

Mr M Wastle
Heritage Tree Services Ltd
5 The Beeches
Stoke Row
Henley-on-Thames
RG9 5RB

Our Ref: 160167/TCA

Your Ref:

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12 February 2016

Your contact is: Sarah Hanson, Planning and Building Control

Dear Mr Wastle

RE: PROPOSED FELLING OF ONE OAK TREE AT 30 SURLEY ROW, READING - SUBJECT TO CONSERVATION AREA STATUS.

Thank you for your Notification of 28 January 2016 regarding the above.

Further to my site visit of 10 February 2016, I have the following comments:

The Oak is a mature, notable tree being the central tree of three; the Oak to the west having been effectively felled (tall stump remaining) and the Oak to the east being subject to TPO 68/07. These trees will be several hundred years old, significantly pre-dating the adjacent houses and are part of the historic character of the Surley Row Conservation Area.

It is agreed that the crown of the tree in question is in decline; decline in most cases being caused by root issues. In this case, it is clear that various ground works have taken place within the root zone of the tree which could have caused damage to the roots over time. When the 1995 TPO (which included all three trees) was reviewed in 2007, only the eastern tree was retained in a TPO. The tree in question was not included in the replacement TPO due to the crown die back but also as old *Inonotus* brackets (assumed to be *Inonotus dryadeus*) were found. As you will know, this fungus mainly decays the central part of the buttress root zone, main buttress roots remaining intact unless affected by other factors. The fungi's presence would account for a sparse canopy if the root system is in decline but it could remain safely standing for many more years if the decay is confined and as long as there is live growth in the crown and epicormic growth on the trunk, there are clearly still functioning roots as well.

I note that you are currently unconcerned about the structural stability of the tree and if main buttress roots are currently unaffected then this is a reasonable stance. As you will know, Oaks can last for decades, even centuries, whilst being decayed by fungi. However, given its location, it would be prudent, if retained, to carry out further investigation to try and determine the extent of decay and to carry out remedial work.

Whilst I agree that remedial work won't 'reserve a decline', a decline, if taken to be decay by fungi, is a natural part of the life cycle of an Oak therefore is not something that needs to be reversed. I appreciate that Mr Joyce will not wish to have an unsafe tree adjacent to his property. However, given the age and historic value of this tree, it would be a pity to not consider alternatives to felling in order that the tree could be retained in some form, whilst addressing any potential safety concerns. I hope therefore that Mr Joyce might consider working with you to perhaps carry out a significant reduction instead of felling. Whilst this would appear to be a brutal treatment, the tree has lower branches and epicormic growth on the trunk so may respond and continue to produce leaves and new growth. If the root system cannot maintain the current size of crown/quantity of wood, it may respond to a smaller volume of structure to maintain. As you'll be aware, Oaks naturally reduce their stature as they age to address their reducing root system. A significant reduction could also address the potential risk from the presence of the fungus.

When Notice is given for tree works in a conservation area, the Council can only object by making a Tree Preservation Order. In this case, a TPO is not considered appropriate for the reasons given above. I can therefore confirm that the Council have no formal objections to the following proposed tree work:

- Oak (central tree of 3) - fell.

However, this 'no objection' comes with a request to consider alternatives to felling in order to retain the tree in some form. For clarification, this is a request and is not a requirement.

The works should not be carried out before six weeks from the date of your Notification, i.e. before 10 March 2016, unless required for health and safety reasons.

This decision is valid for two years from the date of this letter, after which it lapses.

Informatives

1. Removal of dead or dangerous wood or trees: 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'.

2. Disturbance of wildlife: It is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 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

3. Timing of works: It is best to avoid carrying out work in the period immediately before and during bud burst or leaf fall to minimise the impact on the tree's future health

If you require any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me on the above number.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hanson
Natural Environment Officer

C.c. Mr Joyce, 30 Surley Row

