

Mr M Evans
99 Ashby Road
Hinckley, Leicestershire
LE10 1SQ

01 March 2024

Dear Mr Evans,

Trees at Land off Hangman's Lane, Hinckley Leicestershire

I am pleased to submit my observations in respect to the condition and future management of a group of crack willow (*Salix fragilis*) identified below as group G1, an ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) identified as tree T2, and a weeping willow (*Salix babylonica*) identified as tree T3 at land off Hangman's Lane in Hinckley. The trees are cross referenced to the accompanying Tree Survey Plan 01.

1. Background & Introduction

The trees are subject to Hinckley and Bosworth Council Tree Preservation Order (TPO) Land at 2 Hangman's Lane 2002 and TPO Hangman's Lane (Modified) 1976. A TPO is a legal order served by the local planning authority to protect trees when it is in the interests of amenity. You must obtain written permission from the local authority before working on protected trees. Unauthorised pruning, felling, or damage to TPO trees is an offence and could result in prosecution, a criminal record, and a substantial fine. There are exemptions which are in the 2012 Regulations.

I originally visited the site in 2016. I viewed the crack willow trees (Group 1) and produced a report highlighting their poor state and vulnerability to collapse. I applied to remove the trees under the TPO which was refused. An appeal was dismissed in 2017.

The crack willows have gradually failed most recently in the January 2024 storms. Damage has occurred to the neighbouring property as a result. I was instructed to view the trees again in February 2024, carry out an appraisal of their condition and give advice on future management.

This report refers only to the trees within the boundaries of the site. Trees outside the site are the responsibility of the neighbouring property owners.

2. The Site

The site is located at the bottom of Hangman's Lane near to the Ashby Road Sports Club. It is roughly rectangular in format and currently current very wet.

3. The Trees

Group G1: The Crack willow trees in the group G1 are over-mature. They are roughly 18-20m in height with an average stem diameter of 700mm. Roughly six main stems in two clumps come together to form one canopy, hence why I have dealt with them on a collective basis and that the 2002 TPO describes them as a group.

The crack willow trees have a visual presence in the landscape.

The crack willow trees have an over-extended structural makeup (photograph 1) with heavy end branch weight that leaves them vulnerable to failing on a frequent basis. Two main stems failed from the central group in recent stormy weather. They were made safe, I understand, with the approval of the local planning authority under an exemption from the need to submit an application.



Photograph 1

There is a vertical stress fracture (photograph 2-highlighted by pink arrows) identified through a central stem of the main group. There are significant tension and torsional stresses on all the remaining stems as they blow about in the wind.



Photograph 2

There is a pattern of branch failure within the species generally and at the site. Willow trees, particularly crack willow and poplars are members of the same Salicaceae family. They are described by David Lonsdale as “*requiring special attention*” as they have “*relatively weak wood or a reputation for frequent failure*”.

A number of the stems are attached to one another by potentially fragile included bark unions, which occur in the forks of acutely angled stems. The strength of these unions is compromised by wood fibres not fusing at the point of bark to bark contact. There is an increased likelihood of failure here as a result.

Wind moves branches around in different directions in an uncoordinated way. This movement acts to lessen the shock on the overall canopy; it is sometimes called mass damping. The recent loss of two complete stems has resulted in a change to the makeup of the canopy which will open it up to wind gusts it was previously sheltered from increasing wind loading on branches and escalating considerably the risk of boughs failing.

Crown reduction pruning would not be feasible in terms of managing the trees in the long-term. It would result in decay and vigorous re-growth at the points of pruning which would be difficult and potentially hazardous to manage by re-pruning. Further, crack willow trees do not lend themselves well to pruning in that they do not efficiently defend themselves from decay. The wounds expected to occur because of pruning would most likely lead to rot in the stems with extensive shoot growth arising at and around the points of injury. Shigo A (1989) is clear in his research that pruning stimulates sprouts which are unsightly, weakly attached and potentially hazardous. He recognises also that reduction pruning leads to cavities shortening further the safe life expectancy of these trees. The degree of pruning needed would be extensive leaving the trees unsightly.

