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Mr N Wilson
Beechwood Tree Care Ltd
2 Playhatch Farm Cottages
Playhatch
RG4 9QX

Our Ref: 210201/TPO
Your Ref:

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

14 April 2021

Your contact is: Sarah Hanson, Planning & Building Control

Dear Mr Wilson

RE: PROPOSED FELLING OF ONE LIME TREE AT 11 RIDGE HALL CLOSE, READING - T14 OF TREE PRESERVATION ORDER NUMBER 2/09.

Thank you for your application of 8 February 2021 regarding the above. I apologise again for the delay in responding (9 days over the 8-week target date), which is due to current exceptionally high workload levels.

In support of the application to fell you have provided the following:

- Specification document from Beechwood Tree Care Ltd
- HomeServe Job Completion Report relating to a drainage issue in April 2017
- A quote for decoration to the garage from Chris Lewington dated 12/09/20 following leakage of the flat garage roof (no cause stated)
- A quote for decoration to the entrance hall from Chris Lewington dated 19/06/20 following leakage of the flat roof (no cause stated)
- Location plan, including proposed replanting site (for another Lime)
- Three photographs: Photo 1 of the whole tree in relation to the house, photo 2 of a broken off, live branch laying on the porch roof and photo 3 of branch debris on the driveway
- Email of 11 February 2021 from Neil Wilson confirming no concerns about the structural stability of the tree.

As you are aware, I visited the site on 1 October 2020 and spoke to Mr Burcham following his application to fell (ref 200596) which was subsequently withdrawn, to be replaced by this current application. I am therefore familiar with the tree and have spoken directly to Mr Burcham about his concerns.

The mature Lime tree is in good condition - no arboricultural evidence has been provided to justify it's felling on arboricultural grounds. The proposed felling is requested as a result of previous nuisance and damage caused by the tree and concerns over the potential for further damage to people and/or property. The tree is a prominent feature in the road, highly visible therefore providing a high degree of amenity value and is one of many trees retained when Ridge Hall Close was built which collectively contribute to the treed character of the area. When considering applications to fell, the reasons put forward to support the felling should outweigh the amenity value lost as a result of felling, i.e. on balance felling should be justified.

The documents provided contain a number of issues, which I will address below, most being commonly experienced issues across the Borough, but with the degree of nuisance experienced on this site being explained.

In your specification document you state (point 1) that two sizeable branches (no dimensions given) have dropped in the last 12 months, one being dead, the other live. As you will appreciate, trees do drop branches naturally, however in this case it is appropriate to consider previous tree management. The last application for the tree (prior to the withdrawn 200596) was a proposal to reduce the tree in 2016 (ref 160840) - this application was never valid hence not processed. Prior to that, an application was approved in 2010 (ref 10/01511/TPO / 100809). There is no evidence through those applications or from speaking to Mr Burcham that the tree has been professionally inspected in that time. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that some branch failures, particularly of dead wood, could have been prevented if the tree had been under appropriate inspection and management regimes; the removal of deadwood not requiring formal permission hence could have been / can be done as and when required. As such, it is difficult to place too much weight on past failures, alone, in justifying the tree's removal.

In relation to drainage (mentioned in point 4 of your specification document), I note the contents of the Homeserve report from 2017. The report states:

'Line from downstairs toilet blocked between toilet and manhole. Rodded upstream to clear blockage, suspected root ingress from tree right next to line causing issues as I pulled out some roots with blockage. Flow restored. Phoned HCM, spoke to Adam Ext 71871 to arrange follow on for drainage se with camera to check line and possible root cut.'

I have not been provided with information on any follow-up (as suggested above) nor have I been made aware of any issues in the last 4 years hence I assume drainage issues have not arisen again. As such, again, it is difficult to place much weight on this point particularly as drains can be repaired / lined to prevent root ingress, hence there are alternatives to tree felling as a resolution.

In relation to roots lifting the surface of the drive (also mentioned in point 4), this is not unexpected with surfacing of minimal construction, with the block paving used being particularly unforgiving to the impact of root activity, i.e. there is no flexibility in the surfacing without causing an uneven surface where roots are present. This is a well cited

concern for tree owners and is not accepted as a reason, alone, for felling a high amenity tree, particularly when alternative surfacing options are available.

