

Planning Officer's Report – LDCA AUGUST 2021

APPLICATION	2021/35 – Removal of Ficus Tree Limb
PERMISSION SOUGHT	Permission in Full
REGISTERED	15 th April 2021
APPLICANT	Property Division, St Helena Government
PARCEL	JT070015
LOCALITY	Near the Canister, Jamestown
ZONE	Intermediate
CONSERVATION AREA	Jamestown Conservation Area
PUBLICITY	The application was advertised as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Independent Newspaper on 16th April 2021▪ A site notice displayed in accordance with Regulations.
EXPIRY	30 th April 2021
REPRESENTATIONS	None Received
DECISION ROUTE	Delegated / LDCA / EXCO

A. CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

1. Sewage & Water Division	No Response
2. Energy Division	No Objection
3. Fire & Rescue	No Response
4. Roads Section	No Objection
5. Property Division	The Applicant
6. Environmental Management	No Objection - Comments
7. Public Health	No Response
8. Agriculture & Natural Resources	The Agent
9. St Helena Police Services	Not Consulted
10. Aerodrome Safe Guarding	Not Consulted
11. Sustainable Development	No Objection
12. National Trust	No Response
13. Sure SA Ltd	No Objection
14. Heritage Society	Comments

B. PLANNING OFFICER'S APPRAISAL

LOCALITY & ZONING

The application site is the Ficus tree at the Canister. The site is within the Intermediate Zone and within the proposed Jamestown Conservation Area.

THE PROPOSAL

The request by the applicant and Highways Authority is to remove the limb on the Ficus Tree at the point indicated 'A' on diagram 2, where this limb is causing obstruction to vehicles especially those in terms of buses and trucks. Application for removal of this limb was also submitted in early 2020, where it was consequently refused by the LDCA as the overall impact on the health of the tree was of concern. This tree is protected under the tree preservation order.

ASSESSMENT OF TREE CONDITION (*Information taken from Forestry Officers Report*)

The tree has been assessed by the Forestry Section of ANRD and this has been submitted with the development application.

The tree is currently in good condition, despite a number of roots being severed during the period of 2020 as part of the repaving works in Jamestown. No wilting, dieback or any other defects have been observed. The foliage indicates good growth and vigour and it true to colour and form. The tree appears stable and has no obvious defects; no presence of pest or disease is evident at the time of the assessment. There is minor physical damage to the tree, specifically one limb rowing towards the Emporium, which appears to be damaged by larger vehicular traffic. Young shoots at the base of the tree are strong and healthy indicating overall good tree health.

Options for Consideration

Two courses of action are available in mitigating the issues associated with the limb; while the preference is for the removal of the limb, it is possible that the issues can be mitigated against through:

- The removal of the smaller limb, growing of the protruding elbow and coupling this with appropriate signage.

The recommendation in this is quite difficult to make; while support can be given to the preferred option by Crown Estates to remove the limb, the risk of the trees demise is quite significant in this case, however when considered against the potential damage to private vehicles and the possible liability issues that can arise for St Helena Government, the removal of the limb appears the most practical option.

Support in this case would be given to the removal of the smaller limb that clearly been struck by larger vehicles, evident from the abrasion marks and paint on the limb, where the installation of the appropriate signage in installed.

Consideration could be given to the less sever option of the smaller limb removal and signage for a trial period, using motion activated cameras as a form of monitoring before the limb removal is considered.

The recommendation is made with the tree preservation as the primary factor, however it is made without the responsibility for any liability claims that may arise from the public in relation to claims from those whose vehicles may become damaged by the limb in the future.

Diagram 1: Ficus Tree at the Canister – Point A (Proposed location for Cut)



Diagram 2: Napoleon Street Looking onto Roundabout



REPRESENTATIONS

No representations was received from the public, however comments was received from the Environment Management Division & Heritage Society.

Environment Management Division – ‘This tree is protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) and like all trees in Jamestown has positive environmental benefits. The tree is also considered to be in good health. However the overhanging limb does present a safety hazard for drivers and this therefore provides grounds for removal. However the removal should only be done taking out the minimum amount necessary to remove (or greatly reduce) the hazard risk.’

