



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.

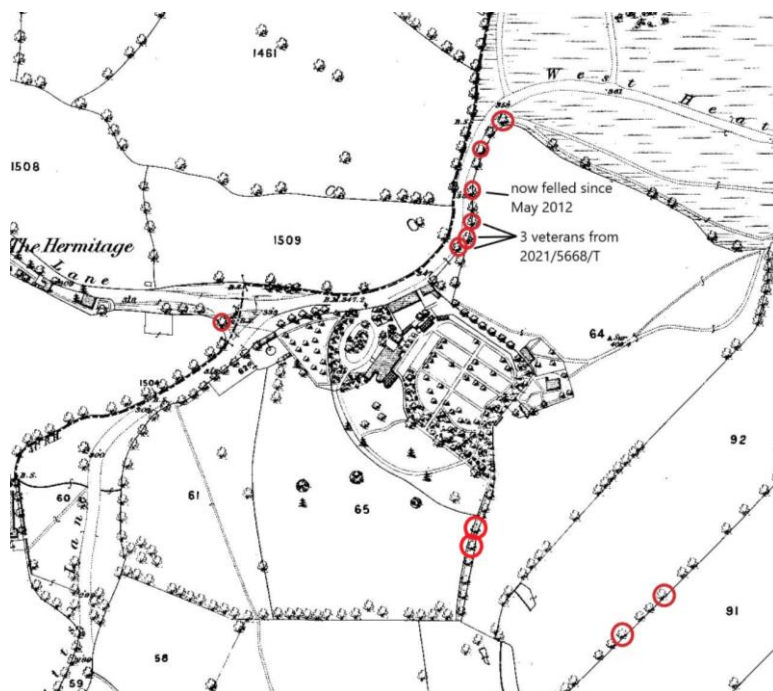
To London Borough of Camden, Development Control Team

Planning Ref: 2021/5668/T
Address: Area to front of 1 - 5 Telegraph Hill London NW3 7NU
Description: AREA AT FRONT: 1 x Oak (Quercus sp.) (T1) - Crown reduce by 3m to suitable growth points, prune to clear streetlight by 2m. 1 x Oak (Quercus sp.) (T2) - Crown reduce by 4m to reduce over hang to footpath and road. 1 x Oak (Quercus sp.) (T3) - Crown reduce by 2m to reduce over hang to footpath and road.
Case Officer: Tree Team
Date: 11/12/2021

We wish to object to this tree Notice of Intent.

The three oak trees here – the specific three trees on the Telegraph Hill bank determined by the descriptions given – are in fact three of the five veteran trees on the bank along the Union and Parliamentary Borough Boundary here between the access to Telegraph Hill and Sarum Chase, which itself has one previously magnificent veteran boundary oak tree. There were six veterans, but the one on the Telegraph Hill bank near to the boundary with Sarum Chase marked as still existing on the enclosed 1866 OS map above the three veteran oaks in this NOI and with its own build-out on the retaining wall here) has been felled, sometime between May 2012 and July 2014. There appears to be no Notice of Intent or Planning Permission that relates to this for either Sarum Chase, 5 Telegraph Hill or 1-4 Telegraph Hill (Planning Applications 2008/3309/P and 2008/3619/C consented on 14th Oct 2008 are reported in Building Control as completed on 11th April 2012).

The descriptions of these trees give four of the signs of veteranisation, confirming their veteran status: deadwood, cavities, hollow at the base, retrenchment (this can clearly be seen to have occurred as well as the trees being 'previously reduced'). Their appearance as significant trees on the 1866 OS map at that date (those still existing circled in red on the map) demonstrates that they are well over 200 years old. The Hampstead OS map surveyed in 1866 was verified as highly accurate for tree placement during the Veteran Tree survey of Hampstead Heath.



The veteranisation of these three trees was probably speeded up at the time of creating the pavement and carriageway of Platts Lane in the 19th century along this 'Union and Parliamentary Borough Boundary'.

These trees are very visible to the public as beautiful examples of our hedgerow veteran tree heritage: Hampstead Heath contains around 600 veteran trees, and Hampstead and RedFrog Wards have over 70 veteran trees within gardens and on streets, including an ancient tree and several notable trees. These particular veteran trees are hugely important both for their public amenity and as a link for rare veteran-specific fungi and invertebrates between veteran trees on the Heath and other veteran trees in the Redington-Frognaal ward area.

The report could be of concern to owners without experience or knowledge of veteran trees.

- i) Dead branches from retrenchment in veteran oak trees^{1,2,3} take a considerable time to detach or break, some about 100 years before falling. The proposed work would produce an extremely ugly outcome (see photo on the right of a veteran elsewhere that had its deadwood removed back to live wood) and is overkill.



