

**DURAMEN CONSULTING LTD**  
**CONSULTING ARBORICULTURISTS**

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Dr Kulkarni  
16 Lime Trees  
Staplehurst  
Tonbridge  
TN12 0SS

Our Ref: 23079

05/12/2023

Dear Dr Kulkarni

**Re: Your oak tree**

Further to my visit to your property to inspect your oak tree to the front of your property on 22<sup>nd</sup> November I can report as follows:

- 1) Your application to prune the tree (Maidstone Council ref 23/505195/TPOA) has stalled as the council has refused to validate it without written arboricultural advice. This report provides you with that advice.
- 2) The tree is a single stemmed English oak (*Quercus robur* L.). It has a stem diameter of 87.5 cm and a height of 15 metres. The crown of the tree measures between 5.7 metres to 6.8 metres radius.
- 3) It is located 3.2 metres from the kerb of the adjacent public highway – a residential street with pavements for pedestrians.
- 4) The council states that the tree is protected by Tree Preservation Order (TPO) No. 12 of 1996; in the TPO it is referred to as T7 Oak.
- 5) Maidstone council has allowed previous crown reductions/pruning ref 20/504474/TPOA on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and ref 17/505911/TPO on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2018.
- 6) In January 2018 the council's tree officer noted the presence of a "degraded fungal fruiting body" which he identified as "*Inonotus dryadens*" – a fungus that causes wood decay. He stated that "*The [fungal] species rarely contributes to tree failure*" but he didn't make any record of what observations led him to believe it was that species. Other fungal species are associated with tree failure so his accurate assessment of tree risk is dependent on this fungal identification being correct.
- 7) The tree officer also described the tree as having a "*crown structure suggests evidence of poor pruning history, with numerous historic wounds and branch stubs evident and an unnatural crown structure.*"

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- 8) My observations confirm the hollowness (under bark) at ground level (from sounding with a soft hammer). No obvious signs of fungal fruiting bodies were found.
- 9) At around 2 metres height there is a hawthorn seedling growing in what appears to be a hole located at the join of at least two branches.
- 10) It is at least possible that the hollowness at ground level is joined internally to the hole where the hawthorn seedling grows – that is the tree is either hollow or there is a cylinder of decayed wood, probably in various stages of decay – some sound but some completely decayed.
- 11) Decay in a mature tree is quite normal and typically a tree will respond to the loss of strength from decay by adding extra reaction wood to make up for such loss. Your tree shows some signs of this by developing wide buttresses at and near ground level but it is not in any way exceptional.
- 12) The extent of decay can be examined in a variety of ways: a) if holes allow penetration into the tree this can be a crude way of examination of decay b) microdrills (with location(s) chosen carefully) can provide some detail on decay location and extent and c) sonic tomographs similar to medical tomography but for trees.
- 13) At this stage, as the tree has been pruned before it is likely that the council will allow a similar level of pruning as before. The specifications for this are provided below. Whilst a tree surgeon undertakes this work they can examine the cavity where the hawthorn sapling grows to see if it is of any significant size. If there is no sign of extensive decay then the pruning work undertaken should be adequate for the moment.
- 14) However, with a general hollowness in the lower stem known since 2018 it would be wise to consider additional methods of determining the hollowness of the stem. A drill (preferably a micro-drill) in the first instance could identify the extent of sound wood in one or a small number of locations. A sonic tomograph could provide a more complete picture at one or more planes through the tree. Unfortunately it's not easy to point you in the direction of the right person or company that can provide this service but in the first instance I can suggest making contact with the consultant at Connick Tree Care [www.connicktrecare.co.uk](http://www.connicktrecare.co.uk) to see if they help.
- 15) Specifications for work to be undertaken under application 23/505195/TPOA:

Over the road: generally clearance on main roads should be to 5-5.5 metres height; on a domestic road it is not likely that a double decker bus or something of a similar height would be common but adequate clearance for high delivery vehicles is best planned for.

Pruning should be to previous pruning points. I have measured these at leaving branches between 3 metres long and 4.8 metres long in the West (towards the road). Height should be reduced to 12 metres.

- Thus:
- 1) crown clearance above roadway to 5.0 metres,
  - 2) crown clearance above footpath to 2.0 metres,
  - 3) crown reduction to height of 12 metres or previous pruning points, as appropriate,
  - 4) crown reduction to previous pruning points leaving branches between 3 and 4 metres length.

Whilst this work is implemented a climbing inspection of the visible hole should be undertaken.

The reasons for the works are two-fold:

- 1) To keep the tree in shape to reflect its position beside the road and to maximise its longevity considering its structural condition,
- 2) To sympathetically reduce the risk of failure by reducing crown size.

Yours sincerely



**Jon Heuch** BSc(For) PhD RCarborA MICFor



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