Point 5 of your document refers to nuisance issues - leaf litter etc into gutters and honey dew drop onto the driveway and cars. It is accepted that these are inconvenient, but they are a natural consequence of living close to trees and are not, alone, reasons to fell a protected tree and would set an unwelcome precedent for other felling applications for the same reason.

I note the concern about light levels in point 6 of your document, particularly in relation to the ability to install solar panels. You state: *'The felling will allow more light into the garden/property and allow the owners to install solar panels which at present despite having south facing property they are unable to do as the trees blocks the light to the roof'*. However, the property (front of house) faces west, with the tree located west of the house and the pitch of the roof inclined to the west and east. Assuming it is viable to install solar panels on the roof (not south facing), the tree will, I accept, block light in the latter part of the day, but equally, will not block the panels for the first half of the day (roughly), especially if they are installed on the east facing pitched roof. The desire to install solar panels is understandable, both for financial reasons (to save on the cost of electricity) and to generate 'green energy' which is better for the environment. It is of course counterproductive to fell trees for the latter reason given the considerable environmental benefits they provide.

A number of the points (2, 3 & 9) in your document relate to the future threat posed by the tree. You are correct in that the tree (road itself) is located on top of an escarpment and that this could result in greater exposure to branch breakage from the wind. However, the Lime is one of numerous tall trees within the road, taller than surrounding buildings, which are also arguably exposed to those wind forces. It would not be reasonable to remove all such trees as the resulting detrimental impact on the amenity of the locality would be substantial. It is difficult to appreciate how this particular tree is so exposed as to warrant its removal, whilst not at the same time accepting that all surrounding trees pose an unacceptable threat. In note your replacement Lime tree location is also on the front garden hence is proposed in a location which you claim to be unsuitable.

In point 7 of your document, you state: *'The area has plenty of tree cover and therefore any loss of visual amenity will be minimal, added to which the owner is happy to replant a new Lime tree in a more suitable location, which will provide visual amenity as it grows and develops'*. It is agreed that the area is well treed, which gives it its character. If viewed from considerably lower ground, for example, on Thames Prom, south of the river, it could be argued that the Lime forms part of the overall tree coverage whose felling would not be noticed. However, it is very different from the immediate locality; the tree standing out clearly as an individual when viewed within the close and from Upper Warren Avenue (junction with Ridge Hall Close). As such I do not agree that the loss of visual amenity will be minimal, regardless of other trees. One has to question, at what level of tree loss (overall), the felling of a tree in this locality would not be considered minimal hence it is appropriate to consider the tree as an individual. Any replacement would take

many decades to replace the amenity, and environmental benefit, lost from the felling of the Lime.

In response to point 10 of your document, it would certainly have been beneficial for the house to have been built further from the tree, however it was constructed in an era (1960s I believe) where consideration of distances between trees and houses were not thought-out as they are now, i.e. to try and minimise future conflict. However, we have to consider the situation as it is, and the reasons put forward in support of the felling.

I acknowledge that overall, the tree and its nuisance issues will be a cause for concern. In terms of addressing potential threats from the tree, I would suggest that these could be reduced to an acceptable level through regular tree inspections and implementation of required works (subject to consent). You may also wish to consider advising Mr Burcham on whether a sympathetic reduction could be achieved to alleviate your concerns about the wind forces you mention. It is unfortunate that building insurers take a negative view of trees generally, but I would hope that evidence of Mr Burcham meeting his 'duty of care' by having regular inspections would placate them to some degree.

We are not, as a Council, ignorant to, or unsympathetic to, the fears and nuisance caused by trees - as an urban borough we deal with these concerns on a regular basis. However, it is the role of Officers to take the wider view and a balanced view in determining applications to fell. In taking that balanced view we also have to be mindful of the Council's climate emergency declaration and the contributions trees make to mitigating climate change, along with the aims of our newly adopted second Tree Strategy, Biodiversity Action Plan and Climate Emergency Strategy. Taking these into account, the responses provided above and the amenity that would be lost if the Lime was felled, its felling is not considered to be acceptable.

In conclusion, the proposed felling of the Lime 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:

Trees and Hedges

Room 3A Eagle Wing, Temple Quay House

2 The Square

Temple Quay

Bristol

BS1 6PN

Telephone: 0303 444 5570

or e-mail: treeandhedgeappeals@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Appeal information can be found at: [Tree Preservation Orders and trees in conservation areas - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

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

C.c. Mr P Burcham, 11 Ridge Hall Close