

Berkshire Corporate,
71 Shelton Street,
Covent Garden,
London,
WC2H 9JQ

Date: 13 November 2020

Your ref:

My ref 20/089

FAO Jay Chauhan

By e mail

Dear Sirs,

Ash tree to the rear of no.180 Wantage Road, Reading, RG30 2SJ

1. Further to your recent instructions I hope this short report is helpful. You have asked me to review the available information and to provide my opinion on the condition and life expectancy of the ash tree growing in the rear garden of no.182, next to the west side of no.180.
2. I have been provided with:
 - Report and constraints plan prepared by Julian Wilkes, 30 July 2020
 - Photograph of the tree's crown taken on 29 July 2020
 - Proposed layout in AutoCAD .dwg format provided by Berkshire Corporate.
 - Proposed layouts showing approved landscaping and one with the tree located accurately relative to the proposed building.
3. I have not been to the site but have viewed the tree on online street view images from July 2019

The tree

4. The online street view images taken in June 2019 show a well-established ash tree with a slight lean and one sided crown. Its appearance is consistent with the description and dimensions in Mr Wilkes' report. The branch structure suggests that it might have been topped or broken at 4 - 5m when younger and grown on, but the images are not clear enough to be certain.
5. In the 2019 image some of the upper foliage is slightly sparse, but looks reasonably healthy otherwise. In contrast Mr Wilkes' photograph taken a year later, shows significant die back of younger twigs and foliage in the upper crown, with scattered new shoots, highly characteristic of trees with advanced ash die-back. For this reason Mr Wilkes classified the tree as Category U as per British Standard 5837:2012, trees in relation to design, demolition and construction.

Proposal

6. This is shown on the Berkshire Corporate drawings and is to demolish the existing garage and build a new house at the far end of the rear garden. The back of the house is in about the same place as the garage, but it is about 1m in from the boundary with no.182, with a path between the wall and the fence. The tree has been plotted precisely and the trunk is 3550mm from the corner of the house.

Discussion

Effect of the proposal

7. A single trunked tree's root protection area (RPA) has an area equivalent to a circle with a radius 12 times the trunk diameter at 1.5m above ground. The 12x figure is not based on any research, but is intended to safeguard enough rooting space for the tree's current and future needs. Assuming a trunk diameter of 350mm this tree has an RPA circle 4.2m in diameter, with an area of 55.5m². The corner of the proposed house occupies 0.53m² or just under 1% of the RPA. That is insignificant, even if the tree is retained for the time being, particularly as this is at the edge of the RPA circle, well away from the trunk.
8. The path takes up about 6m² or 10.8% of the RPA area, but the nearest point is 2.4m from the tree, beyond where any structural roots will be present. It is a lightweight structure that can be laid using no-dig methods and a permeable surface to minimize any effects on the roots, if the tree is retained.
9. This is small scale project and the tree is in an adjacent site with no access, so it is not unduly vulnerable to any indirect or incidental harm, such as soil compaction, contamination or vehicle impacts. It can be safeguarded with some basic protective measures as described in BS5837.

Condition of the tree

10. The photographs of the tree show some sparse upper foliage in July 2019, but by July 2020 its condition had worsened significantly. This is typical of ash die-back, which is rapidly becoming more widespread and indicates that the tree's life expectancy is severely limited. Although I have not been to the site to inspect this tree I believe that Mr Wilke's assessment is accurate and that it is likely to die within the next 1 - 2 years.

Summary

11. The tree has highly characteristic signs of ash die-back, so its life expectancy is severely limited, probably 1 - 2 years, so it is Category U as defined in BS5837.
12. The new house can be built without adversely affecting the tree so, if retained for the time being, it can be safeguarded with some basic protective measures and its limited life expectancy is irrelevant to the proposal.
13. The tree belongs to a neighbour, so there is no control over it but, in the light of the points above, that is also irrelevant to the proposal.
14. I hope this is helpful but if you have any queries or wish to discuss the matter further please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Pryce

Simon Pryce

