

Mr Jeff Warren
14 Windmill Hill,
London,
NW3 6RT

Our reference: J39
25th April 2018

Dear Mr Warren

Inspection of willow tree at 14 Windmill Hill

I refer to your instructions dated 14th March 2018 asking me to visit your property and inspect one weeping willow tree in your front garden, as you have concerns regarding its safety, and provide advice on whether it is hazardous and, if so, what should be done to make it safe. Your concern for the safety of the tree arose when workers from Modern Arb Services came on site to carry out regular pollarding and found that the tree rocked alarmingly at ground level such that they did not feel safe to continue with the works. Your email to me dated 14th March 2018 stated the following:

The man who went up to cut it back reported that there was significant movement in the Willow. They had noted some movement when they were here two years ago, but it was now much worse. They performed what they called a "wobble test", using a rope around one of the main branches, and reported that the earth at the base could be seen moving.

I carried out an inspection of the tree on 16th March 2018 (Figure 1). It had a trunk diameter of 480 mm and was pollarded at 9 m with about 1 m of regrowth from the pollard points. The diameter crown spread was about 9 m. No fungal fruiting bodies were present on the trunk. I tapped around the base of the trunk with a sounding mallet in order to detect the presence of dead bark or internal decay. All soundings were normal with no indications of the influence of fungal pathogens. In order to confirm my diagnosis that the stem was sound I took an increment core to a depth of 240 mm and it revealed intact undecayed wood to the centre of the trunk. I can therefore confirm that the rocking motion reported is not due to weakness in the trunk but is more likely due to problems with root anchorage. I had no facilities to inspect roots and therefore cannot say whether they are likely to be decayed or not, but removal of a small section of bark revealed that the cambium at the base of the tree was live and there were no signs of infection with honey fungus.

I was emailed a copy of a video recorded by Modern Arb Services on 12th April 2018 which showed the tree being 'wobbled' and indeed the trunk was moving in the ground. Whilst I can identify no direct cause for this I consider that the tree cannot be regarded as safe due to its close proximity to the house, boundary wall and road.

The options available to make the tree safe are to further reduce the branches by pruning or to fell it. The pruning would have to be substantial and would need to be well below the existing pollard

points at 9 m. This would significantly disfigure the tree and is therefore not an option that I would recommend. In my opinion removal of the tree and replacement with one more suited to the setting would be appropriate.

Figure 1. Photograph of willow tree in front garden.



If you agree that felling is the most prudent option in the circumstances I will submit a Conservation Area Section 211 notice to the local authority.

Yours sincerely

Dr Martin Dobson

BSc (Hons) Biol, DPhil, FArborA, RCarborA, MEWI

