

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 5/22

Date: 5/12/22

Briefing paper to: All Members of the Regeneration, Culture and Environment
Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Purpose: Trees at Grange Road Cemetery - near Layfield Road

This information is provided in response to a request made by the Committee on 11 August 2022 (minute number 164/2022).

We are doing all we can to meet the aspirations of residents who signed the petition, but as I am sure you will appreciate, we also need to be cognisant of the importance of the trees in question and the impact of any tree works that are undertaken.

The mature lime trees at Grange Road Cemetery, south of properties at Layfield Road, have a very high amenity value and are important in terms of biodiversity as well as response to climate change. They also make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area that they grow in.

Because these trees grow in a conservation area, anyone wanting to prune them needs to make an application to the local planning authority (LPA). The LPA's main consideration when deciding whether to make a tree preservation order in response to such an application is the amenity value of the tree(s) and the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area.

Since taking the above petition to the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 August 2022, officers have met on site again. The purpose of this further meeting was to reconsider the scope of pruning works that would be acceptable in terms of impact on both the health and appearance of the trees as well as the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Whilst the reinspection of these trees from ground level did not reveal the presence of significant defects, other than some dead wood, it was noted that there is evidence of pruning works having been undertaken in the past. I have been informed that these pruning points will be checked when contractors undertake the tree works that we propose to apply for.

Unfortunately, there is no scope to pollard the trees as requested. Industry best practice, set out in the relevant British Standard, describes the circumstances when the crown of a tree might need to be reduced. For example, to relieve mechanical stress likely to lead to a stem to split apart. Even in these circumstances, the standard states that a tree should not be cut back to where it was previously cut in order to avoid creating defects, weaknesses and decay that might jeopardise the safety of the tree(s).

Since the lime trees near the church were pollard a number of years ago our working practices have evolved. They now better align better with industry best practice and seek to maximise the benefits derived from trees in terms of biodiversity and mitigating the impact of climate change

Mindful of the outcome of the reporting of this petition, as well as both the value of these trees and the imperative not to jeopardise their health or safety, officers have reconsidered proposals presented at the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 August 2022. The proposed works now include a crown lift and removal of suckers to a height of 5.5m above ground level, the removal of dead wood and the removal of large shrubs growing adjacent to the low boundary wall between the park and the adjacent footpath.

These works are intended to allow more daylight to pass under the tree canopy, to make significant improvements regarding passive surveillance of the footpath and to remove any significant deadwood that might otherwise fall from the trees.

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