

Note re Weeping Willow at 12 St. Mark's Crescent

My wife and I have lived at 12, St. Marks Crescent for over 20 years. The Regents Canal runs behind the house. The Weeping Willow at the bottom of our garden was there when we moved in. We like the tree. It is attractive and provides privacy. But in recent years it has got bigger and bigger. It continues to grow in size despite regular pruning.

We wish to have the tree felled, and its roots removed and to replace it with another tree of a different type. We would be happy to discuss with the local authority what type of tree would best contribute to the amenity of the area.

The reasons are that the tree has got too big for the garden; its maintenance has become onerous and expensive; it shades my garden and the garden of number 11 excessively and it creates a risk to the structure of my house and of number 11. Moreover the willow has a very limited amenity to the public, since there are three more in the immediate vicinity and in the summer the branches growing over the Regents Canal can cause inconvenience and even danger to waterborne traffic.

I refer to the attached sketch plan and to the report of Simon Pryce dated 9 July. There are in fact five willows along the Regents Canal. One is further down the canal towards the bridge on Gloucester Avenue. There are willows in the gardens of nos 9, 10, 12 and 13. That is to say there are similar trees in four out of five adjacent gardens.

As Mr Pryce records, ours is a small garden and the tree is only about seven metres from our rear extension and about nine metres from the rear of the original house. This is plainly far nearer than would be recommended under current building standards. The garden is about eight metres wide. It is on two levels. Most of it on an upper level, but near to the canal there is a low retaining wall which is "C shaped" to the left hand side (as you walk away from the house). The line of the wall is shown in red on the enclosed sketch. There is then a lower paved area where we put a circular table and six chairs in the summer. We like to eat out by the canal.

The tree also substantially overshadows the garden on number 11 and is undesirably close to that house, being planted within a couple of metres of the fence between the two gardens.

Any substantial pruning of the tree requires specialist contractors, given that it grows partly over a canal and the opportunity for access is restricted due to the small size of the garden. I have employed contractors from time to time to prune it out of the growing season. In addition, during late spring and summer I myself have to trim the branches which hang down to ground level in order to prevent the branches swamping our garden. Even when trimmed back the branches overshadow a large part of our garden.

There is an apple tree to the left hand side of the garden. During the summer the apple tree is overshadowed by the weeping willow branches, as is the table. I have to trim the willow

branches quite substantially in order to enable the apple tree to receive enough light and to be able to use the table and chairs.

I believe that tree will probably now require pruning in the dormant season every year with some trimming necessary each summer. [REDACTED]

I am also concerned that there is some long term risk to my house and to the rear extension as set out by Mr Pryce. For the same reasons it threatens number 11. These risks cannot be quantified but they cannot be dismissed.

My neighbour at no 11 (Mr Lieberson) complains that parts of his garden are also overshadowed and he too is concerned about the risk to his house from the roots of my willow tree. I enclose a letter from him.

Amenity to others

The Regents Canal is a busy waterway in summer and of course people use the towpath on the opposite side of the canal. The four willows I have mentioned are no doubt an attractive feature visually; but if ours is felled three will remain, which is a substantial number.

Numerous craft use the canal including: barges, pleasure craft, rowing boats, punts (carrying musicians serenading their passengers) and children in kayaks (the "Pirate Castle" is only a few hundred metres away.) The branches of the four willows overhang the canal by over a third of its navigable width. During the summer the branches are just inches away from the surface. Given the narrowness of the canal and the amount of traffic, the willows present an obstacle and are a potential danger if there is more than one craft passing at a time. The Waterways Board used to send a boat whose occupants could prune the overhanging branches. However they have not done so for a number of years. There is an accident waiting to happen.

If our tree were removed then the canal side to numbers 11 (Mr Lieberson's home) and number 12 could be used by craft as an area into which to steer in an emergency or to avoid other craft.

My wife and I completely open minds as to what tree should replace the willow if we are allowed to fell it. We would like a tree which would grow to a substantial size in a short time, but significantly smaller than the willow, much easier and less costly to maintain and not presenting any structural risk. Mr Pryce has suggested the following as suitable. He makes the point that they are all much less of a threat to the building than the willow:

- Birch - native silver birch or one of the exotics such as Himalayan white barked birch;
- Indian bean (Catalpa)
- evergreen magnolia (*M. grandiflora*)
- Sweet gum (*Liquidambar*)

We would welcome any suggestions from Camden as to alternative trees and we hope that one of Camden's officers will visit us to see the site and to discuss the options.

Michael Birnbaum

25 July 2015