

## Planning Officer's Report - LDCA MAY 2020

<b>APPLICATION</b>	2021/26 – Proposed   Maintenance to two Ficus Trees
<b>PERMISSION SOUGHT</b>	Permission in Full
<b>REGISTERED</b>	30 <sup>th</sup> March 2021
<b>APPLICANT</b>	Crown Estates Management, St Helena Government
<b>PARCEL</b>	JT00007 BLOCK 4
<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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021</li><li>▪ A site notice displayed in accordance with Regulations.</li></ul>
<b>EXPIRY</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> April 2021
<b>REPRESENTATIONS</b>	None Received
<b>DECISION ROUTE</b>	<del>Delegated</del> / LDCA / EXCO

### 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 Objection
St Helena National Trust	No Response
Sure SA Ltd	No Objection

**B. SITE & WORK DESCRIPTION**

The application relates works on two Ficus tree in Castle Garden, that have raise considerable concern over the impact on the neighbouring listed public buildings that are undergoing considerable construction work. There is also a removal of small buildings and construction of an extension to improve the facilities for the Court House.

The tree are in Castle Garden and in close proximity to the buildings and the amount overhang of the branches has been raising concern for some time that could potentially health and safety issue for the general public that use the Castle Garden area and the occupiers and visitors to the adjacent public buildings.

**Diagram 1: Location of Tree**

**ASSESSMENT OF THE TREES AND PROPOSED MAINTENANCE WORKS**

The proposal is to undertake extensive works to the trees that includes lopping and topping to remove all low hanging branches and reducing the height of these trees. The application is supported by full tree assessment and has considered number of options for the maintenance and wellbeing of the tree.

Overall the trees appears to be stable, they appear to be well anchored, and show signs of minimal physical damage on the main trunk, canopy and root system above ground. The recently LDCA approval for tree maintenance works (June 2020) has ensured that all low hanging limbs have been lifted to the extent that from the visual inspection, they do not pose a risk to either pedestrian or vehicular traffic.

However, there is a back stain visible on one of the stem of the main trunk on both trees, which suggests that decay (type of decay, bacterial or fungal) most likely from past pruning cuts that did not heal or water settling into natural fissures within the tree stems. At this stage while visible, there is nothing to suggest that either stem is unstable at this point. Future monitoring in relation to growth of the decay is required however to ensure public safety.

**Photograph 1: The Ficus Trees**



The tree canopies is less stable in that they both have a mass of dead and drying limbs of various sizes that have been unable to be removed due to capacity, logistical and mechanical issues, during past maintenance works. This dry mass equals an estimated 70-80%% of the overall canopy composition across both of the trees.

Across both trees there are a significant number of new limbs that have developed from the pruning cuts of previous surgeries; these limbs appear healthy, with good growth and vigour seen through the shape and colour of the leaves, but which are poorly attached, and is the point of the tree that is the weakest and therefore more likely to break under normal growing and environmental conditions. Currently there are no visual signs of pest or disease present on either tree.

The canopy of the tree currently growing behind the Public Library, is interwoven with others, making it difficult to determine one from the other, and which will create issues when

selecting limbs for pruning and or removal. The range that the limbs extend from the trunk or past pruning /removal cuts is such that the limbs extend over buildings owned by the Crown but which houses not only SHG employees but members of the public also, specifically the Public Library, Courts, Judicial Services and I&T buildings. The canopy of the tree growing behind the ex-Police Office is sufficiently isolated from other trees and therefore does not pose this issue.

**Photograph 2: The Condition of the Tree Canopy**



No service or utility lines pass through either tree canopy, however energy lines as well as cables leading to the ex-Police antenna are present below the canopy of that tree growing behind the Public Library.

In the assessment of the proposed works number of options have been considered and these include the following:

Option 1: Maintain the Status Quo.

