

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT OF: Principal Arboricultural Officer
TO: Planning Committee 4 March 2009
WARDS: Trumpington

**OBJECTION TO
FELLING OF 5 LEYLAND CYPRESS TREES ON EMPTY COMMON**

1.0 INTRODUCTION – DECISION MAKING

- 1.1 Members are invited to comment on the felling of 5 Leyland cypress trees on Empty Common, growing on land managed by Active Communities. Representations, including a petition, have been received on the proposed felling.
- 1.2 Trees on Active Communities' land are managed by the arboricultural service based in the Department of Environment and Planning. The Director of Environment and Planning has delegated powers to undertake arboricultural work.
- 1.3 In the view of the objections to the proposed felling, the Director of Environment and Planning decided that the decision whether or not to fell the trees should be referred to the Executive Councillor for Arts and Recreation for a decision, as she is the Executive Councillor responsible for the management of open spaces.
- 1.4 The trees are in a conservation area. Ordinarily, the Council's decision, as planning authority, would be needed for the proposed works. Where there are objections on amenity grounds, the decision would be made by the Planning Committee. However, as the trees on Empty Common grow on land managed by the City Council, the Council is exempt from the statutory notification procedure and the Planning Committee's consent is not needed. Despite this, the Executive Councillor has asked that the views of the Planning Committee on the proposed works should be sought so that her decision can be made with the benefit of the Planning Committee's expertise.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Planning Committee advise that no objection be raised to the felling of 5 Leyland cypresses on Empty Common.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Hobson's Conduit Trust has monitored the habitat and wildlife of Hobson's Conduit for many years. It has recorded a significant loss of habitat and, as a consequence, flora and fauna. A request was made to the City Council for a meeting to agree remedial and restoration works. A team of experts in arboriculture, ecology, drainage and landscape architecture met and agreed a programme of restoration works. This was shared with the adjoining owners, Clare College and English Heritage (EH). EH and the City Council have undertaken work and Clare has prepared a strategy for the management of their land, which incorporates the principles behind this work.
- 3.2 The objectors have referred to this clearance in their representations. The tree works on the banks and path to the Conduit were scheduled by the arboricultural service for the Council's drainage engineer, under Environment Agency obligations, and are exempt from statutory requirements.
- 3.3 As part of the restoration work the Council proposed the felling of five Leyland cypresses on Empty Common. Whilst suffering from *Seiridium cardinale*, a fatal disease, the trees do not require felling on arboricultural grounds. The trees were considered inappropriate for the location. Their contribution as a habitat and link in a green corridor is minimal and the specie is inappropriate in proximity to allotments.
- 3.4 The Council planned to plant five replacement native, deciduous trees on Empty Common, of which three have been planted already. As a result of the representations the Council has agreed to plant an additional tree on Empty Common to screen the view to the road and three fruit trees, an oak tree and 30m of native hedge on the eastern boundary of the allotments.

4.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 4.1 191 letters were sent to local residents, amenity societies, resident groups and interested parties advising them of the work.
- 4.2 The Council has received 4 objections, 5 letters of support and a petition containing 282 signatures. Most of these comments relate to the felling of the Leyland cypress on Empty Common.

5.0 CONSIDERATION

- 5.1 Letters advising of the work were sent out on 14 October. No response was received. Work began on felling the cypresses. Following a complaint from a resident of Queensway the work was stopped and further letters sent out on 20 November 2009. Two objectors visited the office frequently and campaigned in the local press for the retention of the leylandii. Since their objections were focussed on the felling of the leylandii, work commenced along the brook. Subsequently, the objectors have included comments relating to this work.
- 5.2 **Objections were received from:**
 - Resident, 49 Queensway.

- Allotment holder, Suite 124, 23 King Street, an allotment holder.
- Allotment holder plot 21.
- Allotment holder plot 24

5.3 Support was received from:

- Allotment holder plot 42.
- Two more allotment holders.
- Hobson's Conduit Trust
- Empty Common Allotment Society

5.4 The reasons for objection to the felling of the Leylandii can be summarised as:

- This part of the city used to be a calm and wild oasis; there is no peace or respite anymore.
- The allotment holders should not be exposed to the public on Hobson's Brook.
- The allotment holders should not be exposed to the traffic on Brooklands Avenue.
- Trees provide a pollution barrier against traffic. The stench of traffic is unbearable.
- The work will not improve wildlife. Foxes, deer, kingfishers are no longer present as their habitat and cover have been obliterated.
- Creating further light on the water only produces algae problems as evident by the new development.
- Nature has a way of taking care and rebalancing without extensive intervention.
- The cypress trees are mature and handsome.
- Goldcrests use the conifers.

5.5 The petition states:

Please lend your support to prevent the felling of mature trees in this area. The trees provide an effective pollution and noise barrier to people and provide cover and habitats for existing wildlife.

5.6 Comments on the objections to the felling of the 5 Leyland cypresses and the petition

- The works, in their totality, necessarily require the felling of more trees than there will be replacements. The five conifers on Empty Common will be replaced by six trees; 30m of hedge and four trees are to be planted on the east boundary of the allotments.

- It is accepted that the trees act as a visual barrier to Brooklands Avenue from the eastern part of the allotments. New tree and hedge planting, when established, will provide an effective screen.
- Trees do not absorb sound but, by obscuring traffic from view, create a sense of privacy and seclusion.
- The canopies of trees act as a physical filter for pollution. Fine particles are trapped on the surface of the leaves and harmful gases are absorbed through the foliage. The cooling and shading effect of urban trees helps to reduce the rate of ozone production. Whilst the Leyland cypress filter and absorb pollutants, the new deciduous trees will perform this function better. The deciduous trees will have a wider crown spread and volume so the increased foliar area will absorb more toxins. In addition, as the foliage is shed and renewed annually, the absorbent capacity is likely to be greater.
- The work will improve the wildlife. The works were instigated by Hobson's Conduit Trust and have the support of Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust. None of the amenity societies raised concerns on the proposals.
- Whilst the Leylandii provide sanctuary to birds and a place to nest, ecological experts acknowledge they have no habitat value.
- Since clearing the self set trees there have been several sightings of kingfishers; tracks of deer and fox have been noted.
- Goldcrests should continue to use the existing trees and inhabit the new plantings. Siskins should forage seeds on the hornbeam.
- The works were instigated by Hobson's Conduit Trust to improve the habitat and were based on years of record keeping and study. The removal of the Leyland cypress has the support of the Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust, the Allotment Holders Society and the Council's ecologist. The planting of native species will enrich the space and provide a valuable link in the green corridor from Hobson's Conduit to Coe Fen, Sheep's Green and West Cambridge.
- The Leylandii grow as a group, when they are visible all are clearly seen, otherwise, neighbouring trees obscure their presence and they blend into the landscape to form part of the general tree cover. The window of vision where they are prominent is limited to a few flats in Queensway, a short distance of Trumpington Road and Brooklands Avenue and the some of the allotments. Between Queensway and Empty common is a closely planted line of mature lime trees, protected by a Tree Preservation Order. Whilst the removal of the Leylandii will impact upon some residents and allotment holders whose plots are at the northern end, generally their removal will not change the outlook for most residents or allotment holders. Reduction of the trees would retain the screen currently provided to the allotments from traffic movements on Brooklands Avenue. For

those that are affected at Queensway both felling and reduction the upper parts of the trees are visually important, so a reduction in height will have a similar impact to that of felling.

5.7 **The petition.**

The petition did not formally request the matter be presented before a Council committee for consideration.

Advice was sought from Legal Services and Committee Services as to how the petition should be treated. Their recommendation was to consider the petition as supporting the objections received. The petitioners were invited to present the petition and speak at Community Services Scrutiny Committee on 12 January.

5.8 The petition requested signatories to *lend your support to prevent the felling of mature trees in this area. The trees provide an effective pollution and noise barrier to people and provide cover and habitats for existing wildlife.* The only mature trees to be felled in the area are the five Leyland cypresses.

5.9 **The reasons for support are:**

- The roots of the trees make cultivation difficult and affect the nutritional content of the soil.
- The trees prevent full use of the adjacent allotments.
- The trees shade the allotments.
- Allotments are places for growing crops, it is not a wild area. The area to the south where soil conditions are poor is dedicated as a wildlife habitat.
- There needs to be a balance of horticulture and ecology.
- The felling of the conifers and replacement with deciduous trees is welcome.
- The work is long overdue management.
- ECAS has not received formal representations from plot holders on the petition. The majority of plot holders support the proposals.

6.0 **CONDITION OF THE TREES:**

6.1 The trees are mature specimens of Leyland cypress, approximately 40 years old. They were planted behind a row of hornbeam, as part of a group of larch and silver birch, probably as a nursery crop to promote good crown formation in the early development of the long-term trees. After a few years the practice is to thin out the conifers to allow the deciduous trees to develop fuller and expansive crowns. On Empty Common the cypresses have not been removed so the conifers, birch and larch create a closely planted group in the south-eastern corner of the open space.

6.2 Whilst generally in a healthy condition some of the trees appear to be showing the first signs of *Seiridium cardinale*, a fatal disease. Foliage in the upper canopies is turning brown as the branches die. A row of *Leylandii* at the Bowls

Club on Brooklands Avenue succumbed to this disease in 2004/5 and have been felled.

- 6.3 If the conifers do not succumb to *Seiridium cardinale* they could be expected to live for another 50-100 years. They could reach over 30m in height with a spread in excess of 6m.

7.0 OPTIONS

One tree is a totem pole and will require felling.

For the remaining four trees the options are:

1. retain
2. reduce the height and spread
3. remove and replace over a period of time

Consideration of options:

1. **retain**

- The trees could be retained, but they may require topping out in the near future.

2 **reduce the height and spread**

- The trees could be reduced in height and cut back. If retained, the *Leylandii* will need to be topped to manage their height and cut back to provide space for the two silver birch and one larch to grow. It will also be expedient to reduce the uptake of water and nutrients by the *Leylandii* otherwise they will deprive the deciduous trees of vital elements resulting in suppressed growth.
- If the cypresses are pruned to bare branches they will never green again and once topped the process will require repeated maintenance.
- This surgery will significantly compromise their amenity value.

3 **remove and replace over a period of time**

- A phased reduction or removal of the trees would allow three replacement trees to be planted, but in altered locations. However, the existing trees will constrain the initial crown development of the new trees and they will struggle to resource water, light and nutrients as the cypress trees are demanding of these resources.
- When the last *Leyland* cypresses are removed it is likely that it will be necessary to prune or fell the two mature birch and one larch trees. The cypresses will have constrained their development to the extent that they are unable to withstand exposure to adverse weather conditions.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 The benefits of felling are considered to outweigh the loss of the trees.

Whilst the view from some of the flats at Queensway and the northernmost allotments may be changed the overall impact is not significant. The felling of the Leyland cypress trees provides an opportunity to improve and restore the habitat of the Common and establish a new generation of trees which will provide a richer environment than that currently afforded by the conifers. The work is in the interests of the wider community who use the path, Brooklands Avenue and Empty Common.

9.0 IMPLICATIONS

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|---|---|
| (a) Financial Implications | £2500 (Cost of felling the trees) |
| (b) Staffing Implications | None |
| (c) Equal Opportunities Implications | None |
| (d) Environmental Implications | The short term loss of 5 trees, but long term improvement in the environment. |
| (e) Community Safety | None |

BACKGROUND PAPERS: The following are the background papers that were used in the preparation of this report:

Report to Ward and County Councillors 8 January 2009

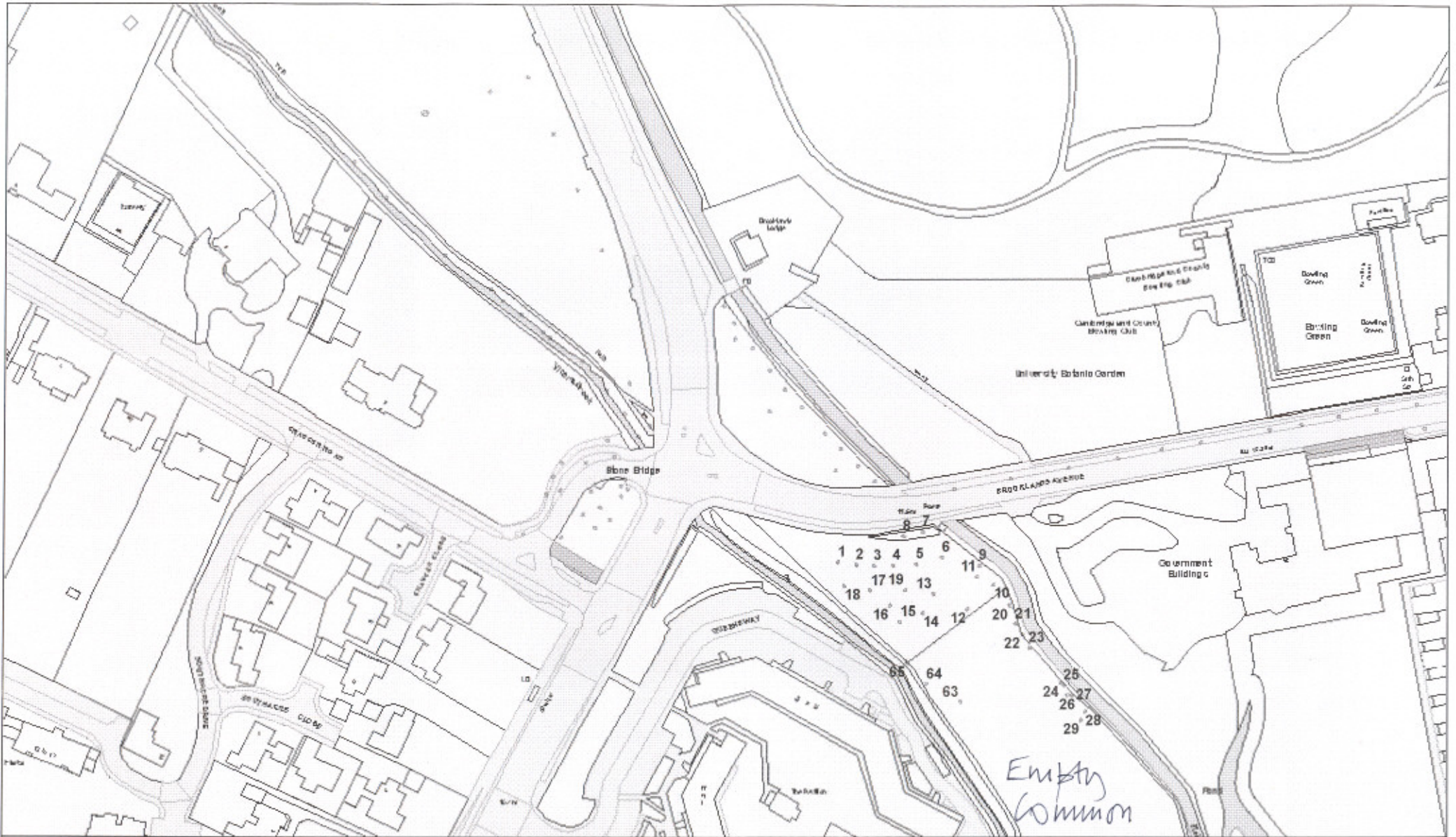
Empty Common file

To inspect these documents contact Diana Oviatt-Ham on extension 7145

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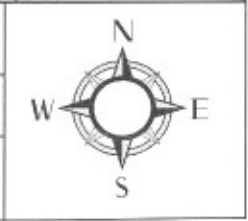
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Empty Common

Scale	Unknown
Date	24/02/2009



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