

Memo

To: Gary Miles, Planning

From: Amy Daly, Assistant Natural Environment Officer, Planning

CC:

Date: 10th December 2025

Re: Consultation on an Application

Planning Application Ref: PL/25/1667

Application Type: Approval of details reserved by a condition

Address: Thameside Primary School, Harley Road, Caversham, Reading, RG4 8DB

Proposal: Application for Approval of Details Reserved by Conditions 5 and 6 of application PL/25/0342

I had previously commented on the application for PL25/0342. I will be addressing both Condition 5 (boundary treatment) and Condition 6 (Arboricultural Impact Assessment) in this consultation.

Condition 6 – AMS

With reference to the Arboricultural Development Report, 18th November 2025, by Woods Consultancy Ltd, I note the following:

The trees impacted due to the development are: T1, T2, T3, T5. T1 is to be removed (B category Maple tree) and T2, T3, T5 have RPA incursions. No pruning has been mentioned to facilitate the boundary fencing.

The report positively suggests a pre-commencement meeting with all relevant people before demolition and construction, which I would agree to as advised, given the nature of the works on this development and the potential impact to trees.

The report also positively states '*There have been exhaustive tests conducted to determine what the ground condition area to enable a specific format of how the new play equipment can be installed without causing root damage*'. This is good as clearly care has been taken to consider and minimise and impact to tree roots.

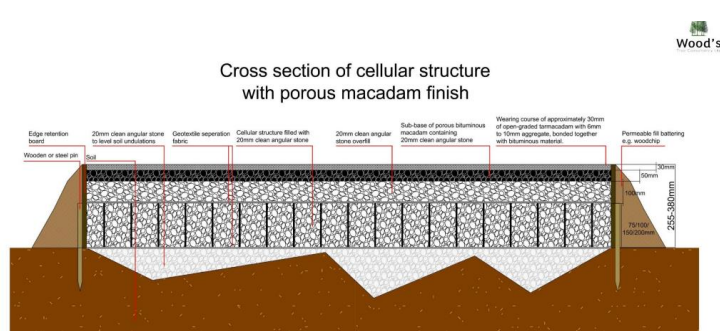
Tests were also done as follows '*to determine what rooting activity was likely to be foundation area where the play equipment is proposed within trees RPA. We conducted a soil removal as shown on the TPP drawing by the orange line this was to a maximum*

depth of 350mm. This was achieved using the recognised use of an 'Air Spade' to remove any issues of root damage occurring. The excavations were extremely difficult to achieve due to the ground composition of heavily compacted chalk with no rooting activity found. Only one root was exposed this has a diameter of 30mm.' It is certainly assuring minimal roots have been found in this area.

Playground Surfacing and Equipment:

Appendix 2 of the AMS describes site guidance for working in Root Protection Areas and methodology for the removal of existing surfacing and replacement of new surfacing, of which the guidance in this should be followed.

Appendix 3 of the AMS describes special surface constructions under tree's RPAs. The special surfacing is generally described as *'a wet pour soft permeable surface is to be installed over the whole area. This will require a surface scape of the present surface to expose the chalk substrate which has been approved by the play equipment installation company as being an acceptable subbase.'* Appendix 3 then goes on to describe the use of a cellular confinement system which is positive as it allows for tree root growth and movement. It provides a diagram of how this will be constructed using the wet soft pour surface. This is all acceptable.



The report then goes on to describe specialist engineered foundations within RPAs. The foundations are for the supports for the play equipment and the edges of the playground.

Trial excavations of the playground were undertaken to determine the presence of tree roots, which the report describes as follows:

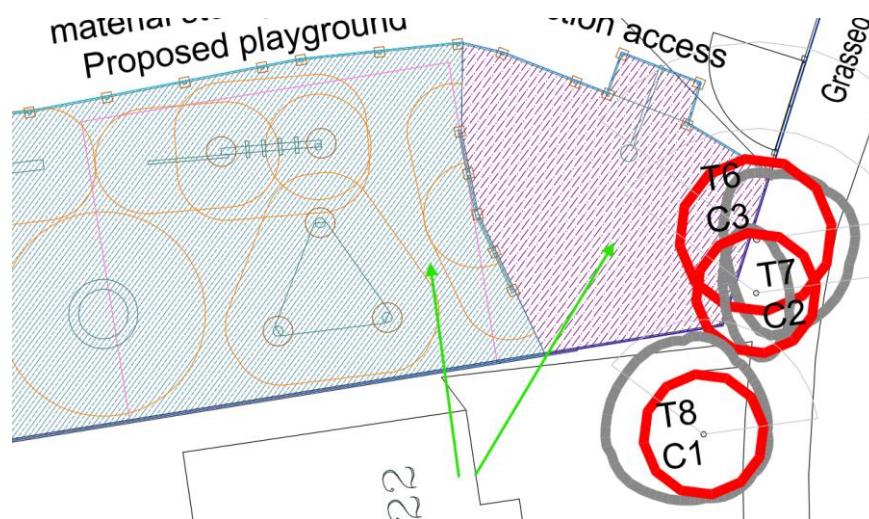
'To determine what rooting activity was likely to be foundation area where the play equipment is proposed within trees RPA. We conducted soil removal as shown on the TPP drawing by the orange line this was to a maximum depth of 350mm. This was achieved using the recognised use of an 'Air Spade' to remove any issues of root damage occurring. The excavations were extremely difficult to achieve due to the ground composition of heavily compacted chalk with virtually no rooting activity found. Only one root was exposed this has a diameter of 30mm. The results are shown in the photograph section of the 16 report. This provides sufficient support and corroboration that there is almost no rooting activity in this area'

Ground screws were originally proposed for the posts for the play equipment, however due to the compact, chalk ground, this was not feasible. So, it was determined that there will be incursions into the RPAs of T3, T2 and T5, which will *'involve the excavation of the ground under the supervision of the Arboricultural consultant to a maximum depth of 600mm and 500mm X 500mm square'*. In the event that tree roots are found *'all sides*

and base of the excavation will be lined with heavy duty polythene and sealed with duct tape to prevent any concrete contact with the roots'. I am happy to agree this acceptable.

The report then goes on to describe the foundation edges for the playground. This is described as 'The edges of the playground will have a shallow retaining edge created which will require minor excavations of approximately 300mm deep, this will be within the compacted chalk layer and as there is minimal root activity present this can be achieved using a light weight excavator.' Some clarity is required on the width of these foundation edges as they are likely to extend further into RPAs than what has been accounted for. However, I am aware that the tests have discovered that this area is not a favourable rooting environment, due to the compact chalk soil and minimal tree roots have been found so it is unlikely to have a significant impact to the trees, but clarity is welcome.

With reference to the Tree Protection Plan, 18th November 2025, Ref: WTC/TSPS/TPP/002, I am slightly unclear on the difference in surfacing shown below. Some clarity should be provided on this given the pink hatched area impacts T6 and T7 RPAs.



Condition 5 – Boundary Treatment

The AMS states 'Posts for the boundary fence will require similar excavations of approximately 300mm X 300mm and 500mm deep, where these are within the trees RPA they must be excavated using hand tools and lined with heavy duty polythene sealed with duct tape to prevent concrete contact.' Whilst this is acceptable in principle, I note the boundary fencing document (10th September 2025) does not include the lining of the posts to prevent concrete leaching into the soil, which it should to ensure clarity and consistency.

I note no crown lifting has been mentioned to facilitate the boundary fencing. As the measurement of clearance between the trees and the crown break hasn't been included within the AMS, it is difficult for me to assess whether this is needed. However, clarity should be sought on this as the fencing is 3m tall.

I note a basketball hoop is proposed within the fencing. I am curious as to where this is proposed to be positioned as it is not clearly annotated on a plan. If this is in close proximity to the tree canopy's, the trees may become a nuisance (obstructing the hoop) and thus may increase the pressure to prune or fell the trees in the future.

It would also be useful if a plan showing the proposed vs existing fencing was shown, as I am unclear whether the 'wire boundary fence' in the Tree Protection Plan, 18th November 2025, Ref: WTC/TSPS/TPP/002, is existing or proposed and whether it will impact T6 and T7. Although, I assume this is existing and retained, with the new fencing proposed around the remaining perimeters of the playground.

Conclusion

To conclude, some clarity is required regarding the crown lifting to facilitate the boundary fencing. The measurements for the foundations edges for the playground should also be clarified to demonstrate the extent they lay within RPAs. It would also be useful if the playground equipment could be labelled so that we are clear on what is proposed and where. It would also be useful if a plan showing the proposed vs existing fencing was shown to improve clarity. The difference in surfacing within the TPP should also be clarified.