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ADDENDUM to Arboricultural Impact Assessment: DC/26/1186 - Land North of Rectory Lane Ashington

1. I am Ian Monger, Principal Arboriculturist at Barton Hyett Associates Ltd, an arboriculturist with 20 years' experience, and a professional member of the Institute of Chartered Forestry and of the Arboricultural Association.

2. Barton Hyett Associates Ltd prepared the Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) report (BHA_5948_AIA Land north of Rectory Lane, Ashington_IM_July2026) in support of the outline planning application DC/26/1186 at Land North of Rectory Lane Ashington, for redevelopment of the site to provide up to 125 dwellings, access, public open space and associated landscaping, drainage and highways infrastructure with all matters reserved except access.

3. The tree survey for the site, which I carried out in October 2024, identified 17 trees and 10 groups of trees of high quality (Category A), and one veteran oak tree T25, also of high quality.

4. The NPPF **national decision-making policy N6** states (paragraph 2) that, *'irrespective of a site's status in nature conservation terms, development proposals which would entail the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists'*.

5. The submitted Outline development proposal (Outline Masterplan (Parameter) 26001-06E and Proposed Site Access 25-036-006 RevA) retains and enhances the veteran buffer of veteran oak T25 as semi-natural habitat, in accordance with the Natural England/Forestry Commission Standing Advice *'Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions'*, and respects the Root Protection Areas (RPAs) of the other retained trees.

6. Comments received from the Horsham District Council Arboricultural Officer (dated 24/09/2026) raise no objection to the proposed tree and hedgerow section removals. However, following further discussion, the Officer considers that oak T22 may meet the threshold for classification as a veteran tree in accordance with the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), and requests a further assessment of the tree.

7. An additional site visit was made by myself on 5 November 2026 to review my assessment of oak T22 made in 2024. This Addendum to the AIA report presents my findings and conclusion. In summary, I do not consider that oak tree T22 meets the threshold for classification as a veteran tree in accordance with the NPPF.

8. The National Planning Policy Framework 2026 (NPPF) defines an ancient or veteran tree as: *'a tree which, because of its age, size and condition, is of exceptional biodiversity, cultural or heritage value. All ancient trees are veteran trees. Not all veteran trees are old enough to be ancient, but are old relative to other trees of the same species.'* (My emphasis.)

9. Given that the NPPF was updated in September 2026, we consider that the NPPF definition supersedes that found within the PPG, which defines trees as being ancient or veteran because of their age, size or condition, and was last revised in July 2019.

10. At Barton Hyett Associates (BHA), we recognise that ancient and veteran trees, alongside ancient woodlands, are irreplaceable living ecosystems. An ancient or veteran tree is one that has developed a range of microhabitats, often associated with decay, which support biodiversity. These features accumulate over time as a tree endures extremes of weather, environmental stress, or human intervention such as pruning.

11. Those features may include: internal heartwood decay; hollowing or cavities within the trunk; tear-out wounds from storm damage forming pockets of decay; lost bark from lightning strikes or physical impact; old pruning wounds; water pools; epiphytes; and crown retrenchment with localised or widespread deadwood, often presenting as a 'stag's head'. These attributes (or 'microhabitats') take a long time to develop and cannot be replicated, and national planning policy accordingly treats veteran tree habitats as irreplaceable.

12. Identifying a veteran tree is a nuanced process; trees grow and evolve slowly over a long period of time, so there are long periods of transitions between 'categories'.

13. Rather than relying on age or size alone, we assess the quantity and quality of structural features (microhabitats) that accumulate over time. The matrix in Table 1 outlines the criteria used during site assessments.

Table 1: Matrix of key criteria used when assessing veteran and ancient trees.

Category	Primary Indicators	Assessment Notes
Condition & Structure	Crown retrenchment ('growing downwards') Significant hollowing of the trunk Stag-headedness (dead, antler-like branches) Heart-rot fungi fruit bodies and cavities	The greater the number of these features present, the higher our confidence in assigning veteran status.
Age & Size	Large girth relative to species Estimated advanced age (e.g., using the White Method)	Trunk girth is a useful starting point but is not definitive. Past management or poor soils can restrict size.
Cultural & Heritage	Lapsed pollards and old coppice stools Prominent local landmarks or boundary markers	These forms represent a direct link with historic land management and rural economies.

14. To navigate the subjectivity of assessing irreplaceable habitats, Barton Hyett Associates adheres to the following professional protocol:

- **Direct Observation & Verification**: Trees are assessed based on direct observation in accordance with national guidance. Crucially, any tree identified as a veteran or ancient

specimen is subject to peer verification by a second member of our arboricultural team to ensure robust decision-making.

- **Transparent Reporting**: All identified indicators and features are recorded transparently within our tree survey reports to clearly justify the assigned status.
- **Desktop Cross-Referencing**: We utilise historical mapping and public inventories (such as the Ancient Tree Inventory, ATI, and Ancient Woodland Inventory, AWI) to guide our surveys, though these do not replace independent site assessment.
- **Interdisciplinary Collaboration**: We share our arboricultural survey data with project ecologists. We recognise that BNG assessments use differing parameters and we welcome the input of ecologists and heritage consultants regarding site sensitivities and unrecorded habitats.

15. We acknowledge that it is inevitable that other people, whether professionals working in arboriculture or not, may sometimes form a different opinion about a tree than we put forward.

Veteran oak T25

16. By way of comparison to the oak T22 in question, the veteran tree T25 identified on site has a trunk diameter of 1210mm. Images of the tree are included in Figure 1.



FIGURE 1: IMAGES OF VETERAN OAK T25, TAKEN NOVEMBER 2026.

17. The tree has pronounced and attractive buttressing, and *Pseudoinonotus dryadeus* fungal brackets at the base, with likely heartwood cavity and dry crevices from soil erosion. Two water pools were confirmed within the buttresses. The tree also has a strong population of lichens and mosses on the bark. Deadwood within the tree has nesting holes.

18. However, the trunk size of the tree (while not an overriding factor) suggests a younger age than we would ordinarily expect for a veteran tree. It also shows no significant crown retrenchment, but some twig dieback.

19. Overall, I consider the tree worthy of veteran status, at a middle range of confidence, because of its range of microhabitat features and strong aesthetic appeal.

Oak T22

20. Oak T22 has a trunk diameter of 1540mm. (The trunk was measured this year at a slightly lower height than 1.5m due to twig obstacles, at 1560mm over dead ivy stems.) Images of the tree are included in Figure 2 below.



FIGURE 4: IMAGES OF HIGH-QUALITY OAK T22, TAKEN NOVEMBER 2026.

21. The oak is undoubtedly a large tree - probably the tallest/largest at the site. However, with cautious reference to Figure 1.3 of Lonsdale (2013)[1], a leading publication on identifying veteran trees, its girth of 4.8m places the tree at the lower end of the 'veteran/notable' category of girth in relation to age and developmental classification. The term 'notable' simply refers to a tree's size, being one which is very large but might not qualify as veteran or ancient but stands out locally because it is larger than other trees around it, and carries no weight within the NPPF.

22. As the Arboricultural Officer notes, ivy and undergrowth have recently been cleared from the trunk base. This better displays a basal decay cavity (with no fungal fruiting bodies observed at my visit) with three openings. The cavity openings are to the north, southeast, and northwest, and they have been excavated by rodents. Old decay is visible inside the cavity.

23. Basal decay in mature oaks is very common. Indeed, mature oaks have an entire ecosystem of fungi living within its tissues for its entire life, perhaps only becoming decomposers or pathogens when conditions are right. The presence of heartwood decay within a tree is a strong feature of veteran/ancient trees, but alone is not sufficient to signify this status.

24. The areas around the basal cavity opening of T22 show strong and entire buttressing and bark, indicating that the tree is responding well to the decay and is likely to do so for many years to come. The tree shows no crown retrenchment.

25. The tree has several pieces of large, low, weathered deadwood which I consider to be typical of a mature oak. For example, a large dead branch to the southwest is likely caused by the overshadowing by the adjacent oak T23 to the south. There are three low branch pruning/ fracture stubs. The fracture stubs appear to have been caused by mechanical damage from passing farm machinery.

26. Having consulted with my colleague and Director Paul Barton *MSc, BSc (Hons), MArborA, RCArborA*, a Registered Consultant of the Arboricultural Association, we agree that oak T22 does not represent a veteran tree because of its age, size, and condition, in accordance with the definition of the NPPF.

27. The tree is undoubtedly a tree of high quality (probably better expressed as Category A3 instead of A1, in recognition of its material conservation value), and a tree which is 'notable' in the locality because of its size. However, the tree does not display a wealth of veteran tree features, and is not of exceptional biodiversity, cultural, or heritage value that would warrant the special treatment as a veteran tree.

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[1] Lonsdale, D. (Ed.) (2013). Ancient and other veteran trees: further guidance on management. The Tree Council, London.