



The Heath & Hampstead Society

The Society examines all Notices of Intent for tree work relating to Hampstead and Hampstead Heath Fringes, and assesses them for their impact on the Conservation Areas, the local environment and building stability.

To London Borough of Camden, Tree Preservation Team

Planning Ref: 2020/1757/T (documents from 2020/0306/T)
Address: 9 Willoughby Road NW3 1RT
Case Officer: Tom Little
Date: 12th June 2020

I am writing to object to the felling of the ash tree here as it would seem it is most unlikely to be the cause of subsidence, and gives significant public amenity at this important corner position that can be seen for quite a distance in several directions.

In Crawford's Report, there is the usual evidence-free cut-&-paste I have seen identical copies of in dozens of other subsidence claims: 'The timing of the event.... Fortunately, the cause of the problem (dehydration) is reversible' etc even 'there should not be a recurrence of movement'. The one improvement with this application is that for the first time I'm aware of Crawford's actually mention that the underlying geology is Claygate Beds not 'London Clay' as they usually assert even when buildings are on the Bagshot Sands. The trouble is Crawford's have no idea what this means. They might as well say the underlying geology beneath the London Clay is chalk for all this contributes to discovering the main causes of subsidence here.

Any person living in Hampstead who has experience of cracking and subsidence claims, particularly serial tree-removals that still fail to sort the problem will be all too familiar with this, and know that in most cases such statements are nonsensical.

Crawfords do mention that there is an issue with the guttering to the front of the property, but have not done a drains survey and say they do not consider this issue is related to the movement to the property!

Evidence of the groundwater and leaking drains problems in Willoughby Road:

- 13 Willoughby Road has leaking drains and cracking but no remaining implicatable trees.
- The report by Eldred's Geotechnics for 19 Willoughby Road's subsidence claim by Sedgewick in 2019/0854/T subsequently withdrawn showed that the movement of 47 Rudall Crescent and 19 Willoughby Road was likely to be silt erosion and most unlikely to be trees. 19 Willoughby Road also has leaking drains (see Drainage Investigation Report for 2019/3909/T)
- 21 Willoughby Road which has long-standing pumps beneath it hit water as soon as they started digging out a basement, to the degree this had to be abandoned, leaving 'downstream' neighbours 23 and 25 Willoughby Road with permanent water seepage into their gardens and rotting of their vegetation.
- Boreholes and groundwater continuous testing over a year at 31 Willoughby Road has demonstrated that in addition to silt eroding groundwater within the Claygate Beds and an all year round constantly running aquifer at the top of the Claygate Beds here, there is evidence of water from leaking drains within the superficial permeable 'Head' layer above (a solifluction) too.

- A tributary of the river Fleet along with several smaller tributaries crosses below 33 and 44 Willoughby Road. Most of this runs within a conduit of uncertain integrity, but a significant degree of groundwater will run in parallel in historic pathways through the Claygate Beds within sand partings.
- Boreholes performed for 37/39 Rudall Crescent 2013/0824/P that really illustrate well the laminated ground below with its fissures, discontinuities, gleying from the water table and historic watercourse pathways, sand pockets and partings (some only 1 - 3cm apart), and seepage at various within layer levels (6.5m, 14.2m & 19.2m depth).
- 44 Willoughby Road 2007/5851/P Ground Investigation Report states 2 boreholes (2004) encountered water at 3.2m and 3.6m depth i.e. the aquifer at the level of the top of the Claygate Beds below the 'Head'.

Coupled with a high angle of slope beneath the 'Head' which itself is a potentially unstable material prone to landslide, increased water pressure at the base of and within this ground, even if intermittent, is likely to cause on-going intermittent movement.

