

Mr C Ball
9 Wychcotes
Caversham
Reading
Berkshire
RG4 7DA

Our Ref: 171511/TPO
Your Ref:

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5 October 2017

Your contact is:

Sarah Hanson, Planning & Building Control

Dear Mr Ball,

RE: APPLICATION TO FELL ONE CEDAR AT 9 WYCHCOTES - T6 OF TREE PRESERVATION ORDER NUMBER 63/03

Thank you for your application dated 29 August 2017 regarding the above and the supporting report by Tamla Trees dated 11th July 2017.

Your application follows an earlier application (ref: 170443) to remove the two large branches (limbs) which were identified as the eastern upright and western low limbs plus one high western limb from the Cedar. The removal of the two larger limbs was proposed as a means of reducing the risk of branch failure following a major branch failure during high winds.

The Borough Council concluded that the removal of the two large lower branches would not make the tree any safer. On the contrary the removal of these two sizeable branches could be detrimental to the long term health and stability of the tree. For this reason application 170443 was refused on 6th April 2017. Consent was granted for lesser works to carry out an overall reduction of a maximum of 2 metres, ensuring that no more than one third of the foliage is removed from each individual branch. The approved work includes the removal of one low lateral branch overhanging the garden of No. 9 (added to the original application).

This current application (ref. 171511) was submitted on 29th August 2017 to fell T6 (Cedar). I have read through your application in detail and the accompanying report by Tamla Trees. As one of the points raised in the tree report is the perceived low amenity of the tree I have also reviewed the tree from the surrounding area to make an assessment of the tree's amenity value.

Your arboricultural consultant Keiron Hart has undertaken a detailed inspection of the

tree. He has noted the trunk of the tree to be in a satisfactory condition. He has identified that the previous branch failure was the result of a tear in the branch rather than the failure of a branch union and concluded that this is likely to be the result of exposure to strong winds. He noted that the shedding of branches from mature Cedars is not uncommon.

Mr Hart has also reviewed the risk associated with the tree and concluded it to be in a 'high risk zone'. The Borough Council agrees with this assessment. Reading is a densely populated urban area and many of the trees which enhance the Reading landscape can be considered to also fall within 'high risk zones'.

With regards to the appropriate pruning work, Mr Hart agrees with the Council's assessment that the removal of the two large limbs from the Cedar would not be effective management at this time. In addition, he has identified (6.15) that the architecture of Cedar trees is less tolerable of canopy reduction work and that the reduction of the canopy as permitted would *'reduce the level of tensile stresses on the remaining branches but relative to the actual weight of the branches which will remain, I would consider this approach unlikely to remove significantly the risk of further failure events'*. I find this statement misleading.

The branch which failed was strongly upright in form and it is accepted that this failed under tensile pressure in high winds. The remaining side branch following the branch failure is also upright in form. Mr Hart recognises (6.13) the advice on crown reduction given in BS3998 (2010), Section 7.7, which notes that *'Crown reduction alleviates biomechanical stress by reducing both the leverage and the sail area of the tree'*. The outcome of the approved work specification would be to reduce the sail area of the tree and thus the wind loading on the tree's canopy in high winds.

Having now had the opportunity to view the upper canopy of the tree from the opposite side of the river, it is apparent that many of the upper smaller branches of the tree are also growing vertically. Such growth pattern is consistent with the tree having been reduced in the past and the regrowth resuming apical dominance. This denser more upright foliage increases the wind sail area of the tree which could be addressed by the moderate pruning works permitted; works which you confirmed are to take place on 16 October 2017.

Having viewed the tree in wider views from Thames Side Promenade, I note that the upper canopy sits notably above the height of the surrounding deciduous tree cover and is subject to greater wind loading. A relatively small reduction in canopy height and breadth will have a significant reduction in the sail area and wind loading on the upper canopy. The lateral branches have strong upward growth. The issue here is not so much the weight of the branches as the wind loading and exposure to prevailing winds.

D. Lonsdale advises that "crown reduction, involves only the outer part of the crown and therefore provides only a modest reduction in overall height (i.e. the level arm of the tree). This combined with the accompanying decrease in sail area is often sufficient to mitigate all but the most severe types of hazard.¹"

¹ D. Lonsdale (1999) *Principles of Tree Hazard, Assessment and Management*

The overall reduction of 2m permitted in your application 171443 would include a reduction of the upright branches which currently protrude above the adjacent trees back to the height similar to those of the surrounding cedars. This would create small pruning cuts but allow for a high proportion of the foliage bearing structure to be retained. Given the age of the tree, vigorous or strongly vertical regrowth is not considered to be a likely outcome following this work.