Tree T2: The ash tree T2 is small with low public value. It is roughly 11m in height with a stem diameter of about 400mm. It has a profound asymmetric form as a result of its proximity to the much larger crack willow trees in the group G1. The ash tree appears to be dying back possibly as a result of ash dieback disease. There is little chance of it recovering. The ash tree T2 will become fragile as it dies and breaks up onto the adjacent driveway.

Tree T3: The over-mature weeping willow tree T3 has a very unbalanced exposed form (photograph 3) because of its proximity to another willow tree that was recently removed because of storm damage. It has a moderate degree of public visibility.

Stress fractures are evident throughout the branch framework. Several substantial boughs have broken in the recent storms and been made safe by pruning with the approval of the local planning authority. Very dense ivy restricted a view of its stem. Like crack willow trees, weeping willows have an inherently fragile structure that is prone to shedding boughs. There is a foreseeable risk of the tree T3 breaking up further because of its exposed form and collapsing completely onto the adjacent accessway.

The willow tree T3 could possibly be maintained in the short term by pruning, the degree of which would leave it unsightly and vulnerable to pathogen ingress and decay.



Photograph 3

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

There are numerous high value targets including an accessway, gardens, fences, parking, and garden buildings under and around the trees in the group G1, the ash tree T2 and the willow tree T3. The management of these trees is a balance between benefits and risk. The danger of collapse in respect of the crack willow trees in the group G1 and the weeping willow tree T3 is foreseeable. The consequences in terms of potential harm to people and property are significant. The ash tree T2 is declining in health. There is a possibility that it could also break up.

It is my advice here that the need to address the foreseeable risks associated with these trees outweighs any future loss of amenity. My recommendations are as follows:

- Remove to ground level the crack willow trees in the group G1 and plant replacements.
- Remove to ground level the ash tree T2 and plant a replacement.
- Remove to ground level the weeping willow tree T3 and plant a replacement.

I will be happy to apply to Hinckley and Bosworth Council for you under the TPO to remove the trees.

5. Replacement Trees

It is my advice that the removed trees be replaced by new specimens to maintain a consistent and sustainable landscape and to complement any future land use. It is important to carefully choose the location of new trees while bearing in mind their future growth habits. The following species would be suitable for this site:

- River birch (*Betula nigra*)
- Italian alder (*Alnus cordata*)
- Weeping willow (*Salix babylonica*)

Planting and Maintenance: It is essential that new trees are planted properly with a post-planting maintenance regime including watering, weeding etc. This could be required by a condition accompanying the TPO consent.

I trust that you find this letter helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely

R A Jones

Richard Jones MICFor, F Arbor A, CEnv
Director

References

Dunster A. J (2017), The Tree Risk Assessment Manual, International Society of Arboriculture

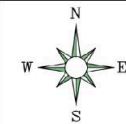
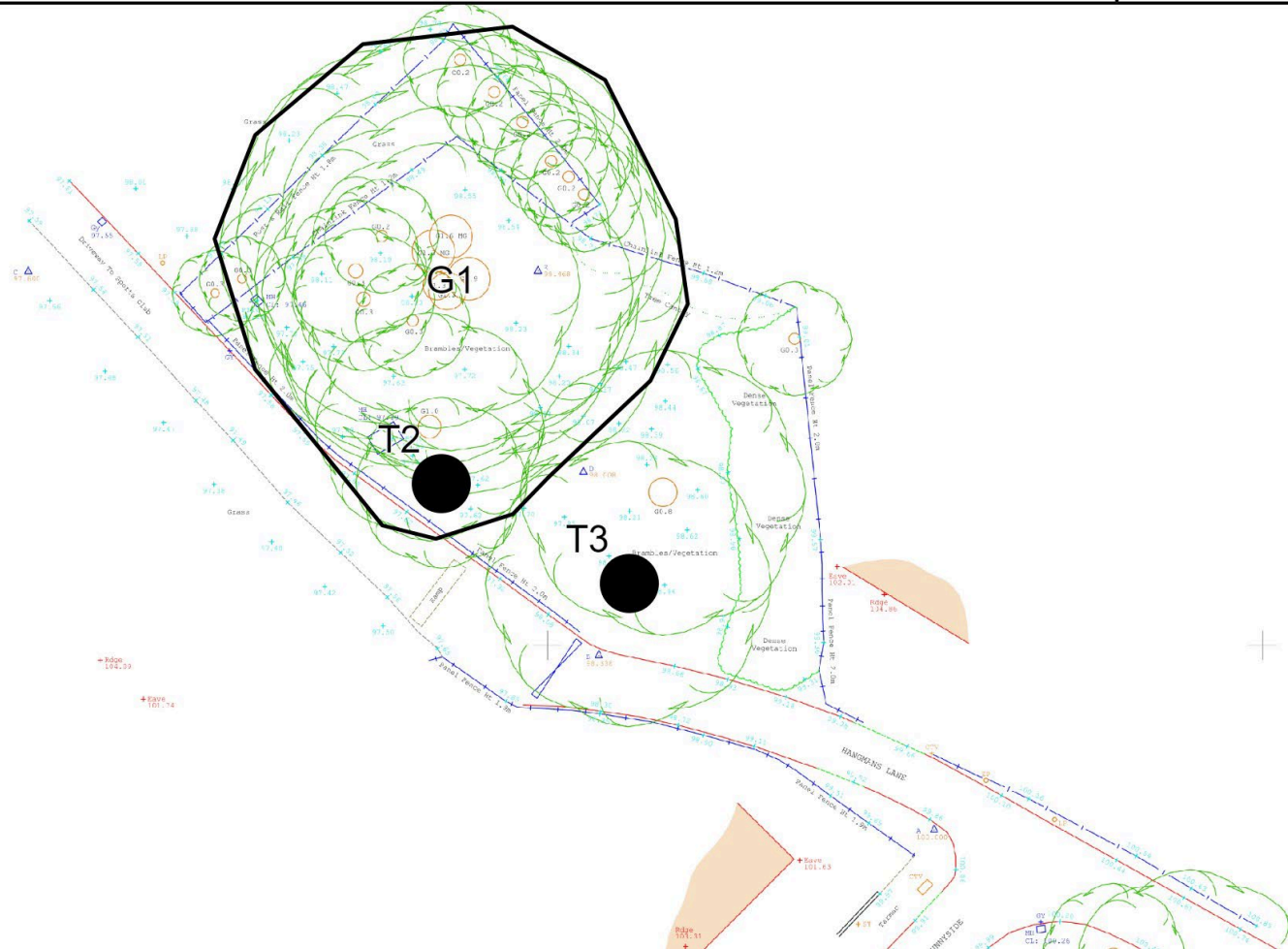
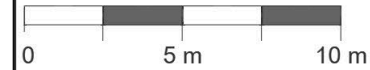
Lonsdale D (1999), Principles of Tree Hazard Assessment and Management, The Stationary Office

Shigo A (1989), Tree Pruning A Worldwide Photo Guide

Tree Survey Plan 01
 Hangman's Lane, Hinckley
 March 2024

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Legend

Station	Existing (m)	Proposed (m)	Level (m)
A	987.000	987.000	987.000
B	985.250	985.250	985.250
C	985.000	985.000	985.000
D	982.250	982.250	982.250
E	980.000	980.000	980.000

Notes

- Points are for height above sea level only.
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RJ Tree Services Ltd

Registered Office:

27 Main Street, Foxton, Leicestershire, LE16 7RB
Mob: 07765 792719 Email: richard@rjtreeservices.co.uk

Director: Richard Jones MICFor, F Arbor A, CEnv

Company Number: 9484682

 Institute of
Chartered Foresters
Registered Consultant

 CEnv
Chartered Environmentalist