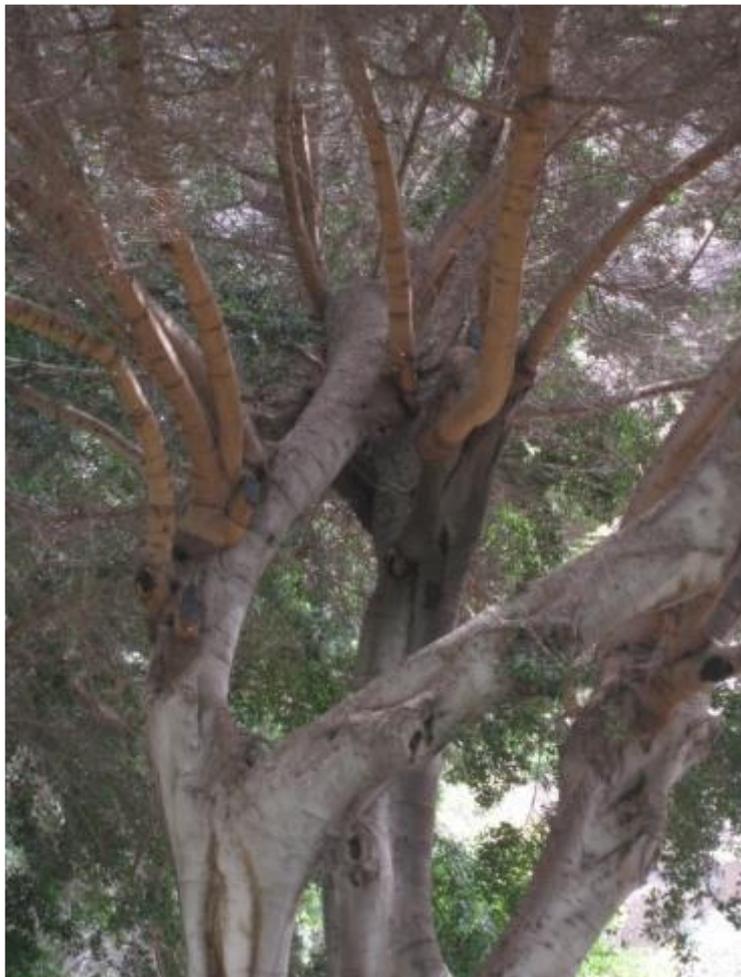
Option 2: Topping to a manageable height for future tree management

Option 3: Topping to a height beyond that which is manageable for future tree management.

Option 4: Tree Removal

In the pre-application discussion with the Planning Officers, the applicant was advised that Options 2 and 3 appear to be the more acceptable proposals and that the development application should state the option that applicant wishes to pursue. The development application process can considered the appropriate option for the Planning Officer to make decision or recommend to the Authority.

**Photograph 3: The Condition of the Tee Limbs**



The applicant has therefore proposed that Option 3 would be the appropriate level of work for the trees and assessment is based on the level of tree surgery this would entail. The level of tree surgery proposed for this option includes the surgery works that would also be undertaken for Option 2. This would work of topping that removes limbs of a tree at any point to reshape and resize the trees canopies and will be effective in reducing the height and spread of the existing canopies. The recommended rate of removal for the amount of total foliage removed at one pruning for mature trees is 10%, this does not include 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 a practice. The ficus trees in Jamestown are estimated to be around 250 years old (Ref: Phil Lambdon, Flowering Plants & Ferns of St Helena) with regenerative capacity declining as the tree ages.

For Option 3, this operation will ensure that a greater volume of green leaf canopy will remain on the trees; a current projection of an increase in leaf canopy of 5-10 % is anticipated across both canopies. This theoretically increases the chances of trees survival as a greater volume of green leaf canopy equals greater photosynthesis and greater chance of tree survival, however when considering the tree age and the impact of such a sever practice, it is possible that again the tree will not be able to survive.

### **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 in Castle Garden are particularly significant for the overall environment of the historic nature of the garden.

The trees under discussion have been subject to a thorough and comprehensive examination by forestry experts within ANRD. The assessment report is very thorough in examining the tree and considering the various option to ensure that the trees remain as an important feature of the historic garden. Similarly it is also 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.

As these trees are important for the enhance and conservation of the historic area of Jamestown and their location that is popular with visitors to enjoy and within close proximity of property, the works indicated by the Assessment Report for Option 3 is acceptable and can be supported. When all the works has been completed, it would be appropriate to assess the remainder of the trees, in terms of the visual impact on the landscape and its health. A condition this affect will be added.