

## Planning Officer's Report - LDCA JULY 2022

<b>APPLICATION</b>	<b>2021/47</b> – Annual Tree Maintenance at the Duke of Edinburgh Playground
<b>PERMISSION SOUGHT</b>	Permission in Full
<b>REGISTERED</b>	17 <sup>th</sup> June 2021
<b>APPLICANT</b>	Property Division, TI & SD Portfolio
<b>PARCEL</b>	JT080061 & JT080062
<b>ZONE</b>	Intermediate Zone
<b>CONSERVATION AREA</b>	Jamestown Conservation Area
<b>PUBLICITY</b>	The application was advertised as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Independent Newspaper on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2021</li><li>▪ A site notice displayed in accordance with Regulations.</li></ul>
<b>EXPIRY</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> July 2021
<b>REPRESENTATIONS</b>	None Received
<b>DECISION ROUTE</b>	<del>Delegated</del> / <b>LDCA</b> / <del>EXCO</del>

### A. CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

Water & Sewerage Division	No Objection
Energy Division	No Objection
St Helena Fire & Rescue	No Response
St Helena Roads Section	No Objection
EMD	No Response
Public Health	No Response
ANRD	The Agent
Crown Estates	The Applicant
St Helena Police Services	Not Consulted
Aerodrome Safe Guarding	Not Consulted
Enterprise St Helena (ESH)	No Response
St Helena National Trust	No Response
Sure SA Ltd	No Objection

## B. SITE & WORK DESCRIPTION

**Diagram 1: Location of Trees**



### **ASSESSMENT OF THE TREES AND PROPOSED MAINTENANCE WORKS** *(Extracted from Forestry Officers Assessment)*

#### **Current Condition:**

In all, it is fair to say that the trees in the DoE playground are in reasonable condition, despite there being a number of concerns on the stability of the canopies caused by far reaching limbs and the sheer volume of dead and dry limbs that exist within.

Overall the trees are stable, they appear to be well anchored as there are no signs of roots impacting the hard surface of the play area or the adjacent main road, nor are there any cracks seen in the walls of adjoining buildings or the area itself. Works carried out in 2020 has ensured that low hanging limbs have been lifted to the extent that from our visual inspection, they appear not to pose a risk to either pedestrian or vehicular traffic on Main Street. Recent works has also resulted in tree leaders being removed to reduce the negative impacts of tree debris on neighbouring properties

while restricting light and air into the buildings. As a result, the overall tree canopy on the tree bordering the Run has been reduced to a manageable height.

The limbs of trees in the upper play area are far reaching, extending almost to the buildings on the opposite of Main Street. The tree within the lower play area has a full even canopy but again extends outwards to the existing residential properties and street. The trees bordering the Run are those recently reduced in height and spread through the ENRP Annual Tree Maintenance Programme and are now without any visible defects or wide spread canopy. All of the trees with the exception of the latter are approximately 60 feet plus in height and below them are public car parks, amenity and recreation areas, residential and business properties and the main highway in Jamestown, all of which could be impacted by the trees.

The canopies of the trees in the upper playground are transparent giving good visuals of the extent of their spread and condition. Overall an estimated 40% of the canopies are made up of dry material of small girth. It is worth noting that very little regeneration from previous cuts can be seen, especially of the nature seen on the trees of the Castle Gardens. The regeneration seen in the Duke of Edinburgh Playground is young, leafy growth, not developed as yet into limb materials at heights of 20 plus feet, interestingly on sections of the trees that were pruned approximately 10 plus years ago.

No evidence of any pest or disease has been noted on any of the trees in the playground.

#### **Identified Risks:**

- There is a significant risk posed by the trees, which increases year by year where there is no intervention based on current capacity. It is possible that through environmental factors (wind, rain and or drought) as well as the trees age and current condition, both dead, dry and actively growing limbs can fall without provocation and warning. There is no system available or method known on island that can allow this to be determined.
- The risk posed by this is significant as the location of the trees and the presence and use of public facilities, public spaces, commercial and residential buildings directly below the canopies poses a direct risk to human life as well as private and public sector property.
- While a small number of limbs have started to regenerate from past pruning cuts and removal of limbs, noting not a the same rate of occurrence as seen within the Castle Gardens, the fact that they are present means the risk carried in the playground is the same. This new growth is weakest at the point of origin

therefore not being securely attached to the main body of the tree. Weight from ever developing limbs, heavy rainfall, pressure from movement caused by wind causes additional stress on these points, which can cause them to break at this point. The consequence of these limbs falling onto public buildings and spaces can be catastrophic. It is likely that should any of these limbs fall loss of life, limb or injury is possible along with property damage to buildings and vehicles parked on the street.