- ii) Hollowing out their trunks is part of the way veteran trees survive longer. They encourage beneficial fungi to 'compost' their heartwood, making them more supple and able to withstand severe gales. Many hundreds of mature trees on Hampstead Heath were windthrown during the 1987 hurricane, but not a single veteran tree was uprooted or lost major branches out of the around 600 veterans that exist there. Not only should **trunk hollowing not be of concern**, but it should be recognised for its **risk reduction** of the tree and harbouring of the rarer beneficial fungi that only inhabit veteran trees. That people are "...able to see through stem" should be valued for its curiosity and beauty, and its evidence of the presence of rare fungi and its biodiversity. *Pseudoinonotus dryadeus* (also called the Eiffel Tower fungus whose effects would seem to be demonstrated in these trees) aids with tree stability, by prompting pronounced buttressing and the creation of wood that compensates in compression for centralised decay^{3,4} on the leeward side to the wind forces that occur across this bank. It is suggested this be left well alone.
- iii) Retrenching or canopy reduction in veteran trees gives less wind sail and again **reduces risk**.
- iv) Soil erosion is a perfectly common phenomenon of little to no concern with the right circumstances, and trees adapt to this. It is the fine fibrous roots that give cohesion/anchorage in the soil and resist tension on the windward side. Where the soil is silty or sandy, as on higher parts of the Heath, rainfall and surface run-off can erode the silt from the soil around the tree away: hence the Eiffel tower effect where some trees can look as if they are standing just on their roots. Photographs and Street View shots of the Telegraph Hill trees here from April 2007 and May 2019 (see below) show no significant difference in the degree of soil erosion here, indicating it is slight and very slow, so **the trees have adapted** and weathered the various gales and hurricanes we have had in the last many decades.



Google Street View August 2008



Google Street View April 2021

- v) “Lean towards building”. There are no buildings within a huge distance of these trees that they could ever conceivably shade, touch etc. – the width of the road, 2 pavements and a front garden on each side. Since the Telegraph Hill bank is a Local Green Space it will not be built on in the future while this legislation is in play, so they cannot constrain development either.

We suggest the proposed work to the trees is too extreme. If the deadwood is cut out AND the crowns are reduced by 2-4 metres, this will virtually remove the trees and produce an extremely ugly result. Comparing the canopies between photographs of 2007 and 2021 it can be seen that while the trees are increasing their canopies lower down after retrenching, this growth is very slow, which we suggest would be expected for veteran trees of well over 200 years old with root constraint from the retaining wall. We have considered: ‘Trees that tend to produce very large, failure-prone branches are relatively unlikely to have a prolonged ancient phase of life. Intervention in the form of tree work can sometimes extend the lives of such trees.’³ Since these trees are small and already veterans of a significant age, this is clearly not the case here.

Current photographs (see below) of tree canopy in relation to the streetlight show that only a few leaves and young twigs could possibly touch it in a high wind. These cannot do damage to the light and there is no significant wood within growing distance that is likely to reach it either. Damage to the tree would only be to a few leaves which is probably less than the damage to the tree of removing the terminal branches that they are on. Consequently, we consider that “...prune to clear streetlight by 2m” is over-pruning and inappropriate for veteran trees. We suggest this can either be left until there is sufficient growth to warrant pruning, or limited to 1m from the streetlight or back to a suitable growth point, whichever is less.



Where next photo taken



Canopy reach to lamp post seen from below



Canopy reach seen laterally

To propose taking back any growth by up to 4 metres merely so that it doesn't overhang a pavement or roadway is unwarranted in any tree⁵. If this were to be done to all trees there would be hardly any canopy left in our streets to help with carbon capture, pollution control, summer and winter temperature control and contribute with their beauty and leafiness to street amenity. If this practice were to become widespread it can be argued this could INCREASE risk to passers-by, since new growth has weaker attachment than original growth. It also adds to cost as it prompts new growth and requires more frequent visits from tree surgeons. Significant reduction to veteran trees should only be performed by a tree surgeon with, or under the guidance of an arboriculturalist with Vet Cert training (training approved by the Arboricultural Association⁶) to determine the local parameters that warrant any reduction - or don't.

Dead branches are not necessarily of themselves a concern. It has been suggested that it takes a large dead branch on a veteran oak 100 years to fall. Be that as it may, risk to passers-by must be considered but should be verifiable, and to remove all dead wood "just in case" is not appropriate. If there are documented signs that give concern about deadwood here, such as where a branch with central hollowing or decay does not have a thick enough outer wall of wood to resist failure when its entire cross-section is subjected to bending stress, then fracture pruning should be recommended i.e. only snapping a branch across areas of clear and significant decay rather than cutting it away. This provides an unobtrusive and natural effect and ensure no wound damage can occur to the tree from tree surgery. Veteran tree management should generally not include cutting back to live wood since this risks the tree, tends to increase the amount of deadwood in years to come, is unnecessary, and does not reduce the tree's risk to passers-by any more than fracture pruning does.

A project to link veteran deadwood piles in the Hampstead/RedFrog area is being planned to aid biodiversity, so if any deadwood is removed for good reason from these trees, placing this on the ground in a discrete pile on the bank, or donating the wood to the project would be a good contribution towards this. We are happy to be contacted about this.

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¹ Lonsdale, D. (2004). Aging processes in trees and their relationships with decay fungi. In: *The trees of history: protection and exploitation of veteran trees*. Eds. G. Nicolotti & P. Gonthier, Proc. Conf. International Congress, Torino, Italy, 1-2 April, 2004. 23-30.

² Rust, S. & Roloff, A. (2002). Reduced photosynthesis in old oak (*Quercus robur*): the impact of crown and hydraulic architecture. *Tree Physiology* 22, 597-601.

³ Ancient and other veteran trees: further guidance on management. Pub The Tree Council (2013) ed D Lonsdale.

⁴ <https://arboriculture.wordpress.com/2017/06/04/fungal-succession-and-wood-decay-in-living-trees-a-seminar-report-part-i/>

⁵ FC (2011). National Tree Safety Group: Common sense risk management of trees. Forestry Commission, Edinburgh, 104 pp.

⁶ <https://www.trees.org.uk/Training-Events/VETcert>