

Kernahans,
4 Englands Lane,
London,
NW3 4TG

Date: 08 March 2017

Your ref:

My ref 16/121

FAO Brian Kernahan

By e mail

Dear Brian

Plane tree to the rear of 35/36 Belsize Park, NW3 4DY

1. Further to your recent instructions I returned and reinspected the tree and wall on 2 February. This report updates my initial one of 13 November 2014.

Observations

2. The tree has been crown reduced in the last year or so and the regrowth is healthy and vigorous. The overall height and spread are slightly smaller than before due to the pruning, but it is growing back rapidly, so it will need further recutting in order to keep it contained.
3. Using a tape at about the same height as in 2014 the diameter has increased from 830mm to about 835mm, although the trunk is uneven in shape, so there is some margin of error.
4. The damage to the wall is noticeably more severe, in particular the section of parapet next to the tree has lifted further and the brick infill panel has been pushed further outwards. Photographs 1 and 2 overleaf were taken in 2014 and 2017 and show the differences. On this occasion I also measured the displacements, so we can monitor the movement if necessary. The current vertical lift at the crack in the parapet is about 50mm and the outward displacement in the top of the panel half way along the brick to the right of the central crack is just under 30mm, see photos 3 & 4.
5. The cracking caused by the roots under the parking area behind the wall has also worsened, although that is harder to monitor precisely.

Discussion

6. The tree might be causing some soil shrinkage under the wall, but any effects of that are being eclipsed by the direct pressure on the wall, which is being lifted by the growth of roots beneath and pushed outwards by the expansion of the main roots and lower trunk behind. That is happening quite slowly, but the tree is capable of growing much larger, so the movement will be progressive, slowed slightly by the regular pruning. The wall does not appear to be an immediate hazard, but will continue to deteriorate and is becoming unsightly.

7. The wall appears to be beyond any practical repair, so the available options would be to replace the damaged section or the entire length. Railings would accommodate movement better; they might become embedded in the tree as it grows, although that would not harm it significantly. A new wall or replacement section capable of resisting its spread would have to be much more robust than it is at present, possibly made from reinforced concrete, and would need to be bridged over underlying roots.
8. The car park surface is starting to form a mound round the tree's base, which is not a major problem in itself, but the underlying roots are pushing it up into ridges, which impede driving and could be trip hazards if left to develop further. The cracks also allow rain into the lower layers, which will lead to the surface eroding.
9. The roots immediately below the tarmac are likely to be younger ones that could be pruned, giving some scope for making the surface smoother, although it would not eliminate the possibility of further root growth. The practicality of that would need to be assessed by hand excavating the root damaged area to see exactly what is growing beneath the surface. Major levelling of the area round the tree would probably cause considerable root damage.
10. As the tree is protected by a TPO any root cutting or trimming as remedial work would need consent.
11. I hope this is helpful but if you have any queries or wish to discuss the matter further please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Pryce

Simon Pryce

Photographs



1) Wall in October 2014



2) Wall in February 2017, damage noticeably more severe, as more of the end of the lifted section is visible.

Distortion as at 2 February 2017



3) Vertical displacement about 50mm



4) Lateral displacement just under 30mm