Figure 1 - View from Thames Promenade

The Borough Council strongly refutes the claim by Mr Hart that the Borough Council has a '*preservation at all costs*' attitude to tree management. Reading is a historic town which benefits greatly from a large mature tree stock which links back to the town's industrial past. Naturally some trees will outlive their safe life expectancy at which point, when there is evidence to demonstrate the tree as being structurally unsound, consent will be granted to remove the tree and replacement planting enforced. By this means the Borough Council has a fairly staggered age of tree stock which will ensure sustainable tree cover in the Borough for the coming generations.

Mr. Hart has put much emphasis on the limited wider amenity of the tree in views from the adjacent public footpath and as seen behind the adjacent Cedars within Wychcotes. As part of our assessment of tree amenity, the Borough Council will consider the importance of the wider tree scape. After all, felling low amenity trees within woodland, for example, would eventually change the quality and character of the woodland regardless of the perceived low amenity of the individual trees within it.

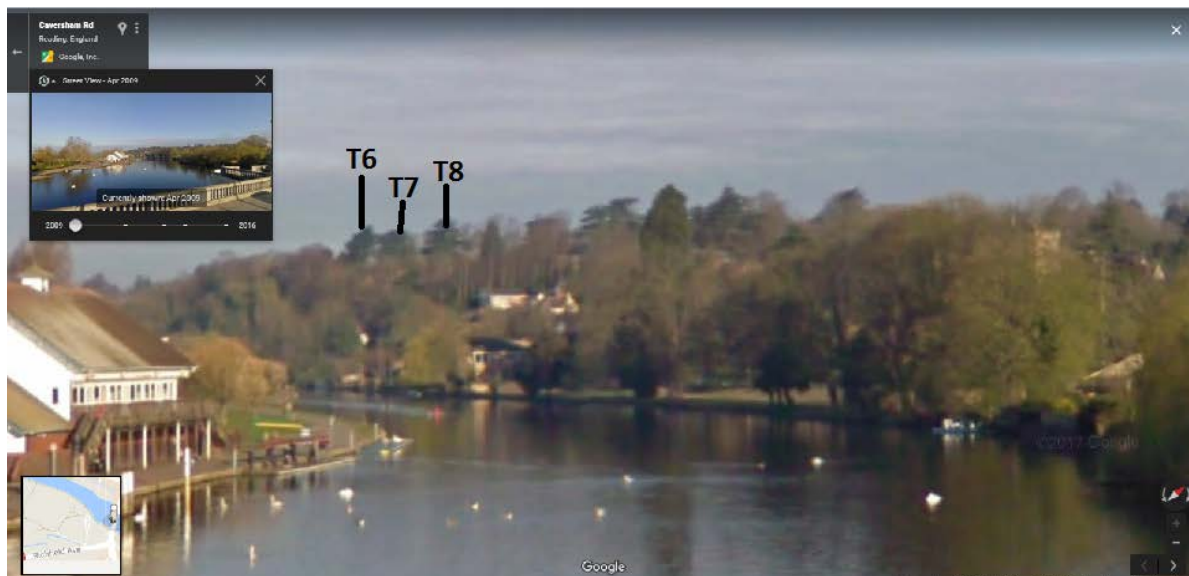
Wychcotes is set on a raised wooded escarpment which rises up from the northern side on the Thames. The Warren Escarpment is a designated Major Landscape Feature in the Borough with all trees contributing to the amenity provided by this feature. It is therefore not appropriate to limit amenity evaluation of this tree to views from within Wychcotes or from The Warren (at the bottom of the escarpment).

On the far (southern side) of the Thames is the well-trod Thames Path and locally popular Thames Promenade. The upper canopies of the Cedars at Wychcotes are visible from the far side of the Thames and make a significant contribution to the character of this wooded bank.



Figure 2 - View from the Thames Promenade

The amenity of this coniferous group is even greater during winter when the adjacent deciduous trees are bare. An old frame from Google street view shows the increased, wider visibility of the trees during these months:



Having considered your application, the Borough Council is of the opinion that there is no overriding health and safety concern to support the felling of the Cedar at this time. Your application to fell the Cedar (T6) is refused.

You have advised that you intend to plant a replacement Cedar 3.5 to 4m high if consent is granted to remove the tree. It is very difficult to find coniferous trees of this size and prices usually start at £600 upwards where available. The young form of cedar is pyramidal which leads to issues with growing, maintaining and transporting the tree.

The Borough Council fully supports your commitment to sustainable tree cover and would suggest that a smaller Cedar could be planted now so that it is fully established as a replacement in the event that consent is granted to fell one of the protected trees should they become unsafe to retain in the future.

If you wish to appeal against the Council's refusal of permission to fell T6 (Cedar), which would be the advised course of action if you are not satisfied with this decision, 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
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 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
Natural Environment Officer