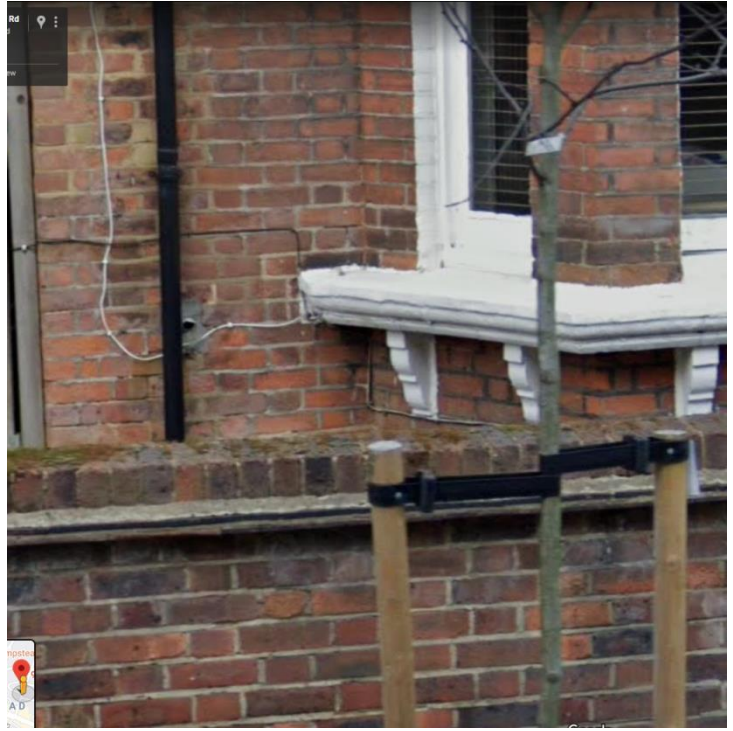
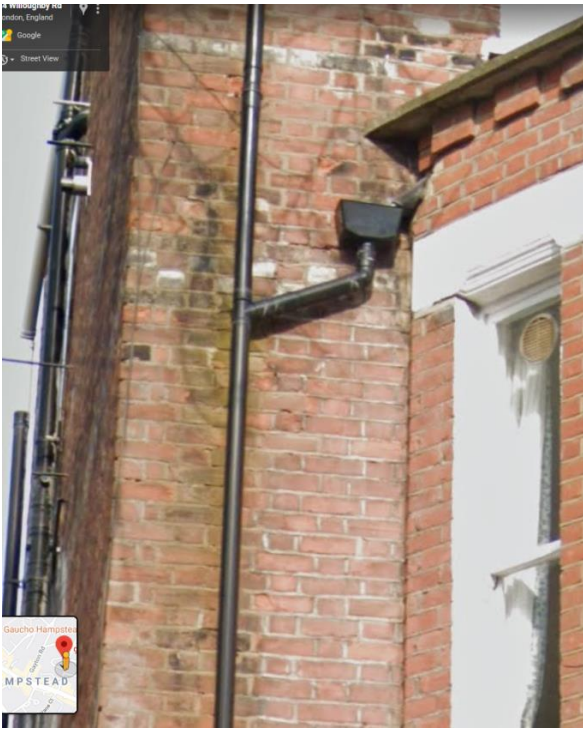
The following photographs show the downpipes and guttering and no doubt the drains themselves remain in an appalling state, indicating that drains surveys should be the first thing to be done, followed by lining all drains with cracks and fixing any failed/broken joints. With silt erosion beneath the drains and other subsidence elsewhere they are bound to have been strained or dropped and leaking. Having fixed these, continuous movement monitoring can then be done, not to then state whatever the outcome "the pattern of movement indicates it's the trees" but to see if this has fixed the movement problem sufficiently - moving it from Grade 3 to 1 or 0 - and to see if further movement can be diagnosed from the patterns of movement in relation to

- rainfall and its relative amount compared to 10-year averages,
- storms, and
- leaf burst and fall.

Complete freedom from any cracking is an impossibility in Hampstead, long-standing repeat mortar joint repairs demonstrating this well in 9 Willoughby Road.



May 2012 showing many different mortar repairs over the years



April 2019: the outside has been painted, but downpipes are still in a bad way. What state the drains?



May 2012



March 2018

Looking back, it is not immediately obvious why suddenly, and despite previous years of even drier summers, Grade 3 cracks should appear in Autumn 2019. The tree has been there for very many years. Why now? I would suggest that possibilities include silt erosion from the many storms we have had all through 2017 and some in 2018 and 2019. Adding in leaking rainwater gullies and rainwater or foul water drains would make matters much worse.

The insurance company will most probably do movement monitoring at some stage, but are unlikely to interpret it in any other way than "it's the trees". I now have evidence that *any* movement - up or down - and *any* type of cracking - recovering or not, and unrelated to rainfall or leaf flush/fall - is described as tree-related(!) hence not to be taken at face value. While not the greatest specimen due to past poor work to it, the tree has huge public amenity in this prominent corner position. We were delighted to see that Camden Tree Officers agreed with local people that it warrants a TPO. Please retain.

Dr Vicki Harding, Society Tree Officer