



The Heath & Hampstead Society

The Society examines all Planning Applications and Notices of Intent for trees relating to Hampstead, and assesses them for their impact on conservation and on the local environment.

To London Borough of Camden, Development Control Team

Planning Ref: 2019/4731/T

Address: Wellside, Well Walk

Tree Officer: Tom Little

Date: 8th Oct 2019

Dear Tom Little,

I wish to submit an objection to this work.

This application has been submitted by Wassells Arboricultural Services: the same firm who submitted the work for 2015/5445/T.

Prior to the tree reduction work in 2015, these three grand and previously notable Lombardy poplars made a beautiful contribution to the treescape of Well Walk. They did this to the extent that they were nominated as 'Important Trees' in the Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan – though in 2015 the Plan had not yet been ratified, as it now has. In 2014 (Planning application 2014/0172/T) there was an enormous local response to the proposed reduction of these trees, which was refused. Lombardy poplars are a key tree species planted in Hampstead to help deal with the large amount of groundwater on spring lines and other boggy parts of the town. This area originally donated by the Gainsborough family for the poor of Hampstead was described then as swampy ground, and the Victorians would have planted these trees to help with this. The name of this property clearly indicates this. Due to the not always well-founded fears about trees and buildings subsidence, there are fewer places in London now where these majestic trees continue to grow. Hampstead, particularly on a spring line as here, is one of the places where these trees are not only welcome but important for the job they do in limiting subsidence due to silt wash out and leaking drains and mains.

The treework done in 2015 following consent shocked us all. The trees did not even look like Lombardy poplars anymore, but stunted, over-trimmed canopies on long sticks. Some lombardy poplar-like trees are 'lollipopped' in France, but even in France they would not be this aggressive.

The crown raise of the two trees at Lower Wellside was considerably higher than the entire building and its roof beneath, so was clearly not just to let light in the windows (there are no windows in the roof). Crown thinning was also performed which is an inappropriate operation here and merely ensures an eventually denser crown that requires repeated thinning to 'knock it back'. Taking the tops off Lombardy poplars is equally ridiculous unless there a clear arboricultural reason to do so (none was given); these are naturally tall trees and it is possible for the attachment of new growth to be weaker than the older growth it soon replaces, again requiring repeated pollarding for the rest of the tree's life, as well as altering the growth and shape of the tree's upper canopy.

Could the result of changing this:



Lombardy poplar outside Wellside



Two lombardy poplars outside Lower Wellside



- to this:



Two lombardy poplars by Lower Wellside;



Lombardy poplar, side of Wellside, Gainsborough Gardens

Pictures taken in 2017 after severe pruning in 2015

- possibly, under any stretch of the imagination, be described as their request in 2015 to do (my italics):
'Selective removal of low branches to raise crown of tree. 20% thin of crown. Reduce top by up to 4 metres back to lower leader. Light reduction to lower crown sides to achieve well formed balanced tree. REASON: To improve natural light amenity for Wellside and reduce the over-dominant nature of these large trees in close proximity to Wellside, *without affecting the local amenity value of the tree.'*

Now there has been some re-growth to soften the effect of the previous brutal tree reductions. One could make a case for removing one tiny piece of new 'epicormic' growth going towards the garage (see first picture below), but in view of its position and that it would not obstruct light, it hardly makes an application worth putting in.



Left of Lower Wellside

Right of Lower Wellside

Front/side corner Wellside

Pictures taken Sept 2019

The application before us now is horrifying. The Lombardy poplar is a tree known for its luscious growth from the ground up - that is its form - so for these to suffer a SIX METER crown raise is unsupportable. Considering the wording used before to describe what was purported to be carried out compared to the actual work done, it would seem not to be unreasonable to assume that merely a dozen leaves might remain on each tree.

These three trees are now on the Important Tree list that was both supported at the local referendum on the Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan by local people and ratified by Camden. They are there for very good reasons.

In addition, these three trees are now part of Biodiversity Corridor A 'Well and Flask Walks + NW Gayton Road' which is also recognised as an historic tree line in the Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan. Lombardy poplars are great supporters of both a large range and a large volume of wildlife. As such, while this is not an application for development, nevertheless (Policy NE4: Supporting Biodiversity)

1. In order to enhance biodiversity, [development] proposals will be encouraged to:
 - b. Increase canopy cover as part of any landscaping scheme.
2. ...proposals should seek to protect or enhance the status or population of priority habitats, species and wildlife movement.

I propose that this Notice of Intent, in addition to going against the wishes of the local people who deem these trees worthy of the title 'Important Trees' and for them to be protected from work that reduces the amenity they provide, also does not support these policies since the proposed work will continue to significantly further reduce the canopy cover and reduce the volume of wildlife and its movement within this biodiversity corridor.

I strongly urge Camden to refuse this application.

Vicki Harding, Tree Officer Heath & Hampstead Society