



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: 2022/5355/T

Address: 44 Denning Road NW3 1SU

Case Officer: Tree Allocation

Date: 13th December 2022

This is the second Notice of Intent to fell these two lime trees. It would seem this has been done without noting the Officer Delegated Report that states:

“There is likely to be a design and/or engineering solution that would allow for the wall to be reconstructed and the trees retained. Input from a structural engineer has not been included with the submission, options that allow for the retention of the trees do not appear to have been explored.”

The submitted Engineer’s report on a ‘Defect Inspection’ is merely that, stating “The instruction was to inspect and comment on the cracks to the front boundary wall”. There is no view presented on an option to retain the trees nor how this might be achieved. From his professional accreditation it appears the surveyor and report writer is a buildings engineer and not a member of the Institute of Structural Engineers.

This becomes evident from this statement (my comments in italics):

“...the wall is unstable [*this could well be so, but no evidence is given as would be expected from such a professional*] and could suffer collapse on users of the subject flats’ front garden” [*I suspect a structural engineer would be unlikely to consider a wall might collapse uphill, away from its lean and through two closely sited large tree trunks pushing it the opposite way*].

It is also stated:

“There is evidence of ... indirect action of the tree roots on the soil volume i.e. tree root induced clay shrinkage subsidence.”

While paragraphs 3.03.3.04, 3.05, 3.06 and 3.07 are historical arguments for the existence of the phenomenon tree root-induced clay shrinkage subsidence, no actual evidence has been presented of its existence here. These lime trees are of course strikingly well within the ‘zone of influence’, but no evidence has been provided that, for instance, the cracking is diagonal or that it is seasonal. It is noteworthy that the professional with the professional expertise to determine such things - the arboriculturalist - did not report finding such factors. If it were true that removing the entire leafy area would result in rot and destabilisation the arboriculturalist would have been unlikely to recommend continuing with regular pollarding to help limit future growth. Pavement-side crack mapping on the other hand explains the cause as direct lateral pressure from the two lime trees.

As previously, I do not dispute that the wall needs re-building, but since this is the case, I consider means should be found for the wall to be safely re-built and supported *with the trees retained*.

While the historical modifications to this wall were insufficient due to natural expansive trunk growth and the passage of time, it is clear there has been a long-term wish to retain these trees. The TPOs that have been applied to them to protect the public amenity they provide demonstrate Camden has such a wish too.

It is within the capability of a structural engineer to design a new wall that retains the trees whose trunks were leaning against the previous wall and where subsidence is a possibility. (Subsidence here is likely to be silt erosion as the wall is directly above a tributary of the old river Fleet and likely to have much silt-eroding groundwater below it - incidentally at a relatively shallow level likely to prevent a sufficient depth of soil suction for root-induced clay shrinkage subsidence.)

We have many examples throughout Hampstead of boundary walls with gaps sufficient to allow tree trunk expansion (as suggested in my previous objection) and walls built over lintels or brick arches for tree root expansion. Walls can also be founded over plates on screw piles rather than simple foundations to counter any potential for subsidence. A structural engineer is well able to check that such a design is possible, prior to obtaining planning permission for it in this Conservation Area.

I am pleased that the tree owners value the trees such as T3 and T5 within the garden and these trees to the extent that they state they

“would be happy to replant with younger trees whether this be Lime trees or other, which would be kept regularly pollarded.”

It seems the applicants have merely failed to obtain a report on how to re-build the wall while retaining the trees (in which case this Notice of Intent would have been irrelevant), or how this might be impossible from someone with the professional scope of practice and experience to determine this. All this was recommended by the original arboriculturalist as well as Camden's Tree Officer.

Dr Vicki Harding
Society Tree Officer