



Mr R Bennet
Watlington House Trust
69 Baker Street
Reading
RG1 7XY

Emma Gee
Acting Executive Director for
Economic Growth and
Neighbourhood Services

Bridge Street, Reading RG1 2LU
☎ 0118 9373787

Our Ref: PL/24/1450
Your Ref:

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

6 December 2024

Your contact is:

Sarah Hanson: Planning, Transport & Public Protection

Dear Mr Bennet

**RE: PROPOSED FELLING OF ONE SYCAMORE TREE AT WATLINGTON HOUSE,
WATLINGTON STREET, READING - T13 OF TREE PRESERVATION ORDER NUMBER 77/02.**

Thank you for your application, received on 31 October 2024, regarding the above, with accompanying 'Tree Works Application Supporting Document' dated 23 October 2024 ("the document"), incorporating the tree survey dated 2 September 2024.

Further to our site meeting of 19 November 2024, I have the following comments:

Briefly, there are two main reasons put forward for the felling of the tree; those being the impact of the tree on the neighbour at 10 The Grove, and related damage to the listed wall of Watlington House's garden.

In relation to the issues with the neighbours, this primarily relates to the tree debris blocking gutters which in turn are alleged to be causing damp to the north-east corner of the property. In addition, they have expressed concerns about having to remove Sycamore seedlings from the garden, having to clear up leaves and the branches being in close proximity to the property.

Whilst difficult to see from ground level, some vegetation was noted in the corner of the upper gutter, which was indicated to be the main concern in relation to the damp on the corresponding corner of the house and in terms of water dripping onto the listed wall. The expense of employing services regularly to clear these gutters is acknowledged, albeit this would not be a reason, alone, to fell a high amenity tree. The document and my visit also noted considerable build up of vegetation in gutters at lower levels, which has not been maintained and which is arguably easier to access - no damp issues related to this (to 10 The Grove) were raised.

The presence of self-seeded saplings in the neighbour's garden and the need to clear up leaves would not be reasons, alone, to fell a tree of high amenity value. Similarly, pruning could be carried out to provide greater clearance between the branches and property to alleviate concerns about direct damage hence this too would not, alone, be a reason to fell the tree. The neighbours advised that they had been told by someone in the past that they were not allowed to prune the tree at all. It is difficult to appreciate how this could be the case as pruning to provide clearance is common. It is almost certainly the case that, if advice was given, they would have been advised that they could not prune without permission and that pruning the canopy back to the boundary would not be feasible. I'm afraid I can find no evidence of correspondence with the neighbours on file hence cannot comment further on this matter. However, please note that crown lifting the tree over 10 The Grove was approved in 2012 (app ref 12/00816/WTP0) - I assume that application (from Mr Jones) was instigated by the neighbours. Such works could be repeated. The Council and your tree surveyor are in agreement that pollarding the tree would not be an arboriculturally feasible option.

I noted from my visit that there is unmanaged vegetation and items against the wall on the neighbour's side and would suggest that these may exacerbate any damp issues for the wall and assume clearance will be encouraged.

In relation to the wall, firstly I acknowledge the listed status of the wall, hence its historic importance on the well-maintained property. This obviously needs to be given significant weight in considering the application.

There are two matters raised in relation to the wall; those being the damp, hence damage, from dripping of the blocked gutter at 10 The Grove, and bowing of the wall caused by tree roots.

In relation to damp issues, it was noted on site that there is an inaccessible gap between the west elevation of 10 The Grove and the wall, that is bricked up at either end, and covered with a slate 'roof'. This slanted roof results in rainwater dripping down the wall hence I expect will contribute to damp issues. However, I acknowledge that the area of most damage (evident on site) in this respect is the area below the north-east corner of 10 The Grove where dripping from the blocked gutter (corner) falls. It is therefore accepted that the blocked gutter (as a result of uncleared tree debris) is contributing to the damp and 'flushing out' of the lime mortar, with associated damage and repair costs.

The distance between the trunk and wall, at approximately 1.3m is acknowledged.

In relation to the tree roots, the document provided advises that your architect trustee states: *'its roots have certainly lifted up the wall in that area and undoubtedly a contributor to the bow in the wall which is potentially a long-term problem'*. The tree survey notes (para 3.2.3) the *'visible signs of historic movement and deformations of the boundary wall'* and confirms (para 3.2.2) that there is *'no visible sign of movement around the base of the tree, no significant mounding or soil heave observed and the root zone appears to be stable...'*. In 3.2.9 of the tree survey, a copy of site comments from the Council from 2018 is provided which includes reference to *'recent excavations (during*

a planning application) have demonstrated, [the wall] has an exceptionally deep foundation and which prevents most root growth to the south beyond the boundary wall’. We know that the ground level of the garden at neighbouring 10 The Grove is lower than the ground level at which the tree sits, with the wall extending down into the neighbouring garden - this is perhaps the ‘deep foundations’ referred to. This does question the wall damage by tree roots then if they are not expected to extend under the wall.

I note that the tree survey has negative comments about the structure and condition of the tree, attributing the latter to its environment and historic works in its root area. One might argue, setting aside the wall issues, that the rooting environment of the tree could be improved to help improve its vitality, rather than arguing its felling. In any case, I note that the recommendation in 5.1.1 is to fell the tree specifically *‘to avoid damage to the historic boundary wall’*.

Ultimately this application is a matter of determining what is more important, the mature TPO Sycamore or the listed wall. It is certainly not a clear case as there are arguments for alleviating the issues with the tree. However, on balance, it is agreed that the retention of the tree, with ongoing maintenance to prevent damage to the listed wall is an unreasonable requirement. The detrimental impact of the root system, whilst not clearly evidenced, is arguably foreseeable due to its proximity.

I can therefore confirm that the following proposed works, as detailed in your application, are approved subject to the conditions below:

- T13 Sycamore - fell

In terms of replacement, as explained, this is a normal requirement, particularly in view of our adopted Tree Strategy to increase canopy cover in the borough. The majority of the trees included in the TPO when it was made have now been felled, with only two (and the Sycamore) remaining in the rear garden and two (T1 & T2) in the front, albeit a replacement for T3 has been planted. I acknowledge the two new trees on the frontage (secured under a planning permission) and the ‘new’ garden planting as part of the rear garden re-design. However, the new planting, whilst positive and attractive provides limited canopy cover due to the nature of the trees included. Hence, we discussed the feasibility of planting a replacement, should approval be given to fell T13, and you provided plans illustrating the constraints posed by site usage, such as parking, storage and underground services. I can see from these, and from my visit, that replanting locations are not feasible, particularly if a new tree is kept at a suitable distance from the walls, anywhere within the curtilage of Watlington House. I also acknowledge that the trust maintains the garden well and I have no reason to be concerned about unnecessary tree removals in the future. In this instance then, a condition requiring a replacement has not been attached to this consent.

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

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)

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. Gaila Adair, Landscape Gardener