

Report regarding Copper Beech tree at St John the Baptist Churchyard, Bath Road, Frome, Somerset BA11 1PL

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Background: Concern had been expressed as to the risks posed by a large copper beech tree that is affected by a fungal colonisation. A site meeting was therefore held on the 13th June 2016 to assess the risks and options, with the following attendees:

Pete Weaver -Corporate Health and Safety Advisor, Mendip District Council (MDC)

The Tree Officer (Planning) MDC , Bo Walsh -Tree Officer (Planning), Mendip District Council (MDC)

The Tree Manager TLG, Terry Offen -Tree Manager, T he Landscape Group (TLG)

Simon Foley -Quality, Health and Environmental Systems Manager officer, The Landscape Group, (TLG)

Sue Church (Contract Officer Mendip DC)

Report

The meeting commenced with The Tree Officer (Planning) MDC and The Tree Manager TLG



Figure 1 Fruiting structures on external trunk

explaining how the fungus (*Ganoderma sp.*) had affected the tree. The fruiting structures of the fungus on the external trunk surface (See figure 1) are the visible part of a more insidious condition which is causing extensive heartwood decay, effectively weakening the integrity of the load bearing trunk of the tree.

External specialists had been engaged to assess and monitor the internal density of the tree, over a period of time, and their results indicate that the decay of the supporting lignin is progressing.

The Tree Officer (Planning) MDC and The Tree Manager TLG agreed that nothing can be done to save the tree and that the continuing decay would inevitably result in the trunk being unable to support weight of the substantial canopy, causing the tree to collapse.

The tree is positioned adjacent to the boundary of the churchyard overhanging a pedestrian pathway which serves the local primary school. (See Figure 2)

This pathway joins another pedestrian path which runs at 90° parallel to the church, again within the shadow of the tree.

The tree has a substantial crown and a number of heavy limbs which could cause serious injury or possibly fatality if they were to fall onto a person.



Figure 2 Position of tree. overhanging pathway

From a risk point of view the Corporate Health and Safety Advisor MDC and the Quality, Health and Environmental Systems Manager, TLG both agreed, that in the light of the information provided, it is eminently foreseeable that the tree, or part of it, will collapse at some time in the future. It is also foreseeable that when the tree collapses, due to its location, it has the potential to cause serious injury or fatality. Taking these two factors into consideration, the risk is substantial and unacceptable. As such, action MUST be taken to reduce the risk as a matter of urgency. The advice of the Tree Officer (Planning) MDC and The Tree Manager TLG indicates that the best option is to fell the tree as anything less would just be delaying the inevitable and could potentially introduce new risks.

Another consideration is that, the weaker the tree becomes, the more dangerous the operation of felling it will become.

Due to its position the felling of the tree must be carefully planned to ensure that it is carried out in a safe and controlled manner.

On a secondary issue, the tree is understandably well loved by parts of the community and the question has been asked whether part of the trunk can be left standing as a memorial to the tree.

The risk of this will need to be assessed as the tree is being taken down. The issue to bear in mind is that it is the trunk itself that is diseased and nothing should be left that is still likely to collapse and cause injury unless it is securely fenced. There are a number of options for using the healthy parts of the tree and perhaps these could be discussed with the interested parties to agree the best option.

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