 29/1/20

Geotechnical report dated 13/2/20

As you will be aware, the felling of the tree was previously not agreed when a Section 211 Notice was submitted in April last year (ref 200527), hence a TPO was served. A site visit was carried out at that time by me and our consultant engineers, Subtilis Consulting. We have taken evidence obtained during that visit along with that contained in the above submissions in order to assess the proposed felling of the Beech.

The Engineers Addendum Report describes the 'Nature of the damage' as *Diagonal cracking both internally and externally*, and the 'Indicated Mechanism of Movement' as *Downward and outward rotational movement*. The author concludes that: *'Following my review of the damage and subsequent geotechnical, arboriculture investigation reports and accurate level monitoring readings I confirm that the cause of the movement to this property is directly related to the seasonal water demands of the nearby Copper Beech tree causing clay shrinkage subsidence'*.

The results of the soil analysis tests confirm that the modified plasticity index of the soil is between 22 and 26, i.e. a soil with a medium volume change potential. From this, it is agreed that the soil has the potential to be impacted by adjacent vegetation hence the building could potentially be affected by vegetation related subsidence.

It is acknowledged that the Root Identification Report found the presence of live *Fagus* (Beech) roots in TP/BH 1 at the front of the property, deeper than foundation depth, and that the tree is within the zone of influence.

In relation to the crack monitoring, this showed very slight closure and opening to monitor station C1 (within a range of around 1mm) and very little movement and a widening of the crack over the summer (again around 1mm) to station C2 - this would fall under Category 1 damage, based on BRE Classification of damage, i.e. fine cracks which can be easily treated using normal decoration. The slight movement and opening up recorded to the crack monitor may be indicative of seasonal movement although it is noted that no corresponding closure of the cracking damage has been recorded during the winter of 2019-2020 and nor 2020-2021. The pattern of cracking damage suggests that the maximum amount of movement is towards the centre of the lobby area of the church rather than the external front wall and is not typical of that relating to clay shrinkage subsidence exacerbated by roots from the Beech tree. A pattern of cracking damage would be expected to show rotation towards the tree rather than, in this case, away from the tree and towards the middle of the lobby area. It is understood from the reports provided that the damage was recorded in March 2019. This is unusual in terms of clay shrinkage subsidence whereby damage normally appears following a period of extended dry weather and towards the end of the growing season - this occurs during June and October. For the damage to occur during a winter period, this would initially suggest a non-clay shrinkage related cause. The monitoring being undertaken to the cracking located to the front of the church (either side of the steps) shows no pattern of movement and with negligible magnitude of movement. If the tree was having a significant effect on the movement of the building since March 2019 then one would expect a pattern of recovery or closure up until around April / May and then a gradual widening thereon. No movement of any significance has been recorded since January last year.

In relation to Level Monitoring, Monitor No. 4 located centrally along the front elevation

of the building shows a slight progressive pattern of movement. Between January and February of this year the level monitoring shows downward movement of 2mm followed by a short period of stability followed by further downward movement of around 1.5mm (maximum total of around 3.5mm) to July, remaining stable until October, followed by upward movement of around 1.5mm to December. This pattern of progressive movement since January is not considered to be related to clay shrinkage subsidence. Where a substantial tree is identified as causing seasonal damage to a property then a pattern of upward movement would be expected between January and April / May followed by downward movement thereafter. In addition, the magnitude of movement recorded on the level monitoring would not give rise to concern in respect of structural movement to the property. The range of movement (the majority being within 1.5mm and only one station showing movement of 3.5mm) is well within that expected for a property built on clay irrespective of whether vegetation exists. One would normally expect level monitoring to show movements of a greater range before consideration is given to whether this will have a structural effect on the property.

It is acknowledged that movement is occurring and it can be appreciated why one might initially implicate the tree given its proximity, presence of roots and soil type. However, looking carefully at the crack and level monitoring and pattern of movement it is not considered reasonable to conclude that the Beech tree is the primary or major contributory factor to the damage occurring hence its removal, and the resulting loss of significant amenity to the locality, is not justified. Consideration could be given to a reduction of Beech tree (subject to a new tree works application) but this would only be considered to minimise the potential for influence in the future and not because it is agreed that the Beech is responsible for the current damage. Should further damage and further, more conclusive evidence be provided in the future, we will assess that on its merits at that time - it is assumed that monitoring will continue, particularly if other vegetation is removed.

I note that the Arboricultural report recommends the removal of G2 cypress, and this would be looked upon favourably if a Section 211 Notice were submitted for this work. Other recommendations are for future maintenance to keep vegetation at its current size and Section 211 Notices will be required for those works as/when.

In conclusion, the proposed felling of the Beech tree is refused. If you wish to appeal against the Council's decision on this matter, please contact the Planning Inspectorate within 28 days of receipt of this letter to obtain the relevant forms:

The Environment Appeals Team, Trees and Hedges, The Planning Inspectorate, Room 3/25, Hawk Wing, Temple Quay House, 2 The Square, Temple Quay, Bristol, BS1 6PN

Email: [environment.appeals@pins.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:environment.appeals@pins.gsi.gov.uk)

Tel: 0303 444 5584

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 Offices, 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