



Mrs H Klarner
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Our Ref: PL/25/0060
Your Ref:

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28 February 2025

Your contact is:

Sarah Hanson: Planning, Transport & Public Protection

Dear Mrs Klarner

RE: PROPOSED FELLING OF THREE HORSE CHESTNUT AND ONE BEECH TREE AT 18 ST PETERS HILL, READING - PART OF G1 OF TREE PRESERVATION ORDER NUMBER 127/08.

Thank you for your application of 13 January 2025 regarding the above.

Your application is supported by the following documents:

Arboricultural Assessment Report dated 8/3/23
Site Plan (Appendix 2 of the Arb report)
Statement of Reasons for Tree Preservation Order Application to fell
Engineer Appraisal Report ref 9660381 dated 11/1/25
Site Investigation Factual Report dated 22/12/22
Crack & Level Monitoring results dated 29/11/24 (covering period 15/02/23- 29/11/24)
Subsidence of Low-Rise Buildings A Property Risk Case Study

Discussion

Further to my visit of 28 January 2025, with our consultant engineer Tim Pither of Subtilis Consulting, I have the following comments:

We met with the householder (owner of Flats 2 & 4) on site and were able to view damage both internally and externally. The householder was also able to advise us about some history of the building, the drainage repairs and progress following damage first being noted.

It is acknowledged that there is the potential for the trees in question to cause damage to the property given their heights and distance from the building. However, it is, as always,

important to consider whether the evidence provided clearly demonstrates that trees are the major contributory factor in the damage to avoid unnecessary tree removal and to ensure, as best we can, that the solution will resolve the issues for the householder.

The property comprises of a detached house built circa 1917, with a two-storey extension constructed to the left and right-hand sides, estimated in late 1970's. The property is constructed over two floors with the roof having been converted to living accommodation more recently (it is believed this was in the 1980s, from the planning history on file).

Submissions indicate that the owner of the leasehold flats 2 and 4 has been aware of cracking since purchase of the flats in 2017. Previous assessment revealed that the cracks were not of any structural importance and the policyholder arranged repairs. In the summer of 2022, further damage was recorded and in 2024, building insurers were advised.

Submissions referred to issues with drainage, and you confirmed that drainage repairs had been carried out in April 2023. The householder, during our visit, suggested the repairs were done more recently, with photographs of the roots found being provided. It is not clear as to whether the drainage repairs extended to under the building. Open and displaced joints were recorded below the footprint to the building. There is also an unknown joint connecting to the pipework just inside the front elevation which has not been identified.

The Engineer Appraisal Report indicates the mechanism of movement to be downward towards the front right corner, although it is not clear as to whether the front right corner refers to the main house, front bay or extension. The level of damage is slight and is classified as category 2.

One trial pit was hand excavated with a borehole being sunk through the base and was located on the front, right corner of the building (corner of the bay window elevation). This confirmed the depth of the foundations (650mm), the soil type (very stiff, brown, silty, gravelly clay subsoil with partings of orange silt and fine sand) and that roots of *Aesculus spp.* (Horse chestnuts) and *Fagus spp.* (Common beech and Copper beech) were found to a maximum depth of 1.8m. Further soil analysis indicates that volume change due to variations in the moisture content is possible and such changes can result in damage to buildings.

The absence of a trial pit to the extension has meant that the following has yet to be confirmed;

- Foundation depth of the extension. The extension to the left-hand side has a basement and the right-hand extension may also have a basement.
- No ground investigations have been carried out below the extension.
- No roots have been recovered below foundation level to the extension.

The Arboricultural Assessment Report pre-dates the Engineer Appraisal Report And Crack & Level Monitoring results but recommends the felling of the four trees in question, hence makes its recommendation without all the factual data being considered.

Level monitoring was undertaken over the period between 15th February 2023 and 29th November 2024 and shows a range of movement between 4-6mm across the various monitoring stations. The results showed very slight seasonal movement to Monitor 3 (front corner of bay) and Monitor 7 (front corner of extension), the magnitude of which is considered minimal and at the cusp of when damage to a building could occur.

Crack monitoring was carried out to the cracking damage below the bay window between 15th February 2023 and 29th November 2024. Twelve readings were undertaken during this period. A further crack within the porch was monitored over the same period which showed stability over 2023 and a very slight (<1mm) opening over the summer of 2024. The main vertical crack was also monitored during this period. The crack monitoring showed no significant seasonal or progressive movement to the cracks being monitored to the front bay, front porch and the vertical crack along the juncture between the extension and main house. This suggests that any vertical movement recorded during the level monitoring to the property has not had any influence on the widening or closing of the cracking damage.

Conclusions

The pattern of cracking internally (vertical crack) is not consistent with foundation subsidence movement. Cracking due to subsidence is normally diagonal representing the rotational nature of the movement. Whilst we were advised that the extension may have moved and rotated as a block away from the main house, this would still be expected to have resulted in some form of diagonal cracking. The pattern of the cracking is also unusual as this indicates vertical displacement on either side of the crack. This could be indicative of additional loading being imposed from above. No discussion within the reports provided has been given concerning the conversion of the roof structure to living accommodation and whether this has contributed to the damage

The vertical movement recorded during the monitoring at this stage is not considered to be sufficient to cause the damage.

The information provided by the Loss Adjusters does not confirm where they believe the area of movement to the property is occurring.

The trial pit was completed to the front right-hand corner of the main building whereas we were advised the concern was the front corner of the right-hand extension. The trial pit undertaken would not reveal any ground parameters in relation to the cause of the vertical cracking.

It is considered that there is insufficient evidence to confirm an influence of the trees to the extension, based on;

- No foundation depth of the extension being recorded (or presence of a basement), no ground conditions being recorded and no roots being recorded under this.
- Confirmation that all drainage repairs have been completed, including under the footprint of the extension

- No confirmation of the mechanism of movement to the extension.
- No confirmation that other causes (i.e. change in loading from the roof conversion for example) have been ruled out.

The evidence provided is considered to be insufficient to determine the removal of the trees as recommended.

As indicated above, it is in the interest of all parties to ensure that the cause of the damaged is properly established such that remedial action is appropriate and provides a resolution for the householder.

For clarity, this letter is not a formal decision but provides feedback following consideration of submissions and information gathered during our site visit. I would suggest it appropriate for you to consider the content and provide any feedback you consider necessary. If further investigations, as suggested, are to take place, and particularly if these will take time, I would suggest withdrawal of the current application and re-submission when you consider that the above concerns have been addressed.

Please let me know how you wish to proceed.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hanson

Sarah Hanson
Natural Environment Officer

C.c. Mr Chaplin, 18 St Peters Hill (owner of Flats 2 & 4)