

Planning Officer's Report - LDCA NOVEMBER 2022

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| APPLICATION | 2022/63 – Proposed Tree Topping at the Duke of Edinburgh Playground |
| PERMISSION SOUGHT | Permission in Full |
| REGISTERED | 29 th September 2022 |
| APPLICANT | Property Division, TI&SD Portfolio |
| PARCEL | JT080061 |
| ZONE | Intermediate Zone |
| CONSERVATION AREA | Jamestown Conservation Area |
| PUBLICITY | The application was advertised as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Independent Newspaper on 30th September 2022▪ A site notice displayed in accordance with Regulations. |
| EXPIRY | 14 th October 2022 |
| REPRESENTATIONS | None Received |
| DECISION ROUTE | Delegated / LDCA / EXCO |

A. CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

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

B. SITE & WORK DESCRIPTION

The application is for the proposed topping of tree number 5 in the Duke of Edinburgh Playground as shown on the location plan below. In July 2022 the LDCA approved the topping of trees numbered 1 to 4.

Diagram 1: Location of Trees



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

Current Condition:

As with the remaining trees, this tree is in reasonable condition, despite there being a number of concerns in relation to the stability of the canopy caused by far reaching limbs and the sheer volume of dead and dry limbs that exist within.

Overall the tree appears to be stable, it appears to be well anchored with no signs of its roots impacting the hard surface of the play area or the adjacent main road. There are no visible cracks seen in the walls of adjoining buildings or the area itself, with little or no signs of physical damage. The limbs of this tree are far reaching and low hanging into the existing play area; due to the tree growth and curvature of the trunk, very little limbs extend outwards over Main Street, making the main area of impact from this tree the amenity and recreation areas below in the upper play area, although risk still remains to car parking facilities outside of the DoE Wall.

The canopy of the tree is littered with dry material of small girth (an approximate 40% of the canopy is made up of dead or dying limbs). The canopy is significantly intertwined with the canopies of trees one and two reported on in the Annual Tree Assessment Report, Annual Tree Maintenance, DoE 2021, and cannot be addressed in isolation. It is proposed that this tree is addressed to reduce the height and spread of the canopy and to relieve the risk associated with its current extent in tandem with Tree No 1, reported on in the aforementioned document and Decision Notice.

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

Identified Risks:

The following issues have been identified:

- There is a significant risk posed by this and all of the trees in the DoE, this is a risk that 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 tree age and the 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, the location of this tree and the presence and use of public facilities directly below the canopy poses a direct risk to human life as well as private or public sector property.
- While a small number of limbs have started to regenerate from past pruning cuts and removal of limbs; while not with the same rate of occurrence as seen in the Castle Gardens the fact that they are also present means that the risk carried in the DoE is the same. As previously outlined, this new growth is weakest at the point of origin, 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 that point. The consequences of these limbs falling onto public buildings and spaces can be catastrophic. It is possible that should

any of these limbs fall loss of life, limb or injury is possible, property damage to buildings, personal property and vehicles on the street is all possible.

Recommendation for 2023 Annual Tree Maintenance Schedule:

The recommendation to address the issues / risks identified are the same as those identified and approved in the aforementioned documents:

- Topping to a manageable height for future tree management. While an ideal solution to mitigate the risk identified, this option if undertaken has negative implications for the tree. Topping is a practice 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. However, this practice involves 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 that is less strongly attached to the tree, making it more likely that the new limbs that form 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, however 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; this will result in minimal absorption of sunlight that creates energy and food, and which can reduce root formation and food storage capacity greatly increasing the level of stress imposed upon the tree and reducing its chances 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 material that is already dead but refers to actively growing foliage. A consideration in removing more that 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.
- This option will 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.

Supporting Photos:



Figure 1: Indicating extent of canopy over DoE



Figure 2: Photo showing limbs extending into DoE and dry limbs in tree canopy



Figure 3: Indicating low hanging limbs in DoE

C. PLANNING OFFICER'S STATEMENT & RECOMMENDATION

Trees are significant and important features in Jamestown for various reasons. As a result, most trees within Jamestown are subject to the Tree Preservation Order of 2015.

The tree subject to this application (tree 5 on the location plan above) has been subject to a thorough and comprehensive examination by forestry experts within ANRD as demonstrated by extracts from the Forestry Officers report above.

The Forestry Officers report includes that the tree canopy poses a direct risk to human life as well as private or public sector property, and recommends the topping of the tree as an appropriate way to manage the risks going forward. The application can therefore be supported.