

Note in response to Woodland Trust

At the time of submission, after the completion of the essential survey work, it was my opinion that these two trees, (both without any growth promoting conditions, e.g., plentiful water supply), satisfied the recognized criteria and should be considered as Veteran and indeed Ancient.

The current NPPF, December 2023, defines veteran trees as,

Ancient or veteran tree: *A tree which, because of its age, size and condition, is of exceptional biodiversity, cultural or heritage value. All ancient trees are veteran trees. Not all veteran trees are old enough to be ancient but are old relative to other trees of the same species. Very few trees of any species reach the ancient life-stage.*

As noted in the Chiropteran report submitted with the application,

“The veteran Quercus robur along the eastern boundary are in good condition. Although a prime site for numerous species to roost, there was no obvious hollows or crevices. The walkway in Linnet’s Wood allowed binocular observations on all sides.”

From an ecology perspective Place Services Ltd. have confirmed that they are content that the trees can be retained in situation provided the applicant provides “a covenant which will prevent future residents removing or damages these trees without prior consent”. The applicant has responded to confirm that a covenant will be secured via a s106 agreement and will ensure the protection of the valuable habitat provided by these trees in this largely pollution free environment.

Turning to the application of Guidelines to these trees:

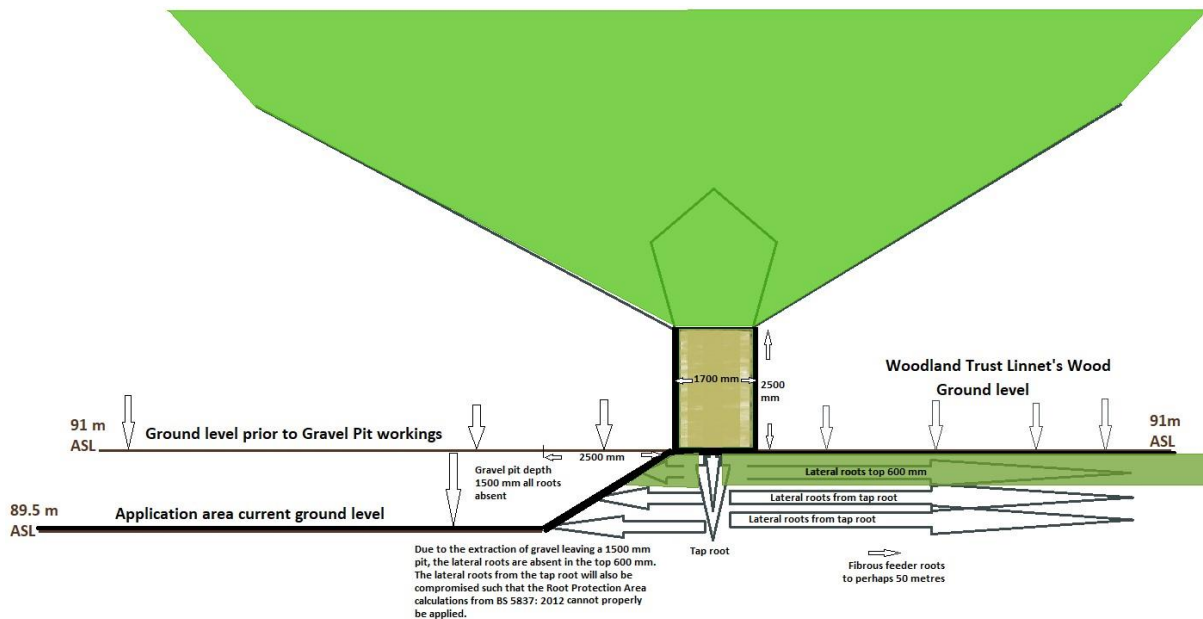
BS 5837: 2012 states that trees should have a root protection area of 12 times the stem diameter (capped at 707 square metres, 15m), the guidelines also recognise that veteran trees need particular care to ensure adequate space is allowed for their long-term retention.

As noted at 6.19 of the planning statement and the Ecology Report the site is a former gravel pit. This is glaciofluvial sand and gravel, probably deposited by the meltwater of a retreating glacier c. 450,000 B.P. The extraction of this sand and gravel, based on the historic OS maps, appears to have started in the late 19th century and continued into the early 20th century. The result of this extraction is that circa a 126 years ago, (1898 O.S. map), the ground levels to the west of these trees was reduced significantly. The ground level within the development area of the application site is currently 1.5m below the root plate of the tree only 2.5m from the base of the relevant trees, TC and TD.

The original level of the base of the gravel pit has had perhaps 130 years’ worth of leaf drop added. The excavation of the eastern edge of the gravel pit was probably lower than that of today. Additionally, the action of solifluction over the same 130-year period will have lessened the slope that was originally excavated. That being the case far more root destruction will have taken place than appears in 2024.

The Glaciofluvial gravel is of high quality, an additional gravel pit was excavated a short distance away to the northwest, within the same geological deposit. This provides very good drainage for the trees in question.

The slope originates at the top of the root plates, so all the lateral roots on the west side of the tree were removed. See diagrammatic section below.



This gravel extraction has therefore destroyed the lateral roots on this side of the tree and that any lateral roots from the Tap root are severely compromised and thus unlikely to be of significant length and notably shorter than BS guidelines would estimate. For this reason, it is considered the root protection zone applied is very conservative and provides a more than adequate buffer.

We, I include the architect and developer, are familiar with Natural England and Forestry Commission's standing advice that states the following with regards to root protection areas/buffer zones: "For ancient or veteran trees (including those on the woodland boundary), the buffer zone should be at least 15 times larger than the diameter of the tree. The buffer zone should be 5 metres from the edge of the tree's canopy if that area is larger than 15 times the tree's diameter. This will create a minimum root protection area. Where assessment shows other impacts are likely to extend beyond this distance, the proposal is likely to need a larger buffer zone."

The assessment of this clearly shows that the root protection is unlikely to exceed the 15m buffer zone. However, it is considered prudent to provide the 5m buffer from the canopy, principally for amenity value. It is proposed to reposition Plots 14, 15 and 16 to allow an expansion of the current buffer zone, the applicant is content therefore for the dwellings in question to be moved slightly to ensure this additional buffer is provided.

BS 5837:2012 5.3.1 states that if operations within RPA are proposed, that the project arboriculturist should "propose a series of mitigation measures to improve the soil environment that is used by the trees"

5.3.2 then goes on to state that "Where there is evidence that a tree has previously been subjected to damage by construction activity, this should be taken into account when considering the acceptability of further activity within the RPA."

In regard these to extracts it is clear that where damage has previously occurred to the root protection zone of a tree that there is an opportunity to mitigate for this and improve the existing soil quality around the tree. It is therefore proposed to build the levels of the gardens up and particular the end of the gardens approaching the base of the tree. This will be beneficial for the long-term preservation of the tree as it will allow lateral roots to establish and help stabilise the trees. This is detailed on the sections showing the gardens of the two relevant plots, which is provided at drawing no 596 x PL24.

Notwithstanding whether these trees are or aren't Ancient or Veteran Trees appropriate mitigation has been incorporated into the development and the proposed building up of the ground around them is a material benefit.

In conclusion, the trees noted TC and TD are both noteworthy, both are retained as part of the application and the development has been located a suitable distance from them to ensure their protection. Additional build-up of soil in the areas where it was previously extracted will improve the existing environment for the tree. This combined with the proposed covenant preventing their removal will ensure that the trees and their valuable habitat is preserved and enhanced by this application.

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