

Northwood House: Comments on the report by TLC Environmental

I've read the report from TLC Environmental (with some perseverance), and I'm afraid I found it repetitive and rather full of gobbledygook, and its recommendations are by no means clearly presented.

It proposes that two trees (sycamores) should come down, and possibly a third (a lime) which the very short recommendations section says should be 'considered for removal'. Proposals for work on 15 other trees are only described in the Survey Record Sheet (Annex A); the text of the report contains no narrative justification for this work so it's very hard to know how necessary it is.

I would not object to the two sycamores (580 and 795) being removed. They are poor specimens and are less than flourishing, probably because they were severely pollarded at some point.

I'm more concerned about the lime (536) which the report acknowledges is in good condition and of value in the context of the landscape. I wouldn't claim that it's more than an average specimen as limes in the Grange go, but it's an upright and reasonably stately tree visible from Lauder Road. The report only gives it 20 years to live, which I consider a considerable underestimate. The tree is clearly close to a wall, but it's not the wall of a building and it's not a boundary wall against the street. The tree isn't visibly leaning as Annex A suggests. There are broken ends of smaller branches and there is probably some dead wood towards the edges of the crown – as you'd expect with a lime of this age. One large branch does extend across Lauder Lane (which isn't a thoroughfare), but it isn't hanging and it could quite easily be cut back. Annex A gives the tree a risk (Hazard Likelihood) score of 3 but as there are no recorded cavities, stem defects or fungal infection, this appears unduly harsh.

All in all I don't believe there is either a valid case for removing it or, as alternatively proposed in Annex A, for taking 10m off the top of the crown.

[There are other aspects of the survey that I'm unhappy about, for instance:-

Section 3 (p.4) cites an HSE statement that actions should be proportionate to risk, but the TLC report confuses risk (the likelihood of an event) and hazard (the potential consequence). Annex A, records 'Hazard likelihood', which with ref. to Fig.3 is actually risk, and 'Risk consequence', which is actually hazard. My feeling is that this results in too strong an emphasis on possible but unlikely outcomes.

P.10 claims that fungal fruiting bodies are affecting the structural integrity of the trees, and it claims that fruiting bodies (toadstools) of honey fungus were found (no mention of rhizomorphs). I rather doubt that honey fungus would be visible in January – it certainly can't be seen in the two photos. The recommendations 'MO' and 'S3' for the tree concerned are not explained.

The life expectancy estimates in Annex A seem unduly pessimistic. The report gives nine of the trees less than ten years and another four less than twenty.]