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Your Ref:

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5 March 2025

Your contact is:

Sarah Hanson: Planning, Transport & Public Protection

Dear Mrs Gumsley

RE: PROPOSED FELLING OF ONE OAK TREE AT KINGS ACADEMY PROSPECT, COCKNEY HILL, READING - SUBJECT TO TREE PRESERVATION ORDER NUMBER 109/02.

Thank you for your application of 9 February 2024, submitted on behalf of 22 Haywood Way, as a result of alleged tree related subsidence to that property. As you are aware, an extension of time has been agreed on multiple occasions in order for queries to be resolved.

The following documents were submitted in the first instance in support of your application:

MWA Arboricultural Report 16/02/2023
Crawford's Addendum Arboricultural Report 08/02/2024
Crawford's Technical Report 07/11/2022
Auger Site Investigation Report 08/02/2023
Crawford's Crack Monitoring 11/10/2022 - 22/01/2024
Knight Level Monitoring 17/11/2022 - 22/01/2024

Following receipt of the householders contact details on 27 February 2024, I visited the property on 15 March 2024 with our Consultant Engineers, Subtilis Consulting.

Our observations were included in my letter to you of 5 April 2024 in which, given the evidence (reiterated by the up-dated Level Monitoring results provided on 7 October), it was agreed that, on balance, the Oak tree could have had a contributory effect on the movement to the rear extension.

As per that letter, the mature Oak tree being proposed for removal is a substantial

tree of high amenity value, being highly visible from the road and adjacent properties. It forms part of the larger TPO woodland at Kings Academy Prospect, that being part of the former 'Stoneham Copse' shown on 1880's maps, and being on the edge of this, forms an integral part of this woodland. Given the size and prominence of the Oak tree compared to the extent of damage to the rear extension it was deemed appropriate for all options to be explored prior to any decision to fell the Oak tree. As such, we sought clarity on a number of matters before determining this application, seeking a response to four specific questions relating to the root barrier costs, underpinning costs, repair works and one other alternative to felling.

A response to my letter was received on 11 June. In response to that, my email of 13 June sought further clarity on the cost and specification of the root barrier proposed, particularly the length (25m) given the garden is approximately 9m wide, and also queried whether access from the school had been considered in view of the comment about costs relating to access issues into the property's garden.

A response to the root barrier queries was received on 20 September. In my response to that of 30 September I stated:

'In querying the cost of the root barrier, we questioned why it was proposed at 25m and pointed out that the garden itself was only approx. 9m across. In the response below, it indicates that a reduced barrier would be 'less effective'. For clarity, as you know, we did not suggest a 9m root barrier, we only pointed out that this was the width of the garden. It is important that in providing a clear root barrier quote the length is deemed to be appropriate and effective.

I note that the reduced cost (based on a 10m barrier - not sure if this is deemed sufficient?) is still estimated depending on a number of factors, all relating to access feasibility through the school. Having checked with the school, I understand there has been no liaison with them to discuss this, nor have they been kept up to date with this application. I would suggest that in determining as accurate an estimate as possible Crawfords should have, and should, look at this in more detail - given the time this application has been in consideration and the time it has taken them to respond to queries, I would suggest they had sufficient time to do this.

To sum up them, please could Crawford clarify their root barrier quote based on 1) length deemed to be sufficient/effective and 2) with knowledge of access feasibility through the school'

Your response, provided on the 3 October, advised that: *'The response from Crawford's is that they would need to get the neighbour's consent for the 25m barrier, if not granted they would need to limit its extent to within the rear garden of the insured address only.'*

As that did not answer my question as to what they deem to be sufficient and effective in terms of barrier length, I sought confirmation of this with reasons. Your response (from Crawfords) provided on 4 October advised that guidance for an appropriate root barrier had been taken from Arboricultural Practice Note 4 (APN 4) 'Root Barriers & Building Subsidence', advising that *'Oak T1 is currently 19m high, with the anticipated mature*

height for Oak being 25m, therefore the length of the proposed barrier to encompass all roots (subject to consent from neighbouring landowners) has been determined as 25m to be sufficient and effective, in accordance with the recommendations in APN4'.

It is relevant to note that APN4 was withdrawn in 2019 pending a review, with no replacement available yet. It is therefore questionable as to whether the advice in this is current and hence appropriate as a reference or to be relied upon. Having dealt with Crawfords before, it would be expected that a root barrier company would have visited the property and provided an accurate quotation, especially given the prominence of the tree. Instead, it appears that Crawfords are uninterested in progressing a root barrier solution, hence the desk top preparation. This may be because it is unlikely to be feasible given that it would need to extend across neighbouring gardens - if that is the case, it would have been helpful for confirmation of this/comment on this in the first instance.

In addition to the above, it has been established that the rear extension in question would be classed as a 'conservatory', despite the latterly added internal roof. As such, no Building Control approval was required for its construction (built at some point between 2002 and 2006) hence potentially no professional input on appropriate foundations, taking into account the presence of significant trees. As the extension is likely to have fallen under 'permitted development', this means that no planning officer, hence tree officer, had the opportunity to comment on potential future issues due to the Oak. These two points have arguably contributed to the current situation.

Conclusion

The evidence from technical reports provided appear to support the claim of tree related subsidence, the Oak in question likely being a major contributory factor.

It is advised that repairs to the property following tree removal are estimated at £11,000, which is some indication of the relatively minor damage that has occurred. In response to my query, the breakdown of the estimated £100,000 for underpinning (if the tree is retained), was not quantified and was confirmed (in your email of 11 June) to be the 'worst case scenario'. It is unfortunate given the prominence of the mature Oak, the associated biodiversity, carbon storage and other environment benefits provided by the tree, that Crawfords do not appear to be advising or encouraging the Insurers to opt for alternatives to felling, which is, I would suggest, contrary to Crawford's Sustainability / Environment Commitment within their published Global Citizenship Report 2023.

The loss of such a mature Oak is contrary to Council aims in view of our Climate Emergency Declaration in 2019 and adopted Tree Strategy (2021). However, the loss of significant trees is difficult to resist without support for retention of trees from the insurance industry and their representatives (including loss adjusters and arboricultural consultants). This lack of support is disappointing but unfortunately commonplace.

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

- **Oak (T1 of application; part of W1 of TPO) - fell**

I would urge consideration of leaving a 3-4m monolith, rather than felling to ground level, and for a large proportion of the wood (perhaps the larger sections) to be left in the wood. In that way, both standing and lying dead wood is provided, each being its own niche habitat, and will help mitigate in some way the significant biodiversity loss resulting from the felling.

Whilst the Oak is in a woodland setting, where it is sometimes appropriate to waive the need for a replacement, the Oak in question is on the edge of the woodland and its size will leave a gap sufficient to plant a replacement tree of an appropriate species, with reference to NHBC water demand criteria. Please note Condition 3 below.

Notwithstanding the Council's decision on this matter, approval for felling must be sought from Kings Academy Prospect, as the tree's owner - note Informative 3 below.

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 broadleaf tree of a minimum 8-10cm girth and 3m in height (at the time of planting) shall be planted within a 5m radius of the felled tree 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/guidance/tree-preservation-orders-and-trees-in-conservation-areas)

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. Mr C Davis, Crawford & Co.
Kings Academy Prospect, Cockney Hill
Ms D Clarke, 22 Haywood Way