**Recommendation:**

- **2022 Annual Tree Maintenance Schedule** – Removal of all dry limbs within the tree canopies, and removal of all low hanging limbs that may cause an obstruction to all users of the area.
- **2022-2023 Annual Tree Maintenance Schedule** – Topping of trees 1 and 2 only to a management height for future tree maintenance.
- **Year 2023-2024** – Topping to a manageable height for future tree management – trees 3 and 4.

**Diagram 2: Dry limbs to be removed**



### Diagram 3: Low hanging & dry limbs for removal



Figure 3: Dry limbs for removal, DoE (2021)



Figure 4: Low hanging limbs for removal, DoE (2021)



### C. PLANNING OFFICER'S STATEMENT & RECOMMENDATION

Trees are significant and important features in Jamestown due to various reasons. For this reason, most trees within Jamestown are subject to the Tree Preservation Order of 2015.

The trees under discussion have been subject to a thorough and comprehensive examination by forestry experts within ANRD. It is important to ensure that the level growth remains manageable and the trees do not become a liability that causes safety concerns for the public and to property, whilst also considering the trees overall health and contribution to the amenity of the area.



The removal of dry limbs on all the affected trees are considered acceptable as there will be no adverse impact on the trees health or appearance.

Topping to a manageable height for future tree management is an ideal solution to mitigate the risks identified, however there is an element of risk involved, where if undertaken could have a negative impact on the tree. Topping is the practice of removing limbs of the tree at any point to reshape and resize the trees canopies, which will be effective in reducing the height and spread of the existing canopies. However this will involve making cuts in a manner that reduces the trees ability to heal and to seal wounds and in doing so the opportunities for pest, disease and decay increases leading to a severely stressed tree that is less tolerant of future surgery works. This practise also encourages the formation of new growth this less strongly attached to the tree, making it more likely that new limbs that from the new growth will eventually pose the same level of safety concern that the topping option hoped to eliminate. It is possible that the new growth can be managed more efficiently than the canopies that currently exist. In reaching this stage with these trees, the level of stress incurred by the tree through this process will most likely cause the tree to die.

In removing the volume of green material the trees ability to photosynthesise will be compromised, which will result in minimal absorption of sunlight that creates energy and food, and can reduce the root formation and food storage capacity thereby greatly increasing the level of stress imposed upon the tree and reducing its chance of survival. The recommended rate of removal for the amount of total foliage removed at one pruning for mature trees is 10%. This does not include the material that is already dead but refers to actively growing foliage. A consideration in removing more than the recommended 10% is the current age of the trees and the trees ability to regenerate following such as practice. The Ficus trees in Jamestown are estimated to be around 250 years old with regenerative capacity declining as the tree ages.

This option will also allow safe 360 degree access to the tree canopies, as operations to reduce the spread and height of the canopy will start from the outside and methodically work in and around the canopy to facilitate the reduction required.

In conclusion, topping poses an element of risk to the trees health with a severe impact on the trees appearance when first carried out. If the consensus is that we do not want to risk losing the trees due to the possibility that the works may compromise their health, as well as having an adverse impact on the appearance of the trees and their setting, then topping should not be supported.

However it is of the officer's opinion that the Duke of Edinburgh Playground being an area used by the public, and in proximity of built development should have trees that are maintained at a manageable height, where they can be shaped and managed to reduce potential risks to property and life. If left unmanaged the associated risks will increase within this public space. It is evident from the sheer scale and condition of the trees that they are in desperate need of some maintenance. It is inevitable that the

trees are likely to take some time to regenerate, but would be beneficial in the long term for the use and general appearance of the area.