Heritage Society – ‘The Heritage Society supports the Forestry Officers preference to protect the tree. We are not clear from the documents provided which option is being put forward for permission from the LDCA. We seek clarity of that.

- Concerned by the suggestion of proposed signage. This could have an adverse effect on the Conservation Area but there is no drawing to indicate signage location or design.
- Concerned about reports in the assessment of damage to larger vehicles. If the vehicles are oversized and beyond the legal limit then the solution may better lie in dealing with those vehicles and their drivers. This should also be a concern of the Highways department, Customs and perhaps the Police.

- In any case drivers of large vehicles in Jamestown are more than likely to know of the tree issue and can plan their route accordingly or take special care. For that reason signs are likely to be superfluous, as the problem is well known.
- A decision to removal of any limb should be taken only in the knowledge there are very few strangers that drive large vehicles on the island.

Officers Response – In terms of the Heritage Society comments raised, a telephonic and email exchange was had to clarify the proposal. Clarity was sought from the Forestry Officer to the exact point of cutting for both options. It is to note that the application is for removal of the limb on point 'A' as indicated in diagram 1. The Forestry Officer has only advised point 'B' as an option.

Diagram 3: Photographs extracted from the Assessment

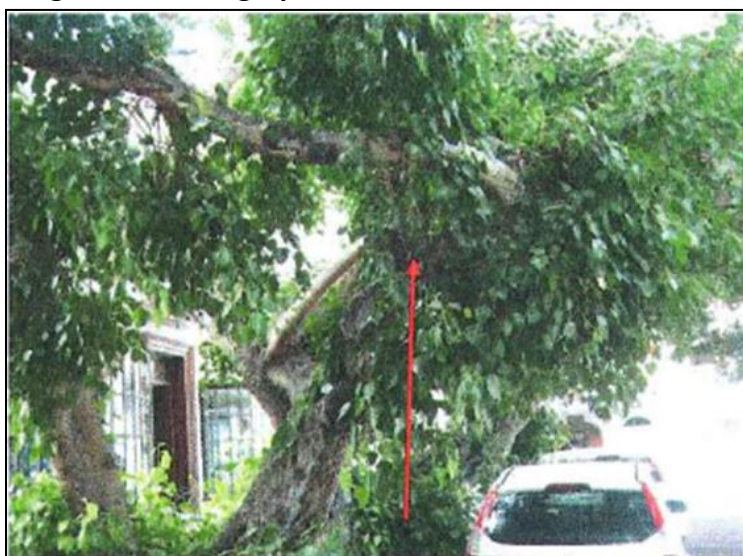


Figure 1: First leader with protruding "elbow"



Figure 3: Smaller limb suggested for removal

OFFICER ASSESSMENT

An application was previously submitted in 2020 for the removal of this same limb, along with additional works around limbs overhanging the roundabout. This application was subsequently approved but only for the limbs overhanging the roundabout, and not the limb being requested for removal now. The reason the limb to be removed was discouraged is due to the adverse impact it may have on the trees overall health, something of which has not changed and remains a key factor in considering this application.

In assessing any trees protected under the preservation order, special regards must be given to the historical heritage and its impact within the landscape. This particular tree forms part of a site that was once used for slave auctions, therefore has significant historical importance.

Furthermore the tree forms an integral part of the streetscape for hundreds of years, therefore any lost would have a detrimental impact on the landscape.

Having assessed the applicant's rationale for the removal of this limb, there are a few observations to be made. As can be seen on diagram 2, the junction lines for the roundabout are positioned approximately 2.5m – 3m away from the kerbs. Drivers should approach and enter the roundabout at this point in the highway; instead the majority of road users are entering underneath the overhanging limb, which has resulted in the damage that has been occurring. Having viewed a larger container transport negotiate this turn, the 'elbow' is not the main issue but rather the smaller limb that the Forestry Officer has alluded to as an option. In conclusion, the removal of the limb at point 'A' indicated would severely impact the trees health, potentially leading to its demise, as well as significantly reducing the trees canopy thus having an adverse impact on its appearance within the landscape. In terms of the option presented by the Forestry Officer, there is evidence of abrasion on this limb along with paint marks. Given the nature of the limb, there is no significant growth on this limb therefore the removal would not detract from the overall appearance however any signage would need to be carefully considered.