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Our Ref: 230949/TPO
Your Ref:

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5 April 2024

Your contact is: Sarah Hanson, Planning, Transport & Public Protection

Dear Sir or Madam

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

Thank you for your application of 11 July 2023, regarding the above.

To support your application, you initially provided the following documents:

Location Plan

Engineers Addendum Report dated 3/7/20, ref IFS-AVI-SUB-19-0084937

Arboricultural Report entitled 'Arboricultural Consultancy for Aviva - Commercial' dated 14/1/20 ref SA-245627

Level Monitoring ref M15099 dated 18 November 2022, providing level monitoring results from 7/1/2020 to 15/11/2022.

My acknowledgement email of 10 July 2023 stated the following:

'As you will be aware, an application to fell the tree was submitted in July 2020 and subsequently refused in January 2021 - application reference 201079. It appears that Engineers Addendum Report & Arboricultural Report submitted under this current application are the same as those submitted in 2020, hence they are 3 years old and have not been updated to the current situation, e.g. with regard to the other vegetation mentioned (has any been removed?) or to provide commentary on any further damage (cracking) and on the level monitoring since the refusal was issued in 2021. Please provide updates.

If would also be appropriate to provide commentary on the current situation and evidence obtained since the 2021 refusal in relation to the reasons why the felling was

refused in 2021 to support your new application to fell.

We would also expect any application to fell a protected tree on alleged subsidence grounds to be supported by all the required technical documents, regardless of any previous applications. Your application will only be determined with reference to the documentation provided for this current application hence I suggest you provide all reports on which you are relying to demonstrate that the tree is the cause / contributory factor in the damage to the building'.

In response, a suite of documents was submitted on 11 July 2024, as follows:

Level Monitoring dated 11 July 2023, covering a period from 7/1/20 to 5/7/23

Crack Monitoring dated 10 July 2023, covering a period from 7/1/20 to 10/7/21 (site visits notes indicated 'Studs removed and cracks repaired' on 28 Feb 2022 and 'Studs have been removed - redecorated' on 5 May 2022).

Location Plan (same as original submission)

Engineers Addendum Report dated 3/7/20, ref IFS-AVI-SUB-19-0084937 (same as original submission)

Application form (same as original submission)

Arboricultural Report entitled 'Arboricultural Consultancy for Aviva - Commercial' dated 14/1/20 ref SA-245627 (same as original submission)

Level Monitoring ref M15099 dated 18 November 2022, providing level monitoring results from 7/1/2020 to 15/11/2022 (same as original submission)

Subsequent to that, the following outstanding reports were submitted:

Arboricultural Report entitled 'Arboricultural Consultancy for Aviva - Commercial' dated 14/1/20 ref SA-245627, revised 29/02/2023 (received 20/10/23).

Engineers Addendum Report from Innovation Group (received 30/10/23)

Level Monitoring dated 16 October 2023 (received 30/10/23)

Crack Monitoring dated 16 October 2023 (received 30/10/23)

The application was then deemed to be valid.

A site visit took place on 23 November 2023 with me, our consultant engineer (Tim Pither of Subtilis Consulting), Keith Connolly of Innovation Group and Ms Irene Hall from the Church.

It was agreed by Mr Connolly that the pattern of movement was atypical for movement expected as a result of vegetation related subsidence attributed to the Beech tree; with the greatest degree of movement (drop) being in the area in the hallway / around the internal doorway inside the Baker Street entrance. He agreed that further investigation was warranted given this, and the significantly higher level of this floor, compared to the ground level outside, to determine what fill was under the floor, the depth of the internal wall foundations, any water leakage under the area and if any roots from the Beech tree are present here.

We agreed the location of the trial dig and that it should extend far enough down to uncover the depth of the internal wall foundations and to determine the fill material.

As an aside, the Arboricultural report from the earlier application recommended certain tree works, which were noted on site to not have been implemented. This included a recommendation to remove the cypress from TG2 closest to the Church, which was still in place and that a different Cypress from this group (west end, closest to the road) had been removed, which is not reflected in the updated Arboricultural report submitted with the current application, hence either that tree has been removed (without submitting a S211 Notice) since 29/9/23 (revised date of the report) or the report has not been updated in all respects.

The trial dig was commenced on 12 January 2024, however, was abandoned due to the dig being more complex than envisaged. The dig was continued on 5 February 2024 and our consultant engineer, Mr Pither, visited on that day. It was agreed with Mr Connolly that a number of additional reports would be provided, and the following were received on 27 March 2024:

Drainage Investigation Report dated 16 February 2022

Soil Analysis Report dated 21/02/24

Root Identification Report dated 8 February 2024

Discussion

As you will know, the tree in question has been implicated by yourselves in subsidence to the property for a number of years; a previous S211 Notice to fell and subsequent tree works application to fell having been refused by the Council based on the lack of evidence to prove that the tree is a major contributory factor in the damage to the building - 200527/TCA & 201079/TPO respectively. The Planning Practice Guidance makes clear that in general terms, the higher the amenity value of the tree and the greater any negative impact of the proposed works on amenity, the stronger the reasons needed before consent is granted. Given the high amenity value of the Beech tree, its prominence to the street scene and contribution to the Conservation Area, it was appropriate for the Council to pursue the trial dig (as agreed by Innovation Group) and require the additional reports in order for a fully informed decision to be made.

The refusal of the 2020-21 application (201079/TPO) was based largely on issues with the crack monitoring and level monitoring, with the decision stating: *'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'*.

The further investigations and reports provided with this current application have been considered, alongside observations made on site, in order to assess whether the felling of the Beech tree is justified. From these we can confirm:

- A trial pit and borehole was undertaken alongside the hall/ lobby wall on the hall side.
- The site investigations revealed internal foundations (hall/ lobby wall) to a depth of 1.4m below the floor level.
- Roots were recorded to a depth of 1.9m and were confirmed by testing to originate from

the Beech tree.

- The subsoil below foundation level was recorded as a shrinkable clay. Whilst the degree of the shrinkable property of the clay was much less than that recorded externally, the clay still retained the ability to experience volume change.
- The clay was recorded as drier at the level where roots were recorded compared to the clay at depth.

The absence of any recovery of the clay subsoil over the winter was noted in this location and is likely to be due to the lack of precipitation beneath the footprint of the building.

From the Drainage Investigation, it is confirmed that there is no evidence of leakage and, given the trial pit and soil samples were all found to be generally dry, this eliminates leakage as a contributory cause of the building damage.

We previously commented on the unusual pattern of cracking damage and movement which suggested downward movement internally to the building. Given that roots have been recorded beneath the building it is surmised that the roots have found a route, perhaps along existing service locations beneath the front entrance to the building.

Conclusion and decision

The presence of tree roots and a shrinkable clay subsoil below foundation level makes it more likely than not that the Beech tree is contributory to the damage and movement internally. Additional investigation and reports provided with this current application address the concerns raised previously about the lack of evidence.

In conclusion, it is agreed that the Beech tree is a major contributory factor in the damage to 81 Baker Street and as such the felling of the tree is approved, subject to the conditions below.

Consideration was given to alternative options to the proposed tree removal. A root barrier was not considered to be viable due to the close proximity of the Beech tree to the building. Underpinning of the building could be considered as an alternative to tree removal although this would be disruptive and expensive given the requirement to underpin the internal as well as external walls to the building.

A condition is attached below for replacement planting, which is considered to be appropriate and feasible given the land available. Species and location should obviously be chosen carefully, with NHBC guidance in mind, to avoid future damage to the building.

Conditions

1. Five days' notice in writing shall be given to the Council prior to undertaking the approved works.

Reason: To ensure that the Local Planning Authority is given sufficient notice of the works to enable the effective monitoring of tree work within the Borough.

2. All tree surgery shall be in accordance with BS 3998: (2010) Tree Work -

Recommendations.

Reason: To ensure that all works are carried out in an acceptable arboricultural manner

3. Following the felling of the tree authorised by this consent, one replacement native or naturalised broadleaf species tree of a minimum 10-12cm girth and 3m in height (at time of planting) shall be planted within the 'front garden' of 81 Baker Street during the planting season (Nov-March) following or at the time of the felling of the tree, whichever is soonest. The species shall be agreed with the Natural Environment Team prior to purchase and planting.

Planting should be carried out in accordance with clause 10 (Planting) of BS 8545:2014 'Trees: from nursery to independence in the landscape - Recommendations'

Should the replacement tree be removed, die or become severely damaged or seriously diseased, all within 5 years of planting, it shall be replaced by a tree of a similar size and species to that originally planted. Modifications to the requirements of this condition must be agreed in writing with Reading Borough Council Natural Environment Team.

PLEASE NOTE: The requirement to replant is the responsibility of the tree owner even if the application was submitted by another person.

Reason: To retain the present visual amenity value of the area and ensure continuity of tree coverage.

Informatives

1. You are advised that, in accordance with Part 4, 17 (4) of The Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation)(England) Regulations 2012, this decision is valid for one pruning operation (as per the approved specifications) to be undertaken within two years from the date of this notice, after which the consent lapses and a new application will be required.

2. Disturbance of wildlife: It is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) 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. Tree work consents on land not owned by the applicant: It is strongly recommended that the owner of the tree be advised of any proposed works. The owner's permission must be sought if the tree works involve work past the boundary line. This consent does not in any way imply that this Council has informed the owner of sought permission or will condone the use of consents to force any landowner to grant such permission.

If you wish to appeal against any of the conditions attached to this consent, 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 5000

E-mail it to: treeandhedgeappeals@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Website: [Tree Preservation Orders and trees in conservation areas - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk/government/topics/trees-and-hedges)

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. Ms Irene Hall, Reading National Spiritualist Church, 81 Baker Street
Keith Connolly, Innovation Group