Unit 60, Aston Down, Stroud
Gloucestershire GL6 8GA
Tel 01285 760466
sales@treemaintenance.co.uk
www.treemaintenance.co.uk

Stephen Cullis, Managing Director

Ken Sheppard, Senior Arboricultural Consultant
MICFor FArborA Dip Arb (RFS) Tech Cert (Arbor A) CUEW

Mr T Sheppard
Newland Homes Ltd
Brighouse Court
Barnett Way
Barnwood
GLOUCESTER
GL4 3RT

16 November 2020

Our Reference: 15065 / 64489

Dear Tom

North Boundary Feature - Upton Gardens, Whitminster

Following our meeting last week, please find listed below my thoughts regarding the management of trees along the northern boundary.

Current position

The northern boundary is formed by a visually significant tree group which provides screening and visual separation of the Upton Gardens site from public open space and playing fields to the north. The group forms Group 5 of the recent Tree Survey and Constraints advice (ref 15065/64293) completed in October 2020. The area is used for informal play, with many of the small coppice stems being vandalised and damaged. The area has also been subject to fly tipping with litter and other detritus being present through the woodland belt (see Photograph 1).

Photograph 1. Informal path and vandal damaged Coppice Stool.

The group consists of two large mature Horse Chestnuts (Trees 751 and 752), young Yew, Ash, regenerating Elm and developing Horse Chestnut and a few Lime coppice stools.

Elm are developing from root suckers and have a limited life expectancy as they tend to develop to around 150-300 mm diameter and then succumb to Dutch Elm disease as can be seen in Group 4.

Although due to the time year it could not be fully assessed, the crowns of the young and middle aged Ash appeared to be suffering from early stage Ash Dieback. This is a windborne, very infectious and progressive disease and is likely to result in the loss of the Ash trees within 3 years.

Photograph 2. Dead and declining Elm and Ash.

Many of the Horse Chestnut coppice stools show evidence of significant basal decay with stems developing close to ground level with weak included forks. The group at present is fairly dense, resulting in tall trunks with high canopies. They are mutually self-supporting by providing companion shelter for one another. Trees will have an increased risk of failure if suddenly exposed by the loss of neighbouring trees. Failure of coppice stools has already started, as shown by tree 750, and will be accelerated by the loss of adjacent Ash and Elm.

Photograph 3. Tree 750 collapsing Coppice Stool

Without proactive management, the group, as a feature, is likely to be lost within a decade and during this time period will pose an increasing risk to informal users of the area and those using the

sports fields to the north. Natural regeneration of the Ash, Elm and Horse Chestnut will occur but will be subject to cyclic loss as is currently occurring. Any development of the site will further bring more targets within falling distance of the trees thereby further increasing the risk of injury and/or damage.

Management Options

Clearly the trees in this group pose an increasing risk of collapse as they continue to succumb to disease, decay and structural weaknesses. The risk is going to increase as trees become more exposed and, without careful management, the group will continue to suffer cyclic loss with an ever increasing liability being placed on the land owner.

Removal of the dead and declining Ash and Elm will reduce companion shelter to the structurally weak Horse Chestnut coppice stools, increasing their risk of failure. The worst of the stools could be re-coppiced, but this would then lead to further increase in the exposure of the remaining stools which will then be more prone to failure. New planting in amongst coppice stools will be problematic as coppice growth will easily out-compete the establishing trees. In addition, establishing trees will be at risk of damage as the retained coppice stools will require ongoing maintenance on a 10 -15 year cyclic operation. Coppicing will result in a permanent lower level feature potentially with a more diverse ground flora as a result of periodic opening up of the canopy. After the initial works, a cyclic programme could be established. Any retained coppice stools will have an increased risk of failure.

Phased replacement could be considered, where part of the group is removed and replaced with new planting, over say a 20 - 30 year period. This would allow the partial retention of the existing feature whilst trees become established but, as above, exposed trees will have an increased risk of failure and new planting will be at risk of damage during subsequent felling cycles. New planting may be more difficult to establish due to above and below ground competition and shading.

Although resulting in the initial loss of the majority of the feature, complete removal and replacement with a diverse mix of native woodland species would provide a long term and sustainable solution. This option would minimise risk of future failure and contribute to the local and wider landscape for decades to come. Trees 751 and 752 would be retained, as they are dominant trees and well above the existing canopy. The rest of the group would be felled and stumps ground out. Larger felled material could be stacked to create dead wood habitat piles. A few larger trunks could left at 2-3 metres high as standing deadwood, providing song and hunting posts for birds. Brash could be chipped to provide organic mulch around new planting to suppress weed growth and provide a slow release of nutrients into the soil. Lime coppice stools to the eastern end of the group would be retained and re-coppiced to provide a more instant effect. Any good quality existing Yew would also be retained. A broad mix of native trees and woodland shrubs will be installed and maintained until established.

Recommendations

In terms of providing a safe, sustainable and manageable landscape feature for the future the preferred arboricultural option should be to remove the existing feature and replace it is in its entirety.

This would remove the ongoing liability associated with further opening up an already unstable and declining group, it will remove species which are unable to achieve their mature size and will decline cyclically and it will provide new planting which is manageable as a linear woodland in perpetuity. Retention of deadwood and the planting of a new woodland understorey would also improve wildlife

habitat and provide ancillary benefits such as safe community access from the sports area to the north.

Consideration should be given to the implementation of the replacement scheme as soon as is reasonably possible to ensure planting is established and thriving before the end of the development of the site. Winter 2020 would be advised as this would avoid the 2021 bird nesting season running from March to August which could preclude and reduce the extent of works which could be carried out.

I trust this assists in your discussions and deliberations

Yours sincerely

Ken Sheppard. **MICFor. F.Arbor.A. Dip. Arb. (RFS) Tech. Cert. (Arbor.A.) CUEW.**
Senior Arboricultural Consultant