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ARBORICULTURAL CONSULTANCY

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Tim Shoesmith,
Philiam Construction Ltd,
Melbury Stables,
Hilfield Lane South,
Bushey, WD23 4EL

Our reference: T52
4th October 2023

Dear Mr Shoesmith

Construction works adjacent to London plane tree at 72 Albert Street, London, NW1 7NR
Tree protection plan and arboricultural method statement

Instructions

1. I refer to your instructions dated 21st September 2023 asking for a meeting on site to discuss protection of a London plane tree situated in the garden of 72 Albert Street, very close to the shared boundary. Further, you have asked for a tree protection plan and arboricultural method statement to provide guidance on how to protect the tree during approved/proposed works in the rear garden.

Introduction

2. On 22nd December 2020 consent was granted by the London Borough of Camden for the erection of a replacement mansard roof extension and a replacement double storey rear extension at 72 Albert Street, London, NW1 7NR under reference 2020/1654/P. Permission to demolish walls and hard paving in the garden as granted under approvals 2021/5060/P and 2022/1376/P. On 27th September 2022 a variation of conditions was approved under reference 2022/1376/P which included reinstatement of bi-folding doors at roof level, alteration to rooflight, extended balcony, new roof design, external staircase, and alteration to fenestrations.

3. None of the plans submitted to, and approved by, the London Borough of Camden make reference to a substantial London plane tree (trunk diameter approx. 1m and height > 20m) which stands in the rear garden of 70 Albert Street close to the shared boundary. A check on Camden's website reveals that the tree stands in a Conservation Area and therefore it is protected, and any works carried out which might harm the tree are prohibited.

4. Works are underway to implement the planning consent, and are being undertaken by Philiam Construction Ltd. However, landscaping work in the rear garden, which includes replacing boundary walls and installation of a pergola on deep foundations, does not appear to have been included in the planning consent.

5. During preparations for the installation of the pergola foundations a substantial woody root, which clearly emanated from the plane tree, was uncovered. Sensibly, the root was not cut, and it was re-buried to protect it. However, the presence of the root raised the question as to whether the implementation of the specified foundations was practical and/or lawful. The pergola foundations would come to within about 2m of the trunk of the plane, and cutting roots at this distance could potentially result in destabilisation of the tree.

6. Philip Walker from Martin Dobson Associates attended a site meeting on 25th September 2023 and from that inspection was able to prepare a tree constraints plan which shows that the root protection area of the plane T1 has a radius of 12m, meaning that it extends across the full width of the garden, and also extends into the approved basement extension (Appendix 1). Philip categorised the tree using the BS5837: 2012 categorisation as A, meaning that it has a high amenity and landscape value. It is legitimate to carry out any works that are required to implement the planning consent within the RPA of T1 , however, it is unclear to me whether permission has been granted for the pergola foundations. In any event, I consider that excavating to a depth of 1m or so within 2m of the trunk of the Plane tree, to create foundations for the pergola, is unreasonable and to be avoided. The alternative is to install a piled raft foundation, which avoids lowering ground levels and harming roots.

Arboricultural Method Statement

7. Trees can very easily be damaged during construction activities through their branches being broken by construction traffic passing close to the canopy or by root severance during the digging of foundation or service trenches. The majority of roots are to be found in the upper 600mm of soil and so even relatively shallow trenches can sever a significant number of roots growing across the direction of the trench. Similarly, the diameter of tree roots tapers sharply within a few metres of the trunk of a tree, so that what might seem to be a relatively insignificant root (perhaps only a few centimetres in diameter) may actually be highly important.

8. Tree roots can also be damaged indirectly, often inadvertently, through soil compaction, which disrupts soil structure and can lead to root death through the development of anaerobic soil conditions. Spillage of toxic materials (e.g. oil or diesel) can also result in root damage and ultimately the death of a tree. Protection of the soil around trees is therefore vitally important in order to preserve roots undamaged.

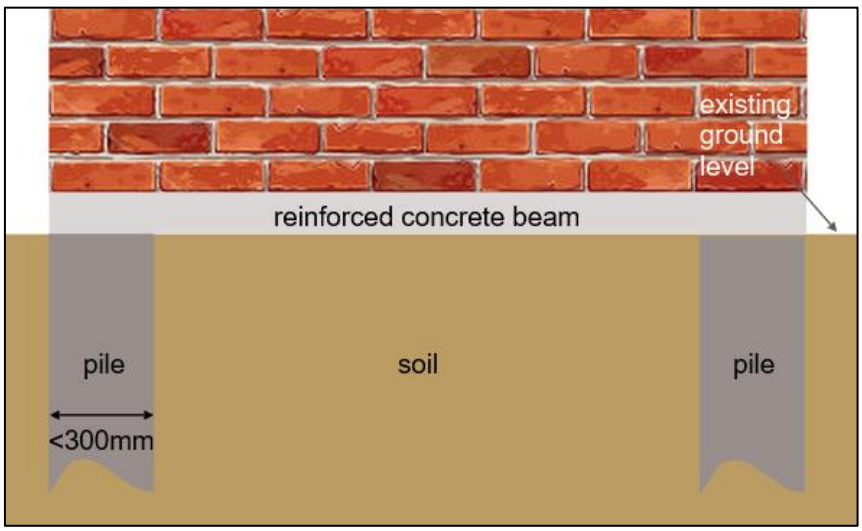
9. No tree protection plan was submitted with the planning application and no tree protection measures have been conditioned. However, harming a protected tree is an offence, and is to be avoided.

10. In order to protect the plane T1 it is recommended that the pergola is installed on piled foundations (screw piles or mini-piles) with the floor slab set above existing ground level, as shown in Appendix 1 and illustrated in the diagram at Figure 1. This will minimise any ground disturbance and root damage.

11. I understand that the rear retaining wall has already been removed and that a trench has been dug for new foundations. No significant roots (>25mm diameter) were encountered, and therefore the remainder of the wall can be constructed, provided the ground adjacent to the wall is protected by covering it with heavy-duty plywood to prevent compaction, or inadvertent spillages coming into contact with the soil, which could be toxic to roots.

12. The boundary wall between No. 72 and 70 has been taken down. I understand that trial pits excavated against the wall revealed footings to be 1m deep. As such the foundations will act as a root barrier – although there is a potential for roots to grow into the mortar between bricks, if lime mortar has been used. I consider that existing foundation can be re-used, but may need to be reinforced to prevent future distortion, perhaps by removing the top three courses of bricks and replacing with reinforced concrete. The reinforcing piers that have been proposed by the engineer are intended to be on land at No. 72, and this should avoid any damage to roots. Nonetheless, if roots larger than 25mm diameter are encountered in any excavations, they should not be cut without reference to the project arboriculturist.

Figure 1. Diagram to illustrate an example of piled raft foundations.



13. Excavations within the root protection area of T1 to form paths, steps etc. must be carried out by hand digging, in order to preserve any roots larger than 25mm diameter. If such roots are encountered the project arboriculturist must be consulted.

14. Heavy machinery must not be used on unprotected ground. If machinery is used suitable ground protection must be provided, and the specification approved by the project arboriculturist.

15. If the procedures described above, and illustrated in the tree protection plan at Appendix 1, are implemented I consider that no material harm will be caused to London plane T1.

Yours sincerely

Martin Dobson

Dr Martin Dobson
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APPENDIX 1 – Tree Protection Plan