



ARBORICULTURAL PLANNING CONSULTANTS

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22<sup>nd</sup> December 2023

**LPA ref: 2023/3083/P**

Our ref: SJA reb 23137-01

Dear Mr Campbell,

**26A Ferncroft Avenue, Camden**

**Response to comments on this application received 8<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

1. On behalf of our client, Mr and Mrs Cremer (the Applicant), we have been instructed to respond to the arboricultural implications of your comments, on behalf of the London Borough of Camden (the LPA), as received by the Applicant's agent on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2023.
2. In your comments, whilst you allude to conversations with the tree officer, you do not substantiate why or on what basis there are 'significant concerns' regarding the removal of the plane tree (recorded as tree no. 1 in our tree survey submitted with the application). However, you do refer to the Conservation Area Appraisal that highlights mature trees in private gardens as a contributing element to the character of the area.
3. I have been asked to provide this rebuttal to draw your attention to our report submitted with the application and a new report from Isaac Hudson, a Chartered Structural Engineer and Director of Michael Alexander Ltd. By way of brief summary, the tree is clearly damaging the Listed Building; the building itself and its heritage status make a greater contribution to the character of the Conservation Area than the single plane tree to the rear of the dwelling. In the context of the planning application the request to remove the tree should be seen as a reasonable request given the opportunity that exists to achieve a comprehensive landscaping scheme with suitable replacement planting.

4. Firstly, a note on the tree's age. This is relevant for two reasons: firstly to demonstrate it is significantly younger than the Listed Building; and secondly because there is next to no risk of heave (that being the opposite of subsidence) if a tree causing subsidence is removed that is younger than the building it is damaging.

5. The most accurate method for aging a tree is to cut it down and count the rings, which is clearly not an option until permission is granted to do so. Another practical option is a handheld device called an 'increment borer'. However, this damages the tree and due to the nature of its timber is notoriously difficult to use on plane trees. Instead there are two mathematical ways in which a tree's age can be estimated. The first and simplest was developed by Alan Mitchell<sup>1</sup> and the second (which is designed primarily for use in veteran and ancient trees, and therefore less appropriate for use in this instance but has been used nonetheless) by John White<sup>2</sup>.

6. Both methods use the tree's trunk diameter as the basis for their calculations and then factor in the tree species, growth rate and the location in which the specimen is growing. The Mitchell method has estimated that the tree is 66 years old. The White method has estimated that the tree is 72 years old. Both methods mean the tree was likely to have been planted in the late 1950's or early 60's (bearing in mind it would have already been 5-10 years old before it was planted).

7. Discussion on the likely age of the Listed Building in the Design and Access Statement (DAS) puts it at the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century or early 20<sup>th</sup>. Certainly it appears on the 1935 OS maps presented in the DAS. Therefore, the tree clearly is younger than the dwelling by at least 25 years but more likely by as much as 60 years (i.e. assuming the dwelling was built at the turn of the century and the tree was planted in 1960).

8. With that in mind I now refer to our report submitted with the application, in particular paragraphs 4.2.2. to 4.2.15. that concludes: '***Tree no. 1's significant proximity to the grade 2 listed building at 26A Ferncroft Avenue poses a threat of harm to this heritage asset, and is clearly a case of 'the wrong tree in the wrong place;' and in view of the tree's reduced arboricultural quality and lack of prominence within the Conservation Area, its removal is therefore considered, on balance, to be justifiable in the broader context of the borough's heritage value, irrespective of the proposed development.***' Our report was submitted with the application and should be given due regard.

9. Furthermore, I attach to this letter, the report by Mr Hudson that concludes: '***we would strongly recommend that the tree should be removed... to prevent further damage to the Listed Building...***'.

10. Taken in isolation (i.e. if this were a tree works application for the removal of the tree to be considered in isolation which) I am aware that LPAs would usually require extensive evidence to

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<sup>1</sup> A Field Guide to Trees of Britain and Northern Europe, Alan Mitchell (Second Edition 1978). COLLINS

<sup>2</sup> John White ((1998) Estimating the Age of Large & Veteran Trees in Britain - Forestry Information Note FCIN 12, The Forestry Commission

demonstrate a tree is responsible for direct and/or indirect damage to a property before acquiescing to a tree's removal. However, the removal of this tree is not to be considered in isolation as it forms part of a planning application that also seeks to preserve a Listed Building and enhance its immediate landscaping and setting. The evidence provided by a Chartered Structural Engineer could not be clearer: the tree has historically caused damage to the building, is currently causing damage and will foreseeably continue to do so.

11. This evidence, coupled with the discussion provided in our report, which include practical assessment of the tree's contribution to the Conservation Area, rather than relying on the principle of it simply being a mature tree in a private garden, should leads the Applicant's consultant team to the conclusion that the limited harm that would result from the loss of the tree would be outweighed by the damage its retention is doing and would continue to do to the Listed Building. Ultimately, it should be self-evident that an irreplaceable heritage asset should be given greater weight than a mature tree that is replaceable (albeit not immediately); does not make a significant contribution to the Conservation Area; and is not of a species that is under-represented in the immediate vicinity.

12. We trust the above addresses your concerns, arboriculturally at least, but if further clarification is needed at this stage, please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

*Frank Spooner*

**Senior Consultant and Operations Director for  
SJAtrees**