

DELEGATED APPLICATIONS

ASSESSMENT SHEET

APPLICATION NO: DC/25/2137: SMG (Cowfold) Ltd Henfield Road Cowfold.

REPRESENTATION AND CONSULTATION RESPONSES:

No representations have been received from the relevant Parish Council

Two representations of objection have been received in respect of this application. The objections are as follows –

Comment 1): The tree has Historical value RE [REDACTED], It is not in a dangerous condition. We need to preserve these assets from destruction including the Oak trees in Eastlands Lane.

Comment 2) As the Tree Warden for Cowfold I am stating objections to the application to fell this important tree for the reasons stated below. The tree may be diseased, but it still has considerable value in terms of biodiversity and contribution to the ecosystem. Diseased oak trees play a very important part, and many species rely on them, such as beetles, fungi and woodpeckers (to name just a few). Moreover, even a diseased Oak has an important role to play in terms of carbon capture. Removing the entire trunk would push carbon straight back into the atmosphere. This tree also has significant historical value. The singer and actor, [REDACTED] had an almost fatal accident when he drove into this tree. Taking all of this into account I would recommend pruning where needed as op-posed to anything as drastic as completely felling this tree

ASSESSMENT:

1. The tree subject of this application is a mature oak situated on the frontage of the SMG Garage on the western side of Henfield Road (A281), Cowfold. The constraint is TPO/0348 served on 29/11/1979 the tree is T21 - Oak - although noted as T21, Order protects this single tree only.
2. The tree stands approximately 1.2m from the footway edge and around 2.7 m from the carriageway, within a highly exposed roadside and commercial setting.
3. The current proposal seeks to remove of the tree on the grounds it is exhibiting signs of decline. This request follows a previous application submitted in 2019 which sought consent to fell the tree; the 2019 application was refused on amenity grounds. At that time, the tree was considered to retain sufficient vitality to warrant continued retention despite its constrained growing conditions.
4. The oak occupies a severely restricted environment within an active garage forecourt, its entire rooting area bounded by long-established hardstanding. There remains no realistic opportunity for soil improvement, decompaction or root zone enhancement. The forecourt is routinely occupied by high-value vehicles positioned directly beneath and adjacent to the tree.
5. The tree also adjoins and partly overhangs Henfield Road and the associated pedestrian footway, placing it within a consistently high-target area that includes moving traffic, pedestrians, parked vehicles and commercial activity. This exposure remains materially unchanged since the 2019 application.
6. The tree primary rooting environment must be regarded as entirely inhospitable for a mature oak. The surrounding hardstanding, highway infrastructure and forecourt surfacing will have resulted in chronic soil compaction, restricted gaseous exchange, disrupted soil moisture availability and a severely limited functional rooting volume.
7. Such conditions can significantly restrict both the development of new roots and the effective function of existing roots. In addition, the site has been subject to prolonged vehicle loading, historic disturbance and contamination associated with forecourt and highway use. Collectively, these factors will have created a hostile below-ground environment unsuitable for the long-term physiological needs of the tree.
8. It is considered beyond reasonable doubt that these unfavourable rooting conditions have driven the tree's decline. The tree has entered an advanced phase of retrenchment, characterised by extensive crown dieback, suppressed growth and a growing reliance on compensatory epicormic and secondary foliage. Given that site conditions remain unchanged since 2019, there is no realistic prospect for recovery.
9. The physiological condition of the oak has deteriorated since the 2019 refusal. The upper and outer crown is now sparsely foliated, with large volumes of non-responsive branch structure. It is estimated that only a limited proportion of the canopy currently supports viable leaf-bearing growth, largely confined to the lower secondary crown material.

10. Extension growth throughout the primary crown framework is minimal to absent. Remaining growth is weak and suppressed, with development largely confined to reactionary shoots. This growth pattern is symptomatic of progressive decline and is consistent with long-term root dysfunction and a severely reduced functional root system.

11. The tree supports a considerable quantity of static deadwood throughout the crown, including material positioned above the garage forecourt and adjacent highway. While deadwood removal could theoretically be undertaken, the extent and distribution of dead material indicate that any such works would be extensive.

12. The scale of pruning required to remove deadwood and manage risk would fundamentally alter the trees already compromised structure, resulting in a specimen of poor form, reduced visual coherence and diminished amenity value. Such intervention would not address the underlying causes of decline and would not represent a sustainable long-term management strategy.

13. Regard has been given to the historic basal wound associated with a previously recorded vehicular impact. Although surface occlusion remains evident, mallet sounding of the affected stem area produces a consistent tonal change indicative of underlying internal decay. This suggests a deterioration in internal stem condition since the 2019 assessment.

14. It is acknowledged that, in a less constrained setting and absent the high-target environment present here, the trees continued retention with managed decline could have been a reasonable option. However, in this case, the combination of the tree's declining condition, hostile and unimprovable rooting environment, and the presence of multiple high-value and high-frequency targets necessitates careful consideration of risk. Continued retention would involve accepting an increasingly disproportionate and indefensible level of risk.

15. The removal of the tree would result in a loss of visual amenity, as it remains a prominent roadside feature contributing positively to the local streetscape. This loss must be balanced against the tree's declining physiological and structural condition, the hostile and sealed rooting environment, and its location within a consistently high-risk setting. Owing to the operational requirements of the forecourt and its relationship with the highway, it is not realistically possible to secure an appropriate replacement tree within the same area or immediate vicinity.

16. Should the tree be retained, it is likely that its decline would continue, with progressive canopy loss, increasing deadwood and a heightened likelihood of branch or structural failure. In such circumstances, removal would ultimately become unavoidable, potentially under emergency or uncontrolled conditions.

17. On balance, having regard to the extent of decline since the 2019 application, the substantially reduced effective canopy, extensive dieback, minimal extension growth, hostile rooting environment, evidence of internal basal decay and the presence of multiple high-value targets within close proximity, the continued retention of the tree is no longer considered reasonable, proportionate or sustainable.

RECOMMENDATION:

Grant consent subject to the conditions below.

CONDITIONS TO BE APPLIED:

- | | |
|--------|-----------------------------|
| 1. TR2 | <i>Time limit, 2 years</i> |
| TINF1 | <i>Note to applicant.</i> |
| TINF2 | <i>Wildlife protection.</i> |

DELEGATED

Authorising Officer sign.....ANBU.....**Arboricultural Officer (Strategic Planning).**

Date.....13 May 26.....