

As two of the residents who successfully appealed for a TPO to be placed on this tree when it was originally scheduled to be felled after a request by the Board of Directors at West Hill Court we would like to urge the Council to uphold that order and turn down the current application for it to be felled. Despite this most recent request being submitted by the Board of Directors at West Hill Court the beech tree remains at the heart of our community of 38 flats and is dearly loved and treasured by many residents.

Simon Stephens writes in his report that "the vigour of the tree has significantly deteriorated since my previous inspections in September 2014". He says the "most likely cause" of this is "a fungus such as the Honey Fungus" but then goes on to say "I looked carefully around the base of the tree but did not find any signs of fungi". This is what he said in passing when he inspected the tree ahead of making his report when he also said that he felt the tree might "come down this winter, it could stand for another twenty years". We are not sure why Mr. Stephens omitted this observation, however casual it may have been from his report. We would therefore ask that before any decision is made and in order for that decision to be fully informed the Board of Directors at West Hill Court be asked to carry out a root inspection in order to establish whether the root system is in fact compromised by the chance that the tree may or may not have Honey Fungus.

Although we respect Mr. Stephens' professional observations on the state of the beech tree's health we do take issue with his statement that "the amenity value is reducing as its vigour deteriorates." This may be his opinion but it is his alone and fails to take into account the opinions or views of many residents of West Hill Court on the "amenity value" of this tree none of whom were consulted on its "amenity" before he submitted his report. Those of us who look out at the tree daily and admire it in all seasons and in all weathers consider its "amenity value" to be priceless which is why we lobbied to have a TPO put on the tree in the first place. The tree is particularly impressive at the moment standing proud against the sky, both day and night it has a majestic and stoic presence. Throughout the autumn and winter gales it has yet to shed any limbs or branches and is the tallest and most prominent tree on the skyline. We would also like to point out that due to a previous report stating that the tree may shed limbs the area beneath its canopy has been fenced off for almost three years and the grass and weeds allowed to flourish. One might argue that if this area were cleared and mulched the tree would respond and its previous vigour may well return.

Lastly, Mr. Stephens recommends that "the time has come to remove the tree and plant a replacement". In the time that we have been resident at West Hill Court (almost nine years) a number of trees have been felled for various reasons and none have yet been replaced. Based on this we do not have the confidence that were the tree to be felled it would be replaced. It is very troubling and frankly distressing to think that an ageing but relatively healthy tree may be condemned and therefore ask the Council to take every step to re-examine the tree, to ensure that a root inspection is carried out before any decision is taken and if it all possible to save this tree for the years and hopefully decades